

FS News – Jan 2022

Time to Reflect Edition

Hello fellow travelers on the road of life,

I'm grateful to be on this journey with you. We are fortunate to have this medium to share thoughts, questions and care. We transform text into relationship, and bring authentic support to one another.

The flood of support I've been receiving over the past month has felt like a warm blanket; reminding me that I am not alone, and that I am not 'out in the cold' with my feelings. My deepest thanks to all of you who have reached out, and also to those who sent supporting feelings without writing a word. I'm getting stronger, and turning my frustrations into ways that I can share information to offer dignity to the 'deeply forgetful', as Stephen Post respectfully calls people with lapses in memory.

Through my month of losses (I also lost two very close friends during the first week of the new year) I have been rebuilding the website, writing the final pages of the Ownership Manual, and doing a lot of reflecting on life. I appreciate the winter months because, once the holidays are over, expectations of effervescence and participation go way down. Taking the time to think while I watch the snow falling, or the wind moving the branches, has a very calming and deeply connecting effect. Taking time to reflect helps me heal and, and also to stay real.

I see reflection as one of the most important aspects of learning. Not only do we grasp information through books, in a classroom or through conversation, but reflection helps that information 'stick' to our minds and our story...even if we disagree with what we've learned. We add the meaning to the information and it then turns into knowledge or even wisdom.

Another word for reflection is introspection. This 'turning inward' can alter the way we see ourselves and others, it can strengthen our emotional intelligence, it can greatly impact our ability to cope with life's challenges and it can open doors to possibility which may have appeared shut. Reflection is also the key to not making the same mistakes twice.

Meaningful reflection can be woven into our mind and our story through art, movement, play, metaphor and dialog...with others, or just ourselves through journaling. I have learned, from people who were released over the past 5 years, that journaling can be one of the most powerful tools to get through difficult and confusing times.

On January 20th, I found a beautiful reflection in the NY Times by Amanda Gorman. Here are a few highlights from her article:

AMANDA GORMAN ALMOST DID NOT READ HER POEM AT THE INAUGURATION

"I almost declined to be the inaugural poet. Why? I was terrified. I was scared of failing my people, my poetry. I was afraid of COVID and domestic terrorists. I was getting messages from friends telling me not-so-jokingly to buy a bulletproof vest. My mom had us crouch in our living room so that she could practice shielding my body from bullets. A loved one warned me to "be ready to die" if I went to the Capitol building, telling me, "It's just not worth it."

I knew only I could answer the question for myself: Was this poem worth it?

And then it struck me: Maybe being brave enough doesn't mean lessening my fear, but listening to it. What stood out was the worry that I'd spend the rest of my life wondering what this poem could have achieved. There was only one way to find out.

By the time the sun rose I knew I was going to be the 2021 inaugural poet. I can't say I was completely confident in my choice, but I was completely committed to it. On the way to the Capitol, I recited the mantra I say before any performance: I am the daughter of Black writers. We're descended from freedom fighters who broke their chains and they changed the world. They call me.

As I stepped up to the dais to recite, I felt warm, like the words waiting in my mouth were aflame. What I found waiting beyond my fear was every person who searched beyond their own fears to find space for hope in their lives.

Though our fears may be the same, we are not. Even as we've grieved, we've grown; even fatigued we've found that this hill we climb is one we must mount together. We are battered, but bolder; worn, but wiser. We are brave enough to listen to, and learn from, our fear.

So do not fear your fear. Own it. Free it. This isn't a liberation that I or anyone can give you — it's a power you must look for, learn, love, lead and locate for yourself. The truth is, hope isn't a promise we give. It's a promise we live."

She did it again! She simultaneously brought a tear to my eye and put fuel on my fire. Thank you, Ms. Gorman!

"I learned that courage was not the absence of fear, but the triumph over it. The brave man is not he who does not feel afraid, but he who conquers that fear." - Nelson Mandela

BUILDING MENTAL HEALTH

According to an article in Nature magazine "more than 42% of people surveyed by the US Census Bureau reported symptoms of anxiety or depression in December, an increase from 11% the previous year. Data from other surveys suggest that the picture is similar worldwide. Isolation and fear of infection are two factors contribution to a rise in anxiety and depression amid the pandemic."

Over and over, I hear things like: people feel powerless, unheard and isolated. We are exhausted. We are sick of the same old thing. We are paralyzed because we are polarized. And "no one cares".

I also hear the last one through the email messages and letters I receive from incarcerated people; frustrated by the lack of care regarding the virus, the mail, and the lack of visits, volunteers and programs

We are all suffering from a national crisis in care. Everywhere I go, people say they are worried about their situation, but they are not able to consider the suffering of others. I feel extremely fortunate to have experienced such powerful care and support from this community!! Clearly care is not out of our reach.

A question that I have been wrestling with for years is: Knowing that extrinsic motivators (laws, demands, bribes, gold stars) will not change people, how can we cultivate care in our society? I would love to hear your reflections.

Speaking of care: THANK YOU FINANCIAL DONORS!

Your care makes this newsletter possible! This last month was 40% more expensive than previous months (\$630 vs our usual \$450) due to new readers, the enormous outpouring of support, and the flood of questions about resources, covid, the horrible mail situation in WI and other states, and many questions. Plus, I have been hearing that other information sources have not been responsive lately. Of course, I'm still just one person here, working 12 hour days (at least!) so the financial support that Fair Shake receives from our very generous donors is making it possible for me to continue to respond to all readers through these stressful times. No grants will cover what I do. If grants were available, I would have a lot of competition for your attention! ~ ;) Thank you donors, for seeing the value and potential in what we are building together. Ubuntu!

SOMETHING TO PONDER:

I found an article recently that contained this list. Does it represent you?

What Do Most Individuals Want?

- Receive an income, "obtain benefits"
- Develop new skills.
- Feel useful and needed.
- Make new friends and stay in touch with the world.
- Provide structure to one's life.
- Have a sense of achievement and accomplishment.
- Know that you are a valuable asset to the community and yourself.

PEN PAL TESTIMONIALS

Sorry, but I'm unable to offer the updated list of pen-pal organizations in this issue. More than two hundred people signed up for the newsletter since January 1st and contributions are still coming in. I will offer the pen-pal list at the end of Feb! In the meantime, if you would like to recommend a pen-pal organization that you've worked with to your fellow newsletter readers, please share the name and address of the organization, and the reason why you are recommending them. Thank you!

JUST A THOUGHT Something to ponder from Brian Zatar's book *The Tree of Life: Sowing Your Seeds of Destiny*

First, just read the following names: God * Allah * Hashem * Buddha * Christ * The All * Krishna * Universe * Consciousness * Subatomic * Field of Energy

"The names are manifold; the fruit is one." - Guru Maya

Now Consider: Many Names Though Source goes by many names they all point to and represent the underlying foundational sea of energy from out of which everything is created, from thoughts, ideas, attitudes, beliefs and feelings to actions and material objects.

BOOK REVIEW: *No Mud, No Lotus: The Art of Transforming Suffering* Thích Nhất Hạnh

Another amazing guide, who shared important wisdom to help us relieve our suffering, has moved on. Thích Nhất Hạnh, who practiced "engaged Buddhism", made his transition from earth on January 22nd. Luckily for us, he wrote more than 100 books, and left many recordings, to help us increase our satisfaction in life. He founded the Order of Inter-being and was dedicated to nonviolence, mindfulness and social service. In *No Mud, No Lotus*, he introduces ways to be in touch with suffering without being overwhelmed by it. "When we know how to suffer," Nhất Hạnh says, "we suffer much, much less." Because suffering can feel so bad, we try to escape it. If we face our suffering, we can be present and available to life, and happiness will be able to find us. If we can take a moment to replace 'doing' with mindful breathing and deep concentration, we may be able to embrace pain and calm it down, bringing a measure of freedom and a clearer mind. He reminds us that the lovely flower, we see, the lotus, is much more than the flower itself, it is also the clouds, the rain, the entire plant, and even the mud, itself. Life is messy: we all suffer. "If your suffering is so great, you can't concentrate, you can't study, you can't focus", he says in this book. "The suffering of each of us affects others. The more we can teach each other the art of suffering well, the less suffering there will be in the world over all, and the more happiness."

QUOTES for our Month of Reflection

"Breathing in, I am aware of the painful feeling within me. Breathing out, I am aware of the painful feeling within me." - Thích Nhất Hạnh

"Most people are afraid of suffering. But suffering is a kind of mud to help the lotus flower of happiness grow. There can be no lotus flower without the mud." - Thích Nhất Hạnh

"We have to learn how to embrace and cradle our own suffering and the suffering of the world, with a lot of tenderness." - Thích Nhất Hạnh

"You cannot develop people. You must allow people to develop themselves." - Julius Nyerere

"The forces that unite us are intrinsic, and greater than the superimposed influences that keep us apart."
- Kwame Nkrumah

"What we see depends mainly on what we look for." - John Lubbock

"Time flies like an arrow, fruit flies like bananas and pineapples." - Dave Pines

Wishing you all the best during our season of reflection. May your signal provide balance to the noise.

Ubuntu! ~ sue

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As always, when you are released, remember to look up free support in your phone-gizmo:
2-1-1 AuntBertha.com Fairshake.net HelpYourselfTherapy.com

Newsletters are available at FairShake.net for your family and friends to read or print.

PS: Low-budget Race News: While I was studying 'Adult Learning' at Rutgers a few years ago, I was simultaneously learning Adult Basic Racing on ice and dirt tracks. For ice racing, we need cold temps and little snow. This year is off to a good start! My 'daily driver' (a yellow 1989 Honda CRX 4 cylinder, 110 hp, dubbed 'the Bee') dons 1989 studded tires so we can see how fast we can fly around a 1.5 mile track that changes each week. We've been out twice now and the little car (the smallest car, the oldest car, the second oldest driver and the only female) got 'fastest time' out of all of the drivers (15) the first week, and second place in our class (front-wheel drive w/ studded tires) last week with more than 30 drivers...some coming from Chicago and Iowa! For the newer readers: Since I was in a reform school, foster care, group homes and jail from age 12 - 18, I did not learn to drive until I was 20. I could not have imagined 'playing' with cars, but when I bought the Bee (I was 52 years old), my mechanic said "you might want to try ice racing"...and I was hooked!

The moral is: We do not have to be bound by the roles that society expects us to play!

"If everything seems under control, you're not going fast enough." - Mario Andretti