

PUBLISHER'S PONDERINGS

By Lisa Browning

I am continually amazed at what happens when I am still. What I am about to say will illustrate this point, I think, better than I started out doing! For context, please note that I am writing this paragraph after writing the paragraphs in italics, below. The paragraphs after the italicized section should become self-explanatory!

When I first started One Thousand Trees in 2010, I had planned on doing nothing other than a monthly magazine (which is why the magazine and my company name were the same). However, as I very quickly came to realize, when we follow our passion, things just start to happen! We meet people we are meant to meet, and situations arise that we may not have expected, but that are in total alignment with the path we have chosen, either consciously or subconsciously.

I figured out really quickly that my path was to empower others, and myself, through telling our stories and speaking our truth. And so, the Sharing anthologies were born. Through the experience of publishing six "regular" anthologies and one "special edition" (Care for the Caregiver), I came to know some amazing, courageous and resilient people, and it was an honour to be able to put their stories into print.

When my father passed away in 2015, I published yet another anthology, entitled You Are Not Alone: 52 stories of hope. I donated my time to put the book together, and covered all printing costs ... so 100% of all proceeds from sales were (are) donated to Hospice Wellington, an amazing facility that made the last days of my father's life so much better.

My favourite quote of all time is the following, from "A Return to Love" by Marianne Williamson:

*Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate.
Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure.
It is our light, not our darkness
That most frightens us.*

*We ask ourselves
Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous?
Actually, who are you not to be?
You are a child of God.*

*Your playing small
Does not serve the world.
There's nothing enlightened about shrinking
So that other people won't feel insecure around you.*

*We are all meant to shine,
As children do.
We were born to make manifest
The glory of God that is within us.*

*It's not just in some of us;
It's in everyone.*

*And as we let our own light shine,
We unconsciously give other people permission to do the same.
As we're liberated from our own fear,
Our presence automatically liberates others.*

Fear is a huge issue for me. Correction: fear was a huge issue for me. During the past months, as I have spent most of my time alone, I have been forced to face my own truths. Some of these were truths I really didn't want to deal with ... and I can honestly say that those months were the most difficult of my life (and that includes some pretty bad times!).

It sounds cliché, I know, but it is true nonetheless: Now that I have faced my darkness, I can see my light.

It was at this point that I took a break, because I was getting too much inside my head. What should I write now? What is my point? These were the questions that were weighing on me, so I left the computer, and turned on Oprah's *Super Soul Sunday*.

Marianne Williamson was Oprah's guest, and they were discussing (you guessed it!), *A Return to Love*. I was dumbfounded, although I know I needn't have been. When I am still, answers come. When I am still, I feel peace, security, and confidence.

From all the people I've met since I first launched Roots & Wings, who are involved with mental health advocacy and awareness, to those who have told me that they have been emotionally abused and are feeling lost ... I know, without a doubt, that I am on the right path.

As I said last month, this project is a work in progress. I am continually updating the website, and formalizing plans for future projects. Please, therefore, check back often, to see what's new. And if you have any ideas for collaboration or projects, or want to write for us, please email lisa@onethousandtrees.com.

Volume 2 – November 2020

'Addicts Are People Too:'

youth overcoming drug addiction create a lesson in clothing

by Ashley-Ann Maginnis

The creation of the sweater was a collaboration between Portage Ontario and The Community Company to create a powerful message. Two youth in the community working to overcome their addiction are creatively fighting the stigma of drug addiction by wearing a lesson.

The thought-provoking image of a boy holding a mask towards his face imprinted on a sweater with the message "Addicts are people too" aims to spark conversations about addiction and was created by Ben, 15, and Tobias, 17 (not their real names). The two are past residents of Portage Ontario, residential drug addiction rehabilitation centre for youth in Elora, Ontario.

Ben said he hopes the sweater sparks curiosity in whoever sees it. "Normally when I do wear the sweater, I hope that someone notices it, points it out and is like 'Hey what's that?'" said Ben. He hopes he can help remove the stigma around addiction by talking about it, something he wishes he was able to do when he himself was suffering from a narcotic addiction that began at the age of 11.

"The non-sober me was a dark person who pushed everyone away and did whatever to get drugs. The sober me, after entering recovery, feels socially normal and good. You have this dark, addiction side of you, but that's only a mask covering what's really on the inside," said co-creator Ben.

He said from his past experience of battling drug addiction he learned that a lot of people are misinformed on the topic and don't really know how to approach people with addictions. "They're either afraid to talk to us or they don't understand and they'll be like 'Why don't you just get off them?'" said Ben. "It's more than just a choice."

The creation of the sweater was a collaboration between Portage Ontario and The Community Company. The funds raised from the sale of the sweaters will help future residents of Portage Ontario.

"The boys wanted something they could look back on during their programming and experience with Portage Ontario. This initiative is something they can be proud of, like 'I created this while I was in recovery and now it's something that's giving back to the next generation of youth who need Portage Ontario's support,'" said Justin Chan, founder of The Community Company.

Ashley-Ann Maginnis, Manager of Development at Portage Ontario is working with Chan to create awareness around Portage Ontario. "In addiction, connection is really important and to be able to connect in the community is a really important aspect of recovery from addiction along with being able to fight stigma," said Maginnis

"The work that he did with the kids at portage was incredible. It was incredible work because of the way he connects with the kids. It was very much about relationships, it was very much about capturing their story," she said about Chan.

The logo on the sweater itself is a digital image of Ben holding a mask towards his face.

"We altered the face a little bit so it didn't look exactly like the boy," said Chan.

"I think it's a really bold reminder that there's a person behind an addiction. When we think about addiction, we think about the cause, we think about the disease, we think about the negative stereotypes with addiction."

He said when someone looks at the logo, there's a really stark reminder that there's a human there.

"There are people who believe addicts are monsters. Monsters who they want to shield from their friends and family, who like to take away from others, and who are a tumour in society. I want you to know that we are people too," said Tobias.

Portage Ontario, a non-profit organisation established in 1985, operates a residential drug addiction rehabilitation centre for youth in Elora, Ontario.

In the therapeutic community environment, residents work through the underlying issues that caused their substance abuse and develop a set of social competencies that will help them deal with the challenges of everyday life without resorting to drug abuse. They develop the self-esteem and confidence to go on to lead healthy, productive, drug-free lives.

The Portage Elora treatment centre serves Ontario youth referred by parents, schools, family physicians, hospitals, other addiction-treatment and youth-serving agencies, as well as Youth Justice and the Children's Aid Society.



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BETTER DAYS ARE ON THE WAY ...

By Colleen Heighington

Mental health issues can show up
In so many ways ...
Perhaps ... you are always feeling sad and tired
And these feelings just don't go away ...

You might feel ever so lonely
That you cry most of the day away
And the things that you once so enjoyed
Now ... deep depression sets in and gets in the way ...

Before ... you always looked after yourself
And most times ... had a smile on your face
But now ... you seem unkept and unwell
And caught up in life's rat-race ...

Don't fret ... better days are on the way ...
Just take that first step and you will see
That by seeking the help that is needed
Your life will start to change completely ...

Eventually ... self destruction will be no more
Life will be fulfilling for you once again
You'll start to feel so much better
And happiness in your life will once again reign ...

You will gradually feel like your old self again
And see things in a new and creative way ...
A new lease on life will be yours to enjoy
As you live it in a more positive way ...

Mental health issues can show up
In so many ways ...
And now ... you know exactly what to do
You fight them back with the hopes of tomorrow
And with the many blessings ...
The Dear Lord has given to You!!!

Hugo and the Sad

By Olivia Radocchia

Since I was a child, I had always told my parents that I wanted to write book. My love of literature grew as I did, and throughout my youth I dabbled in creative writing online, in journals, and in academic courses. While majoring in literature in my first two years of university, I decided to change directions and head towards the field of psychology, later completing an undergraduate specialization in psychology from the University of Toronto. I had always been fascinated by why people are the way they are, their motivations and behaviours, and the inner workings of the mind – and I love being around children. I was inspired by my mother who worked as Speech and Language Pathologist at the school board, and I grew up watching her work privately with children on the weekends from our home office. Growing up, I would act as her helper during her summer speech and language camps and loved spending time helping children learn. I went on to work as a teacher during curriculum summer camps throughout my university years, and knew I wanted to one day be able to merge my interest in psychology, my love of working with children, and my creative side.

My opportunity came knocking a few years later when I was completing my master's degree in Clinical and Counselling Psychology from Adler Graduate Professional School. I had completed my placements in the school board, counselling students from grades 3 to 12 and completing psychoeducational assessments. It had come the time to pick a topic for my thesis; I have always been more of a hands on individual when it came to academic projects (when possible), and so, I tried to think of a project I could create that would have a practical use. While I'm unable to remember the precise moment I thought to write a book, I had likely been gazing at my extensive bookshelf in my room, and looking at all the wonderful children's books that my mother continues to buy for me every year on my birthday.

I approached my supervisor in my program with the proposal to create a children's book aimed at bolstering emotional resilience in children which would include resources on mental health- she loved the idea. I sought out an illustrator and had a wonderful time creating Hugo the hedgehog, a fun-loving young character who, feeling down and not quite himself, would be relatable to a wide range of young children. With respect to psychology, I have always been more passionate about ideas around strengthening resilience and working with individuals in terms of utilizing their passions and interests to improve self-care and wellbeing rather than focusing on a strictly clinical approach. Children are especially able to naturally engage in creative and fun tasks, and so I wanted to create a story that would highlight fun activities that children could utilize to strengthen their emotional resilience, while still enjoying themselves and being able to engage in open conversation with the adults in their lives.

In the midst of the current global change (COVID-19), and a shift towards possible new realities, it is normal to feel ungrounded, confused, anxious, or lost. We are constantly bombarded with news, conflicting information, and it can feel like sensory overload. Children are not an exception; between the changes in the education system as a reaction to COVID-19 protocols, less socialization and extracurricular activities, not fully understanding the *why* behind the changes, and feeling the stress and anxiety of the adults around them, children can begin to feel overwhelmed and anxious themselves. Children, in general, deal with a wide variety of stressors, including bullying, stressful environments at home and within the family, illness, recent immigration, experiencing or witnessing trauma, separation/divorce, among other issues. Examples of how mental health conditions may manifest as a diagnosis in children include: attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), anxiety, depression, eating disorders, substance abuse, and learning disabilities. Fortunately, there are a variety of approaches and resources aimed at helping children cope with mental health difficulties. Seeking information from their family physician, school psychologists or school social worker is a great place to start. Signs that children may be experiencing mental health difficulties include: changes in thinking, such as negative thoughts, poor school performance, and trouble concentrating; changes in feelings, such as feeling lonely, hopeless, angry, sad, or anxious; changes in behaviour, such as wanting to be alone, crying easily, acting quiet and withdrawn, and trouble relating to friends; and physical changes, such as headaches, lack of energy, eating or sleeping problems, or having too much energy. As parents/ guardians/ teachers in a child's life, we can begin to support them by helping them build strong relationships with caring adults and family, help bolster their self-esteem by showing them acceptance,

love, and helping them create attainable goals, listen non-judgmentally to them express their feelings and encourage them to express themselves, and create a positive and safe home environment, involving physical activity, healthy food, limited time spent on technology, and by being a positive role model. It is also important to encourage a child to speak to a counsellor at school if they don't feel comfortable speaking to family members.

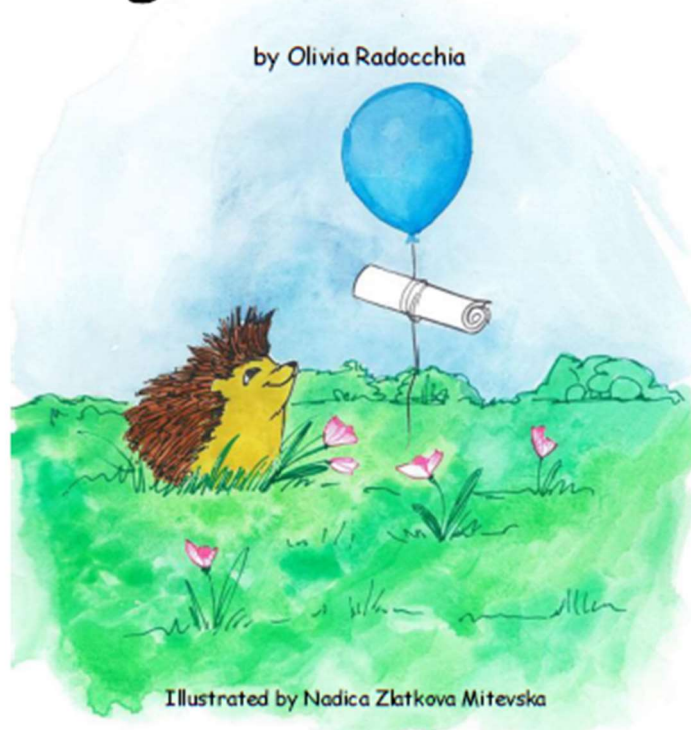
I am very excited to be publishing *Hugo and the Sad*, and hope to circulate the book in schools, doctor's offices, and children's homes. I look forward to creating more books as a part of a series, each with an animal character who deals with unique experiences and challenges.

Currently, I work currently work as a holistic counsellor who is passionate about health and wellness. I conduct psychological assessments and offer counselling to adults and children. I assist those I work with in integrating emotional, spiritual and mental wellbeing utilizing both evidence-based and holistic approaches, including mindfulness, Internal Family Systems (IFS) therapy, compassion-based therapy, cognitive behavioural therapy, and healthy lifestyle activation. I strive to creates a safe space in which the individual can feel at ease in expressing themselves fully, exploring their inner world, and leaning into acceptance and compassion for themselves and their current situation. I lead individuals towards personal growth and wholeness while they learn to connect to their authentic self on a deeper level.

I am also the organizer and host of the Serenità Wellness Retreat, a week-long wellness retreat for women in the Italian countryside, where a safe and magical space is created for women to experience a deep shift towards rejuvenation and connection in the midst of the richness of Italian culture and culinary traditions. In the past, I have worked as a volunteer at Caritas, School of Life Therapeutic Community for Addiction Recovery as an art therapy workshop facilitator, and have also facilitated the MindUp Mindfulness for Kids program, teaching children essential tools for self-regulation and well-being.

Hugo and the Sad

by Olivia Radocchia



Illustrated by Nadica Zlatkova Mitevska

Off With the Rose Coloured Glasses

By Amber McAuley

In 2018, a clinician told me that I'm wearing rose coloured glasses and said I need to take them off, admit I have a problem, and accept treatment.

His words hit me hard. I always considered myself a person who made a good effort to take care of myself, but in that moment, I felt ashamed because I knew I spent years focusing solely on my mental health and ignored ongoing warning signs of problems in my body.

In many ways, discounting my physical health was a survival tactic and, to me, a do or die situation. I battled with mental illness for several years and in my late twenties made a suicide attempt that was noted by the doctor as "lethal". The depth of my struggle was exposed, and it was a traumatic wakeup call. I took hold of the hands reaching out to help and worked diligently on tending to my mental health. I befriended my mind, trained my mind, and eventually felt a loving connection with my beautifully unique mind.

I used a mantra to keep me going, there's "no health without mental health."

That's partly true, although I'm learning it's not the whole truth. I think it also needs to be understood that there's "no mental health without physical health."

In my opinion, for a person to feel balanced in their life they need to recognize, and tend to, the intricacies that contribute to achieving a sense of wellbeing. When a person recognizes their whole being, and takes care of their *whole beingness* - regardless of any illness - they will feel more balanced and well. Here are a few realizations I've made along my journey, I need exercise *and* rest, quiet down time *and* time socializing with loved ones, routine *and* flexibility.

Alas, that balance eluded me throughout my thirties as I exclusively focused on supporting my mental health. Almost everything I did – diet, exercise, meditation - was with the intention of maintaining a stable mind so I would never have another mental crisis.

In some ways I was healthy, but my body was unwell and I experienced chronic pain for over ten years. I kept telling myself that it was "all in my head" and old mental anguish stuff from my past. I figured I just needed to do more yoga, more meditation, eat better, etc. and repeatedly put off seeking help.

Then, in Dec. 2018, my body crashed producing debilitating pain. At that point I accepted I wasn't in optimal health and stopped pretending I was.

It was a powerful awareness for me about how interconnected physical and mental health are. As I felt physical pain, I felt mental pain and started to slip into hopelessness with suicidal ideation. Once again, I took hold of some helping hands and sought professional help.

I went to a clinic in Toronto for blood work and it turned out my immune system was significantly compromised with high levels of mold toxicity, Lyme disease, and three different autoimmune concerns.

I'm now sixteen months into treatment and truth be told, there are times when I want to put on a pair of rose coloured glasses. For example, when I restock my pill box. The medication I take in one single day fills a 7-day medication box. And, I can't close some of the lids! My mind can start ruminating in self-pity:

"Look how sick you are, you have to take more pills in one single day than this container is designed to hold for a week's supply."

But, I gently remind myself that I need to look. I need to see what's going on in my mind *and* body and take care of the WHOLE me. And, it's a good thing I'm paying attention, otherwise I may not have noticed my teeth starting to decay from certain medications!




Everything relates and connects and I'm discovering that when I take an honest look at my life (what's going well and not so well) I see how my experience contributes to enlightening moments for me, and can possibly inspire others.




My recent experience visiting the dentist is a great example:


As I sat in the chair waiting for the dentist, I was feeling gross about the situation in my mouth and nervous about sharing my page-long list of complex meds and supplements. I took deep breaths and softened my body. Then the dentist came in and started asking questions about my list and health conditions. Her questioning came across harsh and judgmental. It felt like an interrogation and my body tensed up with the discomfort.

It caught me by surprise, although I do understand. Much like what I've learned about the arena of mental health, the arena of Lyme disease (diagnosing and treatment) is extremely controversial. Addressing the disease can be triggering for both clinicians and patients. It's complex, and research continues to reveal more layers.

I decided the conversation I had with the dentist could lend a few insights for people to consider when they talk to someone with Lyme experience:

-  Don't assume they want to talk about it.
-  Don't make a big deal about it OR minimize it.
-  Don't assume that person cares to hear what you've read or heard from others.

-  Do embody sensitivity and curiosity, ask if they want to talk about it.
-  Do understand that person might be feeling amazing OR depressed, no matter how they're presenting. It's okay. Ask them how they're feeling today.
-  Do ask if they are looking for resources or connections. Accept that they may or may not be.

After writing out these do's and don'ts I realized they could apply to conversations outside of the Lyme box. So, here's a gentle reminder to be aware that each person is having a unique and layered experience. Move a bit slower, more intentional, and kind in conversations so you can listen deeply and have a nourishing connection 

I hope this blog highlighting what I'm learning with supporting mental and physical health creates an awareness for readers that they are not alone in living out of balance. We've all had difficulty accepting

a problem and suffered – be it, mental health struggles, substance abuse, screen time addiction, dysfunctional relationships, physical pain, or other. I completely understand and I wish you the courage to take off your glasses as soon as possible, reach out for a helping hand and get the support you need to achieve a greater sense of wellbeing. Perhaps your experience will be enlightening for you and you will share your story to inspire others. Remember when you light up your path, you light up our world.

With much love and an extended hand to you,

Amber Sitara McAuley

Pregnancy in a Dangerous Time

By Christine Nightingale

I am going to look at this issue from three perspectives ...family history, my daughter's generation, and my fertility counselling work.

My Mom met my Dad in Holland when they were 18 and 20. She was the secretary to a professor of languages; he was one of the instructor's students, who arrived for his lesson and asked my future mom whether the professor was in. The young woman was apparently so flustered (or smitten) when she met the young man that she did not tell him that yes, the professor was in. They had a long chat instead of him going to his lesson. The couple became engaged shortly thereafter.

But World War II intervened with life as they knew it. (My dad's poor eyesight exempted him from military service). The young couple had to wait for 8 years to get married. (During wartime in Nazi-occupied Holland very few people had the means to set up a household.) My parents later had 5 surviving children over a ten-year period, the last when my mom was 36.

My Mom also had three older sisters. Likely due to the huge number of losses of young Dutch men during World War II, none of them ever married or had children.

As it happens, I had my three children over a similar period, aged 28 to 36.

Only three of us five siblings had children. Two of us now have dearly beloved grandchildren.

Although fertility varies, in general women (as opposed to men) have a relatively small window of opportunity. This means that when disasters of various sorts occur, women sometimes have to decide between caution in the face of adversity, and waiting too long to complete their families.

The fact of the Covid -19 pandemic did not prevent young women, like my older brother's daughter-in-law or my daughter's friends, from completing their families while there was still time to do so. My daughter's two best friends from childhood have each had a second baby during Covid-19. They each have a husband and a home in small communities. And last week my daughter told me that she is pregnant with her second child. (She is almost 35.)

This pregnancy would normally be a source of unalloyed joy. I understand my daughter's need to beat the biological clock. But I also think that carrying and bearing a child during Covid-19 is undoubtedly going to be stressful for all concerned.

The family does not yet own a home; she, her partner and their 7-year- old live in a small one-bedroom apartment. I would have thought that there would be a reduction in demand (and therefore cost) for homes in the last Pandemic months. In fact, prices have gone up significantly in our area of Ontario, which means my daughter has to cope with two potentially competing goals...completing her family and being able to save for a home.

I am of course helping her as much as I can.

Meanwhile, my online work consists of working with women who have fertility issues, such as miscarriage or inability to become pregnant. One might think that most women would put solving those problems on the back burner during Covid-19.

But in fact I have seen an uptick in clients over the last few months, after restarting my only internet ad. The young women's problems are more extreme, their anxiety more intense, than with fertility clients from many previous years.

My clients always want to have their own children while there is still time to do so. Yet, there is far more soul-searching and stress involved with these pregnancies than in previous years. (It is my personal belief that perhaps many couples are being brave and life-affirming rather than foolhardy in not letting the existential threat foil their wish for a family.)

Sometimes it is my job to metaphorically hold the hand of my daughter, or my anxious client, as she wends her way through the fear and lack of clarity.

I have certainly noticed that this Covid-19 wave of clients are less likely to be reasonable about what I can tell them. They want answers to questions they have not asked; they are upset if I cannot foretell the future, or clarify something I have no way of knowing. I am highly intuitive, but cannot do magic. (Like telling them how healthy the child they are carrying is, or the gender of their next, not yet conceived, child. Or whether they should have an abortion.)

These issues go beyond the sort of counselling I can give. I must assume that the sudden uptick of unreasonableness is that the clients' stress level is over the top. (I would never **advocate** having an abortion, for example, although I will certainly defend a woman's right to have one if **she** so chooses.) This too shall pass. There is no stronger love than that between a mother and child. I salute the bravery of all the young women who are willing to go the extra mile during a time of extreme stress, with the children they already have, and sometimes with the children they choose to bear. It is to be hoped that all of us can be supportive to the brave souls who bring life into this dangerous world, and nurture it thereafter.

Searching for my Soul

By Bill Brubacher

In the market meltdown of 2008, I lost most of my life savings... savings that took me 35 years to build, as a music publisher-record producer. I was 63 years old and fell into a period of suicidal depression after losing not only my life savings but also my 20-year relationship and my precious home.

It took ten years to both survive the many obstacles and to re-invent my life. And that wasn't the first time I had faced life and career threatening circumstances.

I survived another excruciating and critical period in my life in 1987, when my historic 66-year-old company went into Receivership owing the bank, shareholders, and creditors over a million and a half dollars. In the end, an amazing 90% plus of our creditors agreed to accept our 'Proposal' keeping us in business. Our chances of survival in those dire years of economic recession was less than 1% in over 37,000 Canadian business bankruptcies, in that one year alone.

And, like death, no two deaths are alike and a second can be just as overwhelming or even worse than the first. And, one death doesn't necessarily 'prepare' us for the next.

So, when I lost my most recent retirement savings so suddenly in 2008, I felt lost and thrown under the bus. But, I eventually came to understand that there is a different 'world' or existence in the mysterious and eternal 'space' between the seconds on a clock. It became clear that any opportunity for executive employment at my age was going to be next to impossible. The best I could do, notwithstanding my mental condition, would be to possibly find part-time work at minimum wage.

I was reduced to a dark emotional state of hopelessness and helplessness. I had lost my retirement future, my security, my partner, my home, my self-worth, and my will to live.

After several months of spending my nights in a fetal position drenched with sweat, I found a job delivering business pamphlets 3 times a week out of a paperboy's bag slung over my shoulder. For minimum wage, I dressed in a shirt and tie and trekked to the offices of doctors, dentists, hair salons, pharmacies, and to any place that would accept advertising in their waiting rooms. Once even to a monument company with a small almost hidden one-room office on the main street of a rustic, rural area. I walked right by it, but then turned around to go back to speak to an older gentleman sitting alone behind an old desk. It was a dull, gray morning but we ended up having a wonderful chat. When I left, my pamphlet was the only paper on his desk.

Things got worse before getting better, much worse. My doctor didn't think my condition was improving, so I was waiting to see the Chief Psychiatrist at the Hospital. A nurse was very concerned when she first saw me because I looked frail. I was wearing seemingly bulky clothes to hide my weight loss, which was now just 120 lbs. (I used to bench press 210 lbs at the gym.) The nurse wanted to immediately admit me because of malnutrition, but there was no available bed in the hospital.

The nurse asked me about my past and I told her a bit about the losses I had recently incurred. At one point she said, "You've had a lot of loss in your life." I remember saying, "Not really." To me my life had been average because most of my days in business were challenging. As an entrepreneur, I experienced gains and losses on a regular basis. Stress was normal.

But - no sooner had I uttered those words and thought those thoughts - the next thing I knew I was crying, uncontrollably. The tears of a lifetime I never knew were there suddenly came flooding down my cheeks... going back to my stressful and underachieving childhood - the young deaths of both of my parents - working my way up the

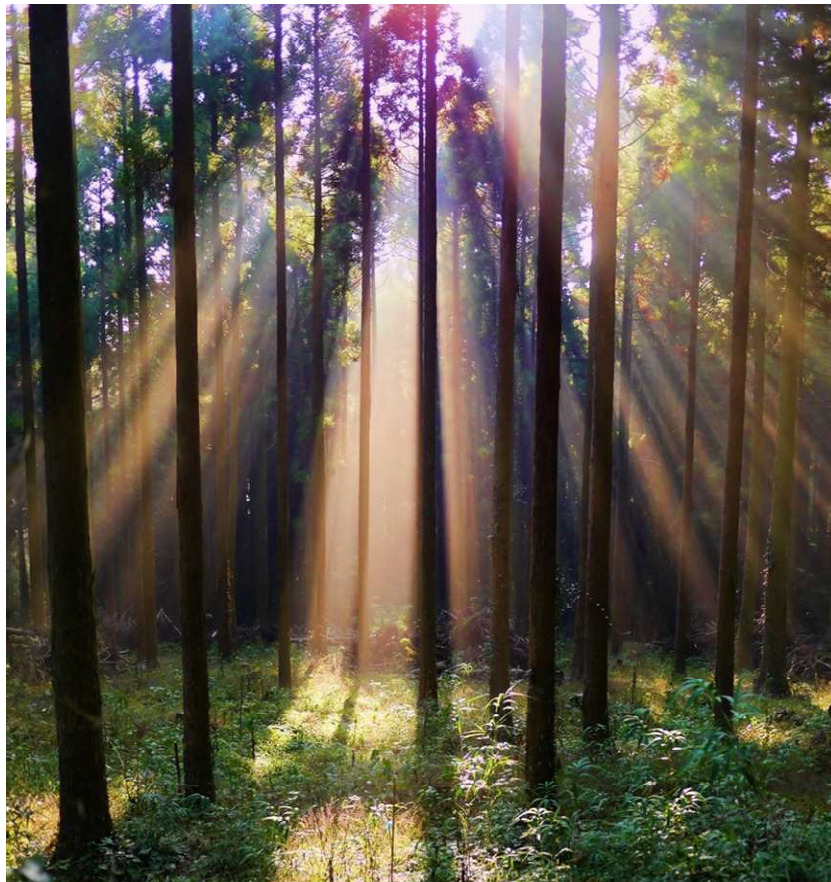
challenging corporate ladder – through bankruptcy – the sale of a successful business – ending with this - the pitiful loss of my life savings. Now, I was back to the beginning... being a disappointment all over again, destined to live out a hard life.

And I felt so profoundly lost – beyond any chance of being found or finding my way out of the surreal existence I fell into.

The nurse looked at me gravely, giving me a moment to finally collect my terribly embarrassed self. And I looking back at her through the watery lens of blurry eyes, suspended in that crystal gray calm. Then she said the words I never expected to hear. She spoke, very slowly, with conviction, “Bill, you don’t need to worry about being lost. You will find yourself when you are ready and your spirit is already on its way to you... You were not born for this alone.” Well, in that moment, it felt as if the sun appeared and was embracing me in its loving warmth and light, taking my fears away. I was not forsaken - there was hope - and I simply needed to be ready for it and to accept it.

That was one of the pivotal moments in my ten-year journey of loss and despair.

If you are, in any way, feeling lost and forsaken in your life right now, I hope my story will make a difference and possibly even inspire you to move on... to believe in yourself, because your ‘self’ is on its way to find you!



The Muscle of the Soul

By Andrea Lines-Botell

The “fight or flight” response plays a huge role within our wellbeing. While it serves a life saving purpose when it is functioning at a regular level it can also alter our entire life experience when it is stuck or heightened. Finding effective ways to allow ourselves to come out of this mode is an essential step in healing and walking in peace.

There are many effective tools for this and for this week I wanted to focus on the psoas muscle. The psoas muscle is an area that many do not realize plays a huge part in our mental and physical wellbeing. It is referred to as the soul’s muscle due to its massive impact on our life experience.

The psoas is crucial for proper body movement, as it affects our structural balance, muscular integrity, flexibility, strength, range of motion, joint mobility, and organ functioning. Without your psoas, you would not be able to maintain proper posture or move your legs to walk. While you’re walking, a healthy psoas moves with ease, continuously massaging the spine as well as the organs, blood vessels, and nerves of the trunk. This process promotes the flow of fluids throughout the body and creates the feeling of being grounded and centred.

The psoas is the only muscle to connect the spine to the legs. The psoas is also linked to the diaphragm through connective tissue, impacting our fear reflex and breathing. This is due to the connection between the psoas and the reptilian brain, the most ancient inner part of the brain stem and spinal cord. The psoas is known as “the fight or flight muscle” because when the body or mind become stressed, the psoas tightens and contracts in a primal response designed to protect us from harm. It is part of our “fight or flight” instinct to protect our vital organs if we were under attack. It can become trapped in a constant “flight or fight” state and then become stressed and constricted. When the psoas is tight, it affects our ability to breathe deeply. This is because the psoas is attached to our diaphragm. If we cannot breathe deeply, our nervous system senses a threat or danger, and the fight or flight response is activated.

The physical body is not the only part of you that suffers from chronically stressed psoas. The psoas is much more than a muscle used for structural stability. It influences every element of life, from how you feel, to how you look at the world, and even how you treat others.

Tightness or imbalance in the tone of the psoas can cause other issues too, including difficulty focusing, sitting still or relaxing; irritability, sadness, anger, problems falling asleep or sleeping well; digestive issues; fatigue and more.

Lengthening and releasing your psoas grounds you enable you to feel more present in the moment. Simple stretches and reset techniques for the psoas can allow the body to come out of “fight or flight” and calm the body, mind, and soul.

The following yoga poses have been linked to decrease or prevent stress and help open the psoas:

- Conscious Savasana (lay in this pose and surrender to the pull of gravity)
- Low lunge and high lunge (Crescent pose)
- Pigeon pose
- Sitting cross-legged
- Tadasana (Mountain pose)
- Vrksasana (Tree pose)

I have also attached links for easy techniques to support coming out of “fight or flight” through rebalancing the psoas muscle and identifying whether your psoas is tight.

https://youtu.be/IdUyq_1hqo4

<https://youtu.be/g4wHzeVp8mo>

https://youtu.be/o-tiRb35F_Q

If you want to find out more, this book has been found to be informative and supportive.

The Psoas Book by [Liz Koch](#)

View From an Advocate

By Clay Williams

When I first talked with Lisa about Roots & Wings and her vision for the project, one of the things that popped into my head was: “Who am I to be writing for a mental health journal?”

I started out my “adventure” in the mental health field simply as a fundraiser, I guess you could say an activist. After starting my first mental health fundraising run, I saw the need for work to be done, the need for people to have access to help, and I tried to think of something I could do to help. There are some things I’m reasonably good at: running slowly for a long time, speaking to small groups, listening, recruiting helpers, making spreadsheets. There are definitely some things I’m not good at, and one of them is providing mental health advice. I’m not a counsellor or a therapist, I have no training in psychology or psychiatry, I only have lived experience spending the last 40 years with my high school sweetheart who has struggled with depression for decades. And trust me, our interactions have not always been successful or productive.

So, knowing all of that, I was still driven to figure out something I could do to make a positive impact. After some research into charitable organizations I decided to try to raise some money for the Mood Disorders Society of Canada. At least that would help some people to get access to mental health services and help pay for development of new programs. As my first fundraiser started to gain momentum and my friends started to hear that I was doing a long run for mental health, people started to talk with me about their own experiences. Although this was something that I encouraged, I initially felt very poorly equipped to do anything. My brain is wired in such a way that when someone presents me with a problem I try to offer a solution. When someone would tell me that they have struggled with anxiety for years, I had no solutions to offer in response, but I found out that I could listen. And I found that by listening I’m allowing people to “unload” a little and even to talk through the tough parts of their situation and maybe make a little more sense of it. I was helping to carry their burdens, making their load a little lighter.

I suppose that’s part of what an advocate does. According to Merriam-Webster, an advocate (n) is one who pleads the cause for another. By talking about mental health issues and encouraging others to talk, I hope I am saying to others that it’s acceptable to talk about your own mental health. For those who feel that it’s unsafe to do that, I’m speaking so that society will give them permission to speak, permission to admit illness, just as they have permission to speak about a physical injury or illness. This isn’t something that I have some specialized skill or training to do, it’s something that almost anyone can do. I’m just a guy trying to do something that’s good and that’s right.