



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 December 2024

“Every single person has at least one secret that would break your heart. If we could just remember this, I think there would be a lot more compassion and tolerance in the world.” – Frank Warren

Hi folks,

A shout out for a friend and fellow mental health advocate who could use some help:

“I have been on dialysis over 2 years. It has put a crimp in my ability to do my mental health advocacy work.

I am hoping to get a living kidney donation or be offered a deceased person's organ.

If you or someone you know who like to be screened to see if they can be a living donor please use this link: <https://nkr.org/JNX922>

Thanks, Howard D. Trachtman, BS, CPS, CPRP, COAPS”

Home/Office (781) 642-0368 (always call first) howarddtrachtman@gmail.com

Music & Thoughts To Share - [“As You Walk Away” by Michael Skinner](#) @ YouTube

A song about estrangement. Please do subscribe to my music channel. & More tunes are coming!!

“When we bring things out into the light, they lose their power over us.” - Al-Anon

“The true beauty of music is that it connects people. It carries a message, and we, the musicians, are the messengers.” - Roy Ayers

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“Trauma in a person, decontextualized over time, looks like personality. Trauma in a family, decontextualized over time, looks like family traits. Trauma in a people, decontextualized over time, looks like culture.” – Resmaa Menakem

“It is not our purpose to become each other; it is to recognize each other; to learn to see the other and honor him for what he is.” – Hermann Hesse

1] [Better Because Collective](#) - Stories of Hope

Be inspired by real-life stories of growth after trauma, written by and for people just like you.

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

In a world of mental health conversations, there are a lot of stories of trauma surrounding loss, stigma, discrimination, and pain. Oftentimes, we put so much effort in trying to stop our emotional trauma that we don't pause to reflect upon how much we've grown. That's where we come in. We're a platform for people to share their journeys to post-traumatic growth. *Better Because Collective* is a mental health-focused nonprofit organization powered by a team of dedicated volunteers working remotely around the world who are passionate about supporting people in writing their personal narratives of post-traumatic growth.

We believe that our shared experiences let us know that we are not alone. That there is always hope, even if it is in the smallest of things. We want you to be encouraged and empowered to celebrate what's wonderful in your life. To know that the things we've been through can actively make our lives better not in spite of the storms we've weathered, but because of them. We're here to celebrate our successes, to provide hope and inspiration to one another, and to recognize our achievements. No story is too small or too big to share. Whatever you've been through, we want to hear how you survived it and what you're celebrating today. You never know — what you share may just make a crucial difference in someone else's life.

STORIES FOR PEOPLE LIKE YOU, BY PEOPLE LIKE YOU

Our collection of stories come from people who have experienced mental health journeys, post-traumatic growth, and struggles with substance use. [Read our stories](#).

[Submission process](#) - Everyone has a story to tell. Our life consists of conflicts, climaxes, and conclusions, like characters in a novel. Stories about post-traumatic growth focus on the positive outcomes of a trauma without denying past distress and ongoing growth. Have you grown because of your mental health experiences? Have you experienced a major turning point that changed you for the better? Let's work together to tell your story of post-traumatic growth.

Your story will describe how you've grown because of what you've been through. Your final piece will be between 500 and 1,500 words. But don't worry, you don't need to have a polished document to send us. Our experienced editors will help you craft your story. And they're all people like you. People who have survived trauma.

“In the midst of hate, I found there was, within me, an invincible love. In the midst of tears, I found there was, within me, an invincible smile. In the midst of chaos, I found there was, within me, an invincible calm. I realized, through it all, that in the midst of winter, I found there was, within me, an invincible summer. And that makes me happy. For it says that no matter how hard the world pushes against me, within me, there’s something stronger – something better, pushing right back.” - Albert Camus

2] [Bullying Hurts Your Health. Kindness Boosts It](#) by Jennifer Fraser Ph.D. @ Psychology Today

Article excerpt: Looking at anti- and pro-social behaviour through the lens of medicine.

Key points

- Humiliating and hurting others can harm your brain and body health.
- Research documents an influx of the stress hormone cortisol when bullying.
- Altruism and kindness, namely caring for and about others, is excellent for your health.
- Recent research shows an influx of the healing hormone oxytocin when being kind.

We have been trained to see [bullying](#) behaviors as signifying power, but from a health perspective, they are actually a sign of weakness. Our culture wires us to look at bullies as if their degradation and dehumanization of others is a manifestation of strength, but once again, from a medical perspective, these bullying acts actually reveal symptoms that occur when someone is falling ill.

Likewise, we are taught that kindness is “good” behavior. It is seen as an ethical gesture that we do for the sake of others and for the care of others. But from a medical perspective, we are now learning just how much acting with kindness is critically important for *our own health*. As much as bullying can harm our health, make us ill and weak, kindness can boost our health, making us [resilient](#) and strong.

First, we will do a quick overview of a social view of bullying behaviours, in order to compare and contrast it with what medical and neuroscientific research says about these anti-social behaviours, followed by a look at kindnesses as pro-social behaviours on the other end of the spectrum.

Bullying Through Society’s Lens - From an early age, we are told that bullying results from a power imbalance. The power-play needs a bully, a victim, and bystanders. In this drama, it’s understood that bullies harm or humiliate victims for power and control. They gain in power by hurting and [shaming](#) victims, while they increase control by creating [fear](#) in those who see their [aggression](#). The ultimate victory is to have their bullying—a display of their power—witnessed by others. The bully’s show acts as a threat to any who question their power which increases their control.

2a] [Does childhood bullying have long term impacts?](#) - Jennifer Fraser @ TEDxLangaraCollege YouTube

2b] Book - [The Bullied Brain: Heal Your Scars and Restore Your Health](#): Fraser Ph.D, Jennifer

Why do we say we have zero tolerance for bullying, but adult society is rife with it and it is an epidemic among children?

Because the injuries that all forms of bullying and abuse do to brains are invisible. We ignore them, fail to heal them, and they become cyclical and systemic.

Bullying and abuse are at the source of much misery in our lives. Because we are not taught about our brains, let alone how much they are impacted by bullying and abuse, we do not have a way to avoid this misery, heal our scars, or restore our health. In *The Bullied Brain* readers learn about the evidence doctors, psychiatrists, neuropsychologists and neuroscientists have gathered, that shows the harm done by bullying and abuse to your brain, and how you can be empowered to protect yourself and all others. Not only is it critically important to discover how much your mental health is contingent on what has sculpted and shaped the world inside your head, it is also the first step in learning ways to recover.

“Apathy changes nothing.” - Unknown

“Sometimes the greatest growth comes through pain, but it's not the pain that helps me to grow, it's my response to it. Will I suffer through the experience and continue as before or let the pain inspire changes that help me grow?” - Courage to Change – Al-Anon

3] [Being Alone Is Actually Sometimes BETTER For You](#): Combating Loneliness This Holiday Season with Art Therapy by Carey MacCarthy @ LinkedIn

Article Excerpt: I wanted to reach out and personally acknowledge that this is a difficult time for many for not only is the holiday season upon us and can be painful reminders of the past, or present, but also we are in a time of global struggle and many are displaced due to war or natural disasters or poverty and inflation, not to mention the recent politics in America, which have many experiencing, what I call, "political trauma."

And then there's the UAP (UFO) disclosure ...

...Not to remind you of all the craziness.... but just to name that there is a lot going on throughout the world at this time in history...

There is a cumulative energy that comes with this, and as energetic beings we can feel this energy whether it is conscious or subconscious.

We are conditioned as a society that this should be a time of joy and that we should be surrounded by loved ones, but for many, who experience feelings of loneliness, despair and isolation, thinking that we should be doing and feeling all these things that have been programmed into us when that is not your reality, can produce feelings of shame that something may be "wrong with you."

New science shows that being alone is actually sometimes BETTER for you than being in relationship or proximity with others... in the science of quantum physics, being alone allows you to feel your own energetic field and have complete control of your own emotional regulation rather than constantly having to attune your emotions to those of others

3b] [Start Up! Art Therapy](#) - download free E-Workbook - “Starting Your Trauma Recovery Journey”
Create your healing blueprint.

“Always hold firmly to the thought that each one of us can do something to bring some portion of misery to an end.” Author Unknown

“Life truly lived is a risky business, and if one puts up too many fences against risk one ends by shutting out life itself.” Kenneth S. Davis

4] [Male Depression: The Hidden Signs You’re Missing](#) - YouTube

Depression isn’t always visible. Many men experience it in ways that are hard to recognize—through withdrawal, substance use, or anger rather than sadness. In this video, I’ll help you spot the often-missed signs of male depression and explain the steps to address it.

If you’re feeling disconnected, irritable, or stuck in behaviors that keep you from feeling truly alive, this video will show you a way forward. And if you’re a partner trying to help, I’ll provide guidance on how to approach this issue without judgment. Facing depression isn’t easy, but it can be done with support.

Welcome to my channel! I'm Terry Real, a relationship and couples therapist with over 30 years of experience. I created Relational Life Therapy (RLT), an integrative approach that empowers individuals and couples to build authentic, honest, and intimate connections. Here, you'll find actionable advice for improving your marriage and relationships, plus guidance for therapists and mental health professionals.

4a] Book - [Us: Getting Past You and Me to Build a More Loving Relationship](#) (Goop Press): by Terrence Real (Author), Bruce Springsteen (Foreword)

New York Times, Wall Street Journal, and USA Today Bestseller • Stop working on yourself as an individual and start working on your relationship as a couple, with the help of the renowned family therapist and author of The New Rules of Marriage

Not much is harder than figuring out how to love your partner in all their messy humanness—and there’s also not much that’s more important.

At a time when toxic individualism is rending our society at every level, bestselling author and renowned marriage counselor Terrence Real sees how it poisons intimate relationships in his therapy practice, where he works with couples on the brink of disaster. The good news: Warmer, closer, more passionate relationships are possible if you have the right tools.

“The strongest principle of growth lies in human choice.” George Elliot

“People start to heal the moment they feel heard.” - Cheryl Richardson

5] [Jasmine Marie Wants to Use Breathwork to Help 1 Million Black Women Deal With Trauma](#) by Ashley Simpson @ Harper's Bazaar/Pocket

Article excerpt: The founder of Black Girls Breathing set a goal to hit by 2025, here's how she's going to do it.

In 2018, Jasmine Marie had a realization. She was living in New York City at the time, working in a high stress environment when she discovered breathwork. The holistic mental health practice changed her life: she subsequently trained to become a practitioner, left her corporate job, and founded [black girls breathing](#)—an organization dedicated to bringing the self-care exercise, along with other mental health resources, to Black women and girls in the US and beyond.

Marie is also now working to transform and decolonize the mental health industry at large. She has pledged to impact 1 million Black women and girls by 2025 through [breathwork](#), which is defined as the regulation of the breath through certain techniques and exercises to relieve stress and enhance the mental state. What's more, *Black girls breathing* is working to fill the research gaps in mental health, a space that—like so many others—has not centered the Black experience in research, practice, or care. We caught up with Marie over Zoom from Atlanta where she is currently based to learn about why breathwork is so transformative in trauma healing, how *black girls breathing* came about, and how she and her team are working to transform the mental health industry.

Why do you love breathwork and how did you first come into contact with it?

I [studied business] at NYU and the culture was very much ‘high stress is expected in your work-life.’ I was working in global haircare after school and my stress was just out of this world. At the time I was really involved in my church in Harlem. The pastor built our church to be so inclusive. There were so many things about his teachings that were revolutionary. He launched a community center and they offered free breathwork classes to Harlem residents. I was coming from a very traditional Christian background, needing it to align to my own beliefs about people and faith.

My first breathwork practitioner was a Black woman which I think was very influential to me looking back. The practice in so many ways saved my life. There was so much stress in my career and [in my] personal [life]. Sometimes our nervous systems are just so taxed and stressed that we disconnect. I remember reclaiming myself and being able to know what was going on in my body and making choices from that. I eventually left the corporate world and started my first business.

“Be kinder than necessary; For everyone you meet is Fighting some kind of battle.” - Author unknown

“What we have done for ourselves alone dies with us; what we have done for others and the world remains and is immortal.” - Albert Pike

6] [Stop Institutional Child Abuse, Troubled Teen Industry](#)

An estimated 120,000-200,000 of our nation’s most vulnerable youth are pipelined into youth residential programs (colloquially referred to as the Troubled Teen Industry) each year **by state child welfare and juvenile justice systems, mental health providers, federal agencies, school districts’ individualized education programs, and by parents.**

These programs, including but not limited to **boot camps, wilderness programs, therapeutic boarding schools, residential treatment facilities, or group homes**, cause harm at a higher rate to youth who are Black Indigenous People of Color (BIPOC), LGBTQ+ youth, and youth with disabilities.

The Troubled Teen Industry receives an estimated \$23 billion dollars of public funds annually to purportedly “treat” the behavioral and psychological needs of vulnerable youth yet there are systemic reports of youth experiencing physical, emotional and sexual abuse including but not limited to prolonged **solitary confinement, physical, chemical, and mechanical restraints, food and sleep deprivation, lack of access to the restroom or personal hygiene, “attack therapy,” forced labor, medical neglect, and being denied a free and public education.** Public records and news reports have documented more than 350 preventable child deaths in these programs.

Want to learn more? Watch [YouTube Original's This is Paris](#) and Netflix's *The Program: Con, Cults, and Kidnapping*.

The "Stop Institutional Child Abuse Act" is pivotal legislation that aims to transform how youth residential programs are overseen and managed across the United States. By addressing long-standing issues of transparency and accountability, this bill seeks to safeguard the health and well-being of vulnerable youths housed in these facilities.

“Trauma is the most avoided, ignored, denied, misunderstood and untreated cause of human suffering.” - Dr Peter Levine, Author of Waking the Tiger

“Education is the most powerful weapon you can use to change the world.” - Nelson Mandela

7] [Dear Psychiatrist – I Survived](#) By [Martha Barbone](#) @ Mad In America

Article excerpt: Dear Psychiatrist: I first met you 30 years ago and I want to let you know how I am doing.

Today I was the proud mother at my youngest son’s wedding — but if I had believed you I wouldn’t have been there.

Two weeks ago I celebrated with my daughter when she received her master’s degree — but if I had believed you I wouldn’t have been there.

A few months ago I celebrated my grandson’s first birthday — but if I had believed you I wouldn’t have been there.

I raised all three of my children as a single mother. I have lived on my own for the last 24 years. I continue to work and have a successful career in a profession I love. I haven’t had a psychiatric hospitalization in 15 years. I haven’t taken any psych drugs for eight years and I have thrived.

But if I had believed you I wouldn’t be here today.

Thirty years ago you said I would likely never raise my children, live on my own or work again.

Thirty years ago my husband (now ex) did believe you — and he wasn’t there for any of this. He left me and our children when he heard this from you.

Sadly, I did believe you when I first heard these words. You see, when I sought your help, I was feeling very helpless, hopeless, and worthless. I had just had surgery to have my thyroid removed. I had two young children and an infant. I was trying to recover from a mild traumatic brain injury. I was having nightmares and flashbacks from childhood trauma that I had successfully hidden in the recesses of my mind until that time.

Interestingly I was still working full-time as an Air Force officer. I was still married and caring for my husband and three children. I was still very much alive and had never considered ending my life. I was just struggling...

I was referred to you by my surgical team because they thought I was depressed. Maybe I was — I had a lot going on. I wanted the support. I wanted to know everything would be okay. I wanted to feel whole again.

“When I was young I admired clever people. Now that I am old, I admire kind people.” - Abraham Joshua Heschel

“There is a time when we must firmly choose the course we will follow, or the relentless drift of events will make the decision for us.” - Herbert V. Prochnow

8] [East LA arts program gives addicts and ex-cons an escape to a new life](#) - YouTube – PBS Newshour

Changing lives and creating art. A tried and true program in East L.A. and the forces behind it are bringing purpose out of despair. Special correspondent Mike Cerre reports on the Homeboy Art Academy for our arts and culture series, CANVAS.

8a] [Homeboy Industries](#) - Homeboy Industries is the largest gang rehabilitation and re-entry program in the world. For over 30 years, we have stood as a beacon of hope in Los Angeles to provide training and support to formerly gang-involved and previously incarcerated people, allowing them to redirect their lives and become contributing members of our community.

“We imagine a world without prisons, and then we try to create that world. - ”Father Greg Boyle, Founder

“The idea that everything is purposeful really changes the way you live. To think that everything that you do has a ripple effect, every word you speak, every action you make affects other people and the planet.” - Victoria Moran

9] [ForLikeMinds](#) - Share Lived Experience and Connect with people like you - living with or supporting someone with mental illness, substance use, or a stressful live event.

Our Story - I was diagnosed with depression and then bipolar disorder 20 years ago while a graduate student. Like so many of us, the stigma associated with mental illness kept me silent and in denial about my condition, making it only worse.

Bipolar disorder impacted every aspect of my life. I felt alone and isolated. At times, I thought my life

was over. At my lowest, I experienced suicidal depression. I lost hope. Accepting my family's loving support and connecting with other people were critical to my recovery. The example of others taking on similar challenges gave me the hope that I could too.

I was awed and inspired by the great courage and strength of our community. Once I finally achieved recovery, I realized that too many people like me continue to suffer in silence. But there is hope. My spouse and I created *ForLikeMinds* to help people like us achieve recovery and wellness together. You are not alone. Please join us.

“Call us a weed

We proliferate in the most surprising places

Do not cast us aside for we shall not wither nor die

Take a closer look and see the power to survive and thrive push from deep within

It is a light that shines through the shadow cast by stark stigma” - Founder

“Nearly everyone is aware of dramatic changes in the world. Yet we continue to live in the assumption that we can ride out the changes without changing ourselves, coasting, as we have always coasted, on the historic wave of human development. What it will take to wake us up is a wave of equal size traveling in the opposite direction. That wave is already on its way.” Verlyn Klinkenborg

10] [The Anti-Alienation Project](#) - YouTube

All things parental alienation... from the point of view of an adult child who went through it.

“Vulnerability is our most accurate measurement of courage.” Brene Brown

“It is loves nature to be expressed.” - Steve Maraboli

11] [Cuaderno para recuperar tu salud mental](#): Una ayuda indispensable para tener una vida estable y significativa (Spanish Edition): by [Katherine Ponte](#) (Author), [María Laura Saccardo](#) (Translator)

My New Book - Thrilled to support Spanish speakers pursuing recovery! Queridos amigos, estoy emocionado de compartir mi nuevo libro - "Cuaderno para recuperar tu salud mental: Una ayuda indispensable para tener una vida estable y significativa." Una guía imprescindible para cualquiera que viva con una enfermedad y quiera aprender a aprovechar al máximo la vida. Vivir con una enfermedad mental no es una tarea fácil y las personas pueden sentirse muchas veces limitadas o abrumadas por su condición. Yo creado este cuaderno que te ayudará a no sentirte limitado y aprender a vivir de la manera más plena posible con cualquier diagnóstico de enfermedad mental.

Because we need mental health resources in every language, I am thrilled to share my new workbook: “Cuaderno para recuperar tu salud mental”. I know this book can be a great help to the Spanish speaking community. When my parents immigrated to Canada they could not speak English, there were no mental health resources in their native language then and for decades to come. I think my parents would have been better able to identify my mental illness sooner and understand how to address it if

there was. Multilingual resources can be of critical importance. We need to meet people where they're at, including in the language they speak. We need hope in every language. The lack of resources can make mental illness worse and harder to treat. We can't let language be a barrier to mental health recovery. I hope my book will help many and inspire other books in many languages. Mental health recovery for all! Salud mental para usteds!

"True friendship isn't about being there when its convenient, its about being there when its not"
Anonymous

"There are years that ask questions and years that answer." - Zora Neale Hurston

12] [Adverse mental health inpatient experiences](#): Qualitative systematic review of international literature @ ScienceDirect

Study excerpt:

Background - Trauma has a well-established link with poor health outcomes. Adverse experiences in mental health inpatient settings contribute to such outcomes and should impact service design and delivery. However, there is often a failure to fully address these experiences.

Objective - To describe the spectrum of negative experiences that people identify while they are inpatients in adult mental health services.

Results - Adverse mental health inpatient experiences can be conceptualized under three headings: the ecosystem (the physical environment and the resources available, and other people within or influential to that environment); systems (processes and transitions); and the individual (encroachments on autonomy and traumatisation).

What is already known - Trauma and adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) are associated with negative mental health outcomes in adulthood, with a dose-response relationship indicating that increased frequency of ACEs leads to more harmful effects.

Restrictive interventions in mental health inpatient settings, such as seclusion, restraint, and rapid tranquillisation, are all associated with a high incidence of PTSD, reflecting the need for careful consideration of their use.

In addition to restrictive interventions, negative experiences in inpatient settings also include ward milieu, boredom, lack of information and coercion, thus a broad spectrum of patient experiences should be addressed to significantly improve outcomes.

"Whatever you can do or dream you can begin it; boldness has a genius, power and magic in it." -
Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

"Those who play rarely become brittle in the face of stress or lose the healing capacity for humor." -
Stuart Brown

12a] [What is Medical PTSD? How Trauma Can Manifest Following Health Treatment](#) by Katie

Macbride @ Inverse/Pocket

Article excerpt: “I think the thing that’s unique about [medical PTSD] is that it’s different from purely external trauma. The ongoing threat is within the body, it’s something that we can’t get away from.”

The first thing Summer Ash remembers thinking after waking up in the hospital following her 2012 heart surgery is, “Fuck.”

The searing pain in her chest was like nothing she’d ever experienced in her then-36 years, she tells *Inverse*.

They didn’t prescribe enough pain medication, because her doctor had gone home for the night, and the nurses weren’t able to increase it. Ash says that the nurse put her into a reclining position, which excruciatingly pulled on her incision site. Compounding the hellish experience was the loneliness: Visiting hours were over, and Ash spent that night awake, scared, and alone.

It was so bad that Ash has medical PTSD from the experience — though she wasn’t formally diagnosed until two years after the surgery.

She’s far from alone: Studies show that, even before the COVID-19 pandemic, people who have had [major surgery](#), [ICU stays](#), or other [serious hospitalizations](#) have PTSD at as much as five times the rate of the [general population](#).

Like Ash, I wasn’t formally diagnosed with PTSD until several years after my surgery. It took me even longer to accept that [medical PTSD](#) was real and something I had.

What is medical PTSD? - The belief that trauma is the result of an external event — a roadside bomb, a violent attack, a natural disaster — is common, [Davis Reiss](#), a psychiatrist and trauma expert, tells *Inverse* because that’s how it used to be defined.

“The old definition was that you had to be either directly exposed or observe a life-threatening event or trauma,” he says. “But when you really look at the process [of trauma], it’s anything that creates anything that triggers an autonomic response of ‘fight or flight.’”

“Scars have the strange power to remind us that our past is real.” - Cormac McCarthy

“Everybody’s damaged. It’s just a question of how badly, and whether you’re healing or still bleeding.” - Angela N. Blount

13] [Sing Sing: A Film by A24 and Rehabilitation Through the Arts](#) (RTA)

Based on RTA’s theater program, SING SING is a powerful portrayal of the life-changing impact of RTA. Join our movement to break the cycle of incarceration.

Join our movement to break the cycle of incarceration.

Founded at Sing Sing Correctional Facility in 1996, RTA has provided arts-based workshops to thousands of incarcerated men and women, transforming lives and breaking the cycle of incarceration with proven results: **less than 3% of RTA members return to prison, compared to 60% nationally.**

SING SING, which will re-open in theaters on January 17, 2025, is a testament to the life-changing impact of our programs. Join our movement to break the cycle of incarceration—every dollar brings us closer to offering hope, growth, and a path to a brighter future for those we serve.

You can break the cycle by transforming a life today.

[Sing Sing - Official Trailer HD - A24 – YouTube](#)

“Art is an effort to create, beside the real world, a more humane world.” - Andre Maurois

“Art is a wound turned into light.” - Georges Braque

14] [The Dilemma of Joy](#) by Mikele Rauch @ Taking Back Ourselves

Article excerpt: This holiday season, there is a profound incongruence in our world situation, within our families, and within ourselves. The lights, traditions, and expectations of the season may feel hollow compared to the uncertainty and violence in the world and perhaps in the face of one's own crippling depression. So you may struggle mightily when the season calls for celebration. We know that grief and sorrow have no convenient timetable at such a time.

We cannot deny the existence of suffering or situations we cannot fix. Superficial platitudes only exacerbate the pain. But consider how it is when an inexplicably small light can surprise you by its sudden appearance in times of distress and sorrow, should you look up to notice.

If you are reading this, you are no stranger to suffering. Yet I invite you to grapple with your own beating heart when it responds to sudden joy. It can show up quite unexpectedly. It can even present a dilemma, because joy is a confusing grace in difficult times.

Joy is mercurial: a moment of unanticipated connection, a surprising realization or a revelation, or even a sweet and hilarious story about the dead at a funeral that can open the heart. Out of the blue, that jolt of joy may present a challenge. Is it disrespectful or strange to have such moments despite a difficult situation? Because there it is, a minuscule awakening. This is the mystery of joy in such times.

It is evidence that the opposite of despair is in fact that tremendous power of kindness and the relentlessness of life—your own.

Perhaps you want to cling to that sweet moment, but then it is gone. Nevertheless, something may have cracked through the darkness. Joy is when the lines of pain and sorrow come together in a wild wilderness of goodness.

Joy is the truth, the justice that you fight for what you believe in. It can help you thrive and heal even though you cannot fix the world. Joy is the courage to say the truth and mean it, even as you tremble when you listen to your own voice. Joy the inexplicable moment that lights up a day or a life, when you

experience courage—yours or others. It is a moment of knowing amid uncertainty, when you recognize that even with the pain of this world, there is more to this life.

Joy simply has much to do with what you give, and shows up when you least expect to receive it. It is community in all the ways you contribute and are nourished in that connection.

14a] [Taking Back Ourselves](#) - We Envision A World Where...

Every person experiencing sexual trauma is offered a community of support, freedom from stigma, and tools that heal mind, body, and soul.

“It is through weakness and vulnerability that most of us learn empathy and compassion and discover our soul.” - Desmond Tutu

“To live in the body of a survivor is to never be able to leave the scene of the crime. I cannot ignore the fact that I live here.” – Blythe Baird

14b] [Michael Skinner - song - “Joy”](#) - YouTube - live performance - A song of thanks to all of those in my life

“Joy” © [Michael Skinner Music](#)

There’s joy in knowing what I have found
There’s joy in knowing that I’m still around
There’s joy in knowing that I still care
Joy in knowing you’re still there
Joy in knowing you’re still there

I’m so glad you’re still around
Thanks for sharing not kicking me down
Something so simple yet it’s so profound
A life to live a life to give your hand held out

Joys of wonder laugh out loud
No more secrets I’ve let them out
It’s tears from laughter and it’s time to shout
There’s joy in knowing I’m still around
There’s joy in knowing you’re still around

I’m so glad you’re still around
Thanks for sharing not kicking me down
Something so simple yet it’s so profound
A life to live a life to give your hand held out
There’s a life to live and a life to give your hand held out

There’s joy in knowing what I have found
There’s joy in knowing that I’m still around

There's joy in knowing that I still care
Joy in knowing you're still there
Joy in knowing you're still there
Yes it's joy in knowing you're still there
Yes it's joy in knowing you're still there

How to Begin:

Rebuilding Life from Within
Love, yourself unconditionally.
Release your bottled up emotions.
Make time for long walks, alone.
Avoid living beyond your means.
Nurture your inner strength.
Stop apologizing for being you.
Surround yourself with positive people.
Embrace your situation, whatever it may be. Author unknown

Thank you & Take care, Michael

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

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

A diagnosis is not a destiny

[The Surviving Spirit](#) - Healing the Mind, Body & Spirit Through the Creative Arts, Education & Advocacy

[The Surviving Spirit Facebook Page](#)

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[Michael Skinner Music](#) - Hope, Healing, & Help for Trauma, Abuse & Mental Health - Music, Resources & Advocacy

Live performances & advocacy @ [Michael Skinner – You Tube](#)

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