



*Healing the Mind, Body & Spirit Through the Creative Arts, Education & Advocacy*

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

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

## **The Surviving Spirit Newsletter July 2023**

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“The 9:30 Train” - trauma survivors disconnecting from others for all the wrong reasons.

*“It’s not enough to have lived. We should be determined to live for something. May I suggest that it be creating joy for others, sharing what we have for the betterment of person-kind, bringing hope to the lost and love to the lonely.” – Leo Buscaglia*

1] [Introducing the Neuroplastic Narrative](#): a non-pathologizing biological foundation for trauma-informed and adverse childhood experience aware approaches by Haley Peckham @ Frontiers

**Frontiers** - *Where scientists empower society. Creating solutions for healthy lives on a healthy planet.*

Most people accessing mental health services have adverse childhood experiences [ACEs] and/or histories of complex trauma. In recognition of this, there are calls to move away from medical model approaches and move toward trauma-informed approaches which privilege the impact of life experience over underlying pathology in the etiology of emotional and psychological suffering. Trauma-informed approaches lack a biological narrative linking trauma and adversity to later suffering. In its absence, this suffering is diagnosed and treated as a mental illness. This study articulates the Neuroplastic Narrative, a neuroecological theory that fills this gap, conceptualizing emotional and psychological suffering as the cost of surviving and adapting to the impinging environments of trauma and adversity. The Neuroplastic Narrative privileges lived experience and recognizes that our experiences become embedded in our biology through evolved mechanisms that ultimately act to preserve survival in the service of reproduction [Read the entire article](#)

*“Optimism is a strategy for making a better future. Because unless you believe that the future can be better, you are unlikely to step up and take responsibility for making it so.” - Noam Chomsky*

*“Healing takes courage, and we all have courage, even if we have to dig a little to find it.” - Tori Amos*

2] [‘You reach a point where you can’t live your life’: what is behind extreme hoarding?](#) by Samira Shackle @ The Guardian

*Hoarding can be distressing and dangerous. But it’s not just a matter of ‘too much stuff’ – it’s a*

*complex condition that requires careful, targeted help.*

At a recent “hoarding panel” meeting in east London, Daniel Pearson, commander for Shadwell and Whitechapel fire stations, played attendees a recording of a 999 call in which a panicked resident reported a fire at their home. A team of firefighters was dispatched immediately, but couldn’t access the property. Pearson displayed photographs from the scene, taken after the event: the doorways and corridors were blocked by heaps of possessions, now charred and unrecognizable. The person who made the call died. Pearson told me they see this kind of case regularly. Last year, the London fire brigade attended 1,036 hoarding-related fires which led to 186 injuries and 10 deaths. It now logs the properties of identified hoarders on a database, so fire stations know to send out extra firefighters if a fire is reported in one of them.

The hoarding panel, which meets monthly, brings together senior firefighters, mental health workers, landlords of social housing properties, and housing and environmental health council officers. At most meetings, they debate interventions for specific cases: should firefighters visit and offer smoke alarms and flame-retardant bedding? Could the person be referred to a specialist support program? Or should the landlord consider forcible cleaning or eviction? Underlying these questions is a larger one: what can we do about hoarding? The panel’s very existence is a sign of a shift in the understanding of hoarding: not as a simple matter of too much stuff, but as a complex condition that requires targeted social policies and careful, long-term management. [Read the entire article](#)

*“We shouldn't be looking for heroes, we should be looking for good ideas.” - Noam Chomsky*

*“The greatest glory in living lies not in never falling, but in rising every time we fall.” - Nelson Mandela*

3] [Drawing, making music and writing poetry can support healing and bring more humanity to health care in US hospitals](#) by Joel Abrams @ the Conversation

The COVID-19 pandemic shined a light on the deep need that people feel for human touch and connection in hospital settings. Having relatives peering through windows at their loved ones or unable to enter hospitals altogether exacerbated the lack of human intimacy that is all too common in health care settings.

Opportunities for creative expression through arts in medicine programs are increasing in U.S. hospitals, and it may be because art-making offers something that medicine can’t. Evidence shows that taking part in art programs [has many therapeutic benefits](#), such as [reducing anxiety](#) and [stress](#), supporting [mental health](#) and [well-being](#) and [connecting people to one another](#).

Research has also shown that these programs can bring [relief from the stresses and burnout](#) that health care workers regularly experience.

[As a medical anthropologist](#) studying how to support people who are facing serious illness, as well as those who care for them, one of my research interests is the intersection of arts and medicine.

Participating in creative activities helps with expressing emotions. This [can improve optimism](#), [boost the body’s immune response](#) and [improve healing times](#).

Arts in medicine programs are also correlated with improved [blood pressure and less pain and depression](#) for some patients. Some music activities can help stroke victims [recover balance and rhythm](#). [Read the entire article](#)

*“Life is what happens when you're busy making other plans.” -John Lennon*

*“Healing yourself is connected with healing others.” - Yoko Ono*

4] [I Survived Pregnancy Behind Bars. Now I'm a Prison Doula](#). By Tabatha Trammell @ The Marshall Project

As a doula in Georgia prisons and jails, Tabatha Trammell supports incarcerated clients through pregnancy, childbirth - and giving up their newborns.

*Tabatha Trammell, 55, is a certified prison doula based in Gwinnett County, Georgia, who uses her personal history to connect with incarcerated clients. In a post-Roe landscape, [community-based doulas](#) like Trammell could play a key role in helping pregnant people in custody advocate for themselves and get the mental and physical support they need.*

When I got pregnant at 15, my family disowned me. They were real religious folks — Jehovah's Witnesses. My church didn't want to be bothered with me. And when everybody at school found out, they stopped being my friend. “Oh, she's pregnant,” they'd whisper. “She's *pregnant*.” So I hated being pregnant, and I hated children. My pregnancy was a shame.

The second time I was pregnant, I was in and out of jail. I was consistently arrested for selling drugs because that's how I supplied my habit. Once, three weeks after giving birth, I was locked up in the Decatur Street annex of the Atlanta City Detention Center, which has since been closed. I told them at intake that I had just had a baby, but they did not come check on me or take me to medical so they could watch me. I was still bleeding, but I could hardly get any pads. Eventually, I had to use torn-up sheets.

For weeks, until I was bonded out, I cried and slept all day. I didn't want to deal with the other ladies who were in the pod. I didn't even want to deal with the reality of getting up and taking a shower. I was suffering postpartum depression, I had been on drugs, and I was locked in a room all day.

Today, I am just under 14 years sober, and I take care of my mental health. [I've started an organization, Woman With a Plan](#), that helps connect girls and women returning home from prison to resources. I'm also a doula who is certified to work in prisons and jails. [Read the entire article](#)

*“Always remember that you are absolutely unique. Just like everyone else.” - Margaret Mead*

*“The best and most beautiful things in the world cannot be seen or even touched - they must be felt with the heart.” - Helen Keller*

5] [Food for thought: South European Atlantic diet shows promising link to lower depression risk](#) By Bhavana Kunkalika @ [Food and Behavior Research](#) [FAB]

In the current study, researchers report the significant benefits of SEAD on depression. This positive association may be due to the increased zinc, omega-3 fatty acid, and magnesium content present within SEAD food products.

Healthy eating trends can positively impact mental health; however, it remains unclear whether the South European Atlantic Diet (SEAD) is associated with mental health problems. In a recent study published in *Molecular Psychiatry*, researchers examine the link between SEAD and the risk of depression.

**What is the SEAD?** - SEAD is a traditional diet consumed in northern Portugal and northwestern Spain, which may have some similarities with the eating habits of other European countries. Compared to other notable European diets, such as the Mediterranean diet, SEAD is high in dairy, legumes, meat, pork products, and fish, particularly cod.

There are numerous health benefits associated with adherence to SEAD, some of which include a healthier gut microbiota, reduced levels of various cardiovascular risk factors including C-reactive protein, triglycerides, cholesterol, and body mass index (BMI), as well as a reduced risk of all-cause mortality. Although eating certain SEAD foods has been associated with a reduced risk of depression, the prevalence of depressive disorder has been reported to be higher in Spain and Portugal than in other European countries.

**About the study** - The current study involved the analysis of five cohort studies. The “Impact of Dietary Patterns and Sedentary Behavior on the Accumulation of Health Deficits and Physical Resilience in Older Adults (Seniors-ENRICA-1 and Seniors-ENRICA-2) are two study cohorts of people living in the Spanish community who are at least 60 and at 65 years old, respectively.

The Health, Alcohol, and Psychosocial Factors in Eastern Europe (HAPIEE) cohort, which was established between 2002 and 2005, consists of men and women between the ages of 45 and 69 from Polish cities. Furthermore, the Whitehall-II study cohort included data obtained from civil servants in London. [Read the entire article](#)

5a] [Feeding Humanity webinar](#) - The Key Role of Nutrition in the Mental Health Crisis. Aug 3, 2023

*“It is during our darkest moments that we must focus to see the light.” - Aristotle*

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

6] [When it comes to adult ADHD, the US medical system is falling behind](#) By Hannah Harris Green @The Guardian

As more people seek diagnosis and treatment, the system is unable to serve them, and social media is filling in those gaps

Sophia Rath, a psychologist in Seattle, has been dealing with more demand than she can handle for a particular service – adult ADHD evaluations. Wait times for these assessments are six months longer

than they used to be at PEAK Psychological Wellness, where she works. She's hired another person to try and fill the gap, but it wasn't easy: "Testing psychologists are a little bit like unicorns, honestly." [Mental health](#) professionals with the skills and training to give full neurological evaluations for adult ADHD are few and far between.

Since the pandemic, practitioners around the country have found themselves in the same position as Rath – inundated with more requests than they can handle for adult ADHD evaluations. Of the more than 30 practices the Guardian contacted, the dozen who replied confirmed that demand doubled or tripled in the last three years. They confirmed that Covid-19 created a new awareness and conversation around adult ADHD – while simultaneously blocking the resources needed to treat it.

"Covid has really clogged up multiple states' licensing timelines," said Rath.

Jared DeFife, a psychologist who conducts ADHD evaluations at his private practice in Atlanta, said the lack of knowledge about adult ADHD was already a problem before the pandemic.

"The current struggle is not just due to increased demand, but also due to the paucity of neurodivergent knowledgeable healthcare practitioners available in the first place," he said, adding that the majority of adults with ADHD have historically gone undiagnosed and untreated – [as many as 80%](#) until recently. As more of those adults are beginning to seek treatment, the medical system is unprepared to serve them. [Read the entire article](#)

*"You're afraid of surrender because you don't want to lose control. But you never had control; all you had was anxiety." – Elizabeth Gilbert*

*"Every step taken in mindfulness brings us one step closer to healing ourselves and the planet." - Thich Nhat Hanh*

7] [weRnative](#) – YouTube - 727 videos - We are a comprehensive health resource for Native youth, by Native youth.

7a] [Making Relatives](#) - YouTube 5:52 minutes - Making Relatives is a guide for developing helpers within tribal communities to support individuals who are in crisis. It was developed to address the unique needs of different tribal reservations.

[Making Relatives – A Guide For Healing The Soul Wound](#) – Trainer's Manual – National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors

*"Three passions, simple but overwhelmingly strong, have governed my life: the longing for love, the search for knowledge, and unbearable pity for the suffering of mankind." - Bertrand Russell*

*"Life isn't about finding yourself. Life is about creating yourself." - George Bernard Shaw*

8] [How to Stop Catastrophizing: An Expert's Guide](#) By Linda Blair @ Pocket

A clinical psychologist suggests a three-pronged plan for tackling anxiety and approaching each day logically and positively.

Let us start by considering why some people catastrophize – that is, on hearing uncertain news, they imagine the worst possible outcome. After all, it is not uncommon and those who catastrophize seem to do it a lot. Catastrophizers tend to be fairly anxious people. Whether this characteristic is principally genetic or more the result of learning is unknown. High levels of [anxiety](#) are extremely unpleasant, so we look for ways to discharge those unpleasant feelings as quickly as possible. If a catastrophizer is told something inconclusive – for example, if they go to a doctor and are asked to have tests – they look for a way to feel in control again immediately. They learn to choose the worst possible outcome because it allows for the greatest sense of relief when they are reassured.

Considering all possibilities is not a bad strategy if you examine them logically. However, unable to bear their distress, catastrophizers rush to external sources to calm themselves down: checking whether anyone else has “come through” the same problem; matching symptoms online to obtain a diagnosis and treatment options; asking a professional to tell them that they will survive. Once they are reassured, they feel better – in psychological jargon, they have “rewarded” this seeking behavior. The next time they feel uncertain or threatened, they will ratchet up their anxiety with a catastrophic thought, then look outwards for reassurance even faster than before. In this way, catastrophizing soon becomes a well-entrenched habit. The greatest problem with seeking others to alleviate anxiety is that it offers only temporary relief. There is always another source to check or another opinion to be had; as a result, catastrophizers feel anxious again increasingly quickly. The only way to break this cycle is to tame anxiety. After this, you can still seek advice. So, if you are a catastrophizer and you would rather not be, how do you go about making changes? [Read the entire article](#)

*“The truth is you don't know what is going to happen tomorrow. Life is a crazy ride, and nothing is guaranteed.” - Eminem*

*“The most satisfying thing in life is to have been able to give a large part of one's self to others.” - Pierre Teilhard de Chardin*

9] [I'm a psychologist with a history of anxiety. Treating it as a permanent problem might make young people feel worse](#) By Lucy Foulkes @ The Guardian

When we give children the label but no tools to challenge it, their worlds grow smaller. My life's greatest moments involved facing my fears.

I was an anxious teenager. For me, the issue was always worry: excessive, awful, irrational thoughts that started when I was about 10 and reached their crescendo when I was an undergraduate, when things fell apart entirely and I needed a lot of treatment to be able to function again. Before I got help, I had no language to describe how I felt and no adults around me who understood what was happening. As the public [conversation about anxiety](#) continues to swell, I've been asking myself: would I have been better off as an anxious teenager today? Despite all the recent awareness-raising efforts, the reduction in stigma, the lessons in schools – and despite how hard it was navigating my own anxiety in silence – I find myself answering “no”.

On the one hand, of course it's better today. I didn't even know the word “anxiety” until I was about 20. If my parents and my school [had understood](#) what was happening, my life could have been very different. I have no doubt that getting proper help would have made life far easier then, and would also

have prevented things from escalating so badly later on.

But growing up now would only be better if it meant access to support, and I'm not sure most teenagers have that. Awareness-raising efforts in schools, online and elsewhere have flooded teenagers' minds with the concept of anxiety, but [funding for services](#) has not caught up, and light-touch school interventions often aren't enough. We are now in a situation where many teens know or believe they are anxious but aren't getting the help they need to manage it. I'm not sure that is better than not having the awareness at all. [Read the entire article](#)

*“The advice I'd give to somebody that's silently struggling is, you don't have to live that way. You don't have to struggle in silence. You can be un-silent. You can live well with a mental health condition, as long as you open up to somebody about it, because it's really important you share your experience with people so that you can get the help that you need.” - Demi Lovato*

*“You don't need to find a lesson in your trauma.” - Jordan Pickell*

10] [For Ukrainian women, painting is a form of therapy to cope with loss](#) By Hanna Arhirova @ AP News

In a sunlit art studio in Kyiv filled with easels and canvases, Iryna Farion puts the finishing touches on an oil painting with a predominantly dark color palette in shades of blue and brown.

The artwork depicts two intertwined trees held together by their roots, as though in embrace, and a radiant yellow sun shining against a moody blue background.

“I feel like it's me and my husband, who was killed in the war,” Farion says of the trees. “They are like two souls, like two hearts, like one body.”

Farion is among thousands of Ukrainian women who have lost their partners in the war Russia launched against their homeland nearly 17 months ago. Tens of thousands of Ukrainians have been killed on the battlefield – most of them men who once led ordinary lives before dropping everything to join the fight for their country.

Farion's husband, Oleksandr Alimov, died in December after being shot on the Donetsk front line. Overwhelmed with grief, she says she has found some consolation in painting alongside other women who lost their partners on the battlefield.

The women are part of an art therapy project called “Alive. True Stories of Love,” which seeks to honor the memory of those who died while helping the women cope with the pain of their loss.

Alimov voluntarily joined the army in the early days of the war after working as an IT specialist for a well-known company. “I don't want us to live in a country where we are not free,” Farion says her husband told her before going off to war. The couple had been together for 10 years.

She still wears her wedding ring, while his hangs around her neck on a chain. “I can't take off the ring yet,” she says. “It feels better for me this way.”



On a recent day, Farion visited the art studio with her friend Olesia Skalska, whose husband was killed in January. The two women initially met at a cemetery, a place where Ukrainian widows commonly find solace in each other's company and form [friendships bound by shared grief](#). [Read the entire article](#)

*“Sometimes the people around you won't understand your journey. They don't need to, it's not for them.” - Joubert Botha*

*“Take a deep breath to remember you are the child who lived through survival mode and the empowered adult who chose their healing.” - Dr. Nicole LePera*

11] [What is Spoon Theory?](#) By Kirsten Schultz @ Healthline

*I'm a “Spoonie.” Here's What I Wish More People Knew About Chronic Illness*

When I became chronically ill as a child, I couldn't explain how different my energy levels were. Everyone around me could see it. I went from a happy, bubbly kid to one that was lethargic. When I said I was “tired,” though, people didn't quite understand the extent of what I meant.

It wasn't until I graduated college that I found a way to explain my fatigue better. It's when I found out about the Spoon Theory.

**What's Spoon Theory?** - [“The Spoon Theory”](#), a personal story by Christine Miserandino, is popular among many people dealing with chronic illness. It describes perfectly this idea of limited energy, using “spoons” as a unit of energy.

Miserandino lives with lupus, a chronic [autoimmune disease](#) which causes an immune system to attack the body's healthy cells. One day, Miserandino writes, her friend wanted to understand better the realities of living with a chronic illness.

“As I tried to gain my composure, I glanced around the table for help or guidance, or at least stall for time to think. I was trying to find the right words. How do I answer a question I never was able to answer for myself? Miserandino writes.

“How do I explain every detail of every day being affected, and give the emotions a sick person goes through with clarity. I could have given up, cracked a joke like I usually do, and changed the subject, but I remember thinking if I don't try to explain this, how could I ever expect her to understand. If I can't explain this to my best friend, how could I explain my world to anyone else? I had to at least try.”

[Read the entire article](#)

*“Change what you can, manage what you can't.” - Raymond McCauley*

*“There is so much pain in the world, and most of these people keep theirs secret, rolling through agonizing lives in invisible wheelchairs, dressed in invisible bodycasts.” - Andrew Solomon*

12] [‘I'm a chef and I forgot how to bake a cake’](#): why trauma often leads to brain fog and amnesia By Zoe Beaty @ The Guardian

*Shock, stress and grief can have a devastating effect on memory – but there are ways to bring it back.*

In early 2016, Juliet Owen-Nuttall decided to bake a cake. It was something she – a trained chef and former wedding cake decorator – had done hundreds of times before. Except, this time, her mind was blank. “I had forgotten how to do it,” Owen-Nuttall says. “I know it sounds really strange but after the trauma of the last few months, it was like suddenly I no longer had access to any of the knowledge I’d built up over the years.”

Owen-Nuttall, 48, wanted to bake to help her decompress after the most stressful period of her life. A dream adventure – relocating to Costa Rica to look after horses on some of the world’s most beautiful beaches – had turned out to be a vicious scam, costing Owen-Nuttall and her husband, Daniel, 41, their life savings and forcing them to live in a small tent on the beach “in squalor”. The pain and shock caused her brain to “shut down entirely”.

“There are only certain bits I remember. When we found out we’d lost everything, I remember starting to feel severely physically ill. Then it’s all a blur.” Her memory was shattered; she describes certain periods as “blanks”, marked by forgetfulness and acute loss of basic skills – such as baking. “It’s like your mind has been shrunk down to a single, dark corridor. There’s nothing outside this corridor, and only the basics inside.”

What Juliet experienced is a common, if rarely articulated, phenomenon that occurs during points of high emotional stress, [trauma](#) and often [grief](#). Some people describe it as a “fog”, or a film around reality; others report chunks of time being severed and lifted from memory, or reappearing as fragments. While we might associate this type of memory loss with the effects of post-traumatic stress disorder, it’s not always so neatly categorized.

One psychological term for the condition is dissociative amnesia – a form of memory loss that is more severe than mere forgetfulness, and that can’t be explained by another medical diagnosis. It is thought to be more common among women than men, and can last from a matter of days to months or, in rare cases, years. [Read the entire article](#)

*“You don’t have to be positive all the time. It’s perfectly okay to feel sad, angry, annoyed, frustrated, scared and anxious. Having feelings doesn’t make you a negative person. It makes you human.” - Lori Deschene*

*“No amount of support or generosity justifies someone treating you badly. This includes parents.” - Sarah Crosby*

13] [You Are Enough](#): The Journey To Accepting Your Authentic Self By Jacques Fleury @ Spirit of Change Magazine

Who among us hasn’t heard that inner voice gaslighting us by reinforcing the mantra “You are not good enough”? Humans are plagued with incessant feelings of uncertainty about who we are. We live in a society that constantly ingrains in our consciousness - and to a more pernicious extent, subconscious - that we are somehow inadequate while navigating life on this planet.

One of the components contributing to this enigma of the nature of the psyche is that we constantly compare ourselves to others. We think we should be who we think others are. We think we should have what others have. However, by participating in this type of rumination we deprive ourselves of what we could actually be if we focused on our own set of talents and Earthly gifts. What was meant for you does not necessarily align with my [authentic](#) self and vice versa.

I find myself coming alive when I focus on the things that bring me joy, the things I am passionate about and the things that I look forward to doing. Whether that be writing, exercising, reading a good book or the pleasure I get from watching my favorite episode of reality TV, what makes me smile may not be what makes you smile. That has to be okay if we are to find our own joys while navigating our own paths.

Comparing ourselves to others can compress our possibilities for potential [growth](#) in all areas of our lives. When you're on the right path, things just magically seem to fall into place. You don't have to try to manipulate the environment around you to get desired results. In the words of Pulitzer Prize winning author Alice Walker of *The Color Purple* fame, "The right path disappears beneath your feet."

Suffering in life only comes when you resist the natural flow of things, thus the wisdom in "going with the flow." In the words of the late spiritual guru Ram Dass, "Resistance to the unpleasant situation is the root of suffering." Essentially, we must embrace our defeats just as we rejoice over our victories. We must follow the energy that awakens the fire of the heart, and greet life with gusto and optimism, not sorrow and pessimism. Do not allow misconceived notions of who you think you're supposed to be, keep you from being who you were meant to be. [Read the entire article](#)

[You Are Enough: The Journey To Accepting Your Authentic Self](#) By Jacques Fleury – Book @ Amazon

[About the Author](#) - Jacques Stanley Fleury is a Haitian-American Poet, Author and Educator.

*"Life is like a piano; the white keys represent happiness and the black show sadness. But as you go through life's journey, remember that the black keys also create music." - Ehssan*

*"This feeling will pass. The fear is real but the danger is not." - Cammie McGovern*

14] Live performance of two tunes from a four song set by Michael Skinner – You Tube

Embrace your creativity, passions & joy-because you deserve it! - "Songs For The Keys To Your Life" - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2sOd1-EvpRI&t=128s>

"The 9:30 Train" - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2sOd1-EvpRI&t=421s>

PS If you scroll back to 5:56 minutes on the video you'll get the backstory to why this was written - trauma survivors disconnecting from others for all the wrong reasons.

*"I keep moving ahead, as always, knowing deep down inside that I am a good person and that I am worthy of a good life." - Jonathan Harnisch*

*"We are not our trauma. We are not our brain chemistry. That's part of who we are, but we're so much*

*more than that.” - Sam J. Miller*

***Thank you & Take care, Michael***

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

***Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter. Martin Luther King, Jr.***

*A diagnosis is not a destiny*

[The Surviving Spirit](#) - Healing the Heart Through the Creative Arts, Education & Advocacy - Hope, Healing & Help for Trauma, Abuse & Mental Health

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

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