



# ANCHOR

where spirituality and social justice meet

a magazine by Still Harbor : issue 08, fall/winter 2017

*with*

**C. Paul Schroeder**

**Allison Coffelt**

**Jennie Meyer**

**Heather Bryant**

**& many others**

*with featured artists*

**Alia Ali**

**Stephen Hamilton**

**Basil Kincaid**

Cover Image: *BORDERLAND* by Alia Ali. 2017. Courtesy of Artist.



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# STILL HARBOR

Forming authentic, justice-oriented, and peace-minded leaders for the 21st century.

[stillharbor.org](http://stillharbor.org)



# ANCHOR

where spirituality and social justice meet

Published by Still Harbor, Inc.

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## ABOUT ANCHOR

Still Harbor publishes a Spring/Summer and a Fall/Winter issue of *Anchor* filled with content that explores the ways spirituality and social justice intersect in our lives and our societies today. We strive to include a diverse collection of personal narratives, spiritual ideas and practices, and creative expressions.

Opinions and ideas expressed in this magazine are the opinions and ideas of the authors, poets, and artists, and they may or may not represent the opinions and ideas of Still Harbor or the editors.

## ABOUT STILL HARBOR

Still Harbor believes that spirituality cultivates the depth of imagination, courage, and resilience we need to create a more kind, equitable, and sustainable world. As such, we design and deliver chaplaincy programs for communities, direct service organizations, and activist networks as they work to achieve their own missions for justice and peace.

## STILL HARBOR PROGRAMS & SERVICES

Still Harbor's programs are designed to create authentic, justice-oriented and peace-minded leaders for the 21st century. We teach the spiritual dimensions of leadership, facilitate personal and relational healing and reconciliation, and support radical idealists as they bring spirituality into their daily lives and work.

We serve across faith and secular traditions of meaning making, meeting people where they are as they seek to make the world a better place. Still Harbor participates in social movements for justice and peace by implementing comprehensive non-profit chaplaincy programs and by training spiritual companions for the 21st century. *Anchor* is an extension of our accompaniment of individuals and organizations.

## SUBSCRIPTIONS

Make an annual donation of \$35 or more to Still Harbor, and you will receive *Anchor* twice yearly in the mail as our thank you. Your gift will support Still Harbor's mission to offer spiritual formation and accompaniment to individuals and organizations seeking to make change in the world.

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If you would like to submit an article, essay, poem, or fine art to *Anchor*, please submit it through our online form at [anchormagazine.org](http://anchormagazine.org). We request that submissions arrive in final form by March 1 for the Spring/Summer issue or July 30 for the Fall/Winter issue. If you would like more information or would like to submit a proposal, please contact us at [anchor@stillharbor.org](mailto:anchor@stillharbor.org).

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## STILL HARBOR

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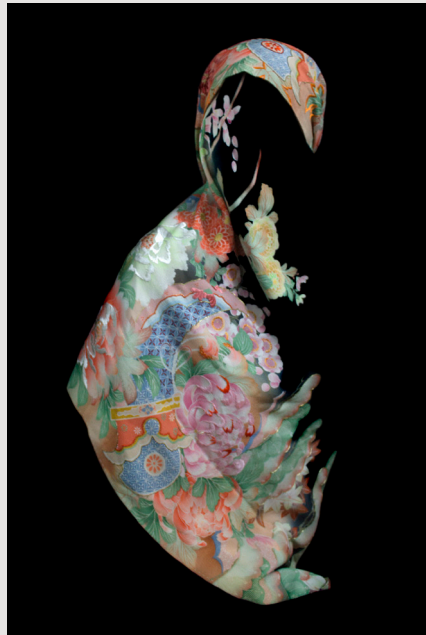
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Cover Image: *BORDERLAND* by Alia Ali. 2017  
Courtesy of Artist.  
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# LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

**W**hat is the path to unity? Why does the journey between head and heart sometimes feel so long? How might we live in wholeness with all that is?

These are questions that invite us to explore the spiritual nature of connection. In the reflections, stories, and ideas throughout this issue, we can see that these questions are personal, relational, and systemic.

In one of our final meetings before publication, as we were checking in, Nadia noted how the mind-clutter of the 24-hour news cycle and the endless stream of headlines can trap us within an atmosphere of fear and anxiety. The repetitive glimpses of sensationalized and negative news can flatten all of our stories; can lead us to think in binary terms; and can force us into consuming meaning made by others instead of making it for ourselves. The potential of the media, however, is in its ability to connect us to people, places, worldviews, and ideas beyond what we already know.

As a magazine with the mission of creating a different kind of conversation, we take seriously the challenge of curating articles, essays, poems, and fine art that support our readers in unlocking the power of reflection and discernment in order to grapple with the essential questions of our time in ways that lead towards connection, healing, and growth. Perhaps more than ever, rising to this challenge feels urgent, particularly for those of us working for social justice.

In this issue, our contributors have taught us that in order to engage in the spiritual work of connection and justice with integrity we must be able honestly also to name disconnection, difference, otherness, and power.

Multiple pieces in this issue examine structures of oppression, tackling the ways that power and privilege impact how people show up to see and be seen. We feature Arts Connect International, an organization seeking to overturn the racism embedded in the art world by connecting artists of color with institutions that hold power in the art world. Heather Bryant takes on the ideas of being silenced and discovering one's voice in complicated family and social circumstances. In "How We Get Free," Monique Harris and Perry Dougherty invite us to examine how we have internalized ideas about difference and how reorienting ourselves to those ideas may support us in a quest for collective liberation.

The photography of Alia Ali and the prose of Allison Cof-felt take on the ways we see, process, and define difference between nations, cultures, and people, inviting us to explore questions of belonging, presence, and identity.

The spiritual teachings in these pages encourage us to explore the paradoxes of connection and of belonging. One such paradox is beautifully captured in C. Paul Schroeder's practice of seeing compassionately. Schroeder helps us understand that discomfort arises when we realize that the people around us are not simply the constructions of identities we have built in our minds, but that they are their own people, distinct and unique. This realization itself is part of our practice, and it is only when we risk disconnection from our worldview or our images of others that we can enter into real connection.

We are honored by the ways our contributors have articulated the messy spiritual work that pursuing connection calls us into.

You don't have to follow the news cycle to realize we live in a time when disconnection, fear, and anxiety abound. We hope that Anchor invites you to pause and consider how you might courageously choose connection, discovering in the process what it means to transform, heal, reconcile, see, and be seen.

We hope that these pages can guide you into deeper contemplation of the spiritual work of social justice.

Warmly,

Perry, Nadia, Elissa, and Tim

## WHAT IS THE SPIRITUAL WORK OF CONNECTION?

# ISSUE 08: THE CONTRIBUTORS



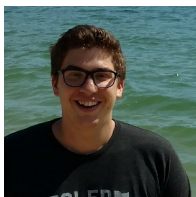
**Alia Ali** (Austria, 1985) is a Yemeni-Bosnian-American multi-media artist. Alia is a graduate of the United World College of the Atlantic (UWCAC) and holds a BA in Studio Art and Middle Eastern Studies from Wellesley College. Her most recent series, BORDERLAND, has been on display at several galleries worldwide. She is currently on exhibit at the Peter Sillem Gallery in Frankfurt, Germany. Learn more at [alia-ali.com](http://alia-ali.com).



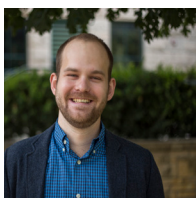
**E. P. Cutler** is co-author of the New York Time's best-selling fashion book *PANTONE on Fashion: A Century of Color in Design* and of *Art + Fashion: Collaborations and Connections Between Icons*. She lives in Paris and is currently working on her first biography, exploring the life of Madame Ginette Spanier. Author image courtesy of Matthew Pandolfe.



**Brian Braganza** is a facilitator and writer who blends circle processes with experiential community engagement. Brian became a Circle of Trust® Facilitator under the guidance of Parker J Palmer and the Center for Courage & Renewal. T.O.N.E. (Therapy Outside Normal Environments) is a men's group therapy project that utilizes adventure and expressive counseling techniques. Learn more at [freerangetherapy.ca/tonel](http://freerangetherapy.ca/tonel).



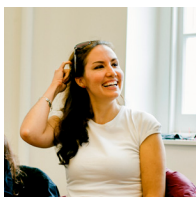
**Tim DeLong (Associate Editor)** is a master's candidate at Harvard Divinity School and a field placement intern at Still Harbor. At HDS, Tim focuses on religion in the Americas with special attention to the intersection of religion and science. Before moving to Boston, Tim worked as a community organizer in Detroit, a housing counselor in Northern Illinois, and a financial counselor in Chicago.



**Aaron Brown** was born in Texas and raised in Chad. He now lives with his wife, Melinda, in Kansas, where he is an Assistant Professor of Writing & Editing at Sterling College. He has been anthologized in *Best New African Poets* and has received Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net nominations. Learn more at: [aaronbrownwriter.com](http://aaronbrownwriter.com)



**C. Perry Dougherty (Editor)** serves as a facilitator, spiritual director, chaplain, and writer in her role as Executive Director of Still Harbor. She has made a career working with non-profit social justice organizations. Perry tailors her programs, workshops, and efforts to the exploration of how spiritual practice, courage, and creativity can enrich leadership for social justice. Perry is an ordained Interspiritual Minister.



**Heather Bryant**, a writer based in Sunnyside, NY, has published short fiction and nonfiction in *The Massachusetts Review*, *The Southeast Review*, *CURA: A Literary Magazine of Art and Action*, and in multiple anthologies. Her essay, "Habitat," won the 2009 Southeast Review Narrative Nonfiction Contest. She teaches at Pace University and leads writing workshops in New York City.



**Madlynn Haber** is a retired social worker and writer living in Florence, Massachusetts. She has published work in two anthologies, *Letters to Father from Daughters*, and *Word of Mouth Volume Two*.



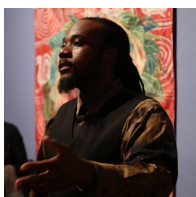
**Kasia Clarke** is originally from Virginia and now lives in Brisbane, Australia, where she studies medicine and writes poetry. In her free time, she enjoys traveling with her husband. She is a practicing Muslim.



**Monique Harris** is a Senior Associate at Still Harbor and also serves as a facilitator, chaplain, and spiritual director. A special education teacher by profession, Monique has worked in public education for more than 15 years. She also served as an Itinerant Deacon in the African Methodist Episcopal Church for 13 years.



**Allison Coffelt** lives and writes in Columbia, Missouri. Her work has appeared in the *Los Angeles Review of Books*, *Hippocampus*, *Crab Orchard Review*, and elsewhere. She works for True/False, a nonfiction film fest, and holds a Master's in creative nonfiction. This essay is from her first book, *Maps Are Lines We Draw: A Road Trip through Haiti* (Lanternfish Press, 2018).



**Stephen Hamilton** is an artist and arts educator living and working in Boston, Massachusetts. To explore Stephen Hamilton's work, visit [theartofstephen.tumblr.com](http://theartofstephen.tumblr.com).



**Nadia Colburn, Ph.D. (Editor)** holds a doctorate in English from Columbia University and a B.A. from Harvard University. She is a kundalini yoga teacher and mindful writing coach, and she offers workshops in person and online. Her writing has been published in more than sixty publications, including *The New Yorker*, *Boston Globe Magazine*, and *The Kenyon Review*. To get free meditation and writing prompts go to [nadiacolburn.com](http://nadiacolburn.com).



**Aziza Hasan**, Executive Director of NewGround, has extensive experience in program management and coalition building. Aziza's work has been featured in several outlets including Yahoo News, Public Radio's "Speaking of Faith" with Krista Tippett, and the LA Times, among others. Aziza currently serves on Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti's Interfaith Advisory Council.





**Kathleen Hirsch** is the author of *A Sabbath Life: One Woman's Search for Wholeness* (North Point Press, 2001), *Songs from the Alley* (Anchor, 1990), and several other books. She currently teaches social justice writing at Boston College and serves as a spiritual director at Bethany House of Prayer in Arlington, Massachusetts. She blogs at [kathleenhirsch.com](http://kathleenhirsch.com).



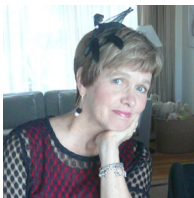
**Amy Perrier** is a self-taught, intuitive painter who focuses her work primarily in the complexities of layering transparent paints and revealing what lies beneath the surface of each piece. Amy has also won several awards in juried fine art fairs across the United States. Amy has a public studio and gallery in Hendersonville, NC. Learn more at [amyperrierpaintings.com](http://amyperrierpaintings.com)



**Andrea Hodos** is currently the Program Co-Director at NewGround, where she facilitates the High School Leadership Council and the adult Changemaker cohorts. She is also the Director of Sinai & Sunna: Women Covering, Uncovering and Recovering, a performance-based community venture harnessing the power of theater to move the Muslim and Jewish communities—literally and figuratively.



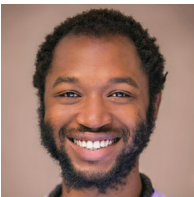
**Christine Poreba's** first book, *Rough Knowledge*, won the 2014 Philip Levine Prize for Poetry. Her poems have appeared in numerous journals, including *Subtropics*, *The Southern Review*, and *The Sun Magazine*, as well as various anthologies. She lives in Tallahassee, Florida with her husband and their young son.



**Gail Hosking** is the author of the memoir *Snake's Daughter: The Roads in and out of War* (University of Iowa Press) and the chapbook *The Tug* (Finishing Line Press). She holds an MFA from Bennington College. Her essays and poems have been published for years in literary journals and newspapers. She currently works as a freelance editor and writing consultant.



**Sebastian Robins** finds himself living, writing, teaching and parenting in New York City after 12 years in an elementary school and university educator in San Francisco, and four years as a resident in an off-grid intentional community in New Mexico. He pines for the ocean and mountains, but finds that a single day in Manhattan with two small boys provides more than enough wildness.



**Basil Kincaid** is an interdisciplinary visual artist from St. Louis whose work explores diasporic identity, heritage, family traditions, and performance/surveillance of self. An avid quilter, sculptor, photographer, poet and installation artist, Kincaid has shown in solo and group exhibitions across the United States and world. Check out his Instagram accounts [@basilkincaid](https://www.instagram.com/basilkincaid) and [@notcollage](https://www.instagram.com/notcollage) for more of his work.



**C. Paul Schroeder** is the author of *Practice Makes PURPOSE: Six Spiritual Practices that Will Change Your Life and Transform Your Community*. He is a social entrepreneur, author, and spiritual teacher who has spent over 20 years working at the intersection of spirituality and social change. He served for more than a decade as a Greek Orthodox priest.



**Brian Kuehn** is a pastel artist from Western North Carolina and often uses historic images depicting early American farm life and rural landscapes. Whether painting people or landscapes, his work has a strong use of composition, texture and color. Brian's work can be seen at many of the high-end juried art shows around the country. For more information, visit [briankuehnstudios.com](http://briankuehnstudios.com)



**Lauren Spahn** is a writer, yoga teacher, and birth doula. She has a background in facilitation and project development as well as non-profit communications and management. Whether teaching, writing, or witnessing, she stays tethered to her call to hold space for the healing and transformative power of presence and community to unfold.



**Elissa Melaragno (Editor)** has been a professional visual artist for thirty years with her works primarily on display in public and healthcare settings. She uses her training in spiritual direction and several holistic healing modalities to inform her work as an artist, art instructor, writer, and consultant in the area of the arts in healthcare.



**Wally Swist** is a writer whose books include *Huang Po and the Dimensions of Love*, *The Daodejing: A New Interpretation*, with David Breeden and Steven Schroeder, *Invocation*, and *The Windbreak Pine*. Forthcoming books include: *The View of the River*, *Candling the Eggs*, and *Singing for Nothing from Street to Street: Selected Non-fiction as Literary Memoir*. For more information, visit [wallyswist.com](http://wallyswist.com)



**Jennie Meyer, M.Div.** is a poet, yogi, and meditation instructor. Her poetry has appeared in *Common Ground Review*, *Ascent Aspirations Magazine*, and *Patchwork Journal*. Jennie lives in Gloucester, MA with her husband and three children.



**Becky Thompson, Ph.D. RYT-500** is a human rights activist, yoga teacher, and poet. Her latest book, *Teaching with Tenderness: Toward an Embodied Practice*, was released this week. She and Palestinian poet Jehan Bseiso are currently editing a volume of poetry, *Making Mirrors: Writing/Righting by Refugees*. For more info on the anthology please write: [becky.thompson@simmons.edu](mailto:becky.thompson@simmons.edu).

# ARTS CONNECT INTERNATIONAL

by Tim DeLong

Marian Brown through her work with Arts Connect International (ACI) is committed to addressing the racial injustice that exists in the contemporary art world. By partnering with emerging artists of color and power brokers in the arts, ACI is building greater equity, access, and inclusion in the sector.

**A**rts Connect International (ACI) addresses systemic inequity in the arts. ACI's mission is to partner with emerging artist leaders of color to build equity in and through the arts.

When ACI was first founded in 2014, its mission focused almost exclusively on individual leadership development. ACI was committed to cultivating and connecting leaders in the art field who were committed to social equity. The original programing, ACI Founder Marian Taylor Brown said, was focused on individual artists and leaders. ACI's leadership development network was, "almost like a mini-MBA" for artists who used their work to address justice issues.

But as ACI grew, Marian and others became convinced that they needed to focus on more than just the individual. To address the systemic nature of white supremacy in the arts, Marian said, ACI needed to pay attention to the institutions that hold power within those systems. About a year ago, ACI did just that – the leadership team started a consulting program that works with non-profit and for-profit arts organizations to address the cultural equity gap in the arts. Marian hopes that ACI's new holistic approach will help them better respond to systemic injustice in the arts.



featuring

# ALIA ALI BASIL KINCAID STEPHEN HAMILTON

In the pages that follow, we feature the fine art of three of ACI's emerging artists: Alia Ali, Basil Kincaid, and Stephen Hamilton. When asked about their contributions to the mission of ACI, founder, Marian Brown said, "Without these three artists, this organization wouldn't be where it is today."

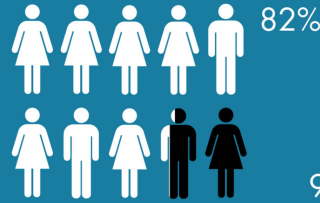
## "WE'LL GO WHERE THERE'S HEAT IN THE ROOM."

- Marian Brown, Founder  
*Arts Connect International*

there is a cultural equity gap  
in the contemporary art world,  
showing a vast underrepresentation  
of artists of color.

*this permeates many aspects of the industry:*

arts managers

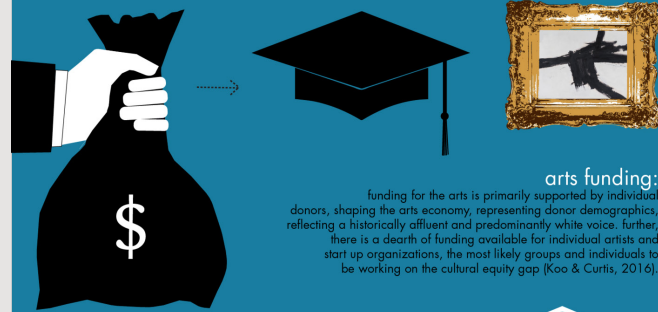


chief executive officers  
& executive directors



arts managing:

In the us, 82% of arts managers, and 92% of ceo's and ed's in the arts identify as white (Cuyler, 2013).



arts funding:

funding for the arts is primarily supported by individual donors, shaping the arts economy, representing donor demographics, reflecting a historically affluent and predominantly white voice. further, there is a dearth of funding available for individual artists and start up organizations, the most likely groups and individuals to be working on the cultural equity gap (Koo & Curtis, 2016).

arts training & academia:

demographics in academia and the arts do not reflect the full diversity of our us census, with an underrepresentation of artists of color at both student and faculty levels.



arts patrons:

"value" in the contemporary art world is defined by the monetization of work, dictated by the patronage of said work, which for centuries has been commanded by a predominantly white and western audience. western history of art and culture claims primacy over global contemporary art and especially its market. museums and art institutions all over the world therefore tend to have a uniform appearance.

Now, by partnering with emerging artist leaders of color and arts influencers who hold institutional power in the contemporary art world, ACI helps collectively build equity, access, and inclusion through transformational leadership development.

Recognizing the necessity to present these systemic inequalities in a concise, data-driven manner, ACI started a research wing to help crunch the numbers. The data ACI gathers might lead to advocate for even larger systemic changes by showing the interconnectedness between capitalism and white supremacy. This, Marian contends, will lead to new questions: "We have to ask: do we develop new rules to the game, or do we develop a new game altogether?"

As for the future, Marian isn't sure what direction the conversation is heading, but she knows ACI will be there. "We will go where there's heat in the room," she said, "we'll go towards those difficult questions." But even with the inevitable changes, Marian hopes that ACI will always maintain its community grounded mentality and continue to be a space for artists to create, "I will always think of ACI as an incubator space for equity. I hope that ten years from now we're community led on and for the quest towards equity." §

# ALIA ALIA



The term “borderland” is most commonly referred to as the crossroads where nations collide. It is a porous zone that diffuses outward from an artificially imposed human made punctuation called a border. Borders enact violence on the geography and identity of those living in borderlands. They are both imprints of power and scars of destruction. Borderlands, on the other hand, are the result of naturally occurring interactions among people and of nature trying to forge an existence in proximity to what is around them.

In this photographic series, BORDERLAND, Alia re-examines these demarcated zones as territories of exploration drawing attention to them as transient physical spaces and a contemporary phenomenon from which the body of artwork is presented and the

viewer is a participant.

The characters in the portraits, called —cludes, are wrapped in layers of fabric from eleven regions of the world that shield them from interrelating with anything beyond the material. Who is on the other side of the fabric questions the very nature of belonging and interrogates the binary of home and exile. Is the subject the one who imposes the standards, the decision maker, the ‘include’? Or the ‘exclude’?

Seeing is an act of power, but so is being seen. Are the —cludes hiding or are they being hidden? Is it an active form of anonymity or a passive one? When confronting the —cludes, we are forced to confront the ways we include and exclude others in our daily lives. Is exclusion motivated by a primitive fear and search for security? A form of

self-preservation? A metamorphosis of the outcast into villain?

What are the fabricated barriers in society that inhibit the incorporation of others? Or are the obstacles just that: ideas, intuitions, fear, discriminations and ‘understandings’? The fabric, like borders, is narrow but long, defined physically and yet interpretative in identity- both have a capacity of exploration. Textiles are products of the earth, canvases through which culture manifests itself at the surface, and objects that become a part of us. Aren’t borders as well? Or are they simply spaces of blankness?

BORDERLAND is currently on display at Peter Sillem Gallery in Frankfurt, Germany. For more details on BORDERLAND and Alia’s other work, visit [alia-ali.com](http://alia-ali.com).





*“Alia has pushed us beyond the concept of dualism or binary that we often talk about when it comes to inclusive practices.”*

- Marian Brown, Founder, ACI



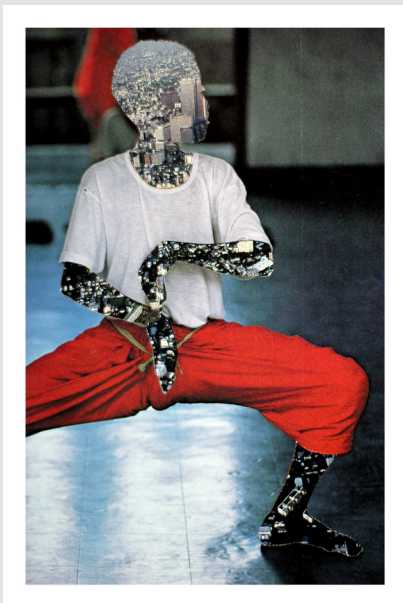
BORDERLAND by Alia Ali. 2017. Courtesy of Artist.







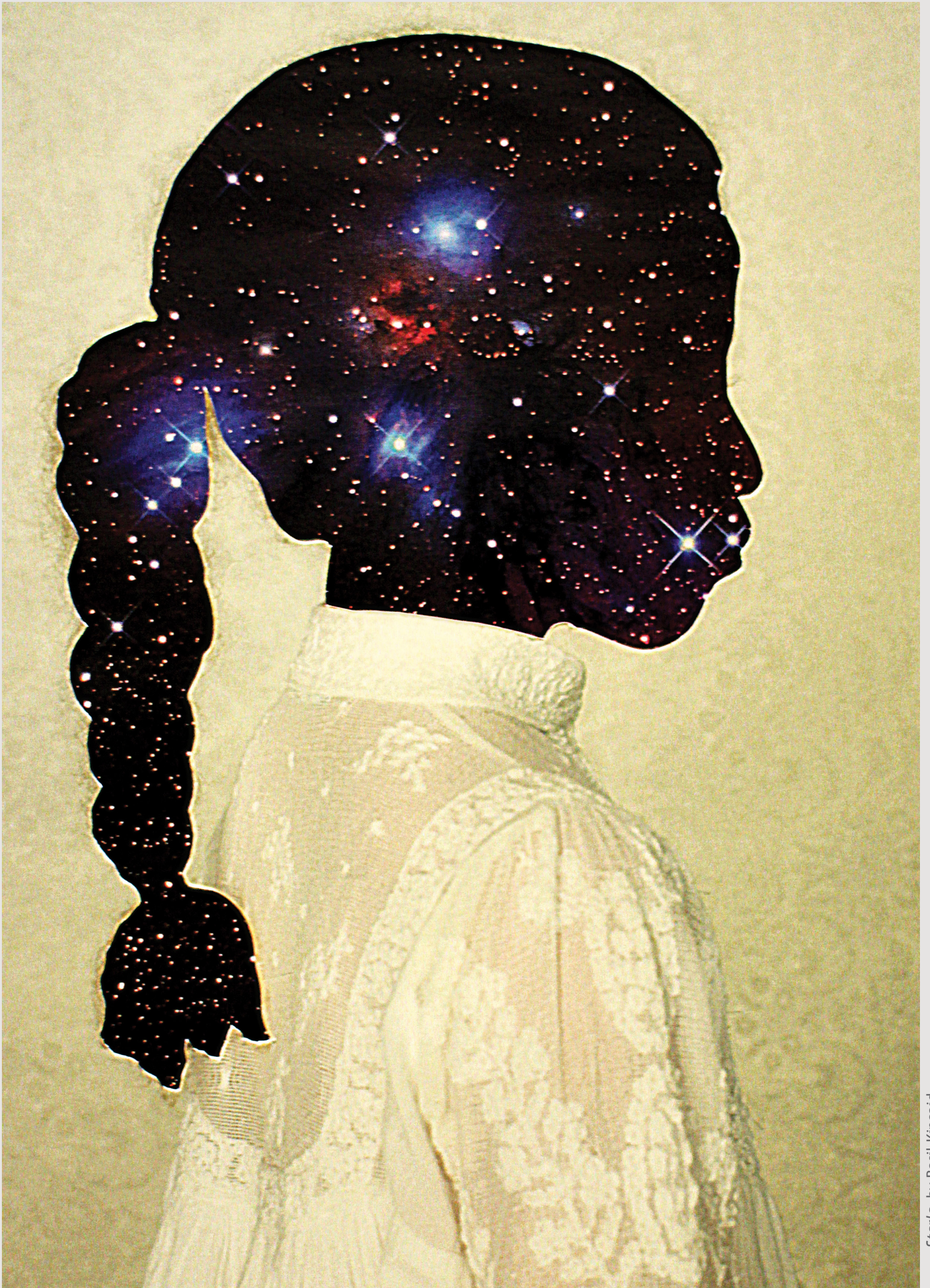
# BASIL KINCAID



**B**asil Kincaid's quest is to understand the wild tapestry of his own personal identity and cultural identity within the African Diaspora, contextualized by the scaffolding of his American experience. He practices self exploration, historical investigation, and critical social questioning to cultivate healing on a personal and cultural level, towards the remedy of Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome.

Within his practice he seeks to promote empathy, curiosity, critical thought, conversation, and inclusion. Having observed how perception and prejudice impact one's relationship to place and their sense of belonging or displacement, Basil's goal is to co-create healing sites that stimulate the ancestral memory of love as freedom within all of us. He believes such spaces will activate participation in shared liberation on local and global scales.

Basil's fine art is about the creation of experiences, objects, and spaces for interpersonal and ancestral connection. His work is primarily comprised of culturally contextualized, found, or donated materials. He often collects materials from people through social media. This methodology explores the seeming immateriality and physical disconnection of on-line spaces while observing how waste is reflective of lived experience. Featured here are a section of works from Basil Kincaid's NewCollage Series. For more on the series and his other work, visit [basilkincaid.com](http://basilkincaid.com).



Starla by Basil Kincaid

Adelaide by Basil Kincaid



Basil Kincaid



You Drive Me Wild by Basil Kincaid

Basil Kincaid

KNIT  
S

Searching the Library of the Heart by Basil Kincaid



*“Basil Kincaid was our inaugural artist-in-residence. He co-piloted the entire concept of ACI as we were doing it.”*

- Marian Brown, Founder, ACI

# STEPHEN HAMILTON

Stephen Hamilton's work focuses on the aesthetics, philosophies, and key symbols inherent throughout Africa and the African Diaspora. He strives to create a dialogue between contemporary Black cultures and the ancient African world. He seeks to describe a complex and varied Black aesthetic through a visual comparison of that which is shared amongst Black peoples around the world. These cultural analyses—the aesthetic, philosophical, and symbolic connections—form his visual language. His pieces depict African thought and culture as equal to, yet unique from, its western analogue. His work stands in stark contrast to the pervasive negative associations, which have become synonymous with Black culture.

To further explore the art and process of Stephen Hamilton, visit [theartofstephen.tumblr.com](http://theartofstephen.tumblr.com).

*“Stephen Hamilton puts at the forefront of all of his work the question, ‘Who is this for?’ Everything that Stephen does is and will be for his community.”*

- Marian Brown, Founder, ACI



Iya Mapo by Stephen Hamilton





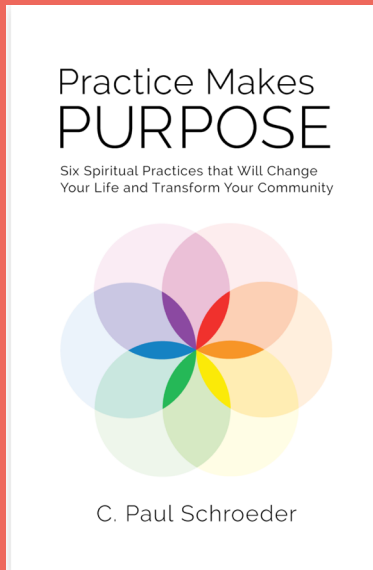




# THE ART & DISCIPLINE OF SEEING COMPASSIONATELY

by C. Paul Schroeder

*“Prophets and sages throughout the generations have all agreed on this one point: how you see determines what you see, and don’t see. So if we want to heal the divisions in our country and our homes, we have to learn a new way of seeing.”*



This article by C. Paul Schroeder is an adapted chapter excerpt from *Practice Makes PURPOSE: Six Spiritual Practices That Will Change Your Life and Transform Your Community*, published by Hexad Publishing, September 2017.

**A**cross our nation, throughout our world, viewpoint polarization is on the rise. People from different sides of the political aisle look at the same facts and draw radically different conclusions. Opposing camps assemble the same pieces of information into different pictures, then attack each other, shouting, “See? See? Here’s proof that we’re right and you’re wrong!” We are pulling farther and farther apart from one another, and the strained fabric of our democracy is starting to tear.

This dynamic, however, isn’t limited to the realm of politics. It shows up even in our most intimate relationships. In my interactions with those closest to me, I often find myself thinking, “You are so clearly wrong on this—why can’t you see it?” or “I have every right to be angry after what you did,” or “If you would just take my advice on this, you’d be much better off.” This usually happens because I make up stories to support my assumptions, selectively assembling the details into a picture that suits me. And when these stories are challenged, I dig in my heels and argue with people I love.

Prophets and sages throughout the generations have all agreed on this one point: how you see determines *what* you see, and don’t see. So if we want to heal the divisions in our country and our homes, we have to learn a new way of seeing.

The spiritual practice of Compassionate Seeing enables us to create space for stories that are different from ours, and engage curiosity and wonder toward people who don’t see the world as we do. It is the first of six practices described in my new book, *Practice Makes PURPOSE: Six Spiritual Practices That Will Change Your Life and Transform Your*

*Community*. The following excerpt is a short introduction to Compassionate Seeing, with some practical suggestions for how to start using it right away.

For more information about the book and the six practices, visit [www.sixpractices.com](http://www.sixpractices.com).

### **HOW TO PRACTICE COMPASSIONATE SEEING**

Ending the cycle of judgment requires Compassionate Seeing, the first and most fundamental of the Six Spiritual Practices. Compassionate Seeing is a moment-by-moment commitment to viewing ourselves and others with complete and unconditional acceptance—no exceptions. Here are the basic steps:

1. *Notice your discomfort.* Pay attention whenever something makes you feel uncomfortable, or seems painful, ugly, boring, or annoying. Don’t try to fix or change anything. Just notice it.

2. *Suspend your judgments.* Resist the inclination to immediately decide whether something is right or wrong, or whether you like or dislike it. Don’t assign blame, and don’t shame yourself or anyone else.

3. *Become curious about your experiences.* Start to wonder about yourself and others. For example, try asking, “I wonder why that bothers me so much?” or “I wonder what this is like for you?”

4. *Look deeply with the intention to understand.* Approach your experiences with a flexible mindset, and try to remain open to new information and alternative explanations.

## THE TWO MOVEMENTS OF COMPASSIONATE SEEING

### *The First Movement: Recognizing the Difference*

Compassionate Seeing has two movements, both of which are encoded in the universal spiritual prescription we know as the Golden Rule: treat others as you would want to be treated in their place. The first movement of Compassionate Seeing is *recognizing the difference* between ourselves and other people. This means seeing others as truly other—they are distinct individuals with their own unique experiences, preferences, and ambitions.

*“The practice of Compassionate Seeing reminds us above all that our story is not the story. There is a greater reality, a larger picture of which we see only a very small part. In this way, Compassionate Seeing connects us to Purpose, the experience of belonging to something infinitely greater than ourselves.”*

Focusing on our differences might seem counterintuitive at first, because we usually think of compassion as somehow blurring the distinction between ourselves and others. But if I don't recognize and respect the difference between me and you, I will impose my beliefs, values, and goals on you and get wrapped up in the outcome of your choices. I will act as if my story was your story, too. Whenever I find myself trying to control other people's behavior or manage their decisions, I take it as a sign that I am having trouble separating myself from them. When I notice this is happening, I find it helpful to repeat this simple maxim to myself: “What is about you is about you, and what is about other people is about them.” I have learned that as long as I keep this in mind, life tends to be much simpler for me and the people around me.

Recognizing the difference between ourselves and others is an especially critical skill when it comes to parenting. As a parent, I constantly struggle not to impose my desires and goals on my children. It's so easy for me to over-identify with them and make their success or failure about me. Much of the conflict between children and their parents happens because the parents don't recognize the difference between themselves and their children. It's important to remember always that our children have their own aspirations and life-trajectory—and they might be very different from our own.

### *The Second Movement: The Imaginative Leap*

As we recognize and accept the difference between ourselves and others, this naturally gives rise to curiosity about their experiences. This leads us to the second movement of Compassionate Seeing: we make an *imaginative leap* across the boundary that separates us. This imaginative leap is a daring act of curiosity and creativity. Instead of imposing my values and beliefs on someone else, I begin to wonder about that person's motivations, desires, and emotions. I put myself in the other person's place, asking the question, “If I were this person in this situation, what would I think, how would I feel, and how would I want to be treated?”

As I am making an imaginative leap into someone else's situation, I notice my tendency to make judgments pauses almost automatically. Curiosity and wonder are fundamentally non-judgmental approaches to the world. I find that I simply cannot hold a judgment in my mind and be truly curious about another person at the same time. Judgments pop like soap bubbles in the presence of curiosity. As soon as I start wondering about someone else's experience, I stop selectively gathering information to support my preconceived ideas. Instead of thinking I have the other person figured out, I see that person as a mystery. Engaging a discovery mindset helps us avoid judgments and stay flexible, open, and interested.

## COMPASSION AND PURPOSE

The practice of Compassionate Seeing reminds us above all that our story is not *the* story. There is a greater reality, a larger picture of which we see only a very small part. In this way, Compassionate Seeing connects us to Purpose, the experience of belonging to something infinitely greater than ourselves. When we practice Compassionate Seeing, we recognize that our lives are intertwined with a story much bigger than our own. Uncovering this thread of connection between us is like plugging into a powerful current of abundant vitality and joy.

Judgments, on the other hand, disconnect us from Purpose by falsely suggesting that what we see is all there is. This makes it easy for us to blame others for what we perceive as their shortcomings or bad choices. Judgments sap our time, energy, and attention. They cause us to waste these invaluable commodities constructing false narratives. If we could see the whole picture—or the whole person—then other people's behavior would probably make far more sense to us than it does now. The more I know of someone else's story, the easier it is for me to accept that person for who they are, even if I find their actions difficult or troublesome. So if I am having a hard time practicing compassion toward someone else, I take that as a sign that I just don't know the whole story. I'm not seeing the big picture. §



## MALINDI BEACH

In low tide, you can walk the cove—  
it comes to shoulder height

and at high tide, you have to row  
your way to the outcrop of rock

where Indian Ocean crabs  
try their best to stay dry,

moving from sand to boulder  
as the waves rise up

into the million crags of home.  
I came here once with my brother.

We beached our boat and floated  
in nearby shallows, watching

the ephemeral fish as the hours went away  
with the waves. Returning to rock,

we found our boat gone with the tide.  
In the distance, rising and falling,

its blue plastic hull burst surface.  
My brother tried to swim the current—

water pushing back his every stroke,  
but there was nothing to be done

except watch the boat get carried away,  
further and further, beyond our little

rock island. My brother  
slowed in the current, turning back.

I waited to ask why he couldn't outswim  
the current, why he'd left the boat

basking on the bar—  
and as he took in each breath,

his body heaving wave-like,  
the crabs appeared from the crags

of the hollowed stone  
as my brother returned, our figures huddled

along the shore, waiting  
for the tide to subside.

by Aaron Brown

*“I am nowhere near a beach, but surrounded by bodies of water.”*

# BODIES OF WATER

by Allison Coffelt



Human beings, we know, require water. It lubricates joints, cushions the brain and spinal cord, delivers oxygen, helps feed cells, regulates body temperature, and moves digestion forward. There is nothing like it.

Water leaves our bodies through urine, sweat, and breath. It mostly enters through the mouth.

The part of the brain that senses thirst is the hypothalamus. This is also the part that maintains homeostasis, or that beautiful, delicate balance that counters external with internal. It responds to temperature and sleep, hunger, and moods. It constantly checks the body's here with the world out there.

Dr. Gardy and I have switched to Highway 1 for the second leg of our trip. His clinic, OSAPO (Organizasyon Sante Popilè) is about 60 miles north of Port-au-Prince, Haiti. We'll follow the coast up the Western side of Hispaniola island and cut to backroads at the small town of Montrois, passing through the Artibonite Valley. The whole thing will take three hours.

I am in Haiti after a decade of not going; after a decade of activism and learning and fundraising; after thinking I didn't need to go to understand this place's pull on me. Haiti was first to teach me, on some guttural level, about distance and the ways in which we construct a sense of *here* that counters *there*. I started reading about Haiti at 15; I was curious and malleable. These lessons could have come from anywhere, really, but Haiti was just far enough away to see them clearly. It's harder, sometimes, to recognize what's in front of you.

Still, I wouldn't go. Not until I understood I needed to experience Haiti not via page or screen, but through my skin. Through the thin wall that separates me from the world out there.

The definition of body of water is broader than I first thought. I knew oceans, seas, and lakes, but it can also

be ponds, swamps, or even puddles. Running water counts, too.

My *here*, in the middle of my home country, appreciates these expansive qualifications. I am nowhere near a beach, but surrounded by bodies of water.

The human body is sixty percent water.

For a while, the route Gardy and I take runs almost parallel to the Artibonite River, which supplies much of Haiti's 150-square-mile central plateau with water. We're miles from this current; we can't see it, but I can feel its presence. Thirty-three months ago the cholera outbreak began on the central plateau in Mirebalais and met the Artibonite, its deltas, streams, and watershed.

I will meet a patient in a few days who presents with bloody stools. He is 69 and does not have cholera. He will lean over his lap, elbows on knees and an oversized plaid shirt hanging from his frame, as he speaks with a clinic doctor.

I will notice his puffy right eye and later learn this is a symptom of Chagas disease.

Chagas, unlike cholera, is caused because you're poor. Chagas, like malaria, is transmitted by an insect bite, though not from a mosquito. This bug thrives in walls made of mud or thatch or straw—the only kind most poor, rural people in Haiti can afford.

This nocturnal insect, *triatomine*, bites and ingests your blood and defecates. If you scratch the bite and then itch your face or rub your eye while sleeping, the Chagas *t. cruzi* parasite from the feces enters your body and lies dormant.

Cholera, on the other hand, does not lie dormant, waiting to flare up. It does not lurk in the background and come out at night. The disease comes from one specific strand, *vibrio cholerae*,

and it either exists and is a problem, or doesn't and isn't. Once introduced, cholera is made worse by poor infrastructure and water systems. But, unlike Chagas, being poor and having mud walls does not cause cholera. Before 2011, not a single case of cholera had been found in Haiti for over a hundred years.

I ask Gardy if OSAPO has been treating a lot of cholera.

They have a whole tent, he says.

“Still?” I say.

“Oh yes. But it's nowhere near as bad as it was.”

After the 2010 earthquake when the UN set up a base near the banks of the Artibonite, they hired the cheapest company they could find, SANCO, to handle septic waste. Jonathon Katz, the AP reporter who traced the cholera outbreak to Mirebalais interviewed a man who lived next to the UN base. The man had watched the septic trucks dump waste into the pools of water by his house.

“When it rained, the pools overflowed,” writes Katz in *The Big Truck That Went By*. “Sometimes they ran downhill to the river. Sometimes they flowed the other way, toward Chery's house, and the smell would get so bad the family couldn't sleep.”

Katz also found a broken PVC pipe leading from the back of the base into the Artibonite River.

In her examination of *Illness as Metaphor*, Susan Sontag writes:

“Cholera is the kind of fatality that, in retrospect, has simplified a complex self, reducing it to sick environment.”

A death that renders an individual a product—made by the market. A market that rises or floods or dips—moves, in other words, like water. A death that strips individuality and is, without doubt, preventable.

Cholera only stops when it's treated as a crisis, an epidemic, a wave.

OSAPO's cholera tent has two rows of narrow beds lining each side with an aisle down the middle, infirmary style. There is a UN seal stamped on the front. A UN issued tent for a UN issued disease.

I hear people talk about flow with longing. They want to make things flow or find their flow. What they mean is a smooth transition, like water pouring from a vessel, assuming the shape of its new home.

This attraction to an ease of movement says something about our desire for less resistance. We are, it seems, on some basic level, most at peace with fewer barriers between the self and that which is beyond.

To get clean water where I'm from, I walk to the faucet.

Unless of course I walk to the faucet, and it's not clean, which does happen in the country of my *here*. When it does, I am alarmed—my trust and health forsaken. And my standard, which defines my sense of *here*, is challenged.

Back at the birthing home I visited before I met Gardy, a community health worker was teaching people how to clean their water. Her job is especially important now, post-cholera. Put the pills in it, she would say, and wait fifteen minutes. Fifteen minutes, she would say, is a good amount. It's the amount it takes for you to walk from here to the road.

The man at OSAPO who walked “only” a few miles in his black rubber sandals for the Chagas diagnosis should be fine, the doctor says. The medicine will clear it up, at least until the next bug bites him.

With little or no immunity to cholera, you can die within a handful of hours.

Water is 70% of the brain, 80% percent of the lungs, and 90% of blood plasma.

I remember learning about water in the human body as a child: a *Magic School Bus* drawing of a body outlined, and water past its midpoint, like a half-filled cup. I was a walking glass of water, and if I turned upside down, it would all rush to my head.

Some illnesses look pretty, even beautiful, under the microscope. Take Chagas, swimming like a snap pea in a pool of purple dye. Cholera is not one of these illnesses. It's a collection of furry, stubby worms clumping together, demolishing the insides.

When *vibrio cholerae* appeared in October 2010, Haiti was still sifting through earthquake wreckage from nine months before. The disease broke through like a hole in a dam, first one place, then another, and then it came as a swell.

Cholera is a fast loss of liquid; the body dumps itself out. Severe diarrhea, vomiting, inability to hold down more fluid.

After the first case, it's a race: you need filters or water cleaning packets; no raw vegetables if you don't know who washed them and with what. Be on constant alert.

The strain of *vibrio cholerae* that ran into the Artibonite was eventually matched to an outbreak in Kathmandu. As it turns out, the peacekeepers in Mirebalais were Nepalese. They had medical tests done once three months before departure per UN protocol. But this protocol did not involve a cholera test despite the *here* from where they came. And despite that in their soon-to-be *there* were people without a shred of immunity.

The cholera tests would have cost \$2.54 per peacekeeper, a recent Yale study showed. Plus an additional dollar per person for preventative medicine.

Along Highway 1, blues of sky and sea compete for brilliance. They come in glimpses through Gardy's window.



Seven months after the cholera outbreak of 2010, the UN finally issued a report.

It traced the outbreak's origin and spread, but excluded medical information from the soldiers, thereby denying responsibility. It claimed a "confluence of circumstances... was not the fault of, or deliberate action of a group or individual," reports Katz.

This, after not testing. This, after hiring the cheapest contractor to build the worst waste water treatment system. This, denying involvement while simultaneously testing the base that leaked the disease.

A confluence—that word we use when bodies of water collide. As if inevitable.

Owning the mistake would have meant liability, which would have required money and action.

Admission of impact smudges the line between *here* and *there*.

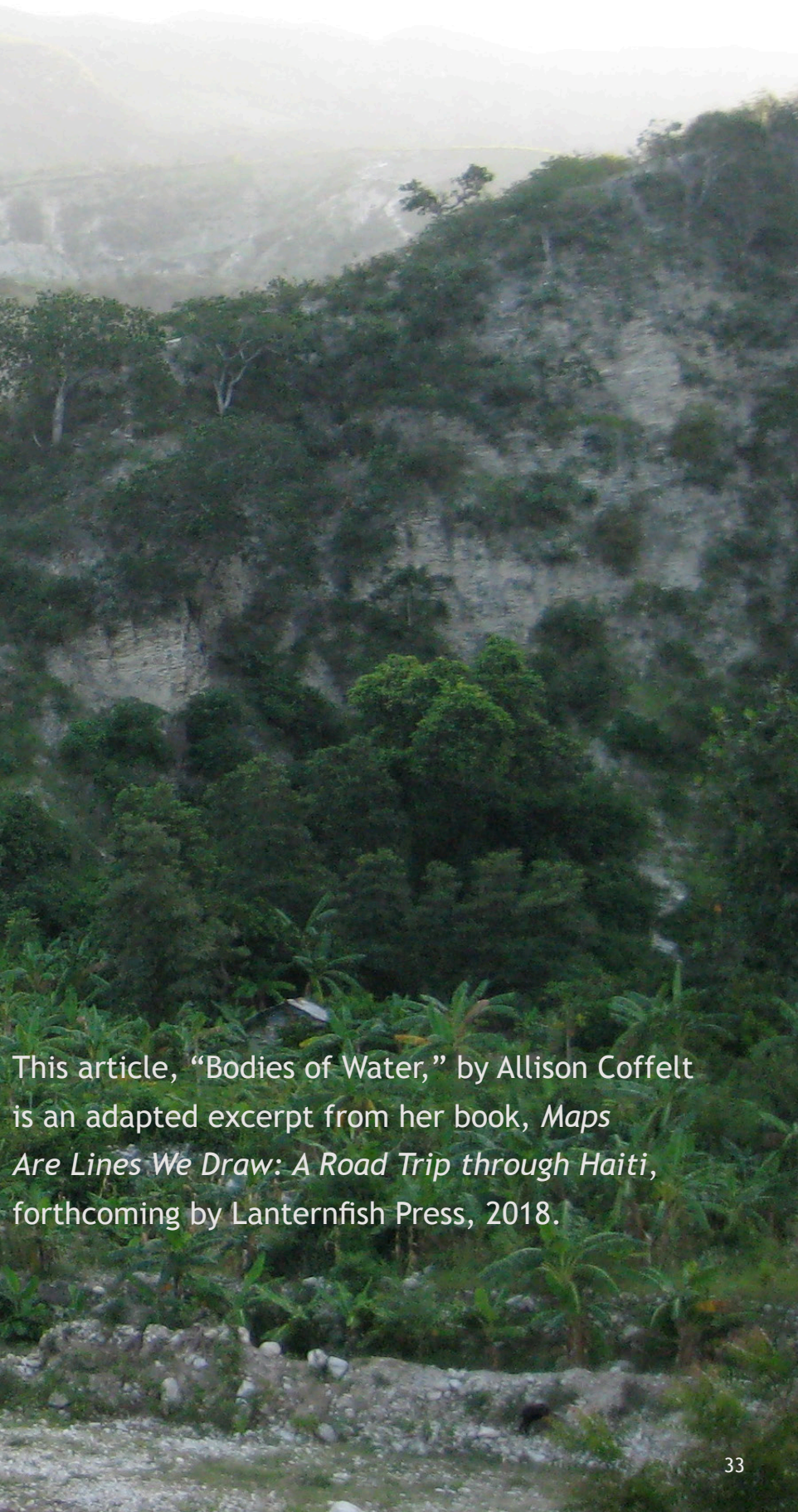
In this, the fastest and largest spread of cholera in the world, over 10,000 people have died and almost a million people have fallen ill.

Almost six years after the outbreak began, the UN admitted "involvement."

Two months later, the floods came. Hurricane Matthew: wind and water ripped across the island; this water-borne illness in its wake.

When the UN finally apologized for its role, the Secretary General called for \$400 million dollars and a new approach. As of mid 2017, they have raised two percent.

The body can survive for more than three weeks without food. But it cannot go more than three to five days without water. §



This article, "Bodies of Water," by Allison Coffelt is an adapted excerpt from her book, *Maps Are Lines We Draw: A Road Trip through Haiti*, forthcoming by Lanternfish Press, 2018.

# MY PERSONAL SESSION WITH THOMAS MOORE

by Kathleen Hirsch

**T**wenty-five years ago, in his best seller, *Care of the Soul*, Thomas Moore gave mainstream America permission to use the word “soul” and not get laughed out of the party. Offering an avuncular conduit to the inner world, the monk-turned-psychologist became a catalyst for a holistic vision of human potential. His book re-energized the mindfulness movement, the re-discovery of the body as source of sacred wisdom, and an activist stance towards psychological inquiry. Outlier practices like yoga, meditation, and reiki became *du rigueur*.

My personal copy of *Care of the Soul* joined my collection of writings by Jung and Jung’s luminous descendants, Marie von Franz, James Hillman, Marion Woodman, and others. What set Moore apart was his kindly approachability. Drawing on the writings of his Renaissance muse, Marcilio Ficino, Moore encouraged over-committed westerners to attend to our dreams, create daily rituals, and practice conviviality. Moore saw us as essentially good, if uptight, materialists in need of

a more holistic vision of the self in order to live lives of true dignity, intent and joy. For a generation, his voice was a warm welcome out of the wilderness.

Even as he moved into the role of columnist (*Spirituality Today*) and guru (a regular at Kripalu and Omega), with his Van Dyke beard, bright eyes, and compact, natty mien, sharing workshop billing with Deepak Chopra, Joan Borysenko, and the like, he continued to spin out books—some two dozen since 1992, on topics ranging from sex to bathing to golf.

Now, at the age of 75, he has taken up the topic of aging.

I found myself wondering what he makes of his legacy. How do those of us committed to consciousness and restorative justice reckon the results of our work in these troubling times? Where has mindfulness gotten us? And what remains to be done?

We met for breakfast in Cambridge, MA a few weeks before *Ageless Soul* was scheduled for publication (*St. Martin’s Press*). Moore arrived in a

navy blazer and a plaid shirt, easeful, relaxed, and prepared to be interested. I felt as if we were old friends just picking up a conversation left off a while back. After ordering berry smoothies and a bit of small talk about his recent New Testament translations, we turned to my questions.

*Care of the Soul* gave us a language for the vitality of the inner life in the culture’s public space. What can we say about its contribution to our advancement in the intervening 25 years? Was our progress an illusion?

“We haven’t improved,” he admits, by way of understatement.

“The forces arrayed against the humanity of the person permeate every aspect of our lives.

“Simply put, it is the quantification of life. Materialism, treating the body as a mechanism, a system of chemical reactions, and the ‘mind’ as an object that is somehow ‘fixable’ by Big Pharma, have taken hold so completely that alternative views go nearly unheard. We have fallen, if anything, even more



*“We have fallen, if anything, even more under the sway of materialism than we were two decades ago.”*

under the sway of materialism than we were two decades ago.

“We live in this insane society that treats everybody like a thing. Even in psychology, now, we are quantitative. The validation for the inner voice is almost non-existent.”

*“The conscious man and woman needs to locate those guides and images that can enable them to do the essential inner work.”*

In the bleak context of these materialistic time, Moore speaks of age as much more than just the last stand against the abyss.

Age in these times—perhaps in every time—becomes, for Moore, the opportunity to counter empty busyness, acquisition, and the domineering ego (the cornerstones of materialist philosophy), and instead embrace a deeper spirituality. If we accept this challenge, and its attending renunciations, age can serve as the threshold into one of the great transformational archetypes, that of elder and sage.

“When you are older, what you do is extremely useful. The young need the refined intelligence of age. They need our mentoring, our modeling, and our life wisdom.”

This journey demands nothing less than the transformation of the ego.

“Jung moved close to it when he said we need a new kind of center. Not the ego. It’s something that’s more at home in the unconscious. Hillman called it ‘an imaginal ego,’ by which he meant, a poetic ego, one that sees layers in everything. Layers and depths. Whatever you look at, no matter what it is—a thing, an object, an animal, a person, a plant. You see these layers. A poet al-

ways sees layers.”

This is the “work” of age.

“It isn’t about productivity, but a different kind of work. When the outer world becomes less pressing, the inner world ‘increases.’”

The way into this work, for Moore, lies in grounded acts of creativity, activities that engender reverie and an opening to the imagination.

“I think Jung would suggest that what we need to do is find a way to be more comfortable with intuition, divination, artistic expression, with image and metaphor. All the things that aren’t taken seriously in this culture. Jung was trying to suggest that we need to develop an ego that can live that way, on a deeper intuitive level, trusting intuition, reading poetry, reading the signs.

“There is a natural spirituality that comes with age, a natural contemplative attitude that doesn’t have to be some system or formal ‘way.’”

In a public sphere overtaken by cell phones and angry speech, it is helpful to remember the special alchemy of simply being with others in a state of receptivity. Travel, knitting, spending time with friends for the pure pleasure of it are all contemplative activities.

“Whatever we can do that allows the inner matter of our souls and imaginations to take form in the outer world in ways they haven’t until now is the process of soul-work. This is the invitation of age. It is an alchemical process, this work on our ‘beings.’ If we could do that, we’d be a different kind of person.”

It is clear that Moore is more concerned with individual consciousness than he is with social critique. Or, to put it more precisely, though he passionately rues the materialism of western medical practice, and the obsession with “fixing” symptoms that rules much modern therapy, his concern is less with repairing broken systems than

with continuing to live out his life’s work of lighting the journey of souls.

“In the monastery, I learned that ‘to work is to pray.’ What you do is prayer. That got through to me. I’ve always viewed my individual work as drawing out a person’s inner excellence. This was what the Greeks meant when they used the word, ‘therapy,’ which they did quite a bit. Plotinus added the element of beauty. These are my sources. And my writing is my personal daily spiritual practice. As soon as I wake in the morning, I go to my desk.”

I reflect on the humble, hidden nature of growth and transformation. It is so easy to jump off the rails into a sort of sociological analysis of matters that are essentially sacramental. It is, indeed, one of the temptations of the times. Moore is mindful, gentle, corrective, ever concrete, ever grounded.

The conscious man and woman needs to locate those guides and images that can enable them to do the essential inner work.

“You can do things when you are older that you can’t do when you are younger. If you travel, don’t be just a world traveler. Travel because you really want to have an experience. Paint. Make music. Write. These are all pretty good options. Be curious; follow your own path to meaning.”

I am reminded of Hillman’s observation: “Aging is a mystical struggle between the progress of a civilization forward and ‘the little man at the end of the road.’” If the human task is complete insofar as we have committed ourselves wholly to a cultural good larger than ourselves, then Moore has made a good journey. As we finish our smoothies, I think perhaps we reckon best the gift that has been our years on earth not in the marquis issue of “legacy,” but by remaining in conversation with one another, sharing what we have learned and loved with those we befriend along the way. §

# THE DINING ROOM

by Madlynn Haber

It is quiet in the dining room of the nursing home at 5:15. No one speaks. The residents eat carefully and intentionally. This is the dining room for those who are able to feed themselves, and that is what they do. Each one looks straight-ahead, lifting fork, spoon, and cup from the table to their mouth. They are focused on eating, chewing and swallowing. They are focused on drinking, sipping and swallowing. There is no chatter, no conversation, no dawdling. Time is limited and nourishment is necessary. They eat with purpose, not with joy or pleasure, not with humor or social engagement. There is no mistaking this for a middle school cafeteria. There will not be a food fight.

I sit on the seat of my mother's walker at the corner of her table and observe. Two aides are outside the dining room door, chatting softly with one another. A momentary break for them between distributing the trays of food and collecting them. The residents eat at their tables on their own. I am the only outsider in the room.

The silence and the dedication to eating I observe holds my attention. I watch each resident in their robot like interactions with their food and wonder how each one arrived here. I consider how each one's life unfolded for them to be in this nursing home. Would they have imagined this happening to them? Would they have chosen this place?

I am sitting at the corner of the table with a perspective on the human condition. If I were I able to paint, I might reproduce the whole scene. I might create some series of abstractions that begin with the withered, wrinkled, grey-looking person at the table in front of a tray. Maybe it would evolve into showing the various people that the person once was:

behind the elder stooped over her plate would be a taller better dressed middle-aged woman and, behind her, a smiling young adult, then a teen, a girl, a toddler. Going back through the years, all the people this person once was live on somewhere in memories and maybe in photographs. I imagine all the lives they have lived are swirling around them as they shuttle forkfuls of food to their mouths. Are others left to remember those lives? Have the children they once were long been forgotten? Or can they remember themselves?

From my perch on the side of the table, I wonder how it comes to this. All those years of growth and enhancement eventually evolve into deterioration and loss. Where did everyone go? Weren't there husbands, lovers, children and friends, grandchildren and neighbors, coworkers and acquaintances, sisters and cousins? Where are they now? These people are left here in silence and separation, alone. Some are no longer able to speak, no longer able to make sense, to articulate and respond. Do those who can, just think "why even bother?"

The awesome silence feels overwhelming. If I were a photographer, I might photograph each one individually. Each in their own portrait with a tray of meat and beans, fruit cocktail, can of tomato juice, and cup of lukewarm coffee. I might fill a gallery with photograph after photograph, each one capturing the light that remains in their eyes, cloudy and worn. I might photograph each one individually and then all of them together from the corners of the room. I smile at the woman next to my mother. She breaks the silence and asks me to please open her juice. §



# MOVING BEYOND FEAR TOGETHER

by Aziza Hasan and Andrea Hodos

Concern and anger overcame us when we heard that a mother and daughter had been punched in the face in the subway in Queens, New York. Seeing the Orthodox Jewish woman's head covering, the assailant mistook the pair as Muslim, assaulted them and yelled "get out of my country." The New York Daily News reports that hate crimes are up by 33% in New York and Muslims have seen a 48% increase in hate incidents since 2016. Nation-wide, the Anti Defamation League reports that "anti-Semitic incidents in the U.S. jumped 86 percent in the first quarter of 2017 compared to same period last year." With the rise in hateful sentiments toward both Muslim and Jewish communities and the lack of differentiation between both communities, it is clear that Muslims and Jews are seen as "the other, together." Indeed, we know women of both faiths have chosen to no longer wear their head coverings in public. Some families choose not to display their religious attire in public spaces.

Feeling this fear ourselves, we recognize the urge to retreat and retract, to focus on protecting our loved ones and

ourselves. And yet, fear has a way of restricting us in ways that might initially protect us, but may ultimately put us at greater risk. Egyptian icon and poet, Naguib Mahfouz encapsulates this danger, writing: "Fear does not lead to life, fear leads to death." If we only act on our urge to isolate, we cheat ourselves out of relationships with allies who could strengthen us in the long run.

The beginning of the New Year for Jews and Muslims is an important time for reflection in both communities. Since in 2017 the Jewish and Muslim New Year coincide, it seems like a timely moment to consider how we can strengthen one another and ourselves to move through the fear that may paralyze us and cause us to face greater jeopardy. We can turn to the imagery of our holidays for some insight.

Jews refer to the holidays of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur as the Yamim Nora'im, "The Days of Fear/Awe." Rosh Hashanah is the time to recognize the sovereignty of God as Creator of the World, Witness and Judge. God has the capacity for sight and perspective beyond anything we can imagine.

The themes of fear and sight weave through many of the Biblical texts read during the High Holidays. The ability to see things anew recurs in the readings—for instance, when Abraham lifts his eyes and sees the ram revealed in the thicket, waiting to be sacrificed in the place of his son, Isaac. Throughout the holidays, the liturgy and texts call us to widen our perspective, to see anew that which might be beyond our immediate reality.

Although not part of the high holiday canon, there is a moment later in the Torah that seems pertinent, where the Torah presents a pun on the words "fear" and "sight." At the beginning of Exodus, the actions of many women brings Moses into the world and keeps him safe. Among these women are two midwives described as "Hebrew midwives" or "Midwives to the Hebrews." Are they Hebrews or Egyptians? We don't know. What we do know is that that when given a commandment by Pharaoh: "LOOK at the birthstool, if it is a boy, kill it," instead of paying attention to the gender of the child, "the midwives feared God and did not do as Pharaoh commanded, and let the

boys live.” [Exodus 4:16-17] The word “look” and the word “fear” act as homonyms for one another in the Hebrew text. The midwives have taken Pharaoh’s command and reinterpreted it; they see something beyond the immediate danger of Pharaoh’s retribution, something that gives them the strength and moral clarity to act on in solidarity with and on behalf of the Hebrews.

While the midwives made Moses’ life possible by achieving perspective beyond their immediate physical fears in the Torah, the Quran also has a story about fear and the life of Moses. For Sunni Muslims, this story is at the center of the holiday of Ashura, when Muslims fast to commemorate the day that Moses fasted as gratitude for the liberation of the Israelites. Shia Muslims mourn the death of the grandson of Prophet Mohammad and refrain from all celebration.

The Muslim tradition dives into the story of Moses in Chapter 20, fraught with fear: A terrified mother places her son, Moses, into the river and tells her sister to secretly follow him as he flows down the river. Moses is eventually saved by the Pharaoh’s wife, but once grown, he flees the Pharaoh’s home in fear after deadly confrontation. After some time, Moses entertains the idea of going back to face the Pharaoh, but when he and his brother Aaron express

hesitation prior to confronting the Pharaoh, God says: “Do not be afraid, I am with you both, hearing and seeing everything.” [Quran 20:46] The Almighty also tells Moses to speak gently to the Pharaoh when requesting freedom for the Israelites—telling him to “speak softly so that he may hear his transgressions.” [Quran 20:44] The command to speak softly is perplexing given the Pharaoh’s record of brutal oppression. Yet soft and gentle speech is God’s directive so the message would be heard and reflected upon. Even though Moses is fearful to confront the Pharaoh, he moves forward.

The story continues with Moses working through fear in different trials and challenges, eventually receiving the declaration that God is “forgiving towards those who repent, believe, do righteous deeds, and stay on the right path.” [Quran 20:82] The text beautifully mirrors one of the central prayers in the Jewish High Holiday liturgy where T’shuvah (repentance), T’fillah (prayer), and Tzedakah (justice) are held up as powerful tools to “transform the harshness of our decree” no matter how harsh the circumstances.

Collectively, these texts give us models for harnessing courage together as we confront our fears. Repentance requires that we broaden our perspectives to face the ways we have contrib-

uted to the pain of others and to repair those relationships. Prayer, belief, and reflection help us keep faith during trying times. When we clarify and broaden our perspectives, we see beyond our immediate fears to the concerns of others. As we heal our relationship with God and ourselves, as we repair our relationships with others, and as we reach out to work toward justice, we ultimately create and reinforce the safety net that holds us all. We transform our fear into a catalyst for change.

May we, like the midwives, have the courage to look past our immediate fears and use our newfound perspectives to give birth to justice and righteousness. As we reach out, may our relationships with one another as Muslims and Jews sustain and support us, allowing us to reach past our immediate communities. May we remember the mother and daughter on the subway, keeping them in our hearts as we work through our fear and contribute to a safer world for all. §

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## REFLECTIVE READING QUESTIONS

1. *How have you seen fear be transformed into a catalyst for change?*
2. *What is a story from your own experience in which you were prompted to move beyond fear and courageously see anew?*
3. *How does God, your higher power, or deep sense of purpose support you in navigating through fear?*

Bring this article and these questions to your own reading group for discussion or join our conversation about this article online at [anchormagazine.org](http://anchormagazine.org).



# WILL YOU BUY ME FLOWERS?

*A MOMENT OF SHARED HUMANITY*

by Lauren Spahn

Connection has the remarkable capacity to transform our perception of ourselves, of others, and of the greater web of humanity in which we all share a part. In the truest sense of the word, connection shows up in many different shapes, sizes, and forms. Yet when we conceive of connection in our culture, we tend to focus the discourse around deeply woven, long-term relationships grounded in history and loyalty. In my experience, however, it is often the many moments of connection that have been just that—moments, fleeting in nature—that truly illuminate and, therefore, hold the capacity to transform our perception.

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My train lurches to a halt at Boston's South Station. In need of some fresh air before embarking on the next leg of my journey, I step outside and am greeted by the local farmer's market.

I naturally gravitate towards the flower stand. Buying myself flowers is one of my routine practices of self-love, and apparently I'm craving some. But

the pragmatist in me doubts that they'll fare well on my six-hour flight home, so I head over to the food truck stationed at the edge of the plaza near the park.

With a rice bowl in hand, I grab a set of chopsticks and seek out a cozy spot on the lawn to drop my bags and take a seat. I begin to watch the urban scene unfolding before me. It is dynamic to say the least. I watch commuters walking as quickly as their legs can carry them and drivers anxiously tapping their hands on the steering wheel. I see a homeless man sleeping in the far corner of the park and the BudLight girl setting up a small outdoor bar for happy hour. I notice a woman in a blue sweatshirt and red hat carrying a garbage bag, half-full, in one hand and a small bag of dog food in the other. As I begin to speculate the contents of her garbage bag, our eyes meet. And as though my inner dialogue has been projected across the park in this fleeting moment, she cuts across the lawn heading towards me.

Suddenly, this woman is directly in

front of me. She drops her bag, puts her hand out, and introduces herself: “Hi, I’m Linda.” In a scattered attempt to conceal my surprise and slight disorientation at her approach, I awkwardly drop my chopsticks and receive her hand replying, “Hi, Linda. I’m Lauren. It’s nice to meet you.” Maintaining eye contact with a fierce intensity, she moves to take a seat in the bright red Adirondack chair behind me. I’m confused yet there is something in her eyes that draws me in, so I shift my positioning to face her. My confusion further befuddles me. My work in social justice informs my understanding – intellectually at least – of the inherent value of connection. Yet here, I’m stumbling.

She begins to ask me questions about myself, and, in the process, she inserts snippets about her own life. I try to discern how, exactly, I got into this conversation. My assumption that this woman is deeply lacking connection in her life surfaces a sadness within me. And in the shadows of that sadness is shame.

*Who am I to judge this person before me?*

*Practice presence, I remind myself. Presence is love.*

Linda continues to drive our conversation with beautifully deliberate and profoundly genuine questions. She asks if I go to church; I say that I am deeply spiritual, but that I don’t go to church. She shares that she doesn’t go to church either and that her boyfriend says it’s just an excuse for people to dress up, see, and be seen. As we both laugh, I feel a spark of connection with her.

She asks another question, I answer and she shares. Our dialogue continues with this cadence and we find a deeper space of connection with each exchange:

I’m from Chicago, have one younger sister, and two loving parents who have dedicated themselves to us even though 17 years of marriage

failed them. Linda is from Vermont, was in the foster care system as a child, and the moment she turned 18 she was left to survive without family (or anyone) to support her.

I moved to Boston 10 years ago for my first job out of college. She bought a bus ticket to Boston 5 years before that in search of one. Since then, work has moved me to Haiti and now California; she has been homeless three times yet re-established a home for herself each time and currently lives in Section VIII housing.

We share a frustration with the health care system and how challenging it is to navigate, though my primary interface is for birth control and hers is the chronic management of HIV.

She loves her neighbor’s two pups (hence the bag of dog food she is carrying), and I can’t wait to go home to snuggle my German Shepherd (I share a photo).

We both find walks by the water to be centering and marvel together over the beautiful forms of community we each have in our lives.

As we talk, I observe the darting of her eyes, the twitching of her hands, the shaking of her legs, and I wonder the extent of the health complications – physical and mental – with which she grapples. My sadness re-emerges. Linda does not explicitly identify her experiences as suffering, but I receive them as that. I wonder if that’s fair of me and question how much of this perception is shaped by my own experiences of suffering and bearing witness to the suffering of others.

And as though our thoughts are pacing along the same track, she suddenly states: “A lot of people must judge you.” I pause, taken aback, yet again. For the first time, I think of what I must look like to her – with my gladiator sandals, high-wasted jeans, trendy floral jacket, and embroidered bag sitting

here in the park eating my food truck meal. As I laugh my ego aside, a smile spreads across my face, and I respond, “Yes, probably.” I’m inspired by her honesty and curious as to whether she perceives my interaction to be misaligned with my image.

I am struck by how our mutual openness and curiosity has allowed us to discover such a depth of connection. Despite the vast differences that exist between Linda and me, we’re able to uncover the honesty and humility of our shared humanity simply by listening and sharing. Presence is a practice of the heart. And my heart has been unexpectedly opened by this exchange.

I glance at the clock and realize an hour has passed. I say to Linda, “I’m sad about ending our conversation, but it is time for me to leave for the airport.” Her response isn’t a formed sentence, but somehow conveys disappointment within understanding.

As I stand to gather my bags, I feel moved to ask her: “Linda, is there anything I can do for you before I leave?” She pauses, fumbles around with her belongings, and then says: “Can I have your phone number?” I pause, trying to unpack the source of my hesitation, and eventually decide to embrace the vulnerability of this connection. “Of course,” I say. As I go to tear a piece of paper out of a new journal I have, I wonder if she might have value in the journal itself as well. When I ask, her gratitude is palpable, so I write my name and number on the front page, remove some of my notes in the back, and hand her the journal.

I’m throwing my bag over my shoulder as she says, “You know...there is one other thing you might do for me.” “What is that?” I ask, turning my body to face her squarely. “I love flowers so much and am never able to have them...” My heart brims over with joy as I hear her words. I just about interrupt her trailing statement to say: “I would love to buy you flowers.” §

# HOW WE GET FREE

## DISCOVERING THE TOOLS OF CONNECTION, HEALING & OUR COLLECTIVE LIBERATION

by C. Perry Dougherty & Monique Harris

**T**here is a profound spiritual crisis at play in our society. It is a crisis of disconnection. As two women who have been young single mothers, our stories and experiences inform our understanding of and commitment to the work of bringing spiritual resources to bear on the current, ubiquitous crisis of disconnection in our world. Our lives have taught us the power of connecting with and across difference and not in spite of it.

We are motivated by the idea that disconnection will keep us from pursuing our collective liberation from the lies of White male supremacy. We all want to be free. Yet we live in a world where socially constructed judgments of who has value and who does not live within us and within our institutions, communities, and relationships. Division, discord, and disconnection within our inner lives and relationships keep such structures of domination alive.

So, how do we seek understanding, compassion, and connection that ensures our personal journeys toward freedom are not tied to the oppression, objectification, or silencing of another? It is based upon this question that

we share our personal stories in this collaborative essay. Working with this question is not for us, and may not be for you, the feel-good work of a kumbaya-style connection. Responding to this question requires deep work with the internalized structures of power that live within each of us.

Just as we do in our workshops and groups, we invite you to read our stories, allowing yourself to notice your feelings and thoughts as you experience areas of resonance with and resistance. The ways stories of others both affirm and challenge us can serve as mirrors for our own self-understanding, growth, and transformation. Certainly this awareness has allowed us to find the words to describe our journeys here.

Our personal stories are not the same, nor are they exceptional, and understanding this is essential to connection. It has helped each of us in our own way embrace that difference itself is not disconnection unless it is tied to a system of power within or outside of us that seeks to erase otherness or celebrate oppressive forms of sameness.

### **MONIQUE:**

Sojourner Truth, Phyllis Wheatley, Maya Angelou, Richard Wright, Langston Hughes, Nikki Giovanni, and the list goes on. Within their rhythms, rhymes, lines, and stanzas, are the voices that taught me what it is to be Black (and woman) in America.

I learned early in life that being a Black woman carried with it a certain burden. There was something in my woman-ness that would set me apart from other women. My woman-ness was not free to flow without constraints, as my Blackness would hem me in on one side and my woman-ness on the other. At a young age, I was conscious of the archetypes associated with my race and gender. I learned to constantly adjust myself to accommodate my environment; to accommodate the gaze that watched silently to make sure I stayed in my place; to accommodate the gaze that encouraged me to subvert my voice to other voices considered more valuable than mine.

Thankfully, there were those before me who were in possession of their voices and lent them to the unconstrained world of poetry, where they

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would communicate more than just their story—they would communicate life, wisdom, and hope. It is in these spaces, between the lines, where the grace to be and celebrate being Black and woman exists.

In high school, I felt most profoundly disconnected from my identity. Always the bookworm, I remember the young, Black student teacher who placed my first Toni Morrison book, *Sula*, into my hands. It was then that I understood that there were Black women creating art with words. I was mesmerized by the reflections of me bouncing off the page. The language that was mine rolling out of the mouths of characters who allowed me to devour them. From then on, I knew that there were Black women writing of my experiences, giving me words and vocabulary to say what I needed to say. It is in those pages that I began to see myself, though it would be years before I found myself.

“So, what do I do now?” That was my question to the nurse that informed

me that I was indeed, pregnant. I was standing at a phone booth because I had been told the day before to call the doctor’s office after three o’clock to get my pregnancy test results. As the nurse gave me the news, my whole world shifted, and I was confused about what to do next, not just in literal terms. I was voicing an existential question that I would ask many, many times over in the years to come, “so what do I do now?”

At 22, I was probably as self-aware as anyone at that age. But I was pregnant and preparing to undergo a monumental life change before I had even established my own identity. I had no idea what motherhood meant in its totality, only that I would be responsible for the care and survival of a vulnerable life. There was indeed a great deal of unease as I moved into this new role of nurturer, caregiver, provider, and advocate. There was also something new: purpose.

Becoming a mother in and of itself

was not a remarkable feat, nor do I believe it is the best or only road to self-actualization. I do know that for me, becoming a mother and the experience of single motherhood profoundly altered my way of thinking about the world. I only had a year and a half of college under my belt. I had no real aspirations other than finding a secure place to call home. At the time, I was living in a one-room hotel with my mother, her then-boyfriend, and my younger sister. I had no privacy. I had very little peace. What I did have was a high level of anxiety as it pertained to safety and security. I knew that I couldn’t raise a child in that environment, and yet I knew somehow I would be able to meet the challenge. That knowing certainly was not self-confidence. That knowing, I now like to call it God, is my divine intuition.

Shortly after confirming my pregnancy, my uncle died of complications related to AIDS. It was a sudden and devastating loss to my family, and I had not yet shared the news about my preg-

nancy with anyone when it happened. It was surreal: grappling with the tragic loss of my uncle, and the impending birth of my daughter. It was a stressful time, but beyond that, there was a deeper inner expansion unfolding as I grappled with the deep realities of life and death simultaneously. Although my family did not adhere to a formal faith tradition, my grandparent's definitely held strong Christian roots. This faith was often expressed during the darkest of life's circumstances. There wasn't a great deal of fervency about faith in my family, but it was through the simple faith that was there that I learned the rudimentary lessons of depending on God.

Preparing my heart and mind to live for a purpose outside myself began to help me see the world more holistically, which meant I had to see myself more holistically. Yes, I would be a mother, but what else? Who else would I be? Despite all of the barriers and obstacles, what more would I be capable of birthing into the world?

Unsure as I was, I resolved to have the baby. In the summer of 1992, I gave birth to a tiny girl that weighed only six pounds, four ounces. I named her "Yaminah." Her name is Arabic and it means "right and proper" or "blessed." As I've been reflecting on my sojourn with her, I have been thinking a lot about the meaning of her name. I thought that naming her was more about what I wanted her to become. It has dawned on me that I gave her a name that was actually a message for me. Her name, every time I said it, was saying back to me, "everything is the way it is supposed to be." Indeed, I have been blessed.

Until I became a mother, I was like an unmoored boat, drifting with no immediate destination. Suddenly, there were things to do: get healthcare, secure housing, tend to the necessities for the baby, and make an income to care for her. These pursuits took all of my time, energy, and resourcefulness. There was little time for much else. My family

did not have the means to financially support me, but they supported my decision to have the baby. I was working part-time at a department store, but that income was insufficient. So, I worked more and tried to save as best I could, eventually landing a studio apartment soon after Yaminah was born.

Audre Lorde, in her essay "Poetry is Not a Luxury," argues that poetry itself, as a vehicle to self-expression, is necessary to survival. She insists that in giving voice and shape and dimension to our inner lives, we birth the seeds of true revolution. We have to learn to trust the intuitive parts of ourselves as we arise and move toward words, which turn to ideas, and then to action. Poetry has often appeared in my life as a mirror. Words and phrases reflecting back to me what I could not, often dared not, say.

Langston Hughes wrote a poem, "Mother to Son," that I have held closely during my time as a parent. It encapsulates so many of the challenges I faced as a single, young, Black woman on the verge of motherhood. There was so much I didn't know that, for many years, I only imagined myself being on the receiving end of this talk. As I grew in knowledge and wisdom, I now can imagine myself the mother speaking to her son at the end of the poem:

*So boy, don't you turn back.  
Don't you set down on the steps  
'Cause you finds it's kinder hard.  
Don't you fall now—  
For I'se still goin', honey,  
I'se still climbin',  
And life for me ain't been no crystal  
stair.*

I see myself absorbing the wisdom and guidance this mother shares with her child while I also connect with the deep hope that this mother holds for the future. This conversation could be taking place between any mother and any child, any place in the world. It is at once encouragement and admonishment from mother to son. This is a stern reminder of the difficulties

of the world. On the surface, nothing about this conversation is remarkable. The transformation comes through the identity of the speaker and the identity of listener. It is in the identity of mother and son where the nuances become deeper, the musical notes more complex.

Now, a simple conversation between mother and child becomes more than just casual talk—it morphs into a manual for surviving the danger and trauma of living in the world while Black. In those few lines, a mother transmits to her son everything that she believes he needs to survive in the world. For her, this is life. She digs into the deep well of her wisdom and gives life like milk from her breast.

Surely, "life for me ain't been no crystal stair." I struggled a lot with my identity and all that it encompasses. I struggled a lot with the box that society placed me in, feeling as though I was becoming a "statistic" in the most negative sense, and the impact of that on my psyche. I struggled a lot trying to overcome the archetype of being a "ghetto welfare queen" as internalized racism reared its ugly head. I did a lot of overcompensating to work against the many strikes against me that could have held me prisoner.

Life was indeed, many times over, a stairway filled with splinters, torn up boards, and bare places. I had to navigate it—some of it with little or no guidance. There were many issues I had to grapple with: a physically abusive relationship with Yaminah's father, navigating social services, and dealing with the stigma of needing those services, filing for custody of my daughter, returning to college as a single mother, and on and on. My learning curve was steep, but that which Audre Lorde calls the "woman's place of power within each of us" began to surface, and it grew stronger and more sure of itself within me. I began to understand that I was able to give my daughter the life she deserved. I understood that I had to steer myself to a

space of self-acceptance to get there. I don't know if I would have made it up the staircase without that little girl as my guide.

Within two years of Yaminah's birth, I went back to school and graduated with my Bachelor's degree two years later. I worked a number of jobs until I began substitute teaching and began my journey as a special educator, which opened my eyes to the plight of those living with disabilities. In that work, I realized how easy it is to move through life without considering the obstacles, challenges and systematic issues that others face. My work was an education in deep compassion and the expansion of how I could become a conduit of love and healing.

Through such experiences, I discerned my call to ministry and formally entered into the faith community seventeen years ago. Social justice work as part of that ministry has evolved as the result of my struggles, needs, and hopes. There were many times I wished for someone to hold space for me; many times I needed encouragement; many times where my emotional needs were cast aside for practicality's sake. My desire as an educator, minister and spiritual companion is that no one has to ignore that essential part of themselves in order to survive. We all deserve wholeness. We all need help getting to the top of that rickety staircase. A lot happened getting from there to here—I still take it one step at a time, one day at a time.

I often reflect on how I found the light to traverse the dark, broken places that found myself in. It was a daily process. Some days were better than others. The common denominator every day was that there was someone who I had to show up for, whether I felt like it or not. Constantly having to tend to the needs of another was what made me get out bed everyday. There was not much in place in terms of self-care, spiritual practice, a loving community, or much else to spur me toward a "greater purpose." I got up every day and attended

to what was in front of me that day. I hate to say that it took an external force to help me to make necessary inward changes, but that was my journey.

By consistently showing up to tend to what was in front of me, I was able to better see and undo the tangled knots of internalized oppression. There were definitely archetypes that I battled. There were ways in which I tried to differentiate myself from the negative narrative of single Black mothers. I didn't want to be seen as irresponsible, uneducated, or unmotivated. In many ways, I created my own archetype of a "respectable" Black woman, which meant I actually began to align myself with cultural norms that would seem more "acceptable" to others. I had to recognize my true self was tied up in identities that were not mine. I had to work on slowly undoing the identities steeped in anti-Blackness and patriarchy, the currency wielded by others in my oppression.

I experienced great joy watching a child grow and develop into an amazing human that I was privileged to have a hand in raising. It is in those years of raising Yaminah that, bit-by-bit, I found myself, my voice, my purpose, and ambitions. I was needed. I needed to be needed. I needed to be important, indispensable to someone. Isn't that a yearning that we all have?

We all want to understand that our living is not in vain; that we have a purpose beyond ourselves that is essential, that connects us to one another in deep, unexplainable ways. However, we also want that process to be easy and painless, and it is not. Connection that is free from oppression requires work. It requires introspection. It requires humility. It requires an expansiveness of Spirit that calls us to examine ourselves and make restoration where we fall short. We have to face ourselves to fix ourselves. There is no collective liberation without this process.

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*"Those of us who stand outside the circle of this society's definition of acceptable women; those of us who have been forged in the crucibles of difference—those of us who are poor, who are lesbians, who are Black, who are older—know that survival is not an academic skill. It is learning how to stand alone, unpopular and sometimes reviled, and how to make common cause with those other identified outside the structures, in order to define and seek a world in which we can all flourish. It is learning how to take our differences and make them strengths. For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change. And this fact is only threatening to those women who still define the master's house as their only source of support."*

- Audre Lorde

**"The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House."**

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#### **PERRY:**

I first came across Lorde's writing in high school. Though I thought of myself as a feminist, perhaps even a radical one, I was blind to the ways a deep-rooted American cultural worldview lived inside of me. And perhaps because of that and my relative comforts in the White, wealthy suburbs of Boston, any understanding I had of Audre Lorde's ideas was an academic one at best.

Despite the values I had developed, I still relied on a White patriarchal framework of how to show up in the world, of what success looked like, and of how I used my voice and didn't: I can see it in the ways I used to define what academic and career success meant or the ways I learned to negotiate sex as something I was giving to a man or the



ways I was able to be chameleon-like in aligning myself to people with traditional positional power or authority by keeping silent about the things I believed or issues I cared about.

Just before my 21st birthday, I remember telling a friend over a midday beer that my period was late. He asked, “What are you going to do if you’re pregnant?” And without really thinking I surprised myself in responding, “I think I’d have to go through with it.” I was studying and living in Santiago, Chile at the time, dating a guy I loved because he distracted me from my pain.

I was in fact pregnant.

Inwardly, my world had been collapsing—I was partying too much, masking something I didn’t fully understand at the time. I justified my actions within the classic narrative of how an American college student studying abroad “should” be enjoying herself. I was clinging to whatever privilege I could find to create an image of having it together, and being an American abroad granted me a tremendous amount of power in just about any room I walked into. I accepted it unchecked.

Numbing in this way served as a momentary relief from the pain of the unhealed and unspoken trauma of a sexual assault in my late teens. But I was hurting. I was self-silencing. And my whole being was festering with shame at the lies I was trying to maintain in order to live in closer alignment to some sense I had of what it meant to be an “acceptable” woman—a definition that no matter how it changed since Audre Lorde wrote was still strictly defined as something set by others’ approval of me.

I chose to leave Chile after a particularly painful fight with my soon-to-be son’s father in order to return to St. Louis to finish my junior year at Washington University. As my pregnant belly grew, it became one of the most honest outward communications of what was actually going on for me within that I’d ever experienced. It didn’t help with my pain, but there was no way of hiding that I was pregnant and being seen felt liberating. This was my first baby step of a long, winding road in figuring out how to stand (no matter how alone) in what is true and authentic for me.

In the six months following Diego’s birth, which happened in Boston where my parents lived, I moved my life to Chile and back again. I continued to find comfort in both big and small lies of omission. When I left Chile for good and returned to my parents’ home, I thought the lies would keep me safe. I thought they would insulate me from judgment—my own and that of others—as I navigated leaving my son’s emotionally abusive, drug-addled father. And to an extent, those lies did keep me safe at that time. “It just didn’t work out,” I’d say. I wouldn’t dare tell people about the Santiago police who had come not once but multiple times to our door in the middle of the night to bring Diego’s father home or the fights that had me running down the street in search of a pay phone because the phones in our house had all been tossed off our eighth floor balcony in rage.

To this day, I am uncomfortable owning this almost cliché story of being a young mom who finds herself leaving a terrible relationship. We have a cultural image of what it means to be “that woman” in our society. My race and class privilege kept me running from that story of mine for years. There was

a chasm at the intersection of who I thought myself to be and what had unfolded in my life, and I did not know how to hold it all together.

This inner fragmentation kept me divided from other women. And worse than that, I was perpetuating the false narratives about who a single mom is and the false narratives about who is impacted by domestic violence. This, I have come to understand, is the anatomy of White male supremacy that lives within me: this internalized sense of superiority that told me what was happening was something other than my life. This false belief kept me disconnected from others, and also lay at the root of my own sense of unworthiness, fueling a similarly deep-rooted internalized sense of inferiority. The ping pong between these two poles in my inner life was exhausting and kept me running from authentic connection and trust with anyone, especially myself.

As we were preparing this essay together, Monique told me: “The truth of the matter is, if I didn’t have Yaminah, I probably wouldn’t have made it. I consider her to be the greatest gift that God has given me because she kept me from giving up on myself.”

Even as I type these words now, tears of connection well up in my eyes. I too have often said that having my son saved my life. Even in my darkest moments over the years, knowing each day that I need to show up for him and knowing that somehow I was worthy in his eyes has kept me rooted in some kind of faith that has been hard to describe. His basic aliveness has kept me from giving up on myself and importantly has forced me to learn that my identity need not be one rigid thing defined for me by the ways society has taught me to orient to others.

At one point, when Diego was about 18 months old, an employer rescinded a job offer because I disclosed that I had a son and needed family benefits. Going through this experience early on in my job search meant that in all

subsequent job interviews, I would not disclose that I had a child until it was absolutely necessary. After years of working for the person who eventually hired me, she laughed as she told me and a group of people that I was on the job for three months before she knew that I had a child. Hearing her tell this story, I had two thoughts. One was that perhaps she simply did not see or hear me for the first few months so when she finally did, it was shocking to her. The other thought was that perhaps I had been hiding. The truth is that it was likely a combination of both. The story itself served as a wake up call for me. I had spent too many years trying to please everyone around me by not showing up whole, by not inviting people to know me fully.

I needed to learn how to take small risks to share who I was with the world—to stop hiding what mattered most to me in order to preserve an image of success that I learned from oppressive systems. Trying to please people and society by clinging to oppressive systems of power that gave me some false sense of security kept me out of connection with what really sustained me, and in that case, had kept me out of sharing the pride I had in my son and in myself as a mother. In years of therapy and eventually a regular meditation process, I learned to name this pattern for myself out loud in order to see it clearly.

Imagining seeing myself through my son’s eyes eventually made me unwilling to be defeated or co-opted by the destructive narratives of what makes a person right or wrong in the eyes of others. I know the subtle and overt violence perpetrated on women by men around the world. I know the suffering of the voicelessness that comes with wondering if anyone will believe me or care. I know the ways women hurt women as they seek to align to structures of power that privilege them in being more “acceptable” than others.

In accepting that these stories are mine among many others, I discov-

ered a skill set rooted in trusting my own deepest experience—a skill set of awareness and discernment—a skill set that the gurus and the sages and the elders and the trees and the sun and the moon and the sky embody. My survival has since grown dependent on trusting in the wellspring of life that I hold within—it’s a spiritual call to live in wholeness with all the tensions and paradoxes that live within me and others. I have had the gift of a mirror as I developed these skills—my relationship with Diego is a reflection of my alignment or misalignment to that call to presence with all that is.

Motherhood—in its profound ordinariness—has connected me to the legacy of women’s survival, a legacy that teaches us how to radically show up day-after-day fierce and loving through whatever may come. This kind of showing up has become my spiritual practice. I believe we are all in desperate need for some kind of spiritual context like this for our existence.

I am no longer a single mother. In loving someone and choosing to live our lives together, I felt as if a big part of my identity slipped away, and not so slowly. There’s been a tentative insecurity in what that change means for me. As my son matures, I see him navigating what it means for him to be a future White man in the world, and I do my best to offer him space to locate himself within himself, because I believe that he too is deserving of that opportunity to use his inner knowing—his poetry and his nurturer—as a center of being that will allow him to show up present and whole.

In navigating this transition in my life and expanding my role as mother to include a step-son and a daughter, I have leaned on a recognition of all that I have been blessed with alongside a radical acceptance of my tremendous insecurity with change. I have offered gratitude for the people who have shown up in my life and continue to do so, stretching me into myself, into relationship, and into the world. And I



have continued to practice showing up to and for myself and others.

The name Diego means supplant-er. Diego's presence in my life at the time he came forced me on a journey of recognition that both my lived experience of oppression as a woman and my privileged worldview as a White, upper-middle class, college-educated person exist within me all at once. My experience of being othered by single motherhood has helped me supplant the lies of White male supremacy with an understanding of the more life-giving truth that to be human together means being flawed and vulnerable and uncertain together and continuing to believe in the power of connection through the celebration of difference.

I have learned how to hold gratitude and fear at once, how to take responsibility and hold people accountable, how to forgive myself for the ways I have been shaped within cultures of domination and forgive others for the ways I have been hurt by them, how to cultivate my son's growth alongside a pursuit of my own development. But perhaps most importantly, I have learned how to embrace difference and be in connection at once, which I have come to define as the holy ground of interdependence that relies on a making a commitment to being fully—courageously and authentically—present in relationship just as it is. Motherhood grounds me in the knowledge and experience of the power of such relationship. But it is not a way of being in relationship reserved only for the parent-child bond. It is, in my estimation, about cultivating loving kindness rooted in spirit, in our very existence, in our inherent dignity and worth, and in that ancient wisdom that is within and connected to us all.

Lorde challenges us to reexamine our orientation to difference in order to create common cause, solidarity, and connection: "I urge each one of us here to reach down into that deep place of knowledge inside herself and touch that terror and loathing of any differ-

ence that lives there. See whose face it wears. Then the personal as political can begin to illuminate all our choices." It was not an easy journey that brought me to the realization that that it was indeed my face that feared difference—being different, connecting across difference, and seeing difference as something to be accepted and celebrated, not erased.

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One could say that it is "poetic justice" that brings two women from divergent experiences into a shared experience of what it means to discover oneself fully. It is in the "otherness" of single motherhood that our two paths converge into the singular path of a justice ministry that embraces that the "other" is both within and outside of us.

Spiritual arts have too often been discounted in our culture, even within justice spaces. It is incumbent upon all of us to push toward an integrated and authentic existence that values mind and heart; that illuminates commonality and celebrates difference; that names disconnection in order to seek connection. These are the keys to our survival. This is how we get free together.

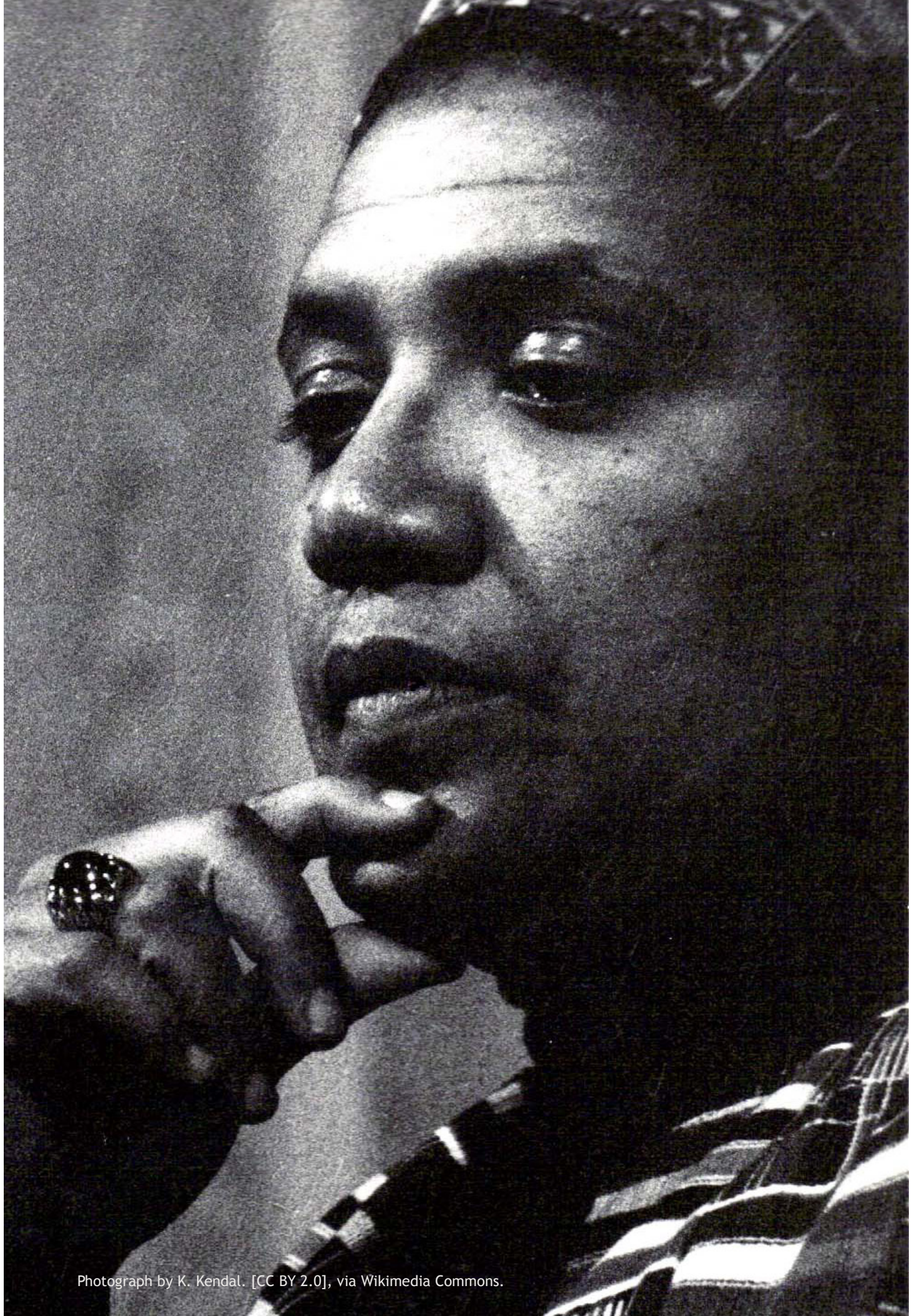
It would seem that nearly every spiritual tradition teaches a similar path—that our collective liberation is tethered to our ability to locate ourselves and the other in the eyes or in the presence or in the loving embrace of a higher power or universal truth. Such a spiritual container for our justice work holds us accountable to being on our own journeys and to doing the hard work to create common cause with one another. Such a spiritual container encourages us to point out where untruths are guiding us astray and lovingly call us into deeper connection with ourselves, others, and something greater than us all. Such a spiritual container has enough room to hold the paradox of what it takes to pursue connection as a path to justice.

Together, we call ourselves chaplains

for social justice. We embed ourselves in justice-rooted communities and organizations to tend to the spiritual needs of leaders and teams. In practice this means that we offer one-on-one spiritual care conversations or group trainings, workshops, healing circles, or dialogues. Whether in our one-on-one sessions or in group work, we explore the complex and intersecting themes of our lives as people working for justice in an unjust world.

*It is incumbent upon all of us to push toward an integrated and authentic existence that values mind and heart; that illuminates commonality and celebrates difference; that names disconnection in order to seek connection. These are the keys to our survival. This is how we get free together.*

We bring the poetry, the nurturing, and the spiritual context of living connected to life as it is. We see this work as urgent in our social justice communities. Disconnection is accelerating burnout, causing people to lash out, and fueling suffering for too many people who want someday, somehow to make the world a better place. Social justice work is about restoring the sacred birthright of human dignity, respect, and interdependence. To do so, we must create more courageous spaces that invite people to show up wholly themselves and to open up to being transformed in the process. As we connect to ourselves and open up to being changed by connecting with the other, however we define that, we tap into a hope for and belief in the possibility that we together can upend oppression and change the world around us. It is possible if we show up. §



Photograph by K. Kendal. [CC BY 2.0], via Wikimedia Commons.

# AUDRE LORDE

February 18, 1934 – November 17, 1992

Audre Lorde, self-proclaimed “black, lesbian, mother, warrior, poet,” fought and gave all of us language to fight intersecting oppressions of racism, sexism, and homophobia. She was an embodied truth-teller and wisdom teacher. Her works continue to inspire readers to take on prejudice in their own lives. If you do not yet know her poetry and prose, find it, contemplate it, and take it with you on your own journey of self-discovery and self-expression.

To read Audre Lorde’s most well know essays and speeches, check out *Sister Outsider* (Crossing Press, 2012).

## REFLECTIVE READING QUESTIONS

1. *Bring to mind a story of a time that you feared difference—yours or someone else’s. In a journal, describe the experience in detail, examine the assumptions at play and where they came from, outline the choices you made, and articulate what you might do differently in the future.*
2. *How do oppression and privilege live and operate within you?*
3. *What does the idea of collective liberation ask of you?*
4. *Bring to mind a story of a time that you felt silenced or felt the need to “fit in.” In a journal, describe the experience in detail, examine the assumptions at play and where they came from, outline the choices you made, and articulate what you might do differently in the future.*
5. *What does courage mean for you?*

Choose a piece from *Sister Outsider* to read alongside “How We Get Free” and “From Silence to Speaking.”

Bring the three pieces and these questions to your own reading group for discussion  
or join our conversation online at [anchormagazine.org](http://anchormagazine.org).

# FROM SILENCE TO SPEAKING

## FINDING THE COURAGE TO SPEAK THE TRUTH

by Heather Bryant

*“When we speak, we are afraid our words will not be heard or welcomed, but when we are silent, we are still afraid, so it is better to speak.”*

- Audre Lorde

I grew up surrounded by noise. The clank of pipes in our building, sirens outside, stray dogs in the alleys, cars honking horns, our elderly neighbor calling out to his nurse, “Can you help me please?”, the thunder of subway cars underground. The hot breath of the city exhaled through the subway grates.

I shared a room with my sister, so even at night, there was her breathing or mumbling, her rustle of sheets. Our twin beds stood to either side of our dressers. On top of those, a pair of guinea pigs rustled around in cedar shavings and rattled the metal tip of the water bottles.

As soon as I learned words, I talk-talk-talked to whoever would listen, never stopping until I was asked. I got in trouble in math class for talking to my neighbor. Miss Proffitt sat me next

to the wall for the remainder of class. I even talked to the wall.

I discovered silence for the first time on our frozen pond in Upstate New York in the winter, when my breath turned into clouds. Twigs snapped in the woods, but under that was a quiet that laced through the spaces between trees. It was a gentle quiet that held everything. I didn’t fully register it then, so focused on the scritch-scratch of my skates as I ankle-skated across the ice.

We moved to California to a home in the Oakland hills just after I turned ten. There, I came face to face with silence. We had no neighbors making noise. Fog hushed in each morning from the Bay. There were long stretches when no cars passed on the road. I missed the city with its noises and restlessness, its busy streets. Here, the houses were often dark with no one home. Only down on Telegraph Avenue did I find the bustle and energy I craved.

Still, the silence I found was a gentle silence, like cupped palms turned up. It was a silence to meet, to come face to face with questions about the

world. Around that time, I became aware of parts of the world that didn’t make sense to me. *Apartheid. Homelessness.* It didn’t fit into my picture of the world. On Thanksgiving, our parents drove us down to the soup kitchen to serve food. People filed past, plates filled with food.

Our parents wanted us to ask questions, to challenge the world, but when it came to our own lives, we slipped into another kind of silence, one of hiding behind a mask. The year we moved to California was the same year my father started growing longer hair and taking hormones that softened a body that had been mostly skinny straight lines. At the time, doctors required a full year of living as a woman before surgery. It felt like a trial year of slipping by unnoticed. All I had to do was say “Diana” instead of “Dad.”

We introduced her to new friends as my “Aunt,” my father’s sister. My father had gone to England, we said, and his sister came to stay. No one questioned this story and for that year, it worked. We passed under the radar. Passing was the goal. Slipping by un-

noticed. Fitting in. We did so well at that that we forgot our own story. Even after we no longer had to hide, we still did. Our silence was born of a larger silence in the late '80s, when silences multiplied across the gay community—and this was one of them—and when the stories in the outside world left ours aside.

“This is my Aunt,” I said, long after the school years when telling might have led to ridicule and ostracization.

Once, in high school, a friend read a letter from a women’s magazine. A young woman had written in about her boyfriend who wore women’s clothes sometimes. I was the one to laugh the loudest. *That’s so weird*, my laugh said. I wanted to make it clear that I had no difference inside me, that I wasn’t an outsider.

I developed a chameleon-like ability to slip into a crowd unnoticed. I ordered preppy clothes from a catalog, wore the sweaters and jackets the other girls wore. This was a way of blending in on the outside to mask what I was hiding within. “We all have secret selves,” writes Kenji Yoshino in *Covering: The Hidden Assault on Our Civil Rights*. “Such secrets want telling.”

Still, in school, I chose to stay hidden. When our school gave us ivory notecards to send inviting our family to graduation, I didn’t send one to Diana. If she came as my aunt, it would have been another layer of pretending in a day of celebration. I didn’t want to pretend.

In college, I still told no one, not even my closest friends. By then, the silence had taken up residence in my body. It felt like a part of me. If I told, that part of me would crack and break off. In class, I wrote about gender as a construction of society, but I didn’t write about my father’s passage into womanhood. The silence grew.

If I couldn’t tell who my family was, if I had to try to fit into a mold that looked like everyone else, then what

could I tell? Who could I trust? If my own experience was best kept secret, then what did I see? What was my truth? If people looked for the wrong in my family, then how could I see what was right?

Crossing over the line from silence to speaking brings with it a vulnerability that left me open to any response. A friend helped me tell my college boyfriend. He held me in his arms. “You can tell me anything,” he said, but still I kept it hidden from most. He told people, and I got to hear of their reactions through him, unedited by my presence. Shock and confusion. The questions rolled out. I was relieved that I wasn’t there to hear them. I didn’t know what I would say, so I kept it inside.

My family intended our silence as a protection, but it also taught me shame. That the people I loved were wrong in the eyes of society. That we were different.

“But you seem so normal,” one friend said when I told her.

Now, when I tell people, they want to know the details.

“How old were you when it happened?”

“Eleven.”

“Oh—that’s such a vulnerable age.”

Yet it’s also the age when we’re closest to childhood in our adolescence, when there’s still a door open to possibility. *This too is part of the world*, is what I thought about the change back then. Yet years of silences draped layers over that understanding.

When I worked at the Yale Law Library, one day I was checking in books on transgender law when a man I knew passed by.

“Transgender,” he said, a hint of amusement in his voice, and I didn’t say anything. I kept checking in the books with a small smile on my face. I was the one standing by, not speaking

up for what I believed in. The truth was caught in my throat, unable to come out.

In those moments of silence, I believed I was protecting myself, but instead I was allowing for the shame to grow. Audre Lorde writes of the importance of breaking through silence in her essay, “The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action.” “I have come to believe over and over again that what is most important to me must be spoken, made verbal and shared, even at the risk of having it bruised or misunderstood.” It was the potential for misunderstanding that kept me in chameleon mode. Still, on some level, I knew I needed to say something.

How do we move from silence to speaking, from the mask of hiding to the light of truth? How do we find the courage to speak our truths? Silence is born out of isolation. When we step into community, we build the courage to speak. Then, when we stand face to face with someone who doesn’t understand, we know others who do.

At a retreat for people who grew up with LGBTQ parents, I met someone who shared my story. Though many other parts of our lives were different, we connected as if we had known each other our whole lives. It was as if we spoke the same language and only needed a chance to use it. We walked around the city, stepping through subway turnstiles and onto trains, but we could have been anywhere, connected by our shared experience. I found that day that even two people can make a community, pulling us out of our separateness and division.

We may think that silence is a source of protection, but it is just the opposite. Lorde writes, “My silences had not protected me. Your silence will not protect you. But for every real word spoken, for every attempt I had ever made to speak those truths for which I am still seeking, I had made contact with other women while we examined the words to fit a world in which we

all believed, bridging our differences.” The search for meaning can be a shared effort. These bridges build a community and give more people the courage to step out of the silence.

At times, I’ve borrowed other people’s voices to find my own. The friend in college who first helped me tell the story said it as if it could happen to anyone. I borrowed her words the next time I told the story. I’ve listened to others cross the line, breaking their own silences. That gave me courage. When one of us breaks the silence, it helps others do the same. In 1978, Harvey Milk challenged the silence that had spread across the gay community. “You must come out,” he said. “Come out to your relatives. Come out to your friends...if indeed they are your friends. Come out to your neighbors, to your fellow workers, to the people who work where you eat and shop...Come out only to the people you know, and who know you.... But once and for all, break down the myths. Destroy the lies and distortions. For your sake. For their sake.” His call to action broke silences that had grown thick in families and communities.

In *Covering*, Yoshino writes of students revealing the true selves they hide behind masks. “I find pleasure in these incantations, which...secure these identities for the next generation. It recollects the verve and urgency of each of my own moments of coming out, that rush of feeling that says, Life changes now.” A single moment can mark that change from hiding to being ourselves.

For so long, I simply didn’t have the words. I had no language to break the silence. The questions we ask each other about our parents didn’t give room for my story:

*Where do your parents live?*

Could I change that question to read,  
*What body does  
your parent live in?*

*What do your parents do for work?*

Maybe that could be,

*Do dresses or suits work for  
your parent?*

*Are your parents still together?*

Could be,

*Do your parents know their  
true identities?*

*Do you visit them often?*

Could be,

*Do their bodies match the  
ones they had when  
you were born?*

We don’t ask what we don’t know.

To find the words that translate our experience is to invent a language. To speak is to find that language. It’s a radical act of truth-telling in a world full of glossy veneers.

There can be a useful silence, that silence of cupped palms, the silence of discovery. In her essay, “Arts of the Possible,” Adrienne Rich writes of the sustaining silence that can be used to find the words that need to be spoken, discover “what is missing, *desaparecido*, rendered unspeakable, thus unthinkable.”

She writes that, “Silence ... can be fertilizing, it can bathe the imagination, it can, as in great open spaces — I think of those plains stretching far below the Hopi mesas in Arizona — be the nimbus of a way of life, a condition of vision. Such living silences are more and more endangered throughout the world, by commerce and appropriation.” It’s these silences, paradoxically, that can lead us into breaking out of the silence that keeps us enclosed.

We have to try, stumbling and making mistakes as we go. Whether speaking or writing the story, the challenge is to find the words. Toni Morrison, in her Nobel Prize acceptance speech wrote that “narrative is radical, creating us at the very moment it is being created. We will not blame you if your reach exceeds your grasp; if love so ignites your words they go down in flames and nothing is left but their scald. Or if,

with the reticence of a surgeon’s hands, your words suture only the places where blood might flow. We know you can never do it properly—once and for all. Passion is never enough. Neither is skill. But try.” Her call to venture out into the wilderness of words is a call to break the silence. To accept imperfection. To fail as a matter of course. The same is true for speaking up. We won’t say the right thing every time. People will ask questions that burn. Misunderstanding might rise up more than connection. But we can try.

In her essay, Audre Lorde asks each of us, “What are the words you do not yet have? What do you need to say? What are the tyrannies you swallow day by day and attempt to make your own, until you will sicken and die of them, still in silence?”

None of us fit into the labels we’re given. As we tell our stories, let’s reach for the words that fill the silence, the ones that share the shape of our experiences. The word “transgender” is what I was given for my father, but the truth, for me, was not held in that word. I witnessed a passage from man to woman, and I witnessed the loss of a life of privilege. I witnessed a change into a person more comfortable in their skin, and I witnessed the fear of violence that comes with any mark of difference. I witnessed the courage to stay true no matter what it cost, and I witnessed the beauty of a life devoted to books and animals.

Through everything, only the animals, with their quiet acceptance, never asked stupid questions. All of this I witnessed, and when I’m tempted to sink into silence, I only need to remember the difference between the silence of cupped palms and the one of hiding behind the mask. If it’s the latter, then it’s time to open my mouth and speak.

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*Names have been changed to protect  
the family’s privacy. §*



« MY SWEET DOE »

You may heal backwards. Some bruises find their blue decades later. You may heal in bone-aching boredom. When seconds take their time. When dust clouds sunrays. Motionless suspended dust. Or watch Law & Order. Both most likely. Rubber squeaks piercingly on linoleum floors. Forget flowers. Bring chapstick and socks. No, bring all three. You may heal in a sorrow too violent to growl, where your mouth fails. There is only silence and drool. Shaking that shifts the axis of the world. 8 centimeters at least. The planet should acknowledge it, after all. To heal will never be linear. It will never make sense. It will snake like the Amazon and encircle you like a labyrinth. You will never be more supported and you will never forget that, that specific chill of solitude. But, my sweet doe, it is amazing what you can survive.

by E. P. Cutler

# BRIAN KUEHN

**G**rowing up in the small town of Mandan in the heart of North Dakota, Brian was given two gifts that would profoundly impact his journey and, ultimately, his work. The first was a love of art, fed and fostered by my parents. The second was an upbringing that kept me connected to my immigrant ancestors and the work ethic and resilience that enabled them to not only survive but thrive in rural America.

Brian is continually fascinated with the struggles and hard work of the generations who came before him. His ancestors immigrated from Germany in the late 1800s. He reflects on the fact that his grandmother lived in a sod house on the North Dakota prairie. Reflecting on her hard, yet beautiful, life served as part of Brian's inspiration for the "Farmers Series." Among the images in the series are many people picking crops and working the farm. These images are often a result of a combination of his personal experience growing up in rural America and inspiration from old photographs he found while searching archives. Whether painting landscapes or flowers or people, ultimately, Brian's work is about telling stories.

For more information on the "Farmers Series" and the rest of Brian's work, visit [briankuehnstudios.com](http://briankuehnstudios.com).



*Pitching Hay*



Brothers Three by Brian Kuehn



KUEHN



Rita Singing by Brian Kuehn

KUEHN

Three Generations by Brian Kuehn





Stacking Wheat by Brian Kuehn



## FAJR IN BANGKOK

God comes as a cat,  
poking her head around  
the neighbouring roof,  
the balcony's potted blooms,  
her presence unexpected  
despite my hands brushing  
blessing over my face and  
my eyes awake for miracle.  
When she comes, I almost miss her,  
so focused I am on folding the rug,  
her tiny tabby face,  
her purr, soft on the tiles,  
echoing in the pale morning light  
the murmur of the city  
another heartbeat, another ameen.

by Kasia Clarke



# THE SPIRIT OF RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

## AN INTERVIEW WITH SUJATHA BALIGA

by Sebastian Robins

Sujatha Baliga found herself sitting in a room with a murderer and his victim’s parents, who had come seeking something more than punishment for their child’s killer. Sujatha, and the process of Restorative Justice, was uniquely positioned to help. She came to that meeting through rigorous academic training, and also through harrowing personal experience. She grew up in Shippensburg, Pennsylvania where she experienced ongoing sexual abuse by her father. As an adult, after several emotional breakdowns related to the early childhood traumas, she decided to travel to Dharamsala, India to visit the Dalai Lama. Through slim odds, she was granted an audience with the exiled leader. After listening to her story and hearing about the anger which had motivated her to become a prosecutor, he instructed her to do two things: meditate and forgive her father. She told him she’d try the first, but that forgiveness was impossible. The Dalai Lama smiled and said, “Ok. Then just meditate.” This encounter, and these instructions, inspired her to start a mindfulness meditation practice, which led her to forgive her father, and then to become one of the leading voices and practitioners of Restorative Justice.

Our traditional criminal justice system is one of retributive justice; it focuses on crime and punishment. Restorative Justice, on the other hand, focuses on the victims. It sees that for each crime committed, harm has been done to the victims, the family of the victims, the community, and often to the offender as well. This approach seeks to repair and restore health in each of these individuals and groups, in addition to—and sometimes instead of—incarceration. All those affected face one another around a circle, ask difficult questions, and listen to one another. Often they learn to forgive. The victims have a say in the consequence and rarely ask for a prison term. It is a radical, highly successful, and controversial approach that draws from various indigenous practices and that has been used effectively in post-Apartheid South Africa and post-genocide Rwanda.

Sujatha stands at the vanguard of this progressive movement which is finally gaining traction in America. Baliga was educated at Harvard University, and later at the University of Pennsylvania, where she earned her law degree. She won a Soros Justice Fellow prize in 2008 and today serves as the Executive Director of the Restorative Justice Project at Impact Justice, in Alameda County, California. Baliga is also the Founder and Executive Director of The Paragate Project, an organization dedicated to exploring forgiveness. Her recent lecture at University of California Berkeley’s Law School, “Law’s Middle Way: Mindfulness and Restorative Justice” typifies her skill at bringing alternative and controversial approaches to powerful institutions.

I interviewed Sujatha in Berkeley, California in the Spring of 2016. What follows is an adapted excerpt of our conversation.

**SR:** *Can you tell us about your spiritual and religious beliefs and how they intersect with your work?*

**SB:** I was raised Hindu and was a very devout Hindu child. I ultimately lost my faith because of the abuse I was suffering in my home and my inability to reconcile how faithful I was in following all of the good Hindu girl rules, chanting, etc., with the abuse continuing. I prayed, knowing that my father was doing this to both of us. I prayed for him, and I prayed for myself, and I prayed for the abuse to stop. And it just wasn't getting any better. And then he got sick, and he got even sicker, and he was the sole breadwinner in the family. It was terrifying for all of us, and it just became so clear to me in that moment that there was no God. Even into my 20's, I had given up on the idea of God. Funnily enough, I still felt very, very religious, but I couldn't figure out where that fit.

*“A good Restorative Justice facilitator operates with equal parts compassion and partiality. So instead of the imagined, and fictional, neutral mediator, we are equally partial to everyone in the circle.”*

When I was 24, I had the opportunity to have a private audience with the Dalai Lama. I had taken a Buddhism seminar and was reading a lot about it at the time. The Golokpa Tibetan Buddhism felt extremely similar to the Vedanta Hindu upbringing I had. It felt like my spiritual home. I learned from my uncle just a few years ago that there were practices that my ancestors followed, but which had been lost do to a lack of qualified teachers, and it turns out those practices only exist in Tibet. Those were the practices I had fallen into through my following Tibet-

an Buddhism. I literally felt like I was able to come home through Buddhism.

For me, the Bodhisatva Path is what I aspire to, and it is about training ourselves to operate with equal love and compassion for all beings. All of them. Not excluding anyone, including those who have done absolutely horrific, unimaginable, terrible acts, and including those who have experienced them. Including me.

And so that feels like a very good fit with Restorative Justice as opposed to the criminal legal system, which forced me to have to be a victim advocate or a defense attorney or a prosecutor. The system forced me to choose a side I was trying to have a victory over. And really, there is no such thing as “victory over.” There is only collective liberation, and that grounds my attraction to Restorative Justice as well as my hope that we have outcomes that are beneficial to everyone.

A good Restorative Justice facilitator operates with equal parts compassion and partiality. So instead of the imagined, and fictional, neutral mediator, we are equally partial to everyone in the circle. We want everyone's best interest to rise and for us to come up with a plan to attend to those interests.

**SR:** *Restorative Justice is posited as an alternative to our criminal justice system. Can you talk about our current model and why it needs remedying?*

**SB:** Our current criminal legal system—and I call it our criminal legal system, and not the criminal justice system because I don't think it produces justice—is adversarial in nature. Any other government-operated process that produces a 75% failure rate would never be tolerated. But the fact is that over 75% of people who have been incarcerated return to our prisons. It's literally foolish that we are pursuing something that almost universally fails to achieve what we hope to accomplish.

**SR:** *And how did we get to this place?*

**SB:** There are a number of factors involved. For one thing, people imagined that mass incarceration might be lucrative.

And I think there is another way to look at it: there was a benevolent notion to the original penitentiary. It was originally a place you went to be penitent. It was like grown ups getting time out, a place to contemplate. But we've gone completely off the rails from that original intention.

Given our history of racial violence and segregation, we must remember that new policies will always replicate those historical problems until we heal those original wounds. In terms of solving the problems of the racial mess of our criminal justice policies, we need to think about a national truth and reconciliation commission around both the taking of indigenous land and our history of slavery and its vestiges, which persist to this day, primarily in housing, employment, health care, schools, and mass incarceration, to name just a few. We need to have the courage to do that if we're really going to solve this. That being said, it doesn't mean we can't also simultaneously work to end ineffective ways of upholding justice.

**SR:** *Are there not any merits to our current system that have persisted over time? Aren't there benefits to a supposedly objective, formulaic meting out of justice?*

If it were effective in actually doing that, then maybe I would agree that we should hold our noses and put up with some of the more objectionable elements. But let's just step back and take a snapshot of domestic violence, to give but one example. 50% of survivors who experience severe violence do not contact anyone in the system at all. Of the 50% who do contact the system, only 20% said they felt safer afterwards. 20% said they felt less safe after engaging with the system.

Federal sentencing guidelines used



to be mandatory. And the idea behind mandatory guidelines is that they were meant to reduce disparities. When we get rid of discretion, sentences go down, but they don't go down across the board; they go down for White people and go up for everyone else.

So, every tweaking we do, to what I think of as a fundamentally flawed approach to justice, is going to fail. You could break it down at every level: victim satisfaction, recidivism, and other aspects. Even the risk assessment tools we develop to do analysis about who should get what types of sentences play themselves out in racially disproportionate ways, as well.

**SR:** *How would you characterize Restorative Justice and the alternative you are advocating?*

**SB:** Restorative Justice if nothing else is a paradigm shift away from a justice of punishment and retribution towards a justice that heals. In our current criminal legal system, we ask three questions: What law was broken? Who broke it? How do we punish them?

Restorative Justice asks: Who was harmed? What do they need? Whose obligation is it to meet those needs? My mentor and friend Howard Zehr encourages us to see that crime is a violation of people and interpersonal relationships. And those violations create obligations, and the central obligation is to do right by the folks you've harmed. Restorative Justice looks to attend to that, and then to build a community structure in which the person who harmed is supported in tending to those needs. And maybe that person can't serve all those needs, so Restorative Justice looks to the community to help serve the needs. It acknowledges that there is a relationship that has developed. In the case that a stranger committed the crime, the relationship develops at the moment the crime occurred. And, in the vast majority of cases, with intra-familial or intra-community crimes, a relationship predates the crime. In this case, a relationship is

broken through different types of harm. How do we come back together in order to move forward in a positive way? There is nothing about a court hearing that moves us in that direction.

I think the biggest thing for me, as a survivor of child sexual abuse, the thing that is so important, is truth-telling. The truth is hidden around certain crimes because of shame and secrecy and because of the criminal legal consequences that cause us to hide what's actually happening.

Restorative Justice, especially when it operates in a way that guarantees that nothing you say will be used against you in a court of law, then, we get to the truth. The criminal legal system as it is disincentives truth-telling.

**SR:** *Is it fair to give the victim discretion in creating accountability? Doesn't our criminal system promise some degree of rational meting out of justice?*

**SB:** I need to continually remind folks that our current system does not solve anything. All of these arguments against Restorative Justice neglect to acknowledge that our current model has completely failed. In 100 cases of child sexual abuse, less than 3 get convicted of anything, and it's usually a plea deal in which the person is convicted of something far less than they actually did, and those who are convicted don't show a decrease in recidivism. So, we have failed. Everything we are worried about that might happen with Restorative Justice, has already happened a million times over with our current failed model.

What we do know is that in a three year study we did here in Alameda County with the first several hundred kids who went through the Restorative Justice process, the kids have an 11.8% recidivism rate, which is very, very low when compared to national averages. We also compared this to kids who just got probation—kids in this same county, who match up by age, race, severity

of crime, number of prior convictions, and zip code. Those who just got probation have a 31% recidivism rate. For those who were locked up, the recidivism rate was even higher. So the more we ratchet up our response, the worse the outcome. That's what's happening in our current system.

Now, let's talk about Restorative Justice. It's important to note that Restorative Processes aren't just about a crime victim getting to decide what happens to the person who harmed them. Restorative processes are about a group of people coming together—people who know all parties involved very well as well as community members and anyone else impacted by the harm. I've been in a circle with 45 people in the case of an attack on a mosque.

*I need to continually remind folks that our current system does not solve anything. All of these arguments against Restorative Justice neglect to acknowledge that our current model has completely failed.*

The outcome in a case like that isn't just based on what the mosque president said, for example. The person who committed the crime looks at how they are going to do right in four ways: by the victim, by their parents, by their community, and by their self. So, you have a four-part plan to repair the harm. And making sure that we are touching on all four of those things ensures the kid stays out of trouble. It's not a dialogue between two people. It's a larger community question.

**SR:** *How does your legal training inform your work with Restorative Justice?*

**SB:** Generally speaking, my training as an attorney is a liability for Restorative Justice work! (Laughs.)

I need to take off my lawyer hat when I'm facilitating circles. Whatever professional hat we're wearing when we come to Restorative Justice, we need to take it off, whether it's a social worker who wants to social-work it or a psychologist who wants to analyze everybody. We really leave it to the wisdom of the families and the communities, and when we're working with families and communities from different cultural backgrounds, their idea of a positive outcome may look radically different from my idea of a positive outcome. In the end, if they are happy, and this person isn't going to commit more crimes, and this person got their needs met, it's none of my business. It's not mine to judge or decide. I'm not the arbiter for what is justice for other people.

One of the best things about Restorative Justice is that I don't have to have all the answers. I used to have to have the answers as a lawyer. Now, I just need to have answers about the "how," like how we are going to do this in a safe and positive way that meets the needs of everyone. But I don't need to have answers about the "what." That's always theirs to answer and that's really great. It's really liberating. Way less stressful.

**SR:** *What are the origins of Restorative Justice?*

**SB:** Restorative Justice has multiple roots. Howard Zehr and his Mennonite community are part of the origin. Zehr talks about Biblical Justice and how it informed the Mennonite version of Restorative Justice in the 1970's.

Apart from (and far pre-dating) that, there are many indigenous traditions from around the world that involve sitting in a circle and participatory decision making and collectively moving together. This notion of the collective really exists deeply in our language. We don't talk about individual justice; there is only a sense of collective justice.

I just came back from meetings in

New Mexico sponsored by The Office of Violence Against Women to talk with different Native American tribes as well as those of us who practice non-indigenous forms of justice about domestic violence. The conversation was very challenging because there are 567 federally recognized tribes, and each of them may have their own justice process, and each of them may look more or less like the Mennonite-initiated, Western notions of Restorative Justice.

And there are many folks in those tribes who would say, "don't use your colonizer language to talk about what we have been doing since time immemorial. Don't try to shove what we do into your colonizer box."

So, I try to be very careful and sensitive when I talk about what I learned from whom. The Family Group Conferencing Model comes from the Maori people, but it's not as if I'm doing a Maori process, per se. I'm very clear that I have changed it to make it fit into an American context.

We have to be careful because too often we take the sacred out of things. I heard an indigenous woman speaking about Restorative Justice and peace-making circles and she said, "You came to us asking to learn about our medicine. You took it away and you stripped it of its healing properties and now you want to sell it back to us in a pill."

As she was describing this, I was thinking about people who are meditating just to practice mindfulness without the Bodhisattva vow as its root. If I am sitting down just to watch my breath so I can make a killing on Wall Street instead of training my mind so I may be of greater benefit to all sentient beings, then we've gone so far off the mark. And it's the same thing with yoga. Am I practicing yoga to have a hot body? Or am I doing it to become enlightened for others' benefits and my own? For the collective liberation of all people?

And so I shudder to think that I might

be trying to do the same with Restorative Justice. I struggle with non-indigenous applications of Restorative Justice in this country. I really worry about taking the medicine out and offering back the pill. It's very easy to get off the mark if we're not starting spiritually, and if not spiritually, then with values. We have to have a sense of the shared values as the starting point for all of our work, otherwise we'll just be sitting in circle and coming up with punitive outcomes.

Another of my mentors is Robert Yazzie, the former Chief Justice of the Navajo Nation. He always talked about "moving forward in a good way." It's very clear to me that that impetus is part of everything he does.

As soon as we start talking about the sacred, we risk going away from the idea of a rational, secular system of justice and into potentially divisive traditions. How do you not turn off the secular judge or the atheistic DA or the skeptical principal? The answer is in the values we use. The values become the bridge.

For me personally, I facilitate every Restorative Justice process as a Buddhist, but secretly! (Laughs.) When I am sitting and holding space in a horrific conference about an unspeakable crime, I am meditating and praying the entire time. But I'm not doing it out loud, and I'm not imposing it on anyone else. That's my personal way of dealing with it. It's extremely hidden.

I try to disassociate Buddhist work from my public life, from my personal life and my Restorative Justice work, and every time I'm asked to speak about the nexus of meditation and Restorative Justice, I get a little anxious about it—I find myself equivocating. I agree with His Holiness the Dalai Lama that we need to have a secular ethics in order to move forward. I don't want to fight the reality of American secularism and even the atheists' disdain of having things imposed on them. So, to that end, values are central.

Without values, we are completely lost. And those values should be collectively identified by the people in the circle and never imposed.

While Restorative Justice has some basic notions of respect and responsibility and reciprocity, the fundamental values that will guide the conversation come from the people in the circle. So, we start restorative processes with a conversation about values: “What kind of values do you hold when you talk about difficult things? What kind of values do you hold when you are being your best self? When you are advocating for yourself? What kind of values do you hold when you are operating in community?”

We have those conversations and then we have a consensus-based set of values that are going to guide our conversation. It’s the first thing we do.

**SR:** *Restorative Justice requires tremendous participation and presence and trust from the criminal and the victim, does it not? How do you help people into that place?*

**SB:** In the Restorative Justice process, participation is required by the person who caused the harm. The person who was harmed may choose to send in a surrogate, although the best outcomes occur when the person who was harmed can be present. The entire process is driven by what feels good to the survivors, by what is going to make it feel safe and possible for them to engage. Trust building is really about following the lead of everyone who is in that space, and building it based on what they need and want.

So, in the beginning, there is a lot of just plain old listening and answering the first two questions: Who was harmed? And What do they need? I spend the first few meetings just listening. And for the people who caused the harm, I just come with a completely non-judgmental approach. Even if you’ve shot your girlfriend in the head, I have to start with the attitude that I’m

just here to help you through this and I don’t bring any judgment. I want them to not feel judged. Nobody is going to come clean about the totality of what happened if they think I’m going to drop the hammer on them. So, first of all, no hammer.

I sit down and say, “I want to help you make this right.” Or, as right as possible, because when someone’s lost a loved one, there is no making it completely right. And I speak using *we*: “We’re in this together; let’s find a way through this.” I don’t make false promises, that’s very important. Someone might ask me, “Is it going to be alright in the end?” Gosh, no. You killed that person. How is that going to be ok in the end? No false promises.

Even with regard to the process, someone might ask, “Is it going to be safe to be in the same room with him?” And I’ll ask them, “Well, what does safety look like to you? Let’s figure out how we can design something that creates safety for you.”

Each person is different. If my father could come back from the dead, I could have a conversation with him without anyone in the room. But that’s me today. Ten years ago, I could never do that without my husband. (Laughs.) And ten years before that, I could never do that, period. So everyone is at a different place in time and in their own life. So being as responsive to that as possible is really important.

**SR:** *Is this the work you are doing with the Paragate Center on Forgiveness?*

**SB:** Yes, in a way. Forgiveness and Restorative Justice are interesting cousins. I can’t think of a better cauldron for cooking up forgiveness than a Restorative Justice process in which a victim feels completely heard by the person who harmed them, and the perpetrator has some desire to make amends. The completion of that process can help with a victim letting go of their anger.

That being said, a Restorative Jus-

tice process never has forgiveness as a prerequisite or an expected outcome. It may or may not happen, but there is never any pressure on survivors to forgive, because they might not be interested in forgiveness. They might just want their car back! (Laughs.)

For me, personally, I was never going to get my childhood back, and that’s why I started to explore forgiveness. Forgiveness may or may not flow out of a Restorative Justice process. It’s lovely when it does. But to be honest, it’s just as lovely when I see people parting ways on good terms, whether or not we ever got to forgiveness or even said those words. It’s like, oh, ok these neighbors who were fighting over one of their kids stealing the other’s car and smashing it up are not going to have that much heat between them any more, and that’s really good.

*The forgiveness work is really an internal journey. It’s not dependent on anything from anyone else.*

The forgiveness work is really an internal journey. It’s not dependent on anything from anyone else. And in the same way that Restorative Justice does not require forgiveness, forgiveness certainly does not require Restorative Justice.

I feel very clear about forgiving my father, and my father passed before I was able to fully confront him.

**SR:** *Forgiveness is central to your story. How did you forgive your father?*

**SB:** How I forgave my father was a very spontaneous experience. As I mentioned, I had this audience with His Holiness when I was 24. I asked His Holiness for advice on how to forgive my father, and his first question to me was, “Do you feel you have been angry long enough?”

That was an extremely useful question because in all my explorations of forgiveness up until that point, I had felt that it was either being shoved down my throat or that it was the right answer and I just hadn't figured out how to be good enough to forgive yet. It was almost that my continued anger towards my father was somehow my shortcoming and the consequences of that continued anger on my relationships, on my own life, on my health, my migraines, all of it were somehow my fault because I wasn't a good enough survivor to forgive him. So, when His Holiness asked me that question—"Do you feel you've been angry long enough?"—it was a true question. He was genuinely asking me what my feelings were on the matter and with no judgment about what the right answer was. So, I took a minute in his presence to just sit and survey anger's impact on my life, and I came to my own conclusion that anger had reached a point where it had diminishing returns for me.

At one point anger was the backbone of my healing—when I had a self-righteous feeling: "You can't do that to me. No father should touch his daughter like that." But it had gone beyond the bounds of righteousness and into rage. It had its own life that I had no control over, and it leaked out in all kinds of inappropriate ways and places that weren't serving me or my purpose in life, which was to be of benefit to people who had suffered what I suffered.

So, then I was like "alright I'm done. Now I really want know how to do this." And he said, "Okay I have two pieces of advice for you. One is to meditate. Your mind is bright but it's out of your control. So, you want to reign that in." And I agreed. The second piece of advice he gave me was to align myself with my enemies without excusing their behavior. He asked me to find some way to be aware of their concerns and their needs and to open my heart in that way, and I let him know that I thought that was crazy. I thought,

"I'm about to go to law school to be a prosecutor to lock those guys away." I was distraught by what he said. Actually, not distraught, more angry because I hadn't worked on my anger yet. He patted my knee and said, "okay, okay you just meditate."

So, I went off and I immediately started sitting, and I sat a 10-day Vipassana course. There were nine days of doing breath observation and body scanning and getting to this point of having real control over your mind, which was the first time in my life that I'd experienced that to that degree. On the tenth day, they teach you this practice called *mithabhavana*, which is a loving-kindness practice to cultivate that sense of peace and calm or the subtle awareness of the sensations in your own body that you can experience dispassionately. And we were meant to send that outward to others.

First, we thought of people we love, and we sent it out to them, then to people to whom we felt neutral and then we sent love to our enemies. When they started talking about enemies, as if an apparition, as if in my worst throes of post-traumatic stress flashbacks, there arose my father walking towards me to molest me. And instead of what I had done habitually, which was to replay that memory with me stabbing him to death or just slapping him or whatever it was that I would typically do, I simply allowed the memory to play itself out as it actually occurred. I didn't try to change the past. I stayed with my feelings of peace and left his problem with him. As his hands reached out to touch my body, this subtle feeling of peace and this sensation of awareness and presence and peace in myself flowed out of me and into him, and he just dissolved into light and he was gone.

In the weeks that followed, I had no migraines. I had nothing. It was all over—all my stomach problems and my rage too. I just wasn't raging at anybody anymore. I feel like I really got at a root cause of all my other sufferings.

It's not that I excused his behavior. I still have spent the rest of my life trying to end intimate-partner violence and sexual harm, but I feel that I am now able to come at it more from a position like trying to solve a problem with a computer. You know? I'm not trying to solve it with a hammer. In the beginning, I hesitated to talk about it because I didn't want to proselytize about forgiveness. I really honor what His Holiness said in his question: "do you feel you've been angry long enough?" I want people to answer that question honestly for themselves because you can't forgive a minute before you're ready and because there's no right or wrong to it.

**SR:** *Does your experience imply that there is merit to anger?*

**SB:** One day I saw a car with the bumper sticker that had once read "If you're not angry, you're not paying attention." And the second "not" had been in big red letters, but it had faded before the other letters, and so it now read, "If you're not angry, you're paying attention." That changed everything. I thought, "What am I paying attention to?" I'm not angry anymore because I'm paying attention to my breath, to the present moment, to the people in front of me, to their humanity.

It doesn't mean that I don't still get angry. I get angry, and anger has its place. I think the most important thing is to not repress it. Repression leads to the building up and the unhealthy explosion. It's not about not being angry. It's about the ability to express or manage the anger when it occurs. It's about observing my anger with compassion when it arises and looking at the roots of my anger, and being present to whatever is coming up for me. It's about acting and not reacting.

**SR:** *Thank you for taking the time to talk with me and for sharing so much with us about your life and work.*

**SB:** Thank you. §

## GREAT LEDGE

The white-wash of snow holds the leaking sun a little longer this evening,  
so I dare take our small dog up past the Great Ledge,  
through the pine forest, and back along the rim of “Witches Wood,”  
named long ago by our children for its impassible ruin of dead trunks.  
I plan to keep him from straying from my side,  
to return home before the coyotes wake and swallow  
their two-day hunger in the post-blizzard swath.

Suddenly Leo stops and settles deep into his senses,  
stares down over the pin-point tips of cat o’ nine tails,  
draws in a knowing for which I have no language.

Low, lithe, like a fox, but shadow-dark, not rust,  
a creature threads silently along the edge of the old farm,  
an elusive thought.

Brown fox or yearling coyote—the difference,  
were it closer to us, between attack or flight  
or some bargained stand off.

I took the risk to walk Leo at dusk,  
to sink my boots through long-shadowed drifts,  
to listen as up-ended heaps of frozen sea slip  
from marsh grass back into the receding surge,

to marry, have kids, navigate the ridge  
between safety and loss, pack down a daily path,  
part scanning for threats, corralling,  
part watching from the roots of my senses.

by Jennie Meyer

# INTO THE SHADOW

by Brian Braganza

*“And I feel above me the day-blind stars / waiting with their light. For a time / I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.”*

- Wendell Berry

**W**e approach in silence and wrap around the fire, ten of us, and Jim. The blizzard and wind whipping up so we're bundled, some of us swish as we walk in snow pants and heavy boots, toques pulled low, heavy mitts and overcoats. Jim, in contrast, is wearing rubber boots, jeans, a brown canvas jacket, worn leather mitts, his hat like a cowboy. He speaks little as we gather; he is working the fire, which flares up then dowses itself in the accumulated snow beneath the kindling. Jim sweeps off his hat scattering snow to the ground and uses it to fan the embers. This time flames rise up to consume the softwood kindling which flares enough to catch. Jim stands, and we hold the silence. Snow again accumulates on his hat and our eyes are captivated by the fire. All of us are men.

Jim greets us, his voice gentle, so we strain slightly over crackling wood. He speaks his gratitude for our arrival, for our presence here with him. He shares of his own landing in this place twenty-five years prior, his state of fracture

at that time, and how he would spend days and nights wandering the one hundred and fifty acres of forest. He shares how the forest healed him. He continues to see this land as a place of healing for any who come.

We have come here to build our capacity for wellness. I am one of the facilitators for the T.O.N.E. project, Therapy Outside Normal Environments. The other men in this circle, our clients, are suffering from some form of mental illness: anxiety, depression, addiction, or post-traumatic stress disorder, and we're about to take a night walk, without lights, in silence, through an ancient forest in the midst of this January blizzard.

Jim, a stranger to most in this circle, will lead us as far outside of normal environments, as most of these men have ever been.

Earlier in the afternoon they spent time mapping their resiliency, sharing with each other the potential and possibility in their lives. They also recorded images of their shadow sides, sharing how mental illness shows up daily. This evening they will be invited to walk into that shadow.

Jim invites us into this ritual space,

into this rite of passage. We introduce ourselves around the fire, and in saying our names aloud, we become known to the circle.

As darkness closes around our faint fire circle, Jim instructs us on the evening's task, then turns his back to walk into the night. In silence, we peel away from the warmth of the fire, a symbol of our communal light, as we step alone into dark. We wind up the hill into the wood's trails leaving a wide enough margin between us, as instructed, so that we can just barely make out the silhouette of the man we follow. Most of these men have not even seen this forest in the daylight, and now as night drops to only a slim light, we trudge silently, the accumulating snow heavy on our feet. This forest is home to red and white pine, red spruce, and hemlock. A pure Acadian Forest, which has been selectively logged for nearly two hundred years. There are few remaining stands of this kind left in Nova Scotia. Trees tower and are broader than five men standing shoulder to shoulder; we are dwarfed beneath them. We hear the blizzard rage high above in the canopy as Jim leads us through this liminal space.

Snow falls and builds around our shins as we push through. There are times



when Jim will stop, and, as instructed, we stop in order, still holding the long spaces between us. He has encouraged us in these times to stand in our silence, to take in all around us, to breathe in deeply and let it whoosh out of us, to let our shoulders drop, to feel our feet well planted, and our heads ascending with the trees. In these moments, Vivaldi's violin concerto, *Winter*, plays in my mind. The tension of the strings is the rising wind high in the trees, and I hear the drop-down release as the wind calms. I imagine a canopy view of our small group slowly walking, our bodies obscured slightly by falling snow.

With the moon behind the clouds and the reflective snow at our feet, there is enough of a glow to see the shadowy outline of the man in front of me and the man behind. We've stopped on the edge of a ravine, and I see the near trees. They are in silhouette, too. In these moments, we are alone with our selves, and yet we hold each other. Should one of us stumble, a call out would swiftly bring others to lift him.

We have reached the depths of the forest. Jim stops as we gather in circle. He speaks softly and invites us to turn out, in silence, and walk away on our own. We'll take ten minutes to sit or stand in our solitude as snow continues

to fall around us. Jim will beckon us back with a crow-call when the time is complete. Jim holds space at the center.

I walk out and quickly lose sight of those to my right and left. I am alone. I hear a crack as a man steps on a branch, and then it is silent. I walk a little farther then lie down in the snow and hold still. In this moment, the overwhelming ring of silence strikes me. If I still my mind enough, I can hear the impossible sound of snowflakes falling, their swish through the air, their piling up over each other as they land. As I lie still, they quickly accumulate over me, and I wonder how long I'd need to lie to disappear, invisible into forest floor, consumed by the snow-covered land.

Jim's raw crow-call shatters the silence. As we return in silence to the circle, I see only vague outlines as each man walks in from their place in the night. We have become a gathering of shadows among the trees, listening to the snow fall.

Later in the light and warmth of the house, some men will speak openly about their fear in these moments of sitting alone, how it welled up and through them, how it bubbled beneath the lid, spilling over just slightly like the hiss of water as it lands in a fire. Though

all have lived with fear through their mental illnesses, few had intentionally stepped into fear this consciously. Jim had encouraged us to notice fear come over and wash through us, to remain in it, to not push it away. These moments of fear and shadow belong to us, and as Parker J. Palmer writes in his book, *A Hidden Wholeness*, "Wholeness does not mean perfection; it means embracing brokenness as an integral part of life."

*"We embraced our shadows for a moment, and they did not consume us or drive us mad."*

During this night-walk we stepped gently into our shadow-selves. We embraced our shadows for a moment, and they did not consume us or drive us mad. Standing in our silence and fear, we were held by this ancient forest, by the snow falling, by the storm whipping around us, by each other. In daylight moments when the shadows arise, when that hollow pain grips our bellies, we can return to this singular memory that to lean into our brokenness is to accept our wholeness. §

## AFTER THE HURRICANE

We were nearly broken by a week  
of the kind of dark and heat  
our predecessors endured unceasingly,

when kitchens were run by a single flame  
of candle and towns were traveled  
by lantern and feel.

In Apalachicola in 1851, John Gorrie  
gave up medicine in the hopes of inventing  
an ice-making machine to cool a room  
for summer's victims of yellow fever.

Now he stands with one hand on his stone hip  
outside the house where he lived and, in 1855, died  
secluded, penniless, his failure like a hurricane.

This line I'm standing in for ice is almost as long  
as the one for fried chicken.

Out on the street, a strange September scent  
of Christmas seeps from the broken trees  
whose branches time had woven  
with the delicate threads of power lines.

Among the fallen pine needles,  
bodies of baby squirrels lie like torn gray envelopes,  
as though holding messages in another language.  
Did we ever speak it?

by Christine Poreba





# ANXIETY:

## NOT BEING NEEDED & WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT

by Wally Swist

The recognition of our identity is essential to the health of both our human soul and our psyche.

“Compared with 50 years ago,” there are “five times as many working-age men completely outside of the workforce” the Dalai Lama and Arthur C. Brooks cite in a 2016 New York Times article. This idea implies what the American poet Bert Meyers wrote regarding the haunted feeling of being unneeded in his poem entitled “One Morning” from *The Dark Birds*: “I told myself/ a single man’s/ like water where/ nobody swims.”

Social isolation precipitates a whole host of negative emotions and can result in ill health. Research has revealed that seniors of both sexes who experience the anxiety of loneliness are three times more likely to succumb to premature death than those who are active and making themselves useful. The keys for preservation are significant here: staying engaged and, through that practice, finding emotional resilience in preserving one’s integrity. These are priceless prescriptions for health on multiple levels.

Sharing isn’t often thought of as a possible panacea by many of us who suffer from loneliness and the anxiety, which can usurp our best intentions to remain positive and proactive. However, the Dali Lama suggests a question that can actually become a guided meditation to begin our day: “What can I do today to appreciate the gifts that others offer me?” Such a question completely takes oneself out of a continuous circle of self-pitying thinking—a lugubrious dialectic of self-abnegation.

We can each be taken out of ourselves if we take on what the Dali Lama prescribes as our need “to make sure that global brotherhood and oneness with others are not just abstract ideas that we profess, but personal commitments that we mindfully put into practice.” In other words, we affect others as we do ourselves. The result of such positive psychological karma is possibly as the 13th-century Buddhist priest, Nichiren, advised: “If one lights a fire for others, it will also brighten one’s own way.”

Even if one finds the wherewithal and courage to set forth on such a path, what about today’s truculent political climate? How do we go about lighting fires for others to see by if the one that brightens our ascent out of the shadowy realms of anxiety and loneliness isn’t the flame by which others are able to see clearly enough at all to find their own way?

The Dali Lama answers such questions with an intrinsic gleam of wisdom: “The problems we face cut across conventional categories; so must our dialogue, and our friendships... Many are confused and frightened to see anger and frustration sweeping like wildfire across societies that enjoy historic safety and prosperity. But their refusal to be content with physical and material security actually reveals something beautiful: a universal human hunger to be needed.”

For the Dali Lama to reveal the answer to our questions within the experience of anxiety itself is a relevant philosophical axiom worth our time contemplating daily. §



# AMY PERRIER





*Thistle Sage* by Amy Perrier



*Breezy Point* by Amy Perrier



*Homeward* by Amy Perrier



Into the Woods by Amy Perrier

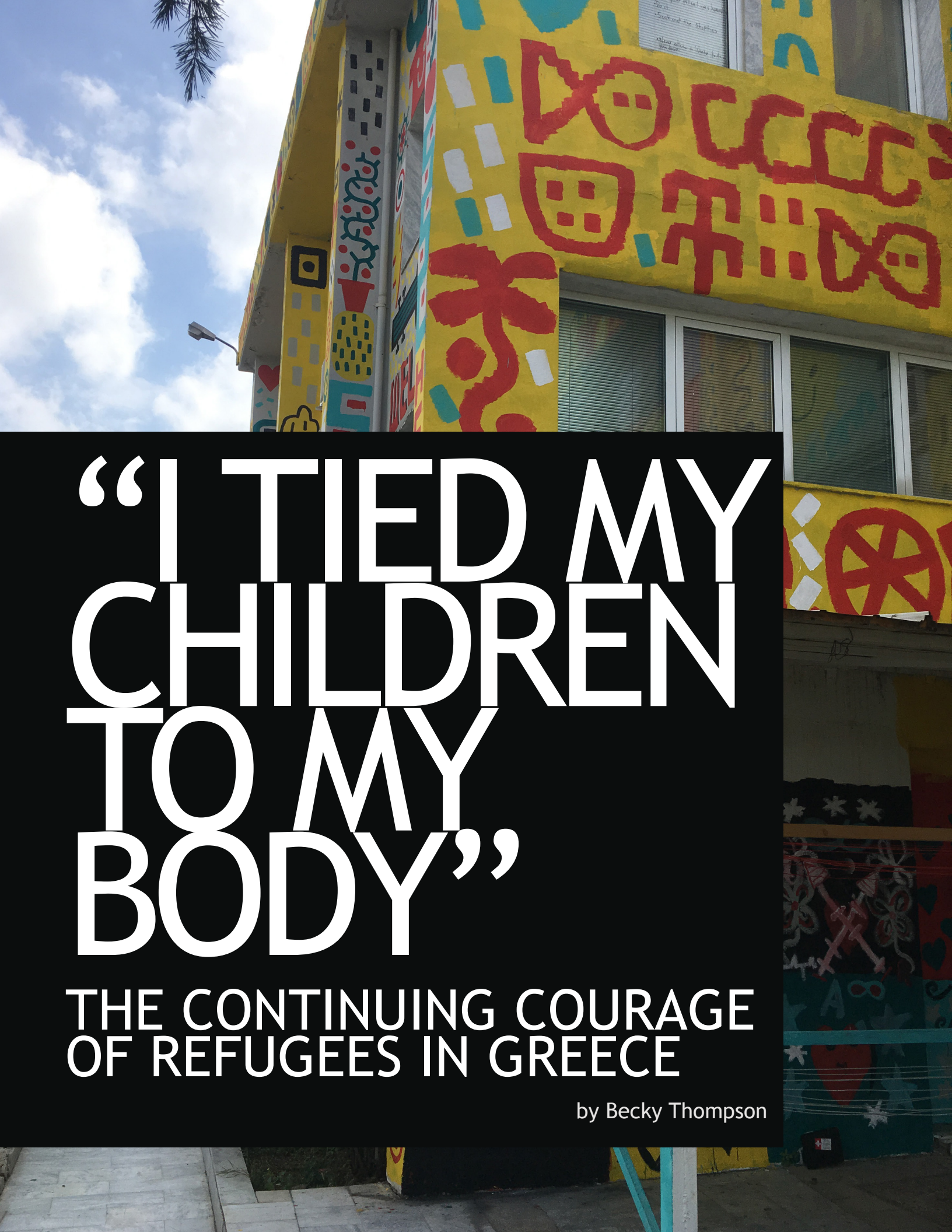


Blue Calm by Amy Perrier

## PRAYER TO THE BEAVER

Your small brown head peaks  
up between our two canoes,  
dives back under, a flat tail slapping  
trails of moving water one of us points to  
with an oar. We wait in silence  
among the water lilies scattered  
in the shiny wet pads, the shallows  
full in this August season. Patience  
brings us to this moment—everything  
we've ever suffered behind us in the stillness  
of an evening's gloam. Separation suddenly  
falls away like a waning moon.  
Loons cry in the distance  
like they're mourning the dead. Then  
the screech of an eagle, a fledgling  
swooping from a giant pine  
as we paddle further, our oars peeling  
through grasses, with skidders gliding  
along the surface. We pause,  
anticipating your return  
while the sky turns a soft-lavender rose  
across the horizon. I could wait  
here until the snows cover  
your dam. I will remain still all night  
as if my life depends on it.

by Gail Hosking



# “I TIED MY CHILDREN TO MY BODY”

THE CONTINUING COURAGE OF REFUGEES IN GREECE

by Becky Thompson



Abbas Sheikhi and his family at Khora in Athens



### In the Belly of the Sea

We were in a boat  
we were afraid of the darkness  
the waves sent us to the sky  
and the sky cried for us  
women were crying  
and men were praying  
I prayed but didn't cry  
because of my small daughter  
our son in my wife's belly  
whispered to us, don't worry  
the sea calmed down  
God's eye saw us.

by Abbas Sheikhi

“I tied my six children to my body with a rope,” the 37-year-old Syrian mother tells me from her cubicle in Elpida, a refugee center for vulnerable families in Thessaloniki, Greece. “Either we were all going to make it together, or none at all.” Fatma Al-Hasan and her six children are among the 57,000 refugees in Greece currently awaiting relocation to another country, possible asylum in Greece, or deportation.

I met Fatma, who is a painter, poet and mother of eight (two of her children are in Germany with her husband), in one of the poetry workshops I recently offered in refugee centers. On this trip, my fifth since I began welcoming rafts to the island of Lesbos in 2015, I witnessed a new layer of the crisis. In addition to the continued exodus of families from war torn countries in the Middle East and Africa, there is a deepening crisis in Greece as the number of refugees waiting in limbo continues to rise, their long term fate unknown.

In Athens, I taught poetry workshops at Khora, an innovative, independently run community center for refugees housed in a five story building in the heart of the city.

At Khora, volunteers are in the background, not in charge. In each class the students guided me. In one, a young Syrian woman asked, “can we start with Jehan Bseiso’s poem, ‘After Aleppo’? I am from that city.” An Afghan mother whispered her comments for the class into her son’s ear who then translated them into English. The students taught me to change my writing prompts on the spot to make my teaching more communal. Individual free writing planned for five minutes turned into the class writing a collective poem, each person offering one line. My plan for them to write their own stories transformed into a group session—writing a list poem of the ten things they do now they didn’t do before.

When the language teachers joined our poetry workshops, I taught ways to harness emotion—to not back away from the sadness and anger expressed through writing. In one workshop, I met Abbas Sheikhi, a young Iranian father who wrote the heart of his poem during our session and then finished it in the hallway as his daughter circled around his legs.

As rafts continue to sneak by the Turkish and Greek coast guards, volunteers stand on the hills—where I used to stand—scanning with fancy telescopes, searching for the latest arrivals. Even as the popular media might lead some to think the crisis is over, we know different. People are still coming. They come wet and tired, risking their lives to save them. I am moved and honored to be a witness. §

## TEACHING POETRY IN KHORA

*Athens, 2017*

Praise this only stand-alone building in Athens for its ingenuity, a welcoming place in the heart of Athens

Praise the tall man from Cote d'Ivoire who refuses to write in class, saying he has no time to think about his past

Praise him again when he says he has no time to write about now

Praise the class when their collective poem majors and minors in despair

Praise another class when their poem is all about green fields and sunny beaches

Praise the Eritrean woman who looks aggravated when I ask if she speaks Farsi

Praise the class that is too afraid to offer popcorn words in response to mine

Praise the mural on the classroom wall that got carried away with color

Praise the teenager who wrote, "they shot us as if we were deer"

Praise the Afghan teenager who wrote a haiku about his eight cousins, "my mother became/ their mother, not enough/ to go around"

Praise the two women who said they could write poetry in the air since they cannot spell or read

Praise the soldier from Syria who asked, "can we write about anything, even if it is scary?"

Praise the artist who wrote in Arabic, "the sea did not save my memories or my paintings"

Praise the Syrian woman who wrote, "the white postbox stood alone after the bomb took everything else"

Praise the twelve-year-old who said, "I carry my soul in my hands"

Praise the mother who wrote, "I sleep with the sea, I do not sleep"

Praise the teachers who try to teach for we know not what we are doing.

by Becky Thompson



“WHY DOES  
THE JOURNEY  
BETWEEN HEAD  
AND HEART  
SOMETIMES FEEL  
SO LONG?”

- *ANCHOR EDITORS*

# GRATITUDE

*Anchor* exists because of the many generous people like you who believe that spirituality cultivates the depth of imagination, courage, and resilience we need to create a more kind, equitable, and sustainable world. We offer our sincere gratitude to all those who make this publication and all of Still Harbor's programs possible. Spiritual formation and accompaniment practices exist across beliefs, traditions, and modalities—we are committed to offering such resources, programs, and supports to leaders of justice efforts around the world.

We work in support of equity, peace, and healing for all people and for the environment in which we live. This publication is part of our commitment to growing the global community of individuals involved in sharing the stories, practices, and ideas of spiritually-rooted service, activism, and movements for change.

with many thanks,



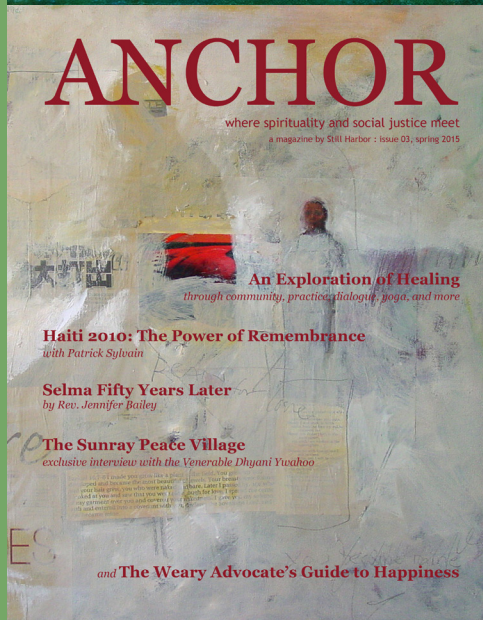
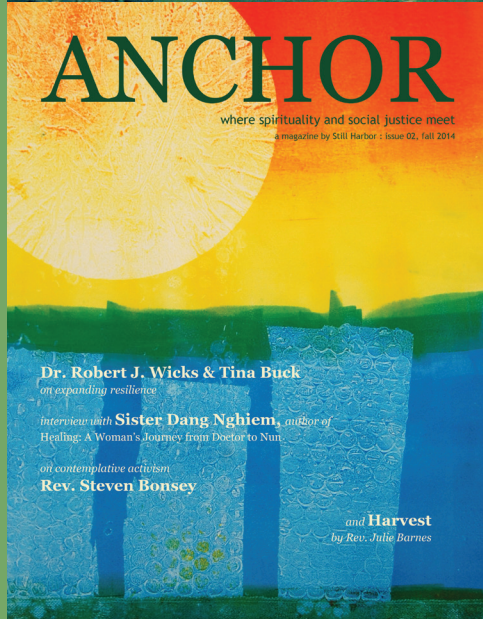
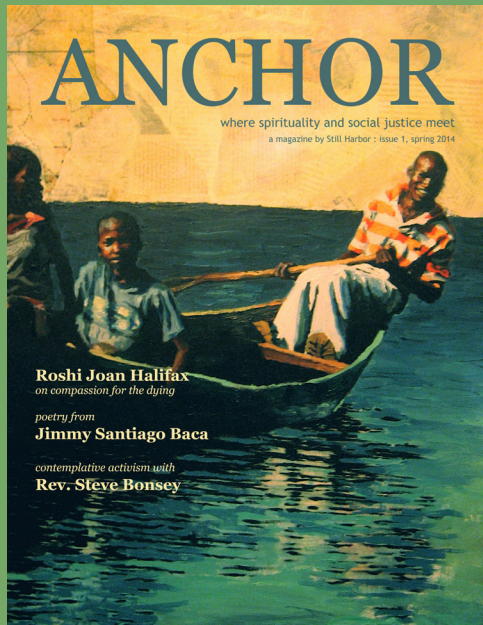
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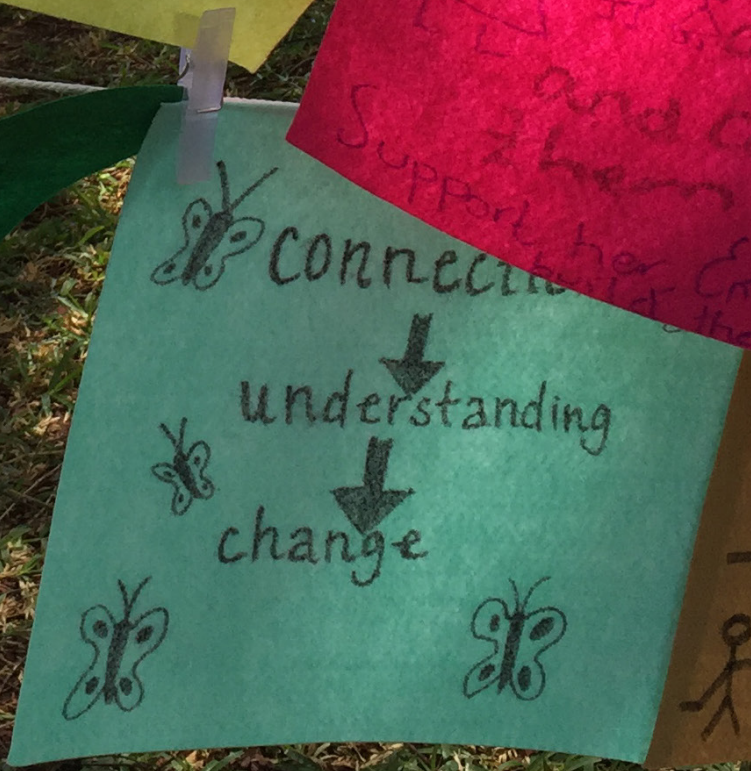
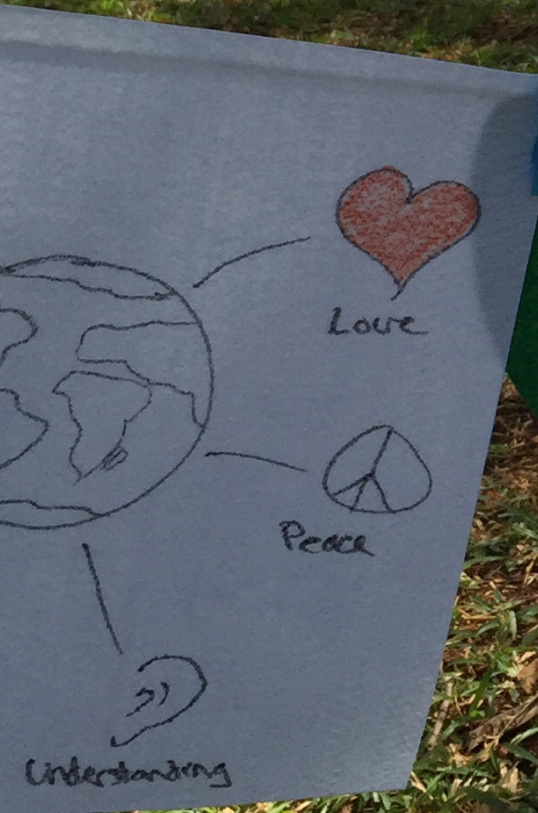
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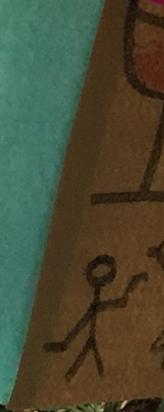
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BORDERLAND by Alia Ali. 2017. Courtesy of Artist.

