

Building Bridges

A Center for Healing and Change



Fall, 2008

Stepping, Lifting, Stepping

By John Brendler, MSW, ACSW, LMFT

36 hours in silence. This would be my first meditation retreat. No talking, no reading, no writing, no emailing. My mind stirred with dread, scanning its uncharted chambers where unknown fears lurked. Would I have to peer behind the veneer of confidence I had crafted throughout my life? Would I need to open myself to uncertainty, unresolved conflicts, and unexplored associations that lay buried deep inside and might appear at any moment? Would I relive my terror at 16 years old in my father's hospital room watching him thrash unconsciously inside the oxygen tent and not recognize me during the last days of his life? What would bubble up from visualizing my mother lying helplessly on her hospital bed, partially paralyzed after her stroke and looking totally vulnerable?

As I entered the sanctuary at 5:30 the first morning, I felt both a warmth in the serenity of the ambiance and an anxiety softly humming through my body, like a slow and steady IV drip. Random thoughts, associations, and feelings kept distracting me. Pain in my knees. Pain in my hips. Pain in my lower back. My mind jumped all over the place, from favorite foods, to strategies for cutting out early, to serious, hilarious, irreverent snippets of conversations with family and friends. I wondered if I would ever feel calm and unaware of thoughts or physical aches in my sitting meditation.

This ordeal continued through alternate sitting and walking meditations, each lasting 45 minutes, for 12 hours. During my 8:00 p.m. walking meditation, I couldn't find a way to slow down

and focus. My attention riveted on an array of buttercups in the grass. I remembered my instructor encouraging us to practice letting go of any strivings and be mindful about everything we did, including walking. As her directions resonated in my mind, accenting slowly and deliberately the process of "Stepping, lifting, stepping," I felt my feet planted firmly on the grass. I was breathing fluidly, moving slowly, feeling balanced. No thoughts, no worries. My mind turned back to the buttercups. I was 10 years old again sitting on my grandmother's bed, listening to her read love notes my grandfather had written and left for her each day before going to work. I felt like I had crossed a threshold.

In the sitting meditation on the second morning, I felt unusually tuned into my body, particularly the pain in my knees. Then, a thought came to me. If I would allow myself to feel and accept my pain, I might discover layers of anxiety underneath the pain that could help me to know myself more deeply and live more freely. Perhaps, I would also feel less physical pain. My mind drifted to the Red Sea where I was snorkeling and looking for what was on the other side of my anxiety. As I explored the coral reefs, I sensed that my apparent confidence and comfort in expressing vulnerability had distracted me from facing more honestly and directly my anxiety about aging and dying. I felt intense grief, like the grief I remember tearing through me as I watched my father writhing in the oxygen tent. I revisited scenes with our children where I had become so involved in their lives that I had lost a sense of

myself. It became poignantly clear that for many years I had hidden from my own grief through my children. As I imagined apologizing to them for not containing and channeling my anxieties more effectively, I felt a huge relief.

An unusual sensation then emerged: my inclination to achieve, to make things happen, seemed to have melted away. I felt open to embracing uncertainty and life as it was. I heard Rilke's voice reminding me to "be patient to all that is unsolved in your heart and try to love the questions themselves... the point is, to live everything. Live the questions now." (*Letters to A Young Poet*)

Moments later, I noticed my mental furies had reawakened. The urge to check my iPhone tugged. Fragmented, broken-off pieces of conversation with my father intruded, questions about his life and death dangled. Then came flashes of self-criticism as I riveted on scenes of my folding in the face of conflict with our children. I awoke to the sound of the gong signaling the end of the sitting period. I smiled to myself with the recognition that though I had slipped into the trenches of regret and judgment, I was sitting cross-legged, calm, and free of pain in my body.



John Brendler, MSW, ACSW, LMFT is a family and couples therapist, teacher of family therapy in the U.S. and abroad, and the founder of Building Bridges.

He is the co-author of *Madness, Chaos, and Violence: Families at the Brink* (Basic Books, 1991). He can be reached at jbrendler7@earthlink.net.

Like clockwork cryptic clouds come
creeping over,
shadow smothering thoughts.
Before the sun was prominent
and happy filled my head.
Shadows overcome if you linger in my
brain,
—Wait, let's just keep the shortened
sunshine.

Ego

His ego is swollen with pride.
having lived and lied.
People are his puppets,
he said he didn't care.
but.
I saw a hole tear
his inflated ego.
and I saw a tear
roll down his cheek.

—Elizabeth Cha

Or So It Would Appear...

With half of her marbles rolling around the
wood floor
She spent her day gathering.
As each retrieved orb clinked decidedly
down into the clear glass jar
A smug little grin spread over her countenance.
Justso kept watch over the marble jar with
uncanny awareness
At the moment she'd amassed a bountiful
color array of fullness
Justso seized the next moment to lay
carnage on that fullness
spilling her booty to cavort aimlessly
random in every direction;
Justso's dedicated mission promised to trap her
Of this she was cognizant.

—T. K. Linn

It Might Happen

In an August cornfield amid humid silk
when tornadoes come
I will build us a house of husks under the
stalks
when colors of the sky turn illusory
and silence deafens before the roar
Swirled lavender paints and pots of lemon
meringue
will exist without great sticks or hard spoons
Rulers will measure and hairbrushes smooth
Come with me, little one, come
In January's horizon when field and sky
meet in steely white
Far from the frigid, I will dig us an igloo
under the snow
when blizzards bluster through houses
and icy survival is not guaranteed
Rose patterned armchairs and size 12
galoshes
will not fly through the air nor kick up tears
Supper will be served where smiles are real
Come with me, little one, come
In May when Mississippi waters gorge and
tumble
I will build us a sailboat full of grace
when the lilacs are laden with scents of
purpose
and you and I are becoming friends
We will hold hands and see fish dance
I will listen to you giggle
I will watch you explore
I will love you

—Susan Sovik

Paper Planes

Paper planes
Fly away
Soaring in the air
Catching drifts
Spirits lift
A broken kite repaired
A little angel
Chasing down
Careless childhood dreams
Bouncing curls
Sparkling shoes
Skip over logs of truth
On a hilltop
Set in stones
A labyrinth
I walk alone
Treading lightly
Around the edge
The soul it seems
So far ahead

—Gillian Mbugua

Hell and Back

I walked down a narrow hall following a
man I didn't know.
The door swung open and no one was there.
I could barely see.
I still had a bloody lip.
He led me down another hall to a room
with a mirror and a bed.
He left for a minute and returned with a
blanket and a pillow.
"Get some sleep," he said.

I woke up to a bang on the door.
A nurse handed me a cup with four pills in it.
The rest of the patients gathered in the
common room.
I looked to the boy next to me and asked,
"What's your name?"
"Ari."
"I'm John," I said
A minute later I tried to get his attention
again.
"Ari," I said.
He looked straight to the sky and said, "Hi
God."

Then one of the girls got up and walked
over to the nurse.
She punched her in the face.
Four other nurses ran out to the common
room.
Two of the nurses were wheeling out a
stretcher.
They strapped the girl down to the stretcher
and injected her with a needle.

I had my own nurse.
She watched me take showers and sleep.
They checked under my tongue after I took
my pills.
I had to take the four pills for ten more days
and I was better.
I wasn't sick anymore.
When I went home I realized that it was the
first day of my life.

—John Hutton

A Grandmother's Love

Christmas Eve, 2005, was the day I knew in the depths of my being that my 22-year-old granddaughter, Marie, was using drugs. I didn't know that in a few weeks, she would be homeless on the streets of Kensington, using needles to transform her pain. Through the previous summer and fall, I suspected she was in some kind of trouble, but I never would have suspected the gravity of her choices.

I never discussed my suspicions with my family. My daughter, Anne, had been ill for 15 years. True to form, I protected her and didn't tell her what I had witnessed. On January 19th, 2006, Marie was missing. Anne was distraught. She called me immediately and I called the family. They responded and surrounded her with love and support. It was then that Anne told all of us about the struggle she had silently endured for almost a year. Shamed at her perceived failure, Anne stayed alone in the struggle to save her daughter. Recently, Anne had told Marie that she couldn't help her anymore. Marie responded by choosing to live on the streets.

My family did double duty for the next several months. We all went to the streets of Kensington and kidnapped Marie nine times, desperately trying to reach her. She was admitted to seven hospitals and two half-way houses.

During a discussion in her seventh hospitalization, I told Marie I would no longer live her life of addiction. I loved

her very much, but I needed to back out. I defined my limits for her and was honest with her about my intent to accept her as she was. This change in stance from fighting to accepting interrupted my family's desperate attempt to save Marie.

When Marie requested several times that her mother take her home, Anne became clearer about her own life and boundaries and asserted her new stance that she would no longer tolerate her drug use and Marie's accompanying irresponsible behavior. The eighth time Anne cooperated in treatment and lived at a half-way house.

Marie maintained her sobriety for more than two years. Recently, she suffered a relapse after hearing from her doctor that her liver disease had worsened and a liver transplant would probably be necessary within 10 years. My family has been in touch with her to offer love and support, while being mindful to not fall into the old pattern of enabling her. I close with the knowledge that only God knows the future and in His mercy He will be the buffer she needs to make the decision to live, to love, and be happy, with the speed bumps along the road.



Cass Lavin-Spouse, MSW, LSW, works at Building Bridges with individuals, families, and couples. She has advanced training in Eye Movement Desensitization Reprocessing (EMDR). She

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What We Provide

Contact the person below for information about specific areas of interest. A wide range of fees is available. Fees and insurance coverage should be discussed with each practitioner. Evening and weekend hours are available.

PSYCHOTHERAPY

Individual, Family, Couples, Group:
John Brendler, MSW, ACSW, LMFT

Art Therapy: Liberty Wetherill, MA

Hypnosis & EMDR: Bonita Boyer-Pearsall, MSS, ACSW

Pastoral Counseling: R. Dandridge Collins, PhD

Play Therapy: Elsa Greene-Cha, MSN, CS

CONSULTATIONS/EVALUATIONS

Psychiatric Consultation and Treatment:
Michael Silver, MD

Psychological Evaluations: Steve Simms, PhD

MIND/BODY WORK

Acupuncture: Patricia Kramer, MAC, LAC

Homeopathy: Mitchel Shapiro

Jin Shin Do® Bodymind Acupressure™ and Shiatsu: Patrice Lightcap, CP, MT

Swedish and Hot Stone Massage:
Bianca O'Keefe, CMT

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FAX: 610-892-2774

Areas of Expertise

- ▶ Adoption
- ▶ Anxiety
- ▶ Attention difficulties and impulsivity
- ▶ Chronic physical pain and fatigue
- ▶ Depression
- ▶ Divorce and remarriage
- ▶ Eating disorders
- ▶ Ethnically diverse families
- ▶ Family and marital/couples conflicts
- ▶ Gay and lesbian adults and youth
- ▶ Infidelity
- ▶ Learning differences (children, adolescents, & adults)
- ▶ Obsessive-compulsive behaviors
- ▶ Physical violence
- ▶ Sexual abuse
- ▶ Stress management
- ▶ Substance abuse
- ▶ Suicidal thinking/behavior
- ▶ Trauma

Who We Are

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We welcome comments, questions, or suggestions about the topics in this edition or any areas of interest that you would like us to address in future newsletters. Correspondence can be sent to John Brendler at jbrendler7@earthlink.net

Building Bridges is a facility where independent, helping professionals pursue their distinct practices in a caring and supportive environment, sharing a common concern for the well-being of their clients.

Building Bridges
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Building Bridges News

John Brendler, MSW, ACSW, LMFT will teach a one-day course, "Therapy with 'Impossible' Families," in the Continuing Education Program at Bryn Mawr School of Social Work and Social Research, November 21.

R. Dandridge Collins, PhD Keynote Address at the National Pastoral Care Week-New Courtland- Senior Citizens Facility, October 24. He also lectured at the Philadelphia College of Osteopathic Medicine Lecture Series on "The Trauma Zone- Understanding Trauma in our Clinical Practice," November 14.

Amy Fantalis, MS, LCSW Taught a one-day course, "Group Therapy with Adolescent Girls," in the Continuing Ed. Program at Bryn Mawr School of Social Work and Social Research, October 17.

Kilian Fritsch, PhD taught a one-day course, "Brief Applications of Narrative Treatment," in the Continuing Ed.

Program at Bryn Mawr School of Social Work and Social Research, October 31.

Tony Goldsmith, MA will participate in a panel discussion on the multi-systems aspects of child sexual abuse, entitled, "Lions, Tigers, and Bears," sponsored by Family Support Line and Widener University, November 21. He also co-leads parent discussion groups for the Healthy Communities Initiative at Springton Lake Middle School, October 2008 through May 2009.

Cass Lavin-Spouse, MSW, LSW led a series of training on "Connecting with the Consumer" through the Resources for Human Development. Philadelphia, November 5,12,19.

Marion Lindblad-Goldberg, PhD and **Steve Simms, PhD** presented a workshop, "Adherence Scales in Supervision to Create Therapeutic Focus", AAMFT, Nashville, Tn., Nov. 1.

Therapy Groups

Contact leader for information on each group.

CHILDREN & ADOLESCENTS

Groups for Girls (grades 7-9, 10-11, 11-12, college age): Amy Fantalis, MSW, LSW
Social Skills Group for Boys (grades 5-7): Amy Fantalis, MSW, LSW

ADULTS

Adult Psychotherapy Group: David Marion, EdD
Women's Psychotherapy Group: Nancy Shapiro, MSS, LCSW
Single Adults Group: Nancy Shapiro, MSS, LCSW
Men's Group: John Brendler, MSW, ACSW, LMFT
Couples Group: John Brendler, MSW, ACSW, LMFT
Grief and Loss Group for Adults: Bonita Boyer-Pearsall, MSS, ACSW
Adult Sex Offenders Group: Barry Morein, MSW, LCSW, BCD & Fran Gibson, MSW, LCSW

PARENTS

Mothers of Young Children: Nancy Shapiro, MSS, LCSW
Perinatal & Postpartum Depression Support Group: Dana King-Butler, MSW, LCSW
Support Group for Parents of Adolescents: Marcy Seminoff, MSS
Reading Group for Parents: Tony Goldsmith, MA

ALL AGES

Creative Writing Group: John Brendler, MSW, ACSW, LMFT

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