



SPRING | SUMMER 2018

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A high-level look at the theory and its applications.

THE SPIRIT LEVEL

Why more equal societies almost always do better



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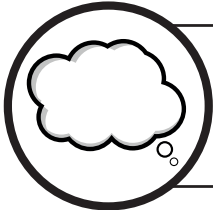
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EDITOR'S NOTE:

There was a fight and some major resistance leading up to the arrival, but Summer's heralder finally came.

I have the same complaint as so many others: Winter lasted too long and yet the days and the year are moving too swiftly; and we've arrived at the halfway point for 2018.

There's still much to do on my 2018 list but I can happily check off a few things:

1. Publish the Spring-Summer print issue of Thrive
2. Have the Thrive website redone
3. Have the Thrive logo refreshed
4. Tweak the design of the publication

Like Spring, I felt major resistance. But I have to say that it was the calls from my most dedicated vendor that served as this issue's herald.

Enjoy and pass along!

Peace,
Delphia



Richard Wilkinson

THR



Richard Wilkinson's work is dedicated to exposing deeply rooted societal inequality and to showing how much better off people are when living in a more equal society. With 'The Spirit Level', the book he co-authored with his colleague Kate Pickett, he brought the results of that work to a mass audience. Wilkinson told INSP about the growing problem of inequality and what street papers are doing to combat it.

"I find this to be quite a daunting audience. I normally speak to academics and people who are more detached from the real world. But I think many people here know the practicalities of what I'm talking about better than I do."

This is the opening gambit of Richard Wilkinson – renowned social epidemiologist and author of the best-selling book 'The Spirit Level: Why More Equal Societies Almost Always Do Better' – as he addresses a room packed full of delegates from street papers across the world. In his book, which was an unlikely hit when it was released in 2009, Wilkinson, along with co-author Kate Pickett, presents cold, hard and unsettling data showing how income equality is deeply influenced by societal factors. In the intervening eight years, he has taken his findings to all manner of communities and audiences, giving TED talks and responding to

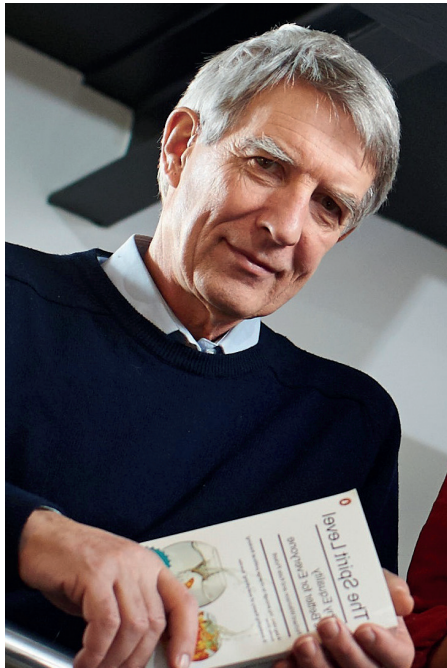
detractors. The book's influence – and popularity – does not seem to have waned, and the uncomfortable truths borne of his research remain startlingly prescient.

"Almost everything we put in 'The Spirit Level' has now been confirmed by other researchers in different countries. And not only have the relationships we've shown – whether between violence and inequality or low social mobility and inequality, or many others – been confirmed, but we can now see clearly what we call the pathways, the social processes, that connect inequality to worse outcomes. I think we feel that the overall structure of what we were showing in 'The Spirit Level' is right. It fits together too coherently to be wrong."

Wilkinson says that, despite this, he still believes that apathy shown towards the academic community is a reflection of certain sections of the political establishment, rather than of the general public as

I V E

'The Spirit Level' author and epidemiologist Richard Wilkinson: "We have to be very vigilant against all the ways that hate is built up"



a whole. "The right has always disliked the social sciences. They are much keener to dismiss evidence and experts because academic research is predominantly, if not always, progressive. It pushes against them.

"Despite all this stuff about fake news and the lies politicians tell us, people don't actually just come to the idea that the truth is simply relativistic, believing whatever they want to believe. People still do have a very clear idea that there's evidence for things and, actually, scientists are trusted better than politicians."

"Notable figures, like the Pope, Ban Ki Moon [former UN General Secretary] and Christine Lagarde [managing director of the IMF], have all made very strong statements against inequalities. The OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development) has started to take action on tax havens by getting them to share data with tax authorities. I'm not sure if that will make a significant difference. But when we were writing 'The Spirit Level', there was no knowledge or interest or concern in inequality at all. And since, there has been a huge increase in media

concern around inequality. I don't think it's going to go away until something's done."

Wilkinson touched on myriad factors for the rise of societal inequality, but there was one noted omission, picked up on by many members of the watching audience of street paper delegates: what about homelessness?

Wilkinson explains that this was not an oversight. "The scale of homelessness is so difficult to measure. There aren't many good comparisons. I remember people trying to measure homelessness by visiting all the places in one night where they thought they were likely to find people experiencing homelessness. But to do that well over a whole country, or to find some way of sampling that and get them for different countries - I haven't seen good figures that would tell you that."

There may be a lack of scientific research that would allow Wilkinson to present homelessness in the same way as he does the other factors explored in his research, but he is still acutely aware of how it fits in to his findings. "I'm pretty sure that housing problems are worse and, I expect, the problem of homelessness is just the bottom end of the housing problem. And, you know, it's always people at the bottom who are affected most drastically. Any economic difficulty the rich can find their way out of it. A rich person losing a job doesn't much matter because they'll probably get another one, likely being paid more. It's the

people at the bottom who find it difficult."

He is also adamant in his admiration for the work that street papers do in contributing to righting the wrongs of inequality. "I think street papers do two things. They increase society's awareness of problems of homelessness and they must do something for the people who sell it. It certainly gives people increased confidence.

"However, you've got to deal with the structural determinants of these problems, whether it's health inequalities or homelessness or whatever, and that's up to the government. It's not enough to simply make people feel better about their circumstances while those circumstances remain appalling."

Wilkinson's work, and the way it has calcified over time, has left him with an overwhelming feeling of a worsening problem. However, it has not left him feeling helpless, and he leaves me with a glimmer of hope. "You usually try not to be too pessimistic in public and I think the problem is still very worrying. But, there has been a growth of opposition to those who seem happy to allow inequality to continue. We have to be very vigilant against all the ways that hate is built up. There are grounds to be optimistic."

Courtesy of INSP.ngo



What is Blockchain?

by Daniel B. Simmons



If you've been watching the news lately, particularly as it relates to finance, you've no doubt seen or heard the term "blockchain" thrown around once or twice. You may have heard some prescient analysts predict that it'll bring about a financial revolution, or even change the face of computing as we know it. Whether or not you agree with these claims, the fact remains that blockchain represents a new and revolutionary way to approach the exchange of information. In this article, we'll take a high-level look at the theory and the applications of blockchain and try to figure out why so many are excited about its potential.

Any discussion about blockchain must begin with the first known application of the protocol: bitcoin. Bitcoin, although originally the purview of coders and tech enthusiasts, has now solidly entered popular nomenclature. Bitcoin is a cryptocurrency, a digital or virtual form of currency. Bitcoin is made up of a balance of ones and zeros in digital "wallets" that has been deemed to have enormous value online. By itself, this is nothing special: people have been buying, selling, and trading digital assets for many decades now. It is the decentralized network on which bitcoin transactions are handled that makes it unique, a network that uses the blockchain as its very backbone.

To illustrate the blockchain protocol in action, let's walk through a typical bitcoin transaction. First off, it must be understood that the bitcoin network, and blockchain-based networks in general, are

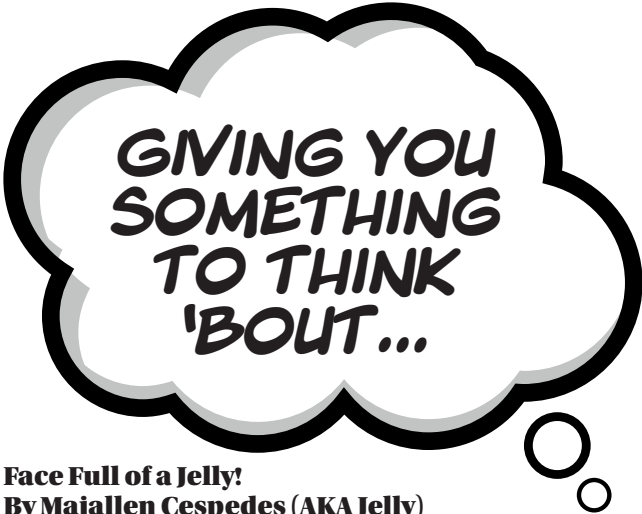
completely decentralized, meaning that no bank, government, or entity controls the account information for the users on the network; instead, everyone controls the information via a continuously updated public ledger. This ledger holds a recorded history of all the transactions processed on the network to date. These transactions are entered into the ledger in "blocks," or groups of transactions that have been gathered together and processed by "miners." Bitcoin miners are users on the network who have agreed to use their computing power to process and verify transactions. These miners are in turn rewarded with bitcoin for each block they help process. Once a block of transactions is verified, it is "chained" to the previous block and propagated to all users on the network. Consensus is the name of the game here and only users whose local version of the ledger agrees with the majority can send and receive bitcoin.

And there you have it in a nutshell. A blockchain consists of three main components: distributed data (in the form of a ledger, record, or database), a secure means of verifying and updating said data, and a mechanism for chaining the current state of the data to previous blocks. Decentralization means that there is no single point of failure or attack by which the network can be compromised. As we've witnessed many times in the recent past, a single bank, website, or financial institution can be compromised, leaving all their users' funds and assets in jeopardy. Stealing from a blockchain-based network like bitcoin involves not only compromising most nodes on the network, but also going back and altering previous blocks on the blockchain to make your fabricated version of the ledger consistent. Both tasks are prohibitively difficult and only get harder as the network grows.

In a world where banks get hacked, financial companies implode, and governments topple, having a monetary system that can survive that doesn't seem like a

bad idea. However, cryptocurrency is but one of the many applications envisioned for blockchain. Blockchain has been applied from everything to crowdfunding to eBay-like auction sites. There are also initiatives like Ethereum that seek to decentralize the very act of computation itself. Instead of hosting an app or website on a centralized server, Ethereum boasts the ability to run any program conceivable on the Ethereum network itself. The Ethereum network is fueled by "ether," a cryptocurrency much like bitcoin in which application developers pay to have their code executed on the network.

The decentralization, privacy, and security that blockchain offers have many people excited for its potential to take control of our economy away from the government and puts it back into the hands of the people. Others are convinced that without the backing of governments and authorities, the technology and applications that blockchain fuels can topple at a moment's notice. Regardless of the debate surrounding blockchain, the market has spoken. As of this writing, bitcoin has soared to a record value exceeding \$6000 per coin, overtaking every publicly traded stock save Warren Buffett's Berkshire Hathaway. Both bitcoin and Ethereum have a combined market capitalization of over \$130 billion, and show no signs of slowing down, not to mention the myriad of other currencies like Ripple and Litecoin that are seeing steady gains as well. No matter what your philosophical leanings, it seems like blockchain is destined to be an important part of the future.



GIVING YOU SOMETHING TO THINK 'BOUT...

Face Full of a Jelly!
By Majallen Cespedes (AKA Jelly)

Hey guys! It's Jelly! I feel like we haven't talked in a long time! But here I am, new and improved as they say, giving you something to think about.

During the time we have been apart, I truly believe that I've changed GREATLY as a person. My outlook on life, my level of maturity, my relationship with God, my way of thinking, how I handle stressful situations, pretty much everything, has changed for the better. Also, in my newfound maturity, I've come to realize that you will never succeed, be great, or receive any blessings when you look down on others, especially those with limitations or special needs. Everyone is equal regardless of their outward appearance or perceived limitations, but kids can be cruel, and if you are one such kid, I hope this article gives you something to think about, and hopefully change your outlook on those with differences.

In this article I will be sharing my experience as a LINK. A LINK is a student who spends time with other students with disabilities to support their classroom integration by being a tutor, academic coach, role model, and friend. I find it interesting that, as a LINK, the benefit of my position was supposed to be primarily for the student with a disability, when in fact I found this experience so rewarding that I too was the one to benefit!

I have been involved in the LINK program since the 6th grade. I've wholeheartedly enjoyed my experience and I truthfully love helping others, not only as a LINK but as a friend. Being a LINK has completely changed my outlook on people with disabilities. They are beautiful human beings and are no different from you and I, they just simply have a different way of doing things we consider "normal." Everyone has their own definition of the word "normal" and we throw the word around like it has an exact definition which is relatable in all circumstances, but it doesn't and it isn't. This 6-letter word should not define anyone. I have been lucky enough to have many rewarding experiences during my interactions with Patrick, my LINK student. One thing that I've noticed is passion for Bill Nye, the Science

Guy. I believe it's a beautiful thing to see the look on one's face when they're talking about the things that they love. Another rewarding experience is seeing Patrick's growing initiative and effort while doing his work. Patrick loves to ask his Earth Science teacher questions. Whenever he doesn't understand or wants further clarification, he asks questions. This has made me feel comfortable to do the same when I need help, something that I would have never become comfortable to do without Patrick. I love to see that he cares about the material and that he isn't simply there just because he has to be.

With all of the great joys of being a LINK, there are most definitely some rough patches. Sometimes it can be frustrating while working with Patrick because he can be very distant at times and a bit uncooperative. But as time has progressed, we've worked on these things and have made great improvements. I do my best to stay patient and try to make the learning experience as comfortable and smooth as possible and remind Patrick that although this may seem like a lot of work, it'll be worth it when he graduates (one of Patrick's favorite lines is "So... I have to do this or I won't graduate?")

Being a LINK has definitely altered the way I see people with disabilities. I've learned to never judge something that you have no understanding of and that being a LINK isn't just about making school work easier, it's about making life easier. I've learned about being a true friend and a shoulder to lean on. During my short time in high school, I've noticed that people judge other people without knowing what it's like to live their life, or to go through and experience the things that they do. There's so much more to a person than what you see on the outside. Not excluding myself because I'm guilty of being quick to judge others too, but this is something that needs to stop. We are privileged and blessed to live the lives that we live, but it all could be snatched away in a heartbeat. So enjoy others' company, appreciate them, and make them feel like the beautiful, equal, and blessed individuals that they are because if it were you, you would want to be treated the same.

JUST SOMETHING TO THINK 'BOUT!

Antonia Dillon

Building her business one Bin at a time!

By Martti C. Peeples



One will never know how one's personal life experience can lead to the creation of new ventures. This is exactly what happened to Antonia Dillon. When her 101-year-old grandfather became ill and it was left to Antonia's mother to pack up his home, Antonia had an idea come to her: start your own business. Take a leap of faith.

And why not? This would not be out of character for her. Antonia grew up in Southfield and attended Southfield-Lathrup High School. After graduating, she went on to the University of Michigan, where she received her B.A. in Psychology with a minor in African American Studies. She's the only child from her parents and although they divorced when Antonia was 5, this event did not break up Antonia's family unit. Every Sunday her parents came together as a family and had dinner. Her parents attended all of her events and kept her grounded. Antonia will tell you of this experience, "I was and still am very blessed and privileged to have a childhood like that."

After graduating from U of M, Antonia spent the next 12 years working in corporate advertising for many companies such as General Motors, Walmart, Com-

cast, and Microsoft. But as the years went on, Antonia started to feel more depleted than invigorated. Antonia has always had a passion for helping people but she just didn't know in what capacity she could help, until the day she was with her mother watching her put her grandfather's things away. "Watching my mom try to arrange a storage unit for his things made me realize that traditional storage is one of the last industries that is not consumer-facing at all! They don't call it 'you-haul' for nothing!" she says. Antonia was onto something, and as the wheels kept spinning, she thought about valet service, which traditional storage companies do not offer.

Traditional storage companies don't allow for a lot of personalization. Sometimes you're rushed and don't have enough time to properly select the storage unit size or company, and as a result, you pay for space you'll never fill up, or find yourself with a lack of access to your things. "I felt strongly that I wanted to own a business, but I didn't have a 'passion' about anything in particular," Antonia says. So she did some research and then it happened... Binefit was born.

Her concept is simple: why pay for space you're not using? She also wanted to personalize her services. Binefit is a valet storage company, which means they come to their customers' homes or businesses to pick up items for storage. Binefit is essentially storage and moving in one.

You contact Binefit, select the bin you need from a variety of sizes, and the bins are delivered to you. You pack what you need into the bins, and after you're done, you arrange a pickup day when your bins will be collected and stored. Instead of paying for square footage, you're paying for bin sizes. Bins of varying size and price provide great savings to the consumer. And how do customers keep track of their belongings? Antonia has created an

online virtual inventory for each bin. For example, you have packed away some fall and winter clothing. The seasons are changing and you want your winter bin. You can go online and request to have that bin delivered to you. This beats rambling through layers of boxes, unpacking unnecessary items, and spending time traveling to your unit. This truly sounds like a "binefit" to me!

Antonia has found other ways to make Binefit work for her. With the support of her husband and parents, she can arrange her work schedule around the important things in her life, like family. She no longer has to feel rushed to get her children off to school and can have her own down time. She says she is very busy as basically a one-woman show. She has assistance from a cousin, Rose, and some helpers to move bins, but everything else is on Antonia's shoulders. She says may have underestimated how busy she would be building Binefit bin by bin (and she now even offers some furniture storage), but she says would not change a single thing.

Iyanla Vanzant has said, "The life you want is on the other side of the labor pains it takes to birth it." Antonia's family is very enthusiastic and overjoyed with her building up her business. The road may get busy, but sometimes you have to become uncomfortable in order to become comfortable.

Antonia is also looking to expand her business into Ann Arbor and the Flint area, along with possibly becoming a franchise. She has made it this far with the perfect ingredients: creativity, instinct, and love of family. Antonia may be on her way to birthing her next chapter.

Antonia Dillon is definitely building her business one bin at a time.

To learn more about Binefit Storage, please visit www.binefitstorage.com or follow Binefit on Facebook.

Jewel of Wisdom

A Million Reasons Why ...

"The two most important days in your life are the day you were born and the day you find out why." --Mark Twain

How profound are the words of Mark Twain if you take the time to consider their meaning.

Let's dissect, and delve a little deeper, beginning with the first half of the quote: "The two most important days in your life are the day you were born...". Stop right there ... "THE DAY YOU WERE BORN!"

I pause here and place emphasis on this point because I think we all generally take the day we were born somewhat for granted. It is understandable, and I am guilty of it myself given that, after all, we are one of a billion others occupying the time/space continuum. Besides, other than when we learned about the "birds and bees" in middle school or high school, who has really given much thought to the meaning of our conception anyway??

Okay, well, pay attention... and if you don't mind, let me be a little technical and just remind you of the biological facts involved here, making your conception not only monumental, but also a great statistical feat, to state it mildly!

So... the abbreviated story of this miracle of life is as such...

A woman is born with 1-2 million eggs. At the time of ovulation, one of these eggs travels through the fallopian tubes to the uterus. During male/female intercourse, when the male organ finds its release, approximately 100 million to 300 million sperm cells are in a race to reach the egg. But wait, that's not the most amazing part... the amazing part is that you are the result of the ONE that made it! Even if you are a twin, triplet, or quadruplet, you get my point! Can you truly appreciate the significance of this fact?

Okay... so when you're ready, let's give some attention to the second part of the quote. The other most important day in a person's life is stated to be "the day you find out why" (you were born).

My first thought when I read this, is that many an unfortunate soul, whether young or old, either does not yet know the answer to that question, or is not living a fulfilling life of purpose and passion. For some it may be simply that they are distracted by the "rat race," the stressors of the daily grind and the struggle to maintain the status quo of work, family, material possessions, etc. For others it may be the lack of belief and faith that what they desire to be, do, or have is possible for them. Or it could be

the fear of the psychological effects of trying, and yet still meeting with failure nonetheless. This fear thus prevents them from ever initiating action in the direction of their dreams.

I feel that many of us, at some time in our lives, can relate to these thoughts and emotions, and may even be struggling in this regard as we speak: unhappy, unfulfilled, just existing, not yet even knowing our true purpose, or simply not living in accordance with our true purpose.

For this reason, please allow me to gift you with the following precious Jewels of Wisdom...

It is my belief, from observation, study, the application of acquired information and knowledge, and thus my life experiences as a whole, that there is a formula from which is derived the substance and sustenance of life:

Knowing thyself: what you want to do, be, and have.

Faith and belief that what you desire is possible because there is something bigger, greater, so extraordinary, transformative, and all-powerful at work on your behalf.

Vision: seeing vividly, in full color, and with such great detail, that you can feel what it is like to do, have, and to experience what you desire most. This energy will transcend and transform your life.

Action: acting on inspired thought, acting on faith. Acting in spite of not knowing what to do, or how to do it because there is no wrong way, there is no one way... all paths will lead you to your field of dreams if you trust and believe, and know that by divine law and providence IT IS SO.

May all your dreams come rushing to meet you!



Peace & Love.

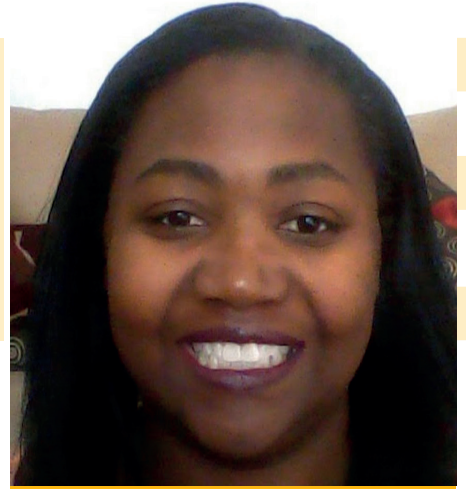
Sajjiah Parker

THRI

Melissa Love:

Candle Maker by Day, Writer by Night

By Martti C. Peeples



Melissa Love is a multi-talented Detroit entrepreneur with three novels to her credit as well as her own candle business. A product of the Detroit public school system, she graduated from Northwestern High School. Soon after, she went on to further educate herself in the medical field. She is a surgical technician and has been in the field for a number of years. She has also worked for the prison system and has been in her current place of employment for 11 years. This proud mother of three grew up around Lee Place near Clairmount and Rosa Parks.

Melissa has always loved reading, and after experiencing some urban fiction writing, she began writing her own novels. She describes her writing as “a way for me to be creative in telling compelling stories and memorable characters of lies and deceptions.” The catchy titles of Melissa’s books include *A Wife’s Denial*, *Love on Death Row*, and *A Scandalous Surprise*, just to name a few. She also is a contributing author to the book *Sorority Ties*. All of these books can be found on Amazon. Melissa started out self-publishing until she was able to find a publishing company.

Of her experience self-publishing, Melissa says, “self-publishing is very hard and nerve wracking. There is a lot of energy to putting a book together, along with being faced with doing my own promoting.”

Melissa’s pros and cons of self-publishing include:

The pros: You can publish your book anytime you want to. You can set your own price

for your book. You get higher royalties if your book sells. You hold all the rights to your book. You can make any changes you want, from the cover to the content.

The cons: You have to pay someone to edit your manuscript and get a cover design for your book. To have a great book that stands out, don’t try to do it yourself. First impression is everything! Readers do judge a book by its cover. If you don’t have a big publishing company behind you, you’ll have to push harder to get your book out there. Traditional books will make it on the big store shelves and authors will get an interview by a website or a magazine with a large audience. But a publishing company will also take a good 40 to 60% of your book sales.

In between working in the medical field and her writing, Melissa also found herself creating candles. Bored with the usual scented candles on the market, Melissa started to develop her own scents and styles. She would make candles for her friends, family, and co-workers as holiday gifts. Soon the requests for orders started pouring in. Her candles are unique for their “wickless” design and beautifully crafted melts. Melissa says, “I wanted to create products that are visual and fun to look at.”

In 2012, Melissa launched her first Esty online store. She has also created “swag bags” for various events and artists. With so many orders pouring in, she has enlisted her daughter to help with packaging and labeling her candles for shipping. I asked Melissa if her daughters have been bitten by the entre-

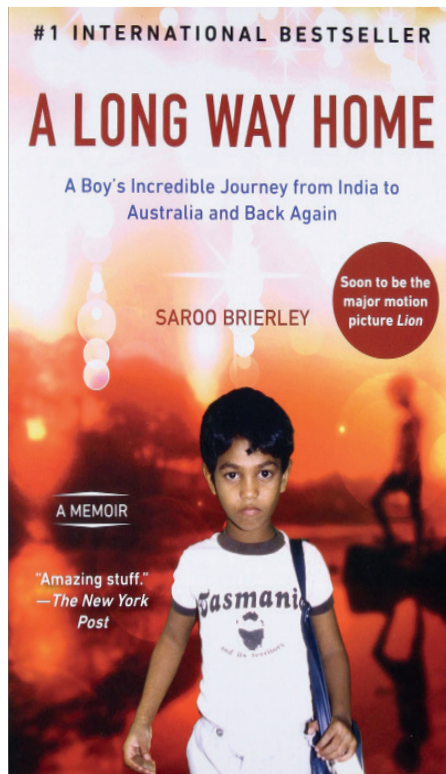
preneurship bug. She said no, but they do enjoy helping Mom in some aspects of the business.

Melissa remains connected to her old neighborhood and returns every year for the annual Lee Place gathering.

She is a woman on a mission, with a drive to turn two passions into an enterprise. Many of her co-workers have purchased her books (which some request to be in) as well as her candle melts.

Keep an eye out for Melissa Love; you may find yourself engulfed one night reading one of her novels by candlelight, with love on your mind.

REVIEW: *A Long Way Home*



Many Americans certainly know about and experience poverty and hardship here at home, but the desperate, frightening nature of the poverty in third-world populations can be more of an abstract concept, until one encounters a book like *A Long Way Home*. It's the story of five-year-old Saroo, who lives in abject poverty with his family in central India. He and his siblings (brothers Guddu and Kallu and sister Shekila) face a hunger every day that leaves their bellies hollow and protruding, and they forage for food where and when they can. There aren't social services in little villages in India (or even in the big cities), so they are on their own. Their mother Kamla loves them deeply, but their father is absent, save for the very occasional bone he throws them to buy shoes or some other necessity.

The story's flashback starts with an adult Saroo recounting what happened when he was five years old and already the primary caregiver of his younger sister, Shekila. The two were often left alone for long stretches because their mother had no choice but to leave them while she went to work. Saroo's

two older brothers were at an age at which they wanted to get out and be mischievous and find food and freedom, so that left a five-year-old as the primary caregiver. One night, Saroo convinces Guddu (against Guddu's better judgement) to allow him to tag along to the train station to hustle for money and food. What happens that night begins Saroo's long journey away from his family to a new family in Australia, and, finally, to a miraculous reunion years later. The portrayal of this young boy—with his distinct voice, vivid memories, longings, love, and resilience—is a powerful force in the book; even as the adult Saroo looks back, the boy Saroo is present.

The wonder of the story is that Saroo survives being separated from his family at age five (after falling asleep on the train that will take him the 1800 miles away, to Calcutta) and thrives in life, if not for the underlying heartbreak that stays with him. He is illiterate and can't communicate at the orphanage he is put into after weeks of being on the dangerous streets of the city, so no one knows his full name or where he is from. Eventually, a couple from Australia adopts him. The vivid details of his childhood, both in India and in Australia, are captivating and full of child-like wonder.

Here is an excerpt from the portion of the book that outlines his adoption and acclimating to life in Australia with the Brierleys:

My transition to life in another country and culture wasn't as difficult as one might expect, most likely because, compared to what I'd gone through in India, it was obvious that I was better off in Australia. Of course, more than anything I wanted to find my mother again, but once I'd realized that was impossible, I knew I had to take whatever opportunity came my way to survive. Mum and Dad were very affectionate, right from the start, always giving me lots of cuddles and making me feel safe, secure, loved, and above all, wanted. That meant a lot to a child who'd been lost and had experienced what it was like for

no one to care about him. I bonded with them readily, and very soon trusted them completely. Even at the age of six (I would always accept 1981 as the year of my birth), I understood that I had been awarded a rare second chance. I quickly became Saroo Brierley.

Sue and John Brierley, the young couple from Tasmania, Australia, provide a good life for Saroo for the next 20-plus years. But as a young adult, with the invention of things such as Google Earth and Facebook, Saroo is able to connect with his lost family 25 years later—those who still remain, that is. The book also outlines and parallels the two amazing women who love him: his birth mother, who worked so hard (and must've suffered so much not knowing what happened to him), and Sue, who herself was a WWII refugee from Hungary. All in all, the book is a fascinatingly detailed account of this young boy's life journey. The movie *Lion*, which was based on the book, is a good adaptation, but the voice of the little boy Saroo really shines through in the pages of this one-of-a-kind true story.

Laurie Fundukian

FOON

CREATED.



By Diana Creel Elarde

If I could have captured that moment, held it as exactly as it was, I would have done so. But time, the hours, days and years, have surely altered it. Perhaps making it even better than what it was.

There was something more in the words she spoke when she said, you are hired. Something which seemed to open what had been shut for so long; the door to possibilities. Clearly, I could see myself in a long, long hallway and all the doors letting light into the hall, all options I have never had in my life.

I held those words like a badge you place on your chest, close to your heart. A badge which gave me entrance to a life that had longed been denied to me.

It allowed me to dream, dared me to know how my life would be different than ever before. It separated me from what had been, brought me to what now could be. And in hope it whispered, now is your time, your place.

It didn't let me down, didn't let me fail. It brought me more than I could describe. It brought new words, bold words, that represented who I became. Competent-Resourceful - Dependable. I could see how those words were me now, how others saw me through different eyes than before. Slowly, I began to accept those words, understanding the symbols in those words, what they meant to the world, to me.

Now I sit with others, and say to them the words you are hired. You are now part of a common goal, a movement. It matters that you show up. You can make a difference now. And in making that difference, you can carve your life, your work. Some are frightened by the words, they move in small ways or not at all. They may even cast the opportunity aside, leaving it on the ground to whither, to die. Others grow before my very eyes; they stand in dignity, in the fullness of their commitment to their lives. I live for that time, that moment when they become.

It is said we should not measure our self-worth by standards outside ourselves. I should feel as good about who I am with or without external accomplishments. Does that then mean I shouldn't let a job, a title define me? Validate me? Become me?

Yet I don't accept it is the title itself which lead to my self-worth. I believe it is about the energy, the effort we create within ourselves when we have work, when we have purpose. The gifts I use, which say who I am, what I am, for me flourish with a purpose beyond what used to be a worthless day. The job, gave me a vehicle to expand, to try my ideas, to push wide my world at my will and measure the expansiveness of it all through my eyes and the eyes of others.

And so for me, what gave me dignity, I now give to others. I help provide the energy, direction and the vehicle to be more, to give more to the world.

That moment, that defining moment so long ago, still lives within me. Every day it breathes and brings life into me. I wake with who I am who I have become. And in the aftermath of a long day, I reflect in gratitude of both small and large accomplishments and gifts which come to me. In peace I retire with my evening song of praise feeling life, life is good; very good.

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Inspiring & Aspiring from the Heart

By Denise Ervin RN,
BSN, NC-BC



What does it mean to inspire and aspire from the heart? Why is it an important part of our overall health and well-being? I started to incorporate heart-centered work into my nursing practice over 17 years ago, and the results have been life-changing. As a nurse, my first instinct is always to teach, so let's start with the basics.

Our body is made up of two hearts, the physical heart and the spiritual heart. The physical heart is about the size of a fist and has four chambers and four valves. Its purpose is to pump blood to our vital organs. As we all know, the physical heart is a major organ and is vital to life. The spiritual heart is the energy center and our intuition. One must feel the spiritual heart. You may hear people say that someone is warm-hearted or kind-hearted or that they have a good heart. We talk about the spiritual heart less than we do the physical heart; however, the spiritual heart plays a major role in our overall health and well-being.

Now let's define the difference between inspire and aspire. According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, the definition of "inspire" is "to influence, move, or guide by divine or supernatural inspiration." The definition of "aspire" is "to seek to attain or accomplish a particular goal." In and of themselves, these words are very powerful, but if we apply these concepts to our hearts, the effect will be immeasurable.

When our heart is inspired, we allow it to influence, move, or guide our actions in life. When we aspire from the heart, we direct our spiritual heart's hopes and desires towards achieving a goal.

How can these two concepts benefit both hearts? I often explain to clients that the spiritual heart requires positive energy to flow freely, just as the physical heart needs the blood to flow freely. When the blood and energy are moving through our body with ease, the risk for "blockages" is less. When someone has a physical blockage in their heart, they may need stents or open-heart surgery. But what can we do when energy is "backed up" in the spiritual heart? How do we open blockages caused by stress or unresolved emotions? Heartfulness Meditation is a tool that we can use to keep that positive energy moving.

Why is Heartfulness Meditation so important? Research shows that stress causes inflammation in our bodies. This inflammation can increase our risk for cardiovascular disease and stroke. Practices using mind-body interventions such as meditation may be clinically useful in the prevention of cardiovascular disease. Also, according to a 1998-2007 clinical trial, meditation provides a significant reduction in the risk of mortality, myocardial infarction, and stroke in coronary heart disease patients. These changes were associated with lower blood pressure and psychosocial stress factors. Cardiologist Dr. Mimi Gualleri, in *The Heart Speaks: A Cardiologist Reveals the Secret of Healing*, states that prevention is the best intervention. Prevention includes healthful macro and micro nutrition, adequate sleep and restoration, environmental protection, energy system balance, spiritual and social balance, emotional and mental balance, stress resilience and physical activity.

Dr. Deepak Bhatt, a cardiologist and professor at Harvard Medical School, states, “Meditation can be a useful part of cardiovascular risk reduction, along with diet and exercise.” It has also been shown to decrease stress and anxiety.

The journal *Circulation: Cardiovascular Quality and Outcomes* ran a study in 2012, in which 201 people with coronary heart disease were asked to either a) take a health education class promoting better diet and exercise, or b) take a class on transcendental meditation. Researchers followed up with participants for the next five years and found that those who took the meditation class had a 48% reduction in their overall risk of heart attack, stroke and death.

The brain function during meditation has been documented using electrophysiology, single photon emission computed tomography, PET, and functional magnetic resonance imaging. Results differ somewhat, possibly owing to the use of different forms of meditation, but in general show increased signals in brain regions related to regulation and attentional control, with increased release of dopamine.

To respond to the demands of being a bedside nurse and nurse coach, I had to develop a

self-care practice. The health of my physical and spiritual heart has been of utmost importance. I utilize Heartfulness Meditation, exercise, mindfulness and a balanced diet to treat the various health issues that I have encountered and to prevent additional health imbalances.

I encourage you begin to look at your hearts in a different light. Both are vital and need unique attention. Meditation and prevention practices will instill balance within our bodies, reduce systemic inflammation, calm the brain and create more awareness about our own health and healing.

finding steady ground

Strengthening our spirits to resist and thrive in these times.



1. I will make a conscious decision about when and where I'll get news — and what I'll do afterwards.



2. I will get together with some people face-to-face to support each other and make sure we stay in motion.



3. I will pray, meditate, or reflect on those I know who are being impacted by oppressive policies, and extend that love to all who may be suffering.



4. I will read, listen to, or share a story about how others have resisted injustice.



5. I will be aware of myself as one who creates.



6. I will take a conscious break from social media.



7. I will commit to sharing with others what's helping me.

findingsteadyground.com

THRIVE

UBER Tales: Insights from the Outsider

By Eric C. Williams



By day, I'm a law professor in Detroit. The pay is decent, but I'm also the father of a daughter in (a very expensive) college. So, by night I'm an Uber driver. Have you ever wondered what kind of things you see and hear driving around metro Detroit? Well...

Pick up location: Fowling Warehouse, Hamtramck, MI | Drop Off: Grosse

Pointe, MI | Passengers: 2 white males, mid-twenties.

First, about Fowling Warehouse. I've never been inside but by all accounts it's fun. Apparently it's bowling with a football. The type of thing you do with a beer in hand. So, naturally, my passengers had been drinking. Not as much as the prior passengers, but they'd definitely had a drink or 3. Buzzed. That's my favorite kind of passenger because they're at the point where they just don't give a damn but they're not drunk enough to vomit in my car. One was a bit argumentative with his friend, but nothing outrageous.

The pick up location, Hamtramck, is an interesting place. It's a city located completely within the city of Detroit. It's diverse*, with a large Polish population and significant Albanian, Black, Asian, Ukrainian, and Arab communities. It also has great music venues and food. Of late, the Muslim population has grown, which, as you might expect, has caused some issues. I like eating there because there are so many places that serve halal meat and it's closer to my house than Dearborn. Oh, yeah, I'm Muslim. If you don't know me, you probably wouldn't have guessed that. My passengers certainly didn't have a clue because they proceeded to have the following conversation:

Passenger 1: "Did you hear about that new mosque?"

Passenger 2: "Where? Hamtramck? Figures. That's what they do."**

Passenger 1: "Yeah dude, I hear it's gonna be as big as the one in Dearborn. There's no way the city should allow that."

Passenger 2: "They probably will." Turning to me, "No offense if you're Muslim."

Now, I have no idea why he decided to suddenly ask me about my religion. Maybe I look like a typical Muslim.

Maybe it was just habit. You know, the reflex of looking around to make sure nobody in the room is part of the group that's about to be the punchline of your joke. Unless of course you're Donald Trump, in which case you don't have time to be PC about your racism/sexism/etc.

In retrospect, I wish I'd kept quiet, just so I could hear how far they'd go. Instead, I replied, "As a matter of fact, I am Muslim."

Nothing as delicious as the awkward silence of Grosse Pointers. One Mississippi, Two Mississippi, Three Mississippi...

Passenger 2: "My wife is Black."

Wtf?

I can't recall many details of the conversation from that point on. It lost all coherence and I wasn't a participant. It was like listening to the audio of a horror movie you've seen a thousand times before. The part where the main characters decide to split up and explore the strange house alone or say "Candyman" or "Bloody Mary" three times in the mirror. You want to scream, "Stop! Don't move! Don't say another word!" But they do it anyway.

I can't remember specifics, but I do recall hearing the following:

- The mother of Passenger 2's wife used the N-word A LOT, but he never did. (I was asked my opinion on the use of the N-word in rap music. I pretended I didn't hear the question.)
- Passenger 2 was really comfortable around Black people.
- Passenger 1 believes that Black people use the N-word like "dude" or "bro" so it doesn't mean anything bad when they say it. (I was asked my opinion. Again, I pretended I didn't hear the question.)
- Immigrants contribute a lot to society. Really, they really really do.
- Islam is a great religion.
- Detroit is a great city.

Maybe it was cruel to just let them go on and on. Maybe I should have said something to put them at ease. That thought actually crossed my mind. But while that thought was meandering across my frontal lobe, we pulled up in front of their destination and they quickly departed. Sigh. I'm sure if I'd had a little longer I'd have been nice and said something appropriate. Probably.

Oh well. I made \$9.38.

* Ancestry Groups as reported in 2000 Census: Polish 10.9% | Black 5.1% | Yugoslav 5.5% | Arab (Excluding Iraqi and Lebanese) 9.2% | Asian Indian 5.4% | Ukrainian 3.2% | German 1.9% | Albanian 2.8% | Bangladeshi 19.7% | Irish 2.2% | Italian 1.8% | Russia 1.4% | American 1.1% | French (excluding the Basques) 0.8% | Lebanese 0.7% | Scottish 0.7% | Mexican 0.2% | Pakistani 11.0% | Macedonian 0.5% | Iraqi 0.5%

** The proposed mosque was actually slated for Sterling Heights, not Hamtramck.

<https://60us393.wordpress.com/>

IN COLLEGE AND HOMELESS

by Malinda Holmes and Julia Henrikson

In our cultural narrative, homelessness is something that happens to runaway youth or adults – the picture of homelessness among college students doesn't compute. But it exists, despite there being a dip in the data available around the issue.

Several studies carried out in 2015 and 2016 indicated that sizable numbers of students at community colleges, public universities and even at some private universities, struggle to pay rent and utilities. These studies also suggested that housing insecurity among students may be as high as 50 percent. According to the Wisconsin Hope Lab, rates of homelessness among community college students is 29 percent for former foster-care students and may be as high as 13 percent for the overall community college population.

Here, two college students of color in Washtenaw County, Shawntae Harris and Bethany C., speak to Groundcover about their experiences with homelessness. Both became homeless during their undergraduate studies and both want to discuss the problematic invisibility of homeless college students.

Shawntae moved out of her parents' home when she was 18 to escape family problems and she resettled in an apartment with her then-partner. After beginning her undergraduate studies at the University of Michigan-Flint (U-M), Shawntae ended her relationship and faced housing insecurity as a result. Unable to return home, she lived with a friend in Washington, D.C. for two months before returning to Michigan.

Although Shawntae was able to find housing for a short period of time, she was laid off in 2008, evicted twice and forced to return to the all-too familiar rituals of couch surfing and living in her car. "You'll sleep anywhere when you don't have anywhere to sleep," Shawntae says.

Despite the fact that college students are more likely to be at risk of homelessness than the general population, colleges are ill-equipped to aid those experiencing homelessness. Now a master's student studying higher education student affairs, Shawntae has dedicated herself to helping students who are struggling.

"[When you are homeless] it is your normal, but it doesn't have to be," Shawntae declares. She intimately understands the difficulties of poverty and hopes to channel her own story to aid those in similar circumstances.

Bethany, an undergraduate sociology student at Eastern Michigan University (EMU), faced a strikingly similar situation during her sophomore year. After breaking up with her partner, with whom she had shared an apartment, she spent four months without a home. Because of family problems and a job commitment, she was unable to return to the west side of Michigan where she grew up.

After the instability of bouncing between the homes of friends, her boss and even strangers, Bethany was faced with the sobering reality of identifying as someone experiencing homelessness. "It was only [for] a short time but it had real consequences," she says.

One common and profound theme resounds through these two women's stories. "People assume that homelessness looks a certain way [but] it can happen to anyone," says Shawntae. "Don't make assumptions about what it looks like."

Both women are well aware of the stigma associated with poverty. "People think of homelessness as being dirty, sleeping outside, begging – which are totally valid things – but people can be homeless for so many different reasons," says Bethany, when asked about how being homeless influenced her identity. "I'm still a person."

Bethany also speaks about internalizing that stigma and letting her pride get in the way of asking for help or accessing resources. "I should have gone to a food bank or shelter, but I didn't because of my pride," she admits. "I want people to realize that you shouldn't be ashamed to use a food pantry. [Homelessness] wasn't something I did to myself. People don't intentionally become homeless. It was a situation I never, ever would have expected myself to be in."

Although state figures show that over 66,000 Michigan people were homeless in 2016, there is still a widespread image of what poor people look like and many assumptions about why they are poor. In her book *Hand to Mouth: Living in Bootstrap America*, Linda Tirado explains that, "Because our lives seem so unstable, poor people are often seen as being basically incompetent at managing their lives. That is, it's assumed that we're not unstable because we're poor, we're poor because we're unstable."

As Tirado understands, there is a pervasive attitude that people are poor as a result of their own decisions – not their circumstances – and that they can simply "pull themselves up from their bootstraps." However, as both Bethany's and Shawntae's life trajectories demonstrate, homelessness is not necessarily a result of poor choices, but more likely a compounding of unfortunate circumstances and a lack of resources for those facing poverty. As we take action to end homelessness and poverty, it is important that work is done that includes educating people about the causes of poverty and eradicating the shame surrounding it.

Ignorance concerning homelessness on college campuses still prevails, but there have been efforts to mitigate its effects at nearby universities. Maize & Blue Cupboard at U-M works towards two goals: providing food for those in need on campus and reducing food waste. Sourcing their food from Food Gatherers, the student organization opens its doors to students to increase food stability and decrease shame. Similarly, EMU has the Swoop's Student Food Pantry, as well as the MAGIC (Mentorship Access Guidance in College) Program, which assists students who have experienced or who are experiencing homelessness.

As these two students' stories testify, changing the face of homelessness on and off campus will require society to up the ante in two mutually dependent ways: by increasing public awareness of the struggles of those living on the economic edge and by improving access to critical resources. Communities will need to find better ways to empower economically struggling people regardless of their situation, giving them both the support and the space for self-determination. As Bethany says, "Support homeless people and don't try to change their life story. Just give them what they need."

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