



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 2025

Hi folks,

Welcome to the July issue of the Surviving Spirit newsletter and grateful to share it...my plans to draft the June newsletter were upended by a viral infection that wiped me out for four weeks. Glad that is in the rear-view mirror now.

Some exciting news to share; I've signed a publishing deal with [Peter E. Randall Publisher](#) for my memoir, ***The Lunch Box Theory – Lessons Learned From Trauma and Abuse***. The book will be released on April 7, 2026. Distribution will be through [Casemate](#). This has been a long hoped for dream to write the book...and grateful for all of those in my life who have urged me to do so. I will keep you posted as more develops...thank you.

Music & thoughts to share - *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

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

Maybe the journey isn't so much about becoming anything. Maybe it's about un-becoming everything that isn't really you, so you can be who you were meant to be in the first place. - Paulo Coelho

[**Songs of Life, Love, Loss & Hope**](#) - Set 1 - Healing Trauma, Abuse & Mental Health Injuries - YouTube

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

After a traumatic experience, the human system of self-preservation seems to go onto permanent alert, as if the danger might return at any moment. - Dr. Judith Lewis Herman

1] [Your Voice Matters: Help Build a Platform That Heals](#) - Help Co-Create a Dynamic Healing Platform

Creative Activists: Turning Pain to Purpose

Are you someone who believes in the healing power of creativity, community, and courageous storytelling? Do you want to be part of a movement that transforms personal pain into purpose-driven action?

Hi I am Rae Luskin, and I'm building a bold, heart-centered platform. A place where survivors,

creatives, changemakers, and truth-tellers come together to reclaim our voices, share our stories, and create a ripple of change in the world.

I need your voice to shape it.

By filling out this short form, you're helping to co-create a space for healing, visibility, and collective empowerment. This isn't just a project—it's a movement.

Your responses will help us:

Identify what resources and tools you need most for healing and creative expression.

Build a dynamic, inclusive space where survivors, allies, and changemakers feel safe and supported.

Plan future episodes and interviews with creative activists whose voices often go unheard.

This is your chance to be part of a sacred space that is so needed now—where healing meets vision, and purpose is born from pain. Let's rise and thrive together.

With love and purpose,

Rae Luskin

[Founder, Creative Activists](#)

Your information is confidential and collected with care.

"The wound is the place where the Light enters you." - Rumi

After a traumatic experience, the human system of self-preservation seems to go onto permanent alert, as if the danger might return at any moment. - Dr. Judith Lewis Herman

2] [Saved by a Song - The Art and Healing Power of Songwriting](#) - Author: Mary Gauthier

"A handbook for compassion... a Must-Read Music Book."

—*Rolling Stone Country*

"Generous and big-hearted, Gauthier has stories to tell and worthwhile advice to share." —Wally Lamb, author of *I Know This Much Is True*

"Gauthier has an uncanny ability to combine songwriting craft with a seeker's vulnerability and a sage's wisdom." —Amy Ray, **Indigo Girls**

From the Grammy nominated folk singer and songwriter, an inspiring exploration of creativity and the redemptive power of song

Mary Gauthier was twelve years old when she was given her Aunt Jenny's old guitar and taught herself to play with a Mel Bay basic guitar workbook. Music offered her a window to a world where others felt the way she did. Songs became lifelines to her, and she longed to write her own, one day.

Then, for a decade, while struggling with addiction, Gauthier put her dream away and her call to songwriting faded. It wasn't until she got sober and went to an open mic with a friend did she realize that she not only still wanted to write songs, she needed to. Today, Gauthier is a decorated musical

artist, with numerous awards and recognition for her songwriting, including a Grammy nomination.

In *Saved by a Song*, Mary Gauthier pulls the curtain back on the artistry of songwriting. Part memoir, part philosophy of art, part nuts and bolts of songwriting, her book celebrates the redemptive power of song to inspire and bring seemingly different kinds of people together.

I define connection as the energy that exists between people when they feel seen, heard, and valued; when they can give and receive without judgment; and when they derive sustenance and strength from the relationship. - Brene Brown

The most authentic thing about us is our capacity to create, to overcome, to endure, to transform, to love and to be greater than our suffering. - Ben Okri

3] [Dan Frey Talks About Psych Meds](#) – YouTube 5:31 minutes

This is Dan Frey with [City Voices](#), striving to bring smiles to our peers with mental health challenges.

A video I did for Pat Deegan's video project team on my experience with psych meds.

For more on Pat Deegan, visit: <https://www.patdeegan.com/> - Illnesses don't recover. People do.

Pat Deegan's Recovery Approach focuses on the person instead of the illness and offers hope-filled tools, technologies, and training for professionals, families & individuals.

Using Pat's Approach, people can move beyond a diagnosis and get to the life they want, and staff gain the knowledge and skills for practicing true recovery-oriented care.

There is not one big cosmic meaning for all; there is only the meaning we each give to our life, an individual meaning, an individual plot, like an individual novel, a book for each person. – Anais Nin

I am not everything that has happened to me. I am everything I became while I healed. Stronger but softer. Focused but not obsessed. A teacher but still a student. I am not broken. I am beautiful. I am a survivor. – Cwpoe

4] [‘We don’t have a cultural place for men as victims’](#): why men often don’t tell anyone about sexual abuse.

Authors - [Vita Pilkington](#) - Research Fellow, PhD Candidate in men's experiences of sexual trauma, The University of Melbourne

[Sarah Bendall](#) - Professorial Fellow in Youth Mental Health, The University of Melbourne

[Zac Seidler](#) - Associate Professor, Centre for Youth Mental Health, The University of Melbourne

Article excerpt: In Australia, it’s estimated almost [one in five boys](#) (18.8%) experience child sexual abuse. And at least [one in 16 men](#) (6.1%) experience sexual violence after age 15.

However, many boys and men don’t tell others about these experiences. Studies show men are [less likely](#) to [disclose sexual abuse](#) and assaults than women.

It also takes boys and men longer to first [disclose sexual abuse](#) or assaults. On average, men wait [21 years](#) before telling anyone about being abused.

This is a problem because [talking to others](#) is often an important part of understanding and recovering from these traumatic experiences. When boys and men don't discuss these experiences, it [risks their mental health problems and isolation becoming worse](#) and they don't get the [support they need](#).

We wanted to understand what prevents boys and men from telling others about sexual abuse and assaults (or “sexual trauma”). So we conducted [a systematic review](#), where we pooled together evidence from a range of studies on the topic.

We found 69 relevant studies, which included more than 10,500 boys and men who had experienced sexual trauma from around the world. Studies were published in 23 countries across six continents, with most studies from the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom. Two studies were published in Australia.

Our new findings offer clues as to how we can break down the barriers preventing men and boys from discussing sexual trauma.

Upending masculine identities -We found across countries and cultures, boys' and men's sexual trauma affected their masculine identities. This included feeling as though they are not “real men”, or that they're weak for having been targeted and assaulted.

Almost universally, boys and men suffered intense feelings of shame and guilt about being victimised, and many blamed themselves for years to decades.

There are wounds that never show on the body that are deeper and more hurtful than anything that bleeds. - Laurell K. Hamilton

If you put shame in a Petri dish, it needs three things to grow exponentially: secrecy, silence, and judgment. If you put the same amount of shame in the petri dish and douse it with empathy, it can't survive. - Brene Brown

5] [Re-imagining Risk in Mental Health @ National Survivor User Network](#)[NSUN] by Ben Ferry

Article excerpt: Risk assessment in mental health has long been one of the most sensitive and complex aspects of care. At its best, it helps ensure safety and guide meaningful support. At its worst, it becomes a tick-box exercise—overly focused on covering professionals' backs rather than truly helping the people it's meant to serve.

For over 15 years, the main national guidance on this topic — *Best Practice in Managing Risk* — has remained unchanged. Since its release in 2007, our understanding of trauma, mental health, and human rights has progressed significantly. Yet, the system seems stuck. Too often, people experiencing distress are seen through a lens of danger and deficit, rather than context, capacity for change, or support needs.

This can lead to harmful practices, from unnecessary hospital admissions to neglect in the community.

We've seen the tragic consequences when risk isn't properly understood or managed. The deaths of individuals like Steven Hoskin, Connor Sparrowhawk, and Sophie Bennett — each preventable — highlight how fragmented systems, defensive practice, and a failure to see the whole person can have devastating outcomes. And despite inquiry after inquiry, we're not learning fast enough.

One of the biggest problems is that risk assessments are often driven by fear — of being blamed, of media headlines, of legal repercussions. This “defensive practice” culture can distort priorities. Professionals may act to protect their organisations rather than building trust, listening, and working collaboratively with the person in distress. Risk becomes something to be managed *about* the person, rather than *with* them.

What's missing is a trauma-informed, person-centred approach. That means recognising that many people in mental health services have experienced significant adversity. It means understanding that language matters — that calling someone “non-compliant” or “a high risk of harm” without context can retraumatise and stigmatise. And it means focusing not just on what could go wrong, but also on what can go right: people's strengths, aspirations, and networks of support.

A better approach would start by asking different questions: What's happened to this person? What helps them feel safe? What are their goals, and how can we support them while managing concerns about safety? Collaborative safety planning, advance directives, and strengths-based conversations can replace forms that feel like surveillance tools.

Of course, we can't ignore that the system is under strain. Staff are overworked and under-resourced. Many receive little training on how to have these nuanced, relational conversations about risk. But this is precisely why the national framework must be updated — to set a new tone and direction, and to shift the culture away from fear and blame.

Before sunlight can shine through a window, the blinds must be raised. - American Proverb

Learn to listen, listen to learn. – Al-Anon

6] [The BART Foundation](#) - Brain Alternative Rehabilitation Therapies (BART) is a non profit dedicated to the research of alternative therapies for brain injury survivors.

About Us -These individuals form a diverse group, including, but not limited to – Acquired Brain Injury[ABI] survivors and their families, physicians and other healthcare providers, lawyers, accountants, academicians, nonprofit executives, business people and experts in fundraising/institutional development and social media.

The BART Foundation provides answers to these urgent questions in understandable terms, making accurate, practical information about alternative therapies accessible to survivors, caregivers, and health professionals. We are dedicated to helping brain injury survivors live more fulfilling, productive, and joyful lives.

Acquired Brain Injury survivors often face long-term challenges and require ongoing support. These

challenges can include physical, cognitive, emotional, and social difficulties, as well as mental health issues like anxiety and depression. Many ABI survivors experience a sense of isolation and frustration due to the "invisible" nature of some symptoms and the perceived lack of progress.

6a] [No Stone Unturned: A Father's Memoir of His Son's Encounter with Traumatic Brain Injury](#) by Joel M. Goldstein and Lee Woodruff @ Barnes & Noble®

Bart Goldstein was only sixteen when he suffered a traumatic brain injury (TBI) in a car accident in 2001. *No Stone Unturned* is the saga of Bart's struggle to regain his life. Told from his father's point of view, the book chronicles the family's ordeal, and flashbacks fill in Bart's life since he arrived from Korea at the age of five months.

Considering every possibility in their search for remedies to Bart's catastrophic injuries, the Goldsteins explored several promising alternatives, including craniosacral, hyperbaric oxygen, sensory learning, and vision restoration therapies. Bart's remarkable recovery resulted from a combination of conventional medicine and alternative and emerging therapies.

TBI has now become the "signature injury" for thousands of wounded warriors returning from Iraq and Afghanistan; this timely book offers profound insights into what survivors and their families must face. Anyone struggling with this "invisible" disability will find the book insightful, inspiring, and useful.

*Now every time I witness a strong person, I want to know what dark did you conquer in your story?
Mountains do not rise without earthquakes. - Katherine MacKenett*

A kind gesture can reach a wound that only compassion can heal. - Steve Maraboli

7] [Pinetree Institute](#) - Building Trauma Responsive Communities

Mission - The mission of Pinetree Institute is to develop trauma responsive solutions to pressing social needs through education and community-based collaboration.

Vision - We envision sustainable communities whose actions are guided by collaborative education and purposeful integration of the principles of trauma prevention and response.

Pinetree Institute is a 501(c)3 nonprofit based in Eliot, ME, and Portsmouth, NH dedicated to trauma responsive solutions to pressing social needs. We offer community-based, trauma responsive solutions, education on best practice approaches, and facilitated collaboration in communities to build action through engagement.

Pinetree Institute does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, nationality of origin, religion, gender, gender expression, sexual orientation, age, disability, marital status, recovery status, or military status in any of its operations. This includes, but is not limited to, hiring and firing personnel, the selection of volunteers and vendors, and the provision of services.

We commit to an inclusive and welcoming environment for all staff, volunteers, contractors, vendors, clients, and program participants.

Don't tell someone to get over it-help them get through it. – Unknown

Always bear in mind that your own resolution to succeed is more important than any other. – Abraham Lincoln

8] [Disability Lead](#) - Power. Influence. Change.

Disability Lead is a network of people with disabilities who use our power to create an equitable and inclusive society.

We accomplish this by Uplifting Disability Power, Influencing and Activating Change, and Making Our Vision Real.

We are positive disruptors who lead with our disability identity. We believe our experiences, ideas, and leadership as people with disabilities are powerful and vital to achieving justice.

[Disability Lead – YouTube](#)

[Celebrating Power + Progress: Kicking Off a Milestone Year for Disability Lead](#) – CEO Reflections by Emily Blum

If you change the way you look at things, the things you look at change. – Max Planck

I am not everything that has happened to me. I am everything I became while I healed. Stronger but softer. Focused but not obsessed. A teacher but still a student. I am not broken. I am beautiful. I am a survivor. – Cwpoet

9] [Common Reactions After Trauma](#) - National Center for PTSD

Article excerpt - All kinds of trauma create stress reactions. People often say that their first feeling is relief to be alive after a traumatic event. This may be followed by stress, fear and anger. Trauma may also lead people to find they are unable to stop thinking about what happened. Traumatic events can create a high level of arousal—or feeling alert or "on guard"—as well, which causes people to react strongly to sounds and sights around them.

If you understand what is happening when you or someone you know reacts to a traumatic event, you may be less fearful and better able to cope. Reactions are common for anyone, even Service members and Veterans, or disaster rescue and relief workers, who have been trained to respond to crises.

Here are some common reactions to trauma:

- Losing hope for the future
- Feeling distant (detached) or losing a sense of concern about others
- Being unable to concentrate or make decisions
- Feeling jumpy and getting startled easily at sudden noises
- Feeling on guard and alert all the time
- Having dreams and memories that upset you

- Having problems at work or school
- Avoiding people, places and things related to the event

That which is loved by the heart is the remedy. – Kenyan proverb

Our brains are wired for connection, but trauma rewires them for protection. That's why healthy relationships are difficult for wounded people. – Ryan North

10] [Seeing People, Not Patients](#): Facilitating Recovery and Community Inclusion by Mark Salzer, Ph.D. @ Survivors and Families Empowered

Article excerpt - The stories we tell about people tells us a lot about how we view them – and influences how we interact with them.

Many years ago, as peer support services were taking off as a Medicaid-reimbursed service, I was interested in trying to detect whether the emerging peer support workforce would impact belief and attitudes toward people with mental health issues. To do this, I asked mental health policymakers, providers, and people with mental health issues to write a story about a man named John who was 34-years-old and diagnosed with Schizophrenia. My intention was to ask these same people to write another story later to see if the themes they mentioned changed over time as a result of increasing numbers of people with lived expertise working in the mental health system.

People generally wrote one of two types of stories.

One type of story, “John the patient,” was bleak. It depicted John as isolated, noncompliant with medication, deteriorating in hygiene, and cycling between hospitalization and jail. His life was framed entirely in terms of symptoms, risk, and control. The tone was one of chronicity and decline. A second type of story—“John the person”—told a different tale. John was a man with a past, a family, dreams, and a part-time job. He was navigating challenges but thinking about dating, working more hours, and visiting family. His diagnosis was part of his story, not the whole of it. This version portrayed John as a human being with desires and potential, not just a clinical profile. The common endings for these stories were about John dancing, working, learning new things, spending time with friends and family, and generally doing things he enjoyed.

[Survivors and Families Empowered](#) by Ron Bassman - We are a coalition of psychiatry survivors, families, and mental health professionals who believe in the power of hope and the resilience of the human spirit.

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

“If we can share our story with someone who responds with empathy and understanding, shame can't survive.” - Brene Brown

11] [Inside prison walls, here's how a book program is changing lives](#) by Albinson Linares @ NBC News

Accessing reading material in prisons is hard, but Freedom Reads co-founder Reginald Betts, a former inmate, went beyond books, creating libraries made by former prisoners.

Reginald Betts, a former inmate and [Freedom Reads](#) co-founder, is transforming access to reading material in prisons by creating unique libraries designed and built by formerly incarcerated individuals. These libraries, placed in housing units, offer a curated collection of books meant to inspire and empower those incarcerated.

Betts's own experience of incarceration fuels his passion for providing access to books and creating opportunities for change within the prison system.

The libraries are more than just bookshelves; they are handcrafted, curved structures made of walnut or maple, designed to contrast the straight lines of prison architecture and encourage community browsing.

The 500-book collection is carefully chosen by Betts and others, with a focus on contemporary works and classics, designed to connect people with the world and themselves.

Freedom Reads aims to foster a sense of possibility and connection for incarcerated individuals, providing a space where they can explore literature and engage with writers.

“The wound is the place where the Light enters you.” - Rumi

“The meaning of life is to find your gift. The purpose of life is to give it away.” - Pablo Picasso

12] [Adult Survivors of Child Abuse Virtual Support Group](#) - brought to you in partnership with Complex PTSD Foundation

Free Online Support Group - This month's topic: PTSD

Date: 8/11 Time: 5p PT / 8p ET Location: Online

For survivors of childhood sexual abuse, PTSD is an anxiety disorder that is directly related to exposure to abuse and experiences of intense fear, helplessness, or horror. We will discuss PTSD, its symptoms, how memory is impacted, and how to overcome PTSD.

ASCA is an innovative and effective support program designed specifically for adult survivors of physical, sexual, and/or emotional child abuse or neglect, bringing them together within a nurturing and supportive community.

This virtual meeting is led by Sexual Abuse Recovery Coach, Rachel Grant.

While this program differs from the [Beyond Surviving Program](#), you will gain many valuable insights and skills through your participation in this group.

Each month, we discuss and explore a topic that is key for healing from abuse, such as:

* Anger * Loss & Grief * Shame * Triggers * Hope * Intimacy * Self-Acceptance ... and more!

Our aim is to learn from each other and transform our lives into the richness and joy we desire.

We are committed to inclusion across race, gender, age, religion, identity, and experience.
The ASCA guidelines state that perpetrators are not allowed to attend these meetings.
Donations accepted. No one turned away for lack of funds.

Learn to listen, listen to learn. – Al-Anon

When you tell someone who was traumatized to stop living in the past, focus on the positive, or just let go, you're teaching them to stay traumatized. These statements have no impact on a person's nervous system. Healing comes with invitation to be honest as and where we are. – Nate Postlethwait

13] [Repressed Memories and Childhood Sexual Abuse with Abigail Gunn](#) - Podcast Episode on RSS.com - *Your Kids Don't Suck: Cultivating Closeness with your Kids through Non-Coercive, Conscious Parenting* by Rythea Lee and Cara Tedstone.

In this potent and deeply personal episode, Cara and Rythea sit down with **Abigail Gunn, MsEd, LMHC, LPC**, licensed therapist and founder of *People Make Sense*. Abigail is changing the way we talk about **childhood trauma, dissociation, and recovery**—with compassion, sharp clarity, and a commitment to truth.

This conversation explores how parenting can become a powerful catalyst for facing your trauma. Abigail shares how having children of her own helped surface repressed memories, and how her time in Al-Anon played a key role in awakening her from long-standing dissociation.

Rythea also shares her experience of retrieving her own repressed memories through dreams, writing, and reenactment in therapy. Together, Cara, Rythea, and Abby explore what happens when a child is forced to choose between their own humanity and the perceived humanity of the adults around them. They discuss how trauma shapes the developing brain, and how dissociation becomes a survival strategy that can last long into adulthood.

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

Courage is tiny pieces of fear all glued together. – Terri Guillemets

14] [Stories – Better Because Collective](#) - Read stories of post-traumatic growth, told by our incredible community members.

Growth from trauma is a collective story - You can get involved by volunteering, sharing your story, or participating in our in person events. Help us make a difference by contributing your skills and time to support others on their healing journey. Together, we can create a stronger, more resilient community. Join our amazing team and make an impact today!

Better Because Collective stands as a post-traumatic growth-focused 501(c)3 non-profit, driven by a team of dedicated volunteers. Our collective passion revolves around providing a platform for people to

tell their stories of post-traumatic growth, on their own terms, as resources for connection and healing.

It would not be possible to complete our mission without the amazing volunteers who keep Better because Collective running!

We love what we do and we do it with passion. We are always on the lookout for devoted individuals to join our team of amazing volunteers to build community around post-traumatic growth.

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

I wish I could show you, when you are lonely or in darkness, the astonishing light of your own being. - Hafiz

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

<https://shop.survivingspirit.com/shop/> - web store – T-shirts, Freedom to Soar Award, music CDs

[The Surviving Spirit Facebook Page](#)

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Twitter <https://x.com/SurvivinSpirit> <https://x.com/MichaelSkinne11>

[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