

Leaving Childhood Behind

By Stephen Wing

for Asa

on these behaviors to go with the issue theme, but rather simply to address this important issue.

Thank you also for your comments about narcissistic parents. While I agree that having narcissistic parents is an important topic, the article series doesn't address narcissistic attitudes and behaviors in parents or other family members, partners, at the workplace, or among friends. It only addresses how these can affect individual community members and whole communities, and what we can do to create more emotional safety.

You wrote of your concern the article implies "that anyone who experiences severe trauma at an early age inevitably becomes a narcissist," and shouldn't have implied it because it isn't true. I agree: it isn't true; I don't believe it either. I reread the article to try to find which part may have caused you to think I implied this. Was it the sentence about Dwight, "No wonder he acted like that?" In Dwight's case it was narcissistic behaviors he seemed to engage in rather than any of the other kinds of trauma-induced behaviors someone could have (borderline, histrionic, high anxiety, and so on) or, having no harmful behaviors at all. As in: *All cats are mammals, but not all mammals are cats*. All people who exhibit narcissistic behaviors as adults (probably) experienced trauma as a child. But not all traumatized children become adults with narcissistic behaviors. They certainly could develop other kinds of distressed attitudes and behaviors instead, or in some cases, develop no harmful behaviors at all.

Future articles will explore what we can do, as individuals, small groups of friends, or whole communities to protect ourselves and work effectively with these attitudes and behaviors when they occur "up close and personal" in our communities.

Thank you again for reading COMMUNITIES magazine, and for reading this article.

All good wishes,

Diana Leafe Christian

Black Mountain, North Carolina

I like the way you said it
best: a ceremony for leaving childhood behind.
Not that you will ever abandon
the little boy inside you, playing hide-and-seek
with the man you will become.
They'll always play together if you let them.

It's just that at the moment
you are neither, and the old games bore you, and
the vast carnival looming ahead
packed with mile after mile of grownup amusements
has an armed guard at the gate.
You carry the seed of manhood like a fake I.D.

So it's time to say goodbye
to what you know, and step naked out on the air.
Be glad you're not a sparrow!
Be glad you aren't celebrating this initiation
alone, or with your buddies
and a bottle smuggled back from the other world.

We are here to take you with us
into that other world. For thirteen years, like you,
we watched our fathers and uncles,
shuffled heroes and villains like baseball cards,
learning as much from their mistakes
as their heroic masculinity. And then it was our turn.

We are here to welcome you
to the mystery of being a man. Not that some cool ritual
can teach you how; we can only
celebrate with you the necessity, the choice you've made
to leave childhood behind. Stand
holding hands in this circle to testify that we survived.

The best hope I can offer you
after years of learning how is that your learning will be
easier. We learned the hard way
we didn't have to take the manhood we were offered;
we could feel our way into the body
of a human male and find a truer path. I hope you'll find yours too.

Because hidden in this hope for you,
nephew, grows the kernel of our prayer for the psychopath
Mankind. That he will at last
grow up; accept his human incompleteness; stop trying to conquer,
acquire, consume the rest of Creation.

Hey, you are the planet's newest seed! Let go of your twig and fly!

Stephen Wing lives in Atlanta, where he hosts an "Earth Poetry" workshop each season to explore the city's many urban greenspaces. He is the author of three books of poems and serves on the boards of the Lake Claire Community Land Trust and Nuclear Watch South. Visit him at www.StephenWing.com.

Praising the Rain

I hear it coming
a minute or two before it arrives,
like stampeding buffalo
off in the distance, heading my way
from some long-vanished
Ghost Dance prairie
as I sit concentrating, distracted,
here on my screened-in back porch—
and then suddenly
it's here, shaking the ground
like the pounding hoofbeats
of a herd of caribou
migrating right through
my quiet neighborhood, dividing
to thunder past my house
and across the Arctic tundra of my roof,
invisible in the dustcloud
of mist and humidity they raise
behind them—
like an explosion of small
flashing wings, a whirlwind swarm
of Old Testament locusts
devouring every blade and leaf
of thought or memory in my head
for a brief and endless,
roaring, howling
trance-like span of time—
and then just as suddenly
it's gone, I hear it galloping on
to the next neighborhood, and then
those same three musical
notes again—

All through the peak
of the downpour,
that three-note birdcall never stopped
praising the rain

O Loveliest

O f blossoms is
a human countenance
opening to astonishment
or agony, the flush
of anger or the flinch of fear:
and loveliest of all Earth's
flowering creatures is laughter,
the tight bud breaking into
helpless music
as all around that shining face
new blooms break out—

Given

Before forgiveness
came simply
giveness—as light
fills all available space,
making emptiness
visible, outlining the edges
of the void, until
even the shadows owe it
everything—
So which came first,
the darkness or the dawn?
The wholeness
or the hurt?

Human Error

"In your silence God's silence ceases."
—Yogananda

*There comes a time
when the best I can offer the world
is my silence*

The omnipresence of God
rivalled only by the ubiquity
of television—

The omniscience of God
neck and neck with the databanks
of surveillance—

The omnipotence of God
overcome in the end
by the sheer stubborn arrogance
of human error—

*There comes a time
when the best I can offer the world
is my silence*

Touching the Dead

for Norman Glassman

Timidly touching the thin dead
shoulder of my long-time neighbor
and beloved elder, I can feel
in its rigidity what we've lost:
not just the flexibility of living
muscle and tendon, but the ability
to flex it. Whether conscious whim
or autonomic reflex, something
concealed inside the skin made this
bony hinge move on command.
What that was nobody knows,
the name he used merely one more
pseudonym for mystery, but the blue eyes
swiveling in his skull shot a beam of it
wherever he glanced, his voice
scattered its shrewd humor and singular
opinions like breeze-borne seeds,
his hands on the bulldozer's joystick,
the screwgun and circular saw
built a life-size model of a vision
it alone could see. And how many
visions outlive the visionary
in the end? The reinforced concrete
and lumber he taught to speak
stand sturdily over him while he lies here
silent. The trees and paths and gardens
he set free from trash and kudzu
breathe in the dark around his deathbed
like memories that obstinately live on
in the world of substance when all those
dancing images in the brain finally
flicker out. One by one his neighbors
drop in one last time to say goodbye.
The closed eyes gaze off
in the direction he was looking
when he finally forgot
how to breathe, or maybe just
why—our only clue
where he's headed from here.

The Object of the Game

Good morning, contestants!
Welcome to the show.
You have each been given
an infinite amount of love
and a limited supply
of hours, minutes, and seconds to play.
The object of the game
is to give away as much as you can
to as many other contestants
as possible
before the bell rings and you
go home. You'll each win
many prizes along the way,
but winning prizes is
the object of some other game,
you'll have to give
each prize away to win the next,
and the game isn't over
until everybody wins.
Got it? Good. Get ready:
start when you hear the sigh of lust
in the darkness
and feel a sudden
tug on your bellybutton.
Good luck!

Lightning's Compass

With every flash and flicker of the sky,
I glimpse another few steps
of the trail back to my tent,
this slow pilgrimage between the trees
without a flashlight—
fork to the left, jog to the right,
slippery downgrade, low-hanging branch—
like my life sometimes,
the chain of epiphanies lighting up my path
and the pitch-dark
between

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