



# MENTAL HEALTH & CIVILIZATION

A COMPILATION EDITED BY BEN BARKER

MENTAL  
HEALTH  
& CIVILIZATION

---

A COMPILATION

EDITED BY BEN BARKER  
JANUARY 2012 • OCCUPIED NESHNABÉ LAND

# Table of Contents

TABLE OF CONTENTS .....	i
INTRODUCTION	
by Ben Barker .....	iv
MONSTERS	
by Ash .....	1
RECIPES FOR MENTAL HEALTH	
by The CrimethInc. Ex-Workers' Collective .....	4
MY DAD, IN 1984	
by Danny Showalter .....	18
SELF-ABUSIVE THOUGHTS	
by Liana Buszka .....	22
ANGUISH OF THE AGE: EMOTIONAL REACTIONS TO COLLAPSE	
by Robert Jensen .....	25
THE PERPETUAL LONELINESS OF ABUSE: TRAGEDY AND POLITICS, OR I CAN'T DEAL WITH IT	
by Anonymous .....	27
CELEBRATE THE STAMPEDE OR STEP OUT OF IT?	
by Jan Lundberg .....	32

MEANINGLESSNESS VS. REWILDING by Urban Scout .....	35
PASSENGERS song by The Filthy Politicians .....	39
YOU DESERVE SUPPORT by Jordan Knowles .....	41
SNOW LEOPARD by Mary LA .....	48
CIVILIZED SANITY IS IMPOSSIBLE by Laurel Luddite and Skunkly Monkly .....	55
UNDERGROUND ROOTS: VISIONS FOR RESISTING MONOCULTURE AND BUILDING COMMUNITY by The Icarus Project .....	59
DECOLONIZING MENTAL HEALTH: A STORY OF SPLITTING by Ben Barker .....	63
ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS .....	67
AFTERWORD AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....	70

What we call “normal” is a product of repression, denial, splitting, projection, introjection and other forms of destructive action on experience. It is radically estranged from the structure of being.

—R.D. LAING, THE POLITICS OF EXPERIENCE

# Introduction

BY: BEN BARKER

THE DOMINANT CULTURE, industrial civilization, is insane. Literally. It is in direct opposition to life. We can see this by looking from any angle: an economic system based on the infinite consumption of living beings; the spiritual sickness that allows clear-cuts, rape, conquest, and oceanic dead-zones; social rewards for those who can fuck others over most efficiently. As the world burns, the destructiveness of this culture has become too clear for debate.

Consuming the living and converting them into dead products is essential to the functioning of civilization. Indeed, it is the meaning of the word “production”. Civilization as a whole can be defined by its material functioning: a culture based on the growth of cities, with cities being defined as people living more or less permanently in one place in densities high enough to require the routine importation of food and other necessities of life. It can also be described as a system that socially rewards (and requires) exploitation, domination, and atrocity. Both definitions reveal civilization’s fundamental death urge.

What is killed by civilization includes the psyches and souls of human beings. Consider, for example, the global scale of people struggling with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, Bi-Polar Disorder (at least two million people in the United States alone), Depression, and Anxiety. Consider also lives wasted in wage slavery, addiction, and apathy. Some know mental struggle more intimately than others, but the dominant culture makes all of its members sick.

This book is for those who feel, in their bones, the struggle of living in such a culture, and for those who love life and want to fight back. The numerous activists, artists, and writers who have contributed to this book also surely know this struggle. Included here is a compilation of personal stories, essays, artwork, and maps for healing, all pointing towards, and developing an answer to, this general question: what does it mean to be sane in an insane culture?

# Monsters

*By: ASH*

TO LIVE IN this world is to live amongst monsters. Hiding within the human form, many of these monsters appear normal. And in most ways, they are. Yet, it is the monster that attaches itself to the soul of a person, skewing our perceptions and altering our behavior. Fear feeds the callous nature of the monster, attacking our social natures. They easily spread amongst us in a self-replicating system that conditions the human psyche from early childhood. These monsters are keen on normalizing destruction and numbing the passions of life. The dominant culture breeds this perspective, the perspective of monsters, for they are the ones who benefit from its existence. Our monsters keep us living, working and dying at the expense of everything real.

My childhood in a world of monsters was short lived. I grew to hate humanity for what it has become on the inside, reflecting its ugliness on streetcorners and bedrooms, wildlands, classrooms, battlefields and televisions. The dark human condition affects us all, permeating every interaction and reaction.

Perhaps this hate consumed me in the later years of my youth. Animosity was appropriate, if not required. This response was natural, as was desperation and fear. How do you fight a world of monsters? How do you destroy something that is so engrained without destroying yourself?

Then came the nihilism. Why care if humanity is destroyed by it's own monsters? If the species self destructs, the Earth will continue on and be better off anyways. Hopelessness became acceptance of fate. These thoughts seemed to speak from a dark void within me. A blank place where I felt nothing, not even rage or despair.

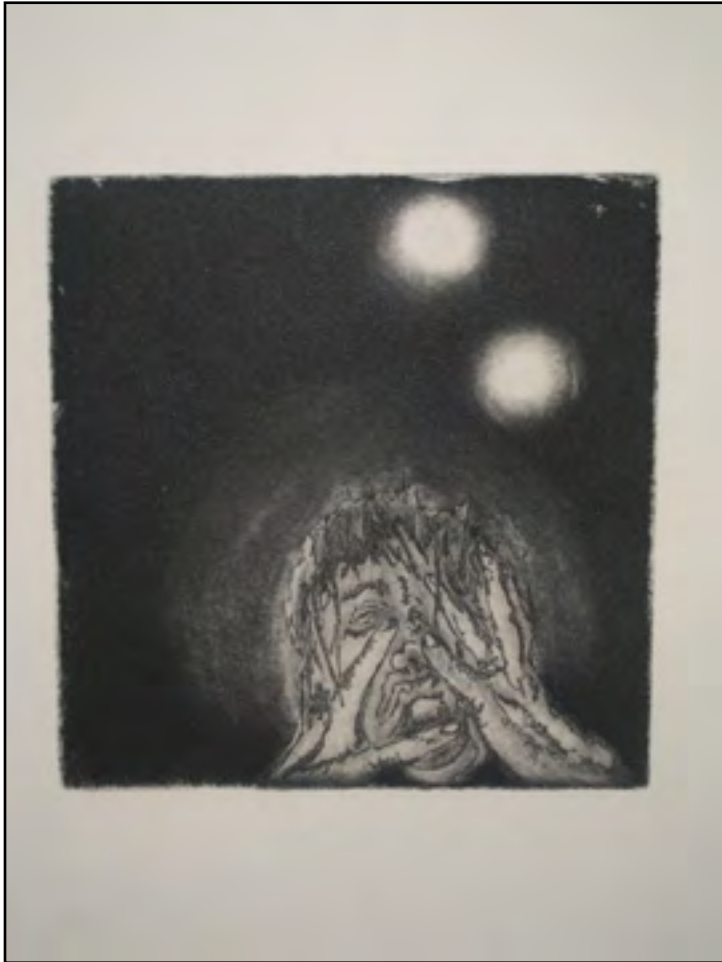
STOP...

Reality struck. I had become that which I hate. The monsters had gotten me, too. But I had caught them in the act, with their own desperate claws clutching at my soul.

You see, it's the monster mentality that makes us apathetic and misanthropic. It makes us hate each other, and ourselves. This is planted in our brains from a young age, and it's important to recognize it as an occupying perspective, rather than something innately "human." We are social creatures, endowed with a great capacity to love. And with this love comes the need to defend, the need to preserve life and

to preserve ourselves. It's a culture of death that runs a counter-current in our brains, rendering us useless and listless when faced with our own destruction.

When someone no longer respects their animal nature, or life in general, then their destructive behavior is not recognized as a problem. Without this respect, it is impossible to understand what is at stake, what can be lost. Devaluing the impact of civilization simply because "we'll die off" and "the Earth can take it" is akin to what the abuser thinks about the victim. Again, the destructive behavior falls short of some kind of threshold (death), and is therefore not seen as a problem.



Of course the earth will survive in some form or another, but this is entirely irrelevant. This says nothing of the fact that what our

species is doing is beyond fucked and it needs to stop. NOW.

If you no longer care about the survival of the species (including the health of our global ecosystem), you are no better than a monster. No better than a machine.

But, I really don't think you're a monster.

No, I don't believe you when you say extinction doesn't bother you.

There's something on this Earth that's convincing you to stay alive, isn't there?

Can you really imagine the work of this world destroyed? The course of evolution permanently diverted, a world where toxic survivors are determined by our present actions (or inaction)? Determined by "what's left" when our insatiable mouths decay on the sands of the deserts we've built?

No matter how hurt we are, no matter how much our monsters have taken hold, we are all still in love with life. We have to be, for passion is our last vestige, our last mental battleground. To lose this fight within ourselves is to become passive and detached, and that is a fate the world cannot afford.

If passion evades you, our mentors are as numerous as our monsters. Survivors are everywhere: our family and friends hardened by struggle and domestic abuse; the dandelion refusing to uproot from the sidewalk despite being surrounded by the shriveled, poisoned bodies of his fallen comrades; the elephant family retaliating for the murder of a newborn; the wren building her nest on the billboard above the freeway where her home once stood; the new parent raising a child in the same world of monsters responsible for their own torment.

This is not the time for debilitating hopelessness, apathy and nihilism to dominate the battlefield within. We must match the strength we see within each other, and exemplify what we desire in our allies. We must show our own monsters no fear, so that we may face the monsters destroying our tangible world. This is a time to fall in love. And in defense of this love, we will reveal a rage unimagined by callous monsters.

Let's show them the passionate force of being alive. Let's show them the fierceness of our our love.



# Recipes for Mental Health

BY: *THE CRIMETHINC. EX-WORKERS' COLLECTIVE*

IF YOU ARE EXPERIENCING A BREAKDOWN AT THIS MOMENT, SKIP TO THE SECTION ENTITLED “CRISIS.”

IT IS IMPORTANT to break the silence surrounding the struggles many of us face with the states of being commonly characterized as mania, depression, schizophrenia, panic disorder, and post-traumatic stress disorder. We need to establish networks of support and guidance for those who are suffering in these ways and are understandably distrustful of the psychiatric industry.

There are no correct or incorrect ways to develop a healing process. My experience, like yours, validates itself. I do not claim to be an authority on these matters, nor do I believe in institutional diagnostic treatment for mental and emotional problems. I have lived and am living through what I write about, and I offer the strategies that have helped facilitate my healing. Compare everything here to your own experience and see what resonates with you.

## YOUR BODY

When I'm at my worst, I can't feel my limbs. My skin goes to sleep; I only experience sensation if I really concentrate. I totally separate my mind from my body. When I'm in that place, I eat nothing but sugar, I never drink water, I seldom move, and I barely even notice—the lack of awareness just feeds itself. So many people in our society live this way. The behavioral patterns of self-neglect and dissociation from our bodies that many of us are taught from birth are reinforced by depression, and vice versa. We have to break these patterns. Our bodies need us! We must come back to ourselves.

A reintegration of mind and body must be the first step in a healing process. Many of us envision methods of healing consisting of hours of introspective writing, intimate conversations with trusted friends, crying, screaming, laughing, dancing, exorcism through art and music—but we can't do any of these things if we don't eat. And often, no one ever taught us how.

There has been a lot of research done about how different diets regulate neural-chemical and hormonal activity, and there are books in which you can read about this. Learning how to nourish your body is a

conscious process that demands full-time commitment. It can actually be fun to look inward and notice how each different kind of food makes you feel—it's a way to get to know yourself that most people never think of trying. Your body has likes and dislikes, just as your mind does.

It can be difficult to meet all your nutritional needs through dumpster. One solution to this problem is government food assistance. Food stamps are issued and regulated by federal, state, and local governments; if you are in a low-income bracket, you are eligible for food assistance. If you live collectively, you can get most of your produce through dumpstering or from local farmers, and have one person apply for food stamps to provide for the house's nutritional needs that can't be served by other means. If this person exceeds the income limit and gets cut off, another person can take this role, or more than one person can and you will live with great bounty and much rejoicing.

A few more tips on eating. Don't work for six hours, realize you haven't eaten, and then gorge yourself really fast. Don't get famished, fill your belly, and fill it up again as soon as there's a little room in it. It really is true what they say: multiple small servings, eaten slowly and chewed thoroughly. Extract every drop of nourishment from each bite. Don't forget to make it taste good.

Another important way to re-inhabit your body is exercise. All you have to do is get your heart rate up, break a sweat, and sustain it for twenty minutes. It doesn't matter what you do. You could take a hard bike ride, get a good pair of shoes and try some combination of walking and running, dance alone in your room, go for a vigorous hike, play drums, whatever. You will have so much more physical, mental, and emotional energy you won't even know what's going on. For this reason, it's probably best to do it first thing in the morning: it wakes you up, switches your system on, and gives you a feeling of vitality.

I can't write about health and wellness without mentioning yoga. As a practice of being present in your body yoga is indispensable. It retrains your entire system, corrects bad alignments, builds strength and flexibility, even teaches you how to breathe. Yoga schools often have free introductory classes, so you can learn a few postures and practice at home. You can get books on yoga, but it's best to learn from someone with a little experience, because if you learn a posture wrong and do it a lot you can seriously injure yourself. The principle of holism is a big part of yoga; it trains us to reintegrate body, mind, and spirit into one whole being.

One more thing about reintegration: if you work, try to find a job that allows you to be outside using your body. Those of us who

were brought up middle-class have been conditioned to believe that mental work is for the evolved and physical work is for the underlings. In addition to perpetuating class oppression, this belief encourages us to be even less present in our bodies. You can build trails for the parks department; you can do freelance construction or painting or landscaping; you can work at organic farms or be a migrant laborer. You'll learn your body's limits—believe it or not, most people never do!—and you'll exhaust yourself, which can feel really good. Even if you have to be out in the cold and the rain, it can feel more fulfilling than waiting tables, or making fancy coffee drinks for rude yuppies, or selling your plasma. Please don't sell your plasma. What a grotesque example of an exploitative industry literally sucking the life out of the poor!

#### LISTS

I have only recently discovered the power of lists. Most people I have talked to about managing depression have a really hard time just taking care of day-to-day tasks. Making a list of things I have to take care of really helps everything seem less overwhelming. Get one of those little writing pads and carry it with you wherever you go. Make a “to do” list each week. When you finish an item on the list, put a line through it—this is so gratifying. If you don't get everything on your list taken care of, just transfer the leftovers to the next list, but take the time to make a fresh list every week. If I look too much at a list I can never seem to finish, it makes me feel more depressed. It reinforces my belief that I can't ever get my act together, and then, of course, that belief manifests itself in reality. The notepad itself is a great tool. You can also use it to write down those crazy ideas and fleeting fantasies you dream up when you're gardening or working or walking around in the rain. You can use it to write haikus about that suicidal squirrel that always waits until a car is about to come before it darts across the street with an acorn in its mouth. You can draw little sketches of all the weird people on the bus. After a while it becomes a really familiar and reliable way to interact with your environment and be present in your lived experience.

More on lists: write down everything you can think of that is beautiful, that makes you feel alive, or that you simply like. It's so easy for us to forget these things when we're in our lows, and just naming them can help bring them back into our lives. Here are a few of the things on my list: moments of total silence on a city street; freshly opened lilacs; the smell of old books; drinking water when I'm really thirsty; cobalt blue glass; really good letters; the color of my skin under a full moon; wind; the color green, deep, deep green; cool velvet on

my ears and cheeks; the smell of sheep; fresh, clean socks. This is the comfort food of my life and I had more or less forgotten about it, all of it, until I wrote it all down.

In addition to the list of things to live for, compose a list of actions you know will help to pull you out if you're in a bad way. This could include anything from taking a walk around your neighborhood to eating a good meal or spending time with your dog. Give copies of this list to your close friends, so they have some idea of how to help you when you're in trouble. Another good tool to give to trusted allies is a list of warning signs that you're having a hard time. These could be subtle, like circles around your eyes from lack of sleep, or they could be blatant, such as not leaving your bedroom for days. Even if these symptoms seem obvious to you, it's important that you identify them to your friends, so they'll know to come to your aid when they first start to appear.

There is one more list that you cannot do without: a list of the people you will contact when you are having a hard time. Compose this list when you're in a relatively level headspace; if you try to do it when panic is asphyxiating you or you're paralyzed by depression, you will have a very hard time thinking of anyone, and this will make you feel ten times worse. Keep this list accessible—lamine it with packing tape and stick it to your phone or bathroom mirror, make a few copies in case you lose one. Even if it doesn't sound important now, believe me, it will be.

#### CREATE!

This almost goes without saying, but people who struggle with depression or other mental and emotional challenges can be gifted with tremendous creative energy. Perhaps when everything else seems totally out of control, people naturally gravitate to those things that can still be given order: words, notes, colors, shapes. When you are having a hard time, focusing on creative pursuits can be tremendously therapeutic. If you can shift your concentration from your feelings of panic and paralysis to arrangements of language, sound, image, or movement that express these feelings, this can enable you to regain your balance and your agency. Don't force this, or let your self-image come to hinge on your creative production—everyone gets writer's block, everyone experiences different phases of creativity—but don't underestimate its power, either.

## CRISIS

This is the best method I can think of to deal with a panic attack or similar situation. It is what I wish someone had told me to try when I was collapsing under the weight of fear and despair:

**1)** Breathe. Put your right hand on your belly and breathe into it deeply, feeling it expand.

Now exhale for twice as long as you inhale. Count the seconds if you like. This will bring your heart rate to a steady pace and will keep your system from getting overloaded with oxygen. Repeat this process. Stay conscious of your breathing. Remember: if you're still breathing, you're still alive.

**2)** If you are not at home, if you are at a show or a restaurant or are traveling and are in common space at a stranger's house, quietly leave the room. When there are lots of people around me and I feel the way you're feeling, it generally makes it worse. If you're with a friend, ask them to come with you; if you're alone, that's OK, too. Go out to the yard or into an empty room, perhaps the bathroom, somewhere you won't attract a lot of attention and where you are not in physical danger. Don't move very far. Don't cross any streets.

**3)** Now, come back to your body. You might not be able to feel your limbs, or your skin either. This is a reasonable response to fear, but returning awareness to your body will do a lot to make you feel safe. If you have someone you trust close by, ask them to hold you, very gently. Focus on their arms supporting you, keeping you safe. If you're alone, wrap your own arms around yourself.

Sit down somewhere, a soft place if you can find one, and slowly, gently, rock back and forth. Your body remembers this from when you were a baby and it will comfort you now just like it did then. Keep breathing, exhaling twice as long as you inhale.

If you are still feeling disconnected from your body, close your eyes and imagine you are filling yourself back up again. Imagine a warm, white light pouring into your feet and filling you up, moving through your legs, up your torso, into your shoulders—keep breathing—down your arms and into your hands, up your neck, into your face, all the way up to the top of your head. Now you are full. Rock gently back and forth until the rhythm naturally slows itself, until you are still and safe. Keep breathing, exhaling twice as long as you inhale.

**4)** If you're alone and still having a really hard time, find your list of people to call when you feel like this. If one doesn't answer, call the next person, and then the next one. Go down the list, all the way down and back up to the top if necessary, until you reach someone. Tell

them exactly what's going on with you.

**5)** Don't fight it. I cannot stress enough that the only way to get through difficult feelings is to let yourself feel them. Trying desperately to hold at bay everything raging inside you will only intensify the storm. You must move through these feelings. Don't deny the experience, acknowledge it for what it is. Name it: "I feel really scared right now," "I feel like the walls are closing in on me," "I feel like I'm sinking."

And just hang out with it. Don't let it consume you, don't let it be everything that you are. Recognize it for what it is, a feeling, and then let it move through you. Soften into it and be with it and it will pass through ten times more quickly and cleanly than if you clench onto it.

## IF YOU'RE EXPERIENCING A BREAKDOWN

If something in your life causes you to experience an emotional or biochemical shift, or the memory of a serious trauma begins to be released, the result can be emotional fragility, deep depression, and generalized anxiety and suspicion. If you are undergoing this, you may feel as though you are falling apart.

The aforementioned guidelines can help you maintain your overall health and wellbeing, and can bring you to a better understanding of your natural rhythms and cycles. At the same time, it can also be unhealthy to focus all your energy on preventing yourself from experiencing a breakdown.

People come undone sometimes; this is inevitable and natural. Decomposition is a vital process in the cycle of life: everything falls, returns to the soil, is broken down, and becomes a part of life's renewal. We are no different—this pattern repeats itself over and over again throughout our lives.

This might sound absurd, but there's a certain skill to falling apart—it is possible to do so gracefully and with care. This is not to suggest that the process of unraveling can be painless or easy, or that you should be able to keep your life from becoming a mess when you're going through it; but there are ways to come undone without losing sight of your needs or those of others.

It is your responsibility first and foremost to be honest and real about what is going on with you. You may not know why you feel the way you do, but that isn't the most important question. What you can know, and must always try to acknowledge to yourself, is what you are feeling. Really try to be inside the feelings that you have. I'm not

talking about developing a romantic attachment to craziness, inhibiting your ability and willingness to heal. I'm talking about eroding the resistance you have to feeling what you feel. I really believe it isn't depression itself that wrecks people's lives, but rather their responses to it: their fear of it, their unwillingness to deal with it and the problems it creates. Be honest with yourself.

The second task is to reach out to others. You may have already worked out an agreement with your trusted friends or housemates that they will act as support people for you when a situation like this arises. It is crucial that you have more than one person supporting you, especially if you are living with a romantic partner. It can be easy to develop patterns of insularity and dependence with a partner when times get tough, and if you put the entire weight of your recovery on one companion it can destroy the relationship, romantic or not. This stuff is hard work for everyone involved; don't forget that your supporters are going to need to support each other, too.

If you made lists of warning signs that you're not doing well and ways to help you feel better, these can be very helpful. When things are especially hard, it may be necessary for your supporters to be there for you around the clock. You must not refuse their help, even if it seems like they're making sacrifices for you—you'd do the same for them, wouldn't you?

It's just as vital that you be honest with your friends as it is that you be honest with yourself. Let them know what you're experiencing, how you feel, and the way their actions make you feel. If they're being patronizing, let them know. They have made a commitment to support you, and any feedback you can give them will make the process easier for everyone. If you aren't able to talk, or if you really just need to be alone, try to express this to your supporters as best you can. Don't reproach yourself for not pulling your weight, or tell yourself you're being a bad friend. Forgive yourself—you haven't done anything wrong by feeling this way. You have to focus on getting through this, and that may be hard work enough.

The capitalist machine does not permit those inside it to break down, ever. If someone does, they are ejected from its ranks and excreted into a psych ward or a welfare line or some other prison. As anarchists, we should be working to create a world in which people are allowed to fall apart when they need to. If you are in a situation in which you are falling apart and you feel you are being emotionally neglected or shut off by the people who are supposed to be your supporters, if you have made it clear that you're going through something

really serious and they are still not giving you the support you need, look for it somewhere else as soon as you can. You might want to stay at a friend's house or with family for a while until you have built up your strength a little. If you remain in a bad situation when you are experiencing a breakdown, it can prolong the process and worsen the pain. You owe it to yourself to get through this smoothly and without guilt or resentment.

Try to see your experience as something necessary and natural, as a kind of wake-up call, an opportunity to make positive, fundamental changes in the way you live your life. After all, it takes a total annihilation to find out what is truly indestructible. Ask for what you need. Be honest—let yourself feel it. You will make it through this.

#### IF YOU ARE SUPPORTING A FRIEND

As a supporter, the most vital tool available to you is empathy. Try to bring yourself back to a time when you were struggling like your friend is struggling now. Remember how it feels to need support. You will need patience, and a clear idea of what you can and cannot do, which you must communicate to your friend.

It can get really hard and really scary; there will be times when you don't know what to do, or if there is anything you can do to help this person you care about so much. Do your support work in a team—this is the best way to preserve your own mental health, and it relieves a lot of pressure. You'll need breaks from the whirlwind, and time for caring for yourself. Meet with the other supporters and check in with each other: update one another on developments, discuss things that need to change. It can really help to be organized about this.

As a supporter, some of your responsibilities might include getting your friend to eat, go outside, get enough sleep, and take care of himself in other simple ways. A person who is living through a breakdown can't be expected to have healthy habits; as healthy habits will help him get through this, you might have to be the one to initiate and insist on them, at least in the beginning. If your friend has made cards with advice on how to pull him out of despair, use them. You may need to take the initiative in getting your friend to see his counselor or go to yoga class. If he is on medication, make sure he takes his drugs at regular times each day; if he runs out, you may have to make an appointment with a psychiatrist for him. Approach his family or a friend who's known him for years and ask how they've dealt with situations like this in the past.

It is not appropriate for you to try to fix your friend—don't take

away his agency like that. He has to fix himself, that's why he's falling apart in the first place. As a supporter, it is your job to create a safe environment for your friend to experience what he needs to, not to make his problems go away.

Try to restrain yourself from judgment. Focus on your empathy, no matter how hard it gets. When things are difficult, remind yourself of your love for this person, of everything he gives you when he is well enough to give. At the same time, be careful not to overextend yourself. You will do yourself, the person you're supporting, and everyone else in your life a disservice if you take on more than you can handle. The part you play in his well-being should be a gift you give, not a burden you shoulder. Stay open and be honest, with yourself and everyone else, about your needs and limits. Keep the lines of communication open, especially if you're nearing the end of your rope.

#### MEDICATION

This is a very sensitive subject among people dealing with these problems, particularly those of us who have been through the psychiatric system. Some feel that psychoactive drugs are purely an oppressive tool of the State, others have no doubt they would have killed themselves had they not gone on medication, and are grateful for it; still others reject the idea that they need drugs to maintain mental clarity and emotional stability, while acknowledging the ways drugs have helped them reclaim their lives. It's a complex issue, one best not portrayed in black and white terms.

It's true that psychoactive drugs are the first card drawn by the mental health industry, and often are seen as a suitable replacement for therapy, lifestyle changes, and other forms of healing. This is typical of the tendency in Western medicine to treat only symptoms, not addressing the root causes of problems. Many drugs can cause side effects: emotional numbness, liver problems, nausea, insomnia, fatigue. Every individual's response to a given drug is unique.

I believe medication is a potent tool to be used when appropriate and then discarded when no longer needed. The thing is, you have to work on healing if you ever want to get off medication. I've been told repeatedly by therapists and psychiatrists that I am like a diabetic in that my brain doesn't produce certain chemicals I need to survive, so if I stop taking my medication the result will be the same as for a diabetic who stops taking insulin: I will die. Now that I have met people (including a diabetic, by the way!) who have used nutrition and a conscious lifestyle to regulate their various chemical imbalances, I

know that it is possible to live without my drugs, and am developing a program to end my dependence upon them.

No one is entirely sure how most psychoactive drugs work. Psychiatrists will tell you, for example, that some regulate the levels of serotonin in your brain; how, they don't know. One thing I can tell you from personal experience is that the drugs called SSRIs (Selective Serotonin Re-uptake Inhibitors) are bad news. They have a way of deadening people, whitewashing their emotions, drastically altering their personalities. Their effects are very hard to predict. A few of the most common SSRIs are Prozac, Celexa, Zoloft, Effexor, Lexapro, and Paxil (which has a page-long list of side effects and withdrawal symptoms, including "electric-feeling shocks throughout the body" and "scratching sounds within one's head"). Keep in mind that almost every name-brand drug also has at least one generic version, so if you're being prescribed medication be sure to ask your doctor if the drug is an SSRI. If it is, ask for something else.

Wellbutrin has worked really well for me when I've needed it. It's not an SSRI and it doesn't numb me or sap my energy the way Prozac did. I liken it to a pair of water wings: it keeps me afloat just enough to prevent me from drowning, and I have to do the rest of the work on my own. If I'm taking my medication, I don't have to worry that I'm going to collapse on the floor thinking the walls are closing in on me, or hear voices in my head telling me to kill my lover, or become consumed by a delusional panic, certain that at any moment I'm going to die and anyone who touches me will die too. It took feeling things like that every day for a few weeks for me to agree to go back on my medication, just to stabilize. It was one of the best decisions I ever made. It came from a place of self-preservation, the closest I could get to self-esteem.

I've been on Wellbutrin for a little over a year now, and have experienced no side effects. I still get depressed, I still feel all my emotions. The difference is that instead of focusing all my energy on desperately keeping myself alive, I can step back, just a little bit, and allow myself to live.

So how do anarchists with no money get prescription drugs? I can think of a few ways. The first is to ask a trusted supporter who has a job that provides health insurance if she will help you hoodwink a psychiatrist. Get to know the details of her coverage and make sure the company will pay for psychoactive drugs before you do anything else. You'll need to know how much the deductible is (how much your agent will have to pay the doctor or pharmacist before the insurance

company picks up the bill), and have this money available. Send your agent, insurance card in hand, to a psychiatrist or psychopharmacologist to report that she has been having problems. For all intents and purposes, she will be impersonating you. Coach your agent in advance about what kinds of problems you are having, including how much sleep you've been getting, how your moods have been fluctuating, what emotions you've been feeling, what you've been eating and how much, how you've been behaving socially, how well you've been able to concentrate, how you've been performing in a work environment, and how long this has been going on. You need a pretty specific set of circumstances to pull this off; it may sound far-fetched, but I know it can work because it's what I do to get my medicine.

Another idea is to get on Medicaid, or whatever public health plan is available in your state, assuming any are. You might be able to get help at a free clinic or community mental health center. If none of these resources are available to you, public hospitals have psychiatric walk-in clinics and emergency rooms, and some have crisis teams who will send a social worker or psychiatrist to your home.

#### COUNSELING

I believe in counseling because I believe in teachers and healers, and these are the roles served by a good counselor. It is strange to have a person in your life with whom you share the most intimate details of your life, to whom you expose the most frightened and broken and cruel places inside you, but with whom you have no outside social contact whatsoever. However, this can make the work you do together feel safer than it would if you were confiding in a friend. There are things I can talk about with my counselor, suicide being an example, that would be too loaded to discuss with many of my friends or any of my family. The sense of responsibility is different than in other relationships: if you stand up your counselor, you are not letting her down, only yourself. The relationship is entirely focused on you and your healing, so you don't have to fear that you are demanding too much.

My counselor is an amazing person. She listens to me, really listens. She doesn't let me get away with anything, but she never makes me feel attacked or violated. She's a queer mother who identified as an anarchist before I was even born! And she's connected to an entire community of healers and old-school activists that I never even knew existed. She works on a sliding scale, as many good counselors will, and has a really sharp critique of the psychiatric industry and all its exploitative tendencies—and she treats me with respect, as a peer.

In this society, we're never taught how to care for ourselves physically, mentally, emotionally, or spiritually. Healing is a skill we have to learn. We can wing it, teaching ourselves as so many anarchist musicians and bike mechanics have, but the stakes are higher. For those of us who suffer from serious chemical imbalances like manic depression, or are trying to recover from intense traumas like sexual abuse, the risks we take when we strike out on our own as if we already know how to heal wounds this deep are serious indeed. Counseling can equip us with tools to use in our own self-guided healing processes.

#### ACCEPT YOURSELF

Here's a crazy idea: what if all your problems, your manias and phobias and dysfunctions, are actually natural, healthy reactions to a manic, paranoid, dysfunctional world? What if you are not messed up after all, but totally normal, and the hard things you are feeling are exactly what you are supposed to be feeling under these circumstances? Instead of thinking of yourself as a broken thing that needs fixing, consider what a healthy person would do if he or she were feeling this way. Rather than enthrone your problems as permanent fixtures in your life, accepting yourself can actually help you feel more capable of self-determination and transformation. Besides, who says that everyone has to be the same to be healthy, that mental health is a one-dimensional standard by which everyone can be judged? The idea that you are flawed, that you are crazy while everybody else is sane, can be paralyzing; it also sounds suspiciously like capitalist propaganda.

Talk of so-called self-improvement can reinforce the feeling, so prevalent in this society, that who we are and what we have is never enough. It's possible to become obsessed to an unhealthy degree with taking better care of yourself, being in better physical shape, doing better introspective work, becoming a better communicator. The harder you press yourself, the further these ideals seem to recede before you. As in dieting and bodybuilding, the pursuit of perfect mental health can degenerate into self-abuse.

Just as writers, painters, and musicians experience creative blocks, all of us have times when we feel lost and jaded. Everything waxes and wanes; that natural pattern governs our lives just as it does the moon and ocean. If you feel stagnant, the worst thing you can do is dwell on your perceived insufficiencies until you have entrenched yourself in total hopelessness. When something isn't working, don't beat yourself up about it; accept that it's not working for the time being, and focus on something else.

Sometimes the most healing thing you can do is simply be still, be present and in your body without any goals or intentions or pressures. Through the eyes of our competitive culture this can look like indolence, but in truth, it's impossible to do nothing. Even if you're lying down, not thinking or hatching plans or dreaming, things are still shifting and growing inside you. Sometimes what you need is to regenerate, to let yourself rest and revive, and this can be as conscious a process as yoga or therapy or writing.

#### THE HEALING REVOLUTION

Ultimately, mental health, like freedom, desire, culture, and everything else, is not produced individually, but by entire civilizations. No one can be wholly sane in an insane world. Discussion of mental health should not be limited to those who identify as mentally ill: it concerns all of us, for everyone is crazy to some extent. Treating mental health issues as identity politics, as if it were only a question of how the "normal" majority should take care of the mad minority, creates a false dichotomy; in truth, we all can benefit from self-care and self-healing.

If any of us are to heal, we have to heal our damaged, destructive society. Still, just as it can be unhealthy to fixate on self-improvement, we have to be careful to provide for our own emotional health and well-being in the process of fighting the system that undermines these. Capitalism is characterized by an inhuman emphasis on productivity and efficiency; naturally, we internalize this, and it infests our personal lives and dreams and political projects. Overworking ourselves in our struggles to abolish work, disregarding each other's needs in the heat of our battles against the heartless establishment, we replicate the virus of self-destruction in our efforts to eradicate it.

Revolution is fought on two fronts, one outside, one inside. We won't be able to overthrow capitalism until we heal ourselves and each other, and we won't be able to finish healing ourselves and each other without overthrowing capitalism. Don't mistake the struggle in the streets for the only struggle, or misunderstand the time we must take to nurture ourselves and one another as a distraction from it. Healing is a form of revolution, just as revolution is a form of healing, and doing what it takes to heal yourself can be truly revolutionary.





# My Dad, in 1984

BY: DANNY SHOWALTER

I REMEMBER THE presidential election between Ronald Reagan and Walter Mondale. My Pop hated Mondale. That was 1984, and I was seven. I'll come back to that after a brief digression.

I grew up in rural Indiana. Shortly before I was born, my father, my mother, my aunt and my uncle went in together on 120 acres of land, mostly woods, on a little jelly-bean shaped lake called Fish Lake. It had all the small mouth bass, bluegill and catfish you could eat, if you knew where they were biting. We gardened for sustenance and from August to November we canned, canned and canned some more. My father was and is a conservative, a VietNam veteran, a gun collector and somewhat of a survivalist type. We always had a freezer full of venison, we ate fresh rabbit, raised chickens and had our yearly hog (a snorting compost pile all spring and summer) that we butchered in the early winter. You get the idea. Once we even raised a few calves for beef.

My mother raised me in a liberal Brethren/Mennonite tradition, that is, pacifism, community involvement and simplicity, but my father never went to church. He stayed home, cut and ranked wood for the woodstove.

And so it was 1984. When I asked my father why he was so rabidly anti-Mondale (in seven year-old terms), he replied, "Well, boy... the Democrats want to take our guns away." I nodded, and went off into the woods or to the barn to play. As I recalled and obsessed on my father's words that day, I almost went into a panic... take our rifles? I had had no introduction to gun violence at all. Firearms were tools with which we hunted and acquired food, and on rare occasion, used to convince people who hunted on our land without permission that this was not where they wanted to be. So there I was, in the woods, whittling a stick or something, in a panic that if Mondale got elected we would be confronted by police that requested my father give them his guns. Knowing my father well, and his response to this hypothetical (all too real in seven-year-old terms) was also what threw me into this panic. So I went back to him for a bit of clarification.

"Pop? What if Mondale gets elected, and guns are outlawed and some people come to take them?"

My dad tensed his lips, then decided to grin, looking up at me

with a sparkle in his eye, the little creases around his eyes telling me he loved my question. In a response I wonder if I would give a seven-year-old, he said:

"Open fire, boy."

Okay, so this response makes tears come to my eyes. Not then, but now.

Open fire.

If I thought I, at seven, was nervous before, this made me



downright upset. I knew my dad was right, and I still know he was right, even though now we disagree quite a bit on exactly which institutions are most oppressive and their intentions. I have spoken to him at length on institutions like the IMF, the World Bank, the Council on Foreign Relations, Trilateral Commission and so on. I have had discussions with him at length concerning the Federal Reserve, and how money is expanded and contracted and the game of economic musical chairs we are forced to play, and who is usually left standing in poverty with no place to sit. I have discussed with him his own views, and what that would mean if he were not in rural Indiana raising berries, grapes and goats now, but in the occupied territories of Palestine even though he sees only "radical Islam" in that resistance instead of a proud tradition of anti-colonialism and self-determination.

My father taught me self-reliance, and the importance of personal sovereignty. He taught me how to grow things and my mother



taught me how to preserve them. I was taught how to raise animals well and consciously, and with respect for their natures and gifts. But he also taught me fear. “They” hate our way of life. America has “enemies.” Liberals want to take your firearms. You know, the typical tea party shit. To be fair, I find him to be much more conscious and critical thinking than that movement, but he still buys into a neo-conservative narrative with earnest at times (he believes Fox News is liberal, which to me, shows the mastery of propaganda behind NewsCorp!). He taught me how to fear very well. Outsiders were not to be trusted. They can gain your trust, sure ... but make sure they think like you ... er, like us.

Our family was insular. My dad and uncle married my mother and her sister. All of our set of cousins on the 120 acres had only two sets of grandparents, who lived a quarter mile in either direction and farmed too. My grandpa was a WW2 veteran, despite being a Mennonite. He was a farmer and factory worker. My other grandpa drove a school bus and farmed. My grandmothers were craftspeople. One, an extraordinary chef and gardener. She taught me that arrowroot instead of cornstarch in pies is the only way. The other grandmother was a florist. She raised and arranged flowers, and eventually bought a store that my mother now owns, since Grandma died.

As should be clear, I have always been raised in a radical tradition, of sorts. My father raised me with the fear I mentioned, but also left me to play in the woods, to tend to the chickens, and to fish the lake and observe its patterns. My mother taught me community involvement, pacifism and forgiveness at all costs. My grandparents taught me that the Great Depression was only the beginning, and that the way “town people” lived was going to make it very hard on those of us who wanted to use land sustainably (not their words). But it was all within a conservative — and later, neo-conservative — framework.

I was taught this framework and lived it, much like the lines you learn for a play your parents come to see, and you perform it to the best of your abilities and you make your parents, who undoubtedly love you, proud. You make them understand why they love you. Don’t be an outsider, Daniel. Outsiders are not to be trusted.

Years later, after one of our heated conversations that begin with a passing comment about the West Bank, or Bill Clinton or some such, it became obvious to my father that I wasn’t — and couldn’t — think through the narrow window of dualism. Politics were growing increasingly irrelevant, economically speaking, the American Dream was not panning out, and it confounded him that while I spat at the neo-conservative ideas that the Republicans were spewing. I could not

align myself with Democrats, either. I began using the term Corporatist in place of both, thinking it more accurate. My speaking about the evils of our sugar-coated imperialism (globalization) didn’t fit in with what he had learned. Using American, conservative, and self-determinate ideas to apply to the situation in the West Bank and Gaza really gummed up his gears. He knew, after all, if he were a Palestinian, he would be a leader of Hamas. If he were a Colombian farmer, or a Basque separatist, or a factory worker in Sarajevo, he would act only in solidarity against Western influence. Were he Afghan, he would be growing poppies with an AK-47 over his shoulder to protect his crop and selling his opium resins for the highest price to feed his family, not be welcoming occupiers as bringing freedom and globally-produced goods, and he wouldn’t smile up at the predator drones. But to any of these things he couldn’t and still cannot bring himself to admittance.

One time, exasperated and angry with me after one of these conversations, he asked, “Who taught you this shit? Why do you think the way you do?”

I remember I felt really sad, depressed, for a moment. My father was not proud of me. He did not approve of what I stood for or what I would continue to stand for and it felt like an ultimatum that could never be satisfied. Like a heart-wrenching breakup you see coming right at you, but can do nothing to stop. It felt like our last conversation. I was in silent tears at this point and almost sobbed aloud, into the phone. But I didn’t. I didn’t because I remembered that I had the answer to his question. I could answer him when he asked “Who taught you this shit?” I took a deep breath and said, “Pop, you did. You made sure we had acres of untouched forest to hunt in and creeks to splash in, a lake to fish out of, an apple orchard and a plot of garden to love and watch grow. You taught me seasons, and appropriate ways to prepare for them. You gave me a chance to connect with the dirt and the sky and the water. And you also impressed upon me the need to defend those things.”

I held my breath and waited for his response. He was sure to be angered, as you never used my Patriarch’s own words against him. Totally taboo. I braced.

“Boy, I sure don’t know where you learned this stuff, but I love you. Boy, I love you.” I could see the creases at the corners of his eyes and his twinkle through the phone, on his voice.

Open fire, boy. Open fire.

# Self-Abusive Thoughts

BY: LIANA BUSZKA

IT SEEMS THAT if there was a time before I had learned and internalized anxiety, I don't really remember it. Actually, that's not true. I remember pre-2nd grade that I was quite talkative. I'd absorb any information about animals available (my parents had provided me with many books to feed this) and then generously share it with anyone in hearing range. Many kids called me a "walking dictionary".



What I mean when I say I couldn't remember, I mean the change remains fuzzy in my memory.

Compare that younger me to me from about a year ago, maybe a year and a half ago. I was consumed by thoughts and fears of people judging me for things like wanting to listen to a particular song, or that they'd find me annoying for wanting to share it with them. I'd immediately put myself down for sharing my feelings or ideas. It got so bad that my body was constantly in stress mode. I always had pain and tenseness in the left side of my chest (a symptom others associate with panic attacks). At least I wasn't so disconnected that I ignored these messages my body was sending me. For a while though, I didn't know what to do.

One day, I asked if these thoughts were realistic. I realized I'd find the most obvious answer if I actually asked people who knew me.

Sometimes these thoughts took the form of their voices, or rather "I wonder if So-and-so might think this." Answers like, "Of course not, I've never thought that way about you," were pretty consistent. So I settled on considering these thoughts as foolish.

This was only a temporary solution, however. It seems like when I've overcome one form of haunting thoughts, they just take new shapes.

I try to think of other animals. They can stay upset for days, as a kitty I know has been known to plenty of times. However, Kitty doesn't judge herself for her feelings, she doesn't feel guilt or other feelings for having her original feelings. She just has them.

I then wonder about wild humans, or any humans not living in civilization. I imagine them trusting themselves far more than I do myself, as other (non-domestic at least) animals seem to.

I then realize that every single fearful, anxious, self-limiting thought can be linked back to ways I was raised to fit in civilization.

Wait, I should make some reference to past experiences, particularly a relationship I was once in (read: endured). The other person was often commenting on how things that people did were stupid. This wasn't an analysis of the insanity of converting living beings to commodities. Nope, he never questioned that, really. He was talking about the ways people would load washing machines. Yes. Washing machines. I began loading his laundry in the way I had watched my parents do it. "That's stupid! I hate when people load washing machines that way." Of course, I long ago realized the absurdity with me even sticking around for this kind of nonsense. But at the time I was still following social 'rules' I had learned growing up. I instead let it make me very self-conscious. I developed fear all over again about being judged for small things, even things that were just a part of being myself.

Anyway, that relationship thankfully ended (unfortunately it took over another year for that to happen). He had revealed himself to be very manipulative. I guess I had learned to be manipulated as well, or perhaps I had simply not learned yet it was something I needed to look out for. I bring up the story from that relationship to point out that this kind of thing, self-abusive thinking, comes out of manipulative, emotionally abusive relationships where we learn to be held back. The victim learns, internalizes, that something is wrong with them, that it is their fault, not the abuser's for being a selfish manipulative asshole. I can also trace many of my more current forms of self-abusive or confusing thought to things I learned growing up. I was never really aware of them however until I began looking for the root of these thoughts.

Every time someone became angry at me for being sensitive, for getting upset or crying, or having strong emotions in general, I internalized it. I eventually learned to scold myself so other people wouldn't chide me. Of course, now some perspective for why there is such intolerance for anyone having thoughts and feelings, which could make it harder for others to maintain their normal behavior or expectations (even if those behaviors and expectations are only normal within an unhealthy culture). Members of this culture don't want people pointing out the insanity of a culture which dissociates from life. That puts a strain on production and progress. So children are taught to distrust their thoughts, that they are 'incorrect'. Many learn easily to not challenge, while others will struggle with internal voices which bring them down when they bring challenges, or make "the way things are" difficult to carry on.

I don't know if I'll ever find more than temporary relief. Perhaps a better goal would be to shape these thoughts so that they might feed rather than hinder. Either way, it has given me quite a bit of strength to finally search for the cause of these thoughts. I know then that it is not my fault (guilt and blame used to be a big self-hindrance for me). I am brought that much closer to trusting myself. That relief and knowledge is more than welcome.



# The Anguish of the Age

## EMOTIONAL REACTIONS TO COLLAPSE

BY: ROBERT JENSEN

WE LIVE AMIDST multiple crises—economic and political, cultural and ecological—that pose a significant threat to human life as we understand it.

There is no way to be awake to the depth of these crises without an emotional reaction. There is no way to be aware of the pain caused by these systemic failures without some experience of dread, depression, distress.

To be fully alive today is to live with anguish, not for one's own condition in the world but for the condition of the world, for a world that is in collapse.

Though I have felt this for some time I hesitated to talk about it in public, out of fear of being accused of being too negative or dismissed as apocalyptic. But more of us are breaking through that fear, and more than ever it's essential that we face this aspect of our political lives. To



talk openly about this anguish should strengthen, not undermine, our commitment to political engagement—any sensible political program to which we can commit for the long haul has to start with an honest assessment of reality.

Here is how I would summarize our reality: Because of the destructive consequences of human intervention, it is not clear how much longer the planetary ecosystem can sustain human life on this scale. There is no way to make specific predictions, but it's clear that our current path leads to disaster. Examine the data on any crucial issue—energy, water, soil erosion, climate disruption, chemical contamination, biodiversity—and the news is bad. Platitudes about “necessity is the the mother of invention” express a hollow technological fundamentalism; simply asserting that we want to solve the problems that we have created does not guarantee we can. The fact that we have not taken the first and most obvious step—moving to a collective life that requires far less energy—doesn't bode well for the future.

Though anguish over this reality is not limited to the affluence of the industrial world—where many of us have the time to ponder all this because our material needs are met—it may be true that those of us living in relative comfort today speak more of this emotional struggle. That doesn't mean that our emotions are illegitimate or that the struggle is self-indulgent; this discussion is not the abandonment of politics but an essential part of fashioning a political project.

# The Perpetual Loneliness of Abuse

*TRAGEDY AND POLITICS, OR I CAN'T DEAL WITH IT*

By: ANONYMOUS

WHEN I WAS a child, I was abused in several ways by several people. It broke my heart, my spirit, and possibly my body. I am now a woman in her twenties, and as many of you could predict, I'm still dealing with all the consequences of what happened. I am dealing with the consequences, he's not, they're not. If anything, they are reaping the benefits.

On a social level, as a woman, I am dealing with the consequences of a sexist culture, and men are not, if anything they are reaping the rewards. As Catharine MacKinnon convincingly argued, in this rape culture, all men stand to benefit from the fear women feel,



whether they want to or not. Similarly, I (as a white woman) benefit from racial dynamics, typing these words on a computer put together painstakingly by “colored” female laborers/slaves—a computer that

will likely spill its toxic crap in a dump site in China, where they can deal with the consequences.

If anything typifies this culture's morality, it is that of misplaced consequences to benefit the privileged.

This is unjust. It makes me rage and cry about how unjust it is. It is unfair, it is terrible. It really is—it is more terrible than I can accept and deal with. But it's the reality of our situation. It happened.

It happens. Deal with it. But how can we possibly?

The reality of our cultural situation is this: we are forced to accept that abusive dynamics are a fact of life. This is extremely fucked up, to say the least. No healthy natural being should have to deal with such an ultimatum, but that's the reality. It happens. Deal with it. Live with it.

Injustice exists in disastrous proportions. In many cases, we feel powerless to change this. What does this do to a person's psychology? What are you supposed to do?

Here's what we do: many survivors of abuse have become very good at holding themselves responsible for everything that happened precisely because the belief that they have agency in their life is more important than the idea that they are so terrible as to deserve abuse. Imagine what it would take for someone to make this choice—a false choice.

I would call myself a highly emotional person—to a fault. I don't think there's anything wrong with being highly emotional in itself: it's just dangerous. It leads to heartbreak. There aren't many wise, experienced mentors who can tell us how to engage with these extreme emotions without going into cultural or personal Denial. And how to engage with them responsibly and realistically.

I go up and down, down and up, but mostly down. My base state is down: it's an endless pit always accessible to me. When I see, hear, taste, smell... something that reminds me of my history and reality, I go really down. I get crazy.

And you could guess what I'm talking about: triggers.

I mentioned the false choice many survivors of abuse are faced with. Many of us develop these patterns of thinking and behaviours—these ways of coping—by ourselves. They are what we ourselves can come up with under pressure. This is because no one else tends to help us. We suffer alone.

There is a reason I mentioned triggers, and I mentioned loneliness. Both are staples of a survivor's experience: triggers and loneliness, loneliness and triggers. I'm writing this article about how triggers perpetuate our loneliness, and how this is unfair: in the tragic personal sense, and in the political sense.

And then the never-ending question: how do we deal with that?

Anecdote time.

I'm fairly good with my triggers. I get upset, but not triggered by rape jokes. I'm fairly good about colors, smells, words. I have a huge weakness, though, and that is porn. I fucking hate it with all my heart; and I'd imagine it couldn't be surpassed by much, except perhaps meeting my perp again.

My boyfriend, like many boyfriends, had a weakness for porn—in the opposite way: he watched it regularly, hid it, gleaned sexist notions from it, ad nauseum.

In my relationship, porn (which was ultimately rejected by said boyfriend, who is now a great ally) and other triggers occasionally send me into a pit of despair, sadness, and anger no one can recall me from. Obviously, this is not fun for me, and it isn't fun for my partner, who can end up feeling just as powerless.

Sometimes it gets too much for him. He doesn't have endless reserves of strength and sympathy. Sometimes, we think we'll break up over it. It hurts to know that I can do very little to prevent this. I didn't choose this. Sometimes it feels like it's heal or break up.

Heal, heal, HEAL. Now.

No one wants to be with someone who cries all the time.

No one wants to be with the cancer patient who's an endless drain of happiness in any room.

No one wants to adopt the puppy who sulks in a corner all day and refuses to play fetch.

It does happen. Some survivors are perpetually abandoned for no other reason than the occasional or regular trigger fest that is just too much to deal with. And who can blame the person doing the abandoning? But, still, it seems like a tragedy: neither partner was the cause of all this, and yet it's inevitable. And this is the perpetual loneliness caused by abuse. Not only was the abused person abused, they are often doomed to be a pain to those who love them. Real fun.

How do we deal with this?



There is a political aspect to this as well: what is my relation to the abandoned puppy, as a privileged human? What is my boyfriend's relationship to me, as a privileged man?



Often, those who benefit from the power structure of abuse are the ones with the power and privilege to choose to abandon someone. Is this fair? Is it fair that someone can benefit all their life from a privilege that comes at the expense of another, and then can then choose to let that Other face the consequences alone? After all, he didn't do it.

No one is left accountable. The consequences are exported.

Nothing is fair about a society that makes billions of dollars off rape victims' backs, and then sweeps said survivors under the carpet.

But it's the current civilized reality.

It is a reality of this culture that the victims of abuse and systematic oppression are perpetually disadvantaged and left to rot by the side of the road. It's but one more mechanism for maintaining the status quo.

The personal is political.

How do we deal with this?

I don't know.

I do know that it is normal to feel that these truths are hard to accept. And I do know that these truths are monstrous and must be

brought to an end.

But it will take some time to get there, and we might not be alive to see it.

We have to take care of each other. Survivors helping survivors. Goddess knows we have enough on our plate already, but if there's anything we're good at, it's handling crisis situations. We've done it, we continue to do it. For example, We women are the ones who started rape crisis centers; and We women are the ones who got us the few rights we do have. We are there for each other and we won't leave when the going gets rough.

We who hear voices, we who have extreme emotional states, we won't leave when the going gets rough. The going's been rough for a long fucking time. And we're not in Denial about it.

As Andrea Dworkin said about prostitutes and the revolution: "Only the toughest among women will make the necessary next moves, and among prostituted women one finds the toughest if not always the best. If prostituted women worked together to end male supremacy, it would end."

I don't know who is to be held accountable. It's not just the rapists, and it's not every single man. But it's someone. And the day I figure it out, they can all go to fucking hell.

We know what we want.

For those who are privileged: be allies. Don't lead, but follow, for a change.

While we're getting there, acknowledging despair is key. So we can deal with it, together.

#### DISCLAIMER

By no means am I saying that survivors can't be intolerable, unrealistic, etc. And I am not saying everyone should cater to every whim of the survivor. What I am saying is that the consequences of abuse are tangled in fucked-upedness and politics. These questions are difficult and involve a lot of responsibility. The reality of the situation is heartbreaking. Dealing with this heartbreak in constructive ways is key but not straight forward in any way. We shouldn't have to deal with it, but we do.



# Celebrate the Stampede or Step Out of It?

BY: JAN LUNDBERG

IF BEING HUMAN and living have value, we ought to celebrate what we are and how we're doing. The only real celebration can be of the truth, based on joyous reality of an improved condition. Yet the truth today is that we are probably about to dangle from the noose that we ourselves stepped right into.

It's crazy to celebrate ecocide. Is there something else to celebrate that is also true? Sure, but it's not the whole truth: human dignity, beauty of life, love between two people—wonderful and inspiring, but to celebrate them while closing off our senses to the bulldozing and poisoning going on around us is increasingly irrational. Being honest would be to admit of our celebrations today, “We are making ourselves feel better, numbing the pain or fooling ourselves.”

For most of us, our personal world and its challenges are all we can deal with. So, little triumphs like selling more widgets than one's co-workers, losing ten pounds of body fat, or quitting alcohol become major accomplishments—kind of in a vacuum, typical of individualism connected with “divide and conquer.” It is rare that one celebrates getting rid of his or her car, for one's lack of a four wheeled machine is commonly equated with hardship.

There is organized and individual resistance to ecocide, climate catastrophe, species extinction, weakening of the human gene pool, erosion of human rights, and the coming trampling and starvation of the overpopulation. But the odds are that you're not part of resistance. It is tiny and does not deserve to celebrate much with a one-in-a-thousand chance for success or victory—odds worsening each day. What are we doing about this trend? Hardly anything; we keep up our activities in the dominant culture, often soothing ourselves electronically or going out to eat some trucked-in food. Ignorance or denial of overarching trends is bliss (and deadly). We may march on as protesters or blog on into the void, hoping to call attention to crises in need of a collective response.

There are times when amusement and passion can flow among those who are quite aware, resulting in some laughter between the tears—but we know we are losing the fight. Many believe we have al-

ready lost. Interestingly, those who hold to that most pessimistic view (in all certainty, they feel) are unlikely to be activists or eco-warriors. Optimists keep busy, trying to help the situation. This gives them purpose, a little comfort, and a little hope at times, but no reason to really celebrate the health and glory of an Earth that can house in her bosom future generations of Earth's children.



The only honest thing to celebrate, if we are to celebrate the real truth, is the impotence of the human race to cease the killing of the Earth. I for one cannot do it, for who can embrace such a perverse idea? Yet, there are valid celebrations, even when times are worse than these, if the big picture is part of our perspective. Otherwise, celebration may simply be to numb the mind: “Woo-hoo! we're drinking a lot of beer!” Everyone, from the aware activist to the downtrodden street survivor (sometimes the same person embodies that spectrum), needs to celebrate. That's like everyone needing to breathe and urinate. Celebration is involuntary and somehow necessary for our species, such as after a good hunt or harvest.

But if we can somehow see that celebration is blind and irrational when we can't celebrate the truth, we might see that it's as crazy as trying to breathe underwater or urinating on our food. Since we would not do those things unless totally insane, we might be able to face that the dominant culture—that says endless material expansion, greed, isolation from one another, and the cancer epidemic

are acceptable—is insane and finally must be stopped for good. The lateness of the hour is such that we cannot wait and say, “We will gradually stop trying to breathe under water. We will only piss a little more on our food. Those are jobs, so we cannot shift away quickly, and besides there are alternatives around the corner if we change industrial investment.” This indefensible and obsolete attitude can be found in the technofix camp, as in gradually reducing fossil fuels emissions only in one’s mind or in legislation. Such a program of Hope wishes to rely on painlessly and miraculously bringing about a consumer economy of less-polluting technology while continuing ecocide, as growth, toxicity and the stampede over the ecological cliff are hardly discussed.

Some in the stampede yell “Faster! See how fast we can go! Our speed and unity brought us here, and standing still is to be left behind!” Such spokespersons own all the megaphones and all the other trappings of the herders of humanity, mainly electronic media, etc. Apparently the much vaunted medium of the internet is not altering the stampede significantly. What does that tell us? Hard to say. Even if through a mass awakening everyone wanted to stop the crazy stampede now, and tried to do so, we may not be able to stop it. This is because we are not the masters of the Earth; the Earth is our master and is on a course we largely set her on. We have barely begun to pay the price.

In this stampede we are somehow simultaneously trying to breathe under water (without scuba gear) and pissing on our food. This is absurd enough, but reality is worse than that: there are those holding our heads under water, while they themselves are under water, obliviously, forcing us to try to breathe. Similarly, there are those among us pissing on our food and aiming our own piss onto our own food. Mass acceptance of such a pickle indicates both the low level and unpopularity of resistance as well as the impotence of the many, who are mostly unaware of the tiny number who are resisting and laying the groundwork for a livable future.

# Meaninglessness vs. Rewilding

BY: *URBAN SCOUT*

DEPRESSION AIN'T JUST for the economy. It sucks. I haven't felt this depressed since age 20. At least, I haven't felt noticeably this depressed since age 20. Age 21-24 I self-medicated using alcohol and cigarettes so I can't clearly say what I felt during that time. But now, I don't medicate at all, legal, illegal, prescribed or otherwise. I drink coffee for the occasional boost, like right now, in order to write this.

My mom asked me today if I always feel either up or down, with no just normal "hum-drum." I told her that I never feel good if I don't follow my heart. That when I have to do something boring that I hate, over a long period of time, I always get depressed. Since I rarely have the opportunity to follow my heart (aside from living off the now-extinguished inheritance for the last year and a half) I almost always feel depressed. She said that working a job she didn't like felt hum-drum to her. I said it feels like slavery to me.



At the moment, I miss most of my friends in Portland. I miss drinking, club-hopping, dressing up, bumping into friends at bars, dancing, feeling like part of something bigger. I wonder how much of all that filled sincere social needs or just worked to distract me from my deep seeded depression. The last time I felt this depressed, I ate a healthy paleo diet, exercised a ton and didn't do any drugs, but I did work at a shitty coffee shop wage-slave job while working my ass off trying to create a non-profit that went no where.

I often have thoughts about suicide. It seems a lot easier than existing sometimes. I'd probably have done it at age 11 (thinking of all those times I fell asleep with a knife at my wrist, eyes red and tired from crying myself to sleep) if I didn't feel a stronger need to save the world. I hate this feeling of meaninglessness. Hopelessness. Despair.

The regular, all-to-familiar bouts of anxiety that feel like a knife up under the sternum and lungs full of water, drowning in grief. I think about all the factors that add up. Moving out of the inner city, losing frequent contact with my best friends, working a wage-slave job that doesn't use my best talents (even though I respect the company and support what they do), not speaking with my dad for seven months now. Add the weight of the world to that, and the grief gets too heavy to carry. I slip and fall, and I have trouble standing back up.

I often say that I come to rewilding regardless of collapse, and I do. I also come to it because I strongly believe that it works to stop environmental destruction and restore it. I rewild because it works as a means to an end, whether that end means surviving collapse or creating a better way to live or both. But when I read about ice caps melting and methane and positive feedback loops of climate change and that we can't change things now, that it will all melt and release methane that will heat the planet up more and kill us all, wild or domestic, it makes me feel a kind of hopelessness and despair that I can barely articulate. While I no longer freak out about the apocalypse, I still have a ton of anxiety about the future. You won't find me screaming on the street corner, but you'll find me having trouble putting my clothes on in the morning. No matter how good or complete my life gets, no matter how much fun I have rewilding, I still struggle with a huge sense of impending doom and the feeling of meaninglessness.

On a large enough time line, everything happening in this moment has no relevance to the whole of time. Some day the earth will merge with the sun and everything alive today will have died long before. Does that make my life meaningless? If we look at life in a linear fashion, yes, it looks rather meaningless. If the methane heat apocalypse happens in 20 years, does that make this moment meaningless? In a linear sense, yes.

Civilizationist's find purpose in progress, which they see as endless growth and expansion. We measure this progress with linear time; from "stone age" to "space age." I find meaning and purpose in maintaining quality relationships with humans and other than humans. Ironically I also perceive this purpose through linear time; from "domestic" to the eventual "wild." Most of the time rewilding still feels like a kind of progress to me, and that makes it feel meaningless when I hear that I may never live a wild life because the methane will heat up the planet so hot that we will all die, and all that "progress" towards creating cultures of rewilding mean nothing.

I don't always struggle with this. For some reason when I sit

on the earth in a quiet place and feel her with my hands, I imagine my death. I see my body decompose and return to the soil. My connection to any kind of progress slips away and I fade into cyclical time where humans don't exist at all. I only see matter and energy constantly changing form. I realize that I don't care about the survival of humans, nor any kind of life, we all came from the same source and will return to it. When I die, my body will change into something else. When the earth and the sun unite, the matter and energy that made me will become one with the sun.

Wild, animistic hunter-gatherers do not experience this purpose of maintaining quality relationships in a linear fashion, but in a cyclical one. This way of perceiving linear time vs. cyclical time feels a crucial part of rewilding to me. If I don't see rewilding as a kind of progress, but rather making and maintaining relationships, it doesn't matter whether or not everyone burns up. Of course, that would suck and carries its own grief, but it doesn't lead to meaninglessness because life (depending on your definition of life), matter and energy, will continue. It feels difficult to see rewilding as non-progressive, since we feel so strongly the chains of domestication, and moving away from that feels like progress towards an end goal of living wild. I would say that rewilding means maintenance and not progress. Even indigenous peoples spent their lives "rewilding," renewing their landscapes and psyches.

Animism, because it seeks to relate and converse with the world, rather than to define and control it, always renews itself. It wakes up every morning fresh and alive, and every evening it tucks itself to bed to dream again for the very first time. Since animism involves a relationship with the world, a living being that exists in the now, the present moment, what more relevant perspective could you find?<sup>1</sup>

These thoughts help me with the meaninglessness, but they don't help me in the moment, because I still have to get up and carry the grief of civilizations devastation with me to my wage slave job. I see no one mourning for the collapse of salmon populations, though I spend hours sobbing over it, too sad, frustrated and hopeless to take action, legal or otherwise. Honestly I don't know how people make it through this fucked up culture. I just don't. A best friends death I can handle (for the most part). The death of the world? The threat of the

---

1 Willem Larsen, The College of Mythic Cartography

death of the world? I don't think humans come into the world equipped to handle this kind of grief. That any of us wake up and continue to live should show us our beautiful inherent resilience (or our great ability to deny reality!).

I wish I knew how to get over depression, how to process all



this grief. I wish sweat lodges, tinctures, prozac, massages, acupuncture, alcohol, video games, television dramas, diets and blogging did more than temporarily relieve me from the pain. I mean, I know that if I got paid to rewild I wouldn't feel as depressed. But I don't know how to get paid to rewild, aside from what I do now. Of course, not having to pay for clean water, a place to live and store things, and all of my food would kick ass too. I think this grief and depression will just exist until civilization comes down and the stress of this system will no longer lock us in jobs we hate. I don't know.

# Passengers

SONG BY: *THE FILTHY POLITICIANS*

we're just passengers, with life passing by  
we accept the world and we don't ask why  
we're not drivin but we keep ridin  
cuz we can't imagine what's outside it  
you'd have to see it, to believe it  
when you breathe that first breath  
feel free to take a rest cause you need it  
when you see it you believe it  
take that breath and you breathe it  
and the best is leavin that mess  
they said you needed behind  
free your mind and let yourself shine

well let me tell you we're all immersed in  
somethin that's oh so cursed  
and the worst part of a brand new start  
is to find your heart you gotta break it first  
but it's all uphill from here  
the fog will lift that mist will clear  
won't say that the pain goes away  
but now you can put it in the right place  
cuz it's not just life, it's how we live it  
that's the problem, not existence itself  
so called wealth on that magazine shelf  
is a war on your mental health  
do we really benefit, workin our lives away  
spendin everything we get, lookin for that new way  
to space out and disconnect  
from the stress we put up with for that paycheck  
sayin fuck neighbors, we got netflix  
fuck nature, might as well forget it  
wait fuck that lets think for a minute  
you only get one life start livin in it

more children get depressed  
everyday cuz their brains a mess

if it keeps up this way it'll never end though  
when their best friends a nintendo  
now they're gettin turned in to consumers  
at faster rates than me an you were  
it's an onslaught how can we not see it  
probably cuz our iphone's don't tweet it  
now a blackberry ain't a fruit  
if your apple freezes just reboot  
and lets not forget where it all gets made  
by a 14 year old far away  
we're gettin too good at selectin  
what we need to ignore and never question  
everything's spiralin the wrong direction  
try the truth you'll find it refreshing  
cuz deep down you know in those quiet moments  
when you hear that voice that's still your own its  
too much to take all at once  
we'll help you crawl then watch you run

these days it takes a lot of work to fit in  
makeup, muscles, college education  
they reinvent the joneses day in  
day out to keep us chasin  
that good life, it's an illusion  
it gets lonely when it gets high falutin  
if you don't have enough to buy your happiness right now  
then come figure this out  
it's a spiritual problem  
we take the third world and we rob em  
just to experiment with our proven problems  
an ignore the outcomes an move with the mob  
cuz we're all so scared of bein ourselves  
cuz we've been told that natural smells  
natural faces, natural hair an  
natural bodies are embarrassin  
but fuck that, we could all make a pact  
to support each other, an say i got our back  
you can be whoever you are and play your part  
as long as love is in your heart

# You Deserve Support

BY: JORDAN KNOWLES

YOU DESERVE SUPPORT. These have proven to be some of the most important words ever said to me. As animate, loving, living beings on this wondrous, animate, loving, living planet, you deserve to have your emotional and mental needs met. Activism in the service of life and the planet should be nourishing to your being. When it isn't, we need to reevaluate our approach, identify our limits and prioritize our love so we can continue to fight on the side of life as intensely as they deserve and need to be fought for. Aligning yourself with life can mean a lot of things. It can empower you, teach you, nourish you; but it also means forming relationships with the land and your non-humyn neighbors. It means acknowledging and internalizing the atrocities of the civilized on these occupied lands. That process can be terrifying, confusing, horrifically sad, enraging, or downright devastating. These feelings tend to manifest themselves in the form of hopelessness, apathy, depression, anger, confusion, guilt, denial and resentment. These reactions and manifestations can debilitate you without proper processing and support. They can make you feel crazy, but you are not. They are the symptoms of living in a terrifyingly violent culture of death. As activists and loving humyns we should be able to stand with this knowledge as our fuel, our reason to keep fighting; but without support our energies dwindle and we feel small and powerless to these larger issues. Without support we either do less and feel guilty, or continue to push beyond our healthy limits. This is when we feel burnout, guilt, self-hatred, and apathy.

The reason we don't get the support we need to do effective, nourishing activism properly is because of the ways in which this culture socializes us. This culture disconnects us from our experience and therefore our emotional selves. Think of how so many of us were born: in hospitals, kept indoors. All of our sensory experience was limited to almost strictly things of human origin. Most of us are then placed, for the majority of our days, in the care of someone else. The motives of our caretakers more likely are their financial stability and the survival of the grueling workweek, rather than our direct emotional wellbeing. We are all homogenized to the same standards: right and wrong, emoting, creating, obedience, regardless of what suits us best as living people. The myths of our culture are slowly and methodically em-



bedded into our psyches (i.e.: the world is dead, human supremacism, gender roles, capitalism). We were all taught to keep our emotions in check, to forfeit our happiness for their ease of compartmentalization and control. We are taught to be docile, and unquestioning of the myth of progress- which means enviro/socio/political degradation. We were never taught to cultivate relationships with the land, the stars, the Birch tree that hung over the mulch pile. Most of us, though, found these relationships nonetheless. I'm guessing that for most of us, this is what keeps us fighting. As adults, we are cast into the world of industrial capitalism, forced to pay for our very existence. What we need, what we love to do, and whom we love to spend time with can never be the focus of our active lives. Instead, we labor in jobs where we spend the bulk of our waking hours wishing our time away, staring at a clock, denying our personal and emotional needs for hours on end. In regards to our emotional selves at work, there is a common theme of being able to disassociate during the time at work for the sake of working efficiently. For eight or more hours a day, five or more days a week, we are willingly ignorant of our emotions. What is the price of this? While some activists can find ways around this abuse, many of us do not have the luxury of opting out of the working world. How can we be certain in our motives, in our self-worth, in our tactics, if we are systematically detached from our emotional bodies? Industrial Capitalism rewards exploitative and abusive people, usually meaning white males who are the main benefactors of the existing power structure. The rest of the people who inhabit this planet; the physical and emotional casualties of an ever expanding empire, either adopt this toxic masculinity or never "succeed".

We are then left with a world full of oppression, tyranny, and violence; with peoples disconnected from their pain and burning love. In times of weakness or ignorance we adopt "toxic mimics" and replace them for the relationships that would otherwise nourish us holistically. Examples of these mimics are: television, which stands in the way of lived experience and family togetherness; and compulsory school which is an agent of homogenization and indoctrination. It is televisions and industrial schooling that has reared the generations we see now; the same who toxify the earth and its inhabitants and pacify the humyn people who could otherwise be an oppositional threat to the current power structure. They (we) are, by definition, insane; detached from the reality of the physical world; which does not need capitalism-quite the opposite actually-but needs thriving and diverse land-bases to survive. These generations would not last for long in the real

world; the actual physical world outside of industrial capitalism. The sane members of the humyn population, who would have their morality rooted in the earth, in their relationships to dirt and wind, junebug and flickerbird, would have no hesitation to resist against these insane detached demons.

Born and metabolized into a culture of abstractions has left me as is. My biological parents were drug addicts, my older sister was a drug addict, my brothers and I were all neglected, abused, malnourished and born chemically dependent. My adoptive father was physically and emotionally abusive, my stepmother as well. I have unconfirmed memories of sexual assault that have haunted me since childhood. Being raised in such a way as I have, in the grip of exploitation, patriarchy, and capitalism, I feel wholly without the tools to cope with both my history of abuse and this culture's constant abuse. I often feel meaningless and lost, having life without reason. This isolation almost always leads to a depression that is difficult to articulate and overcome. When I am in the midst of this depression I wish for death, for void. I feel as though I have no one to hold me accountable or to whom I am responsible, so I may as well die. I get tangled in the mess of distractions and pressures that accompany capitalist culture. I worry more and more about my source of income rather than my emotional wellbeing. I get easily overwhelmed when situations are out of my control; a product of this masculinity and participating in an insane process for which there is no opting out. So I (and so many others) am left with a history of trauma and abuse at the mercy of an exploitative culture, full of people who are either abusive, apathetic, or traumatized and unable to heal.

I can say though, that I am not crazy; that my depression and isolation is symptomatic of this culture and a sign of civilized insanity. As a being, I am not crazy. As a being, deprived of the realization of the source and meaning of my life, I am insane. This civilization has not cultivated my awareness of existence in the rich banks of the river near my home nor the rolling kettles and moraines that dance around me. My identity was not formed with my utter codependence on the fish of that river, but instead with the machine culture that occupies this land and sells my relationships back to me; packaged and dead. My emotions are not vested in the vitality of the soil, nor my actions dictated by the language of clouds. What this means is that my emotional being doesn't operate from a place of physical reality, but instead somewhere outside of it, above it. The good thing is that the foundations of this colonization are rusty and are being constantly subverted.

As activists; liberation, reclamation, and resistance should all be

acts of inclusion, of deep rooted love, and should help us heal when we realize we are not alone, not the minority. Everything happens somewhere. There are parts of the land in our hair, in our breath. Pollen makes its way into our nostrils. Fog touches our skin and condenses. We breathe the exhalations of forest and ocean beds and they, us. We are beautifully codependent and incomplete creatures, being filled at every possible moment by the living magic of the Earth and the cosmos. The Sun literally nourishes us. The land is embedded in our memories as we are embedded in the land. This makes us strong. We are never alone, never isolated, never without place or meaning. Our value dictated by the richness of our reciprocity. Step outside, breathe the air, notice it play with your hair and skin. Feel the colors of the sky and what they mean to you. Notice the cracks in the pavement; the birds living in the abandoned factories; the ants in the spaces of the sidewalk; the erosion of the local dam; the crumbling of the stone buildings. Align yourself with life and the rest of the living world is fighting with you; tearing up concrete, eroding dams, blowing over electrical poles. This also makes us strong. How is apathy possible when you stand in solidarity with billions of lives?

Things will often get pushed back into the scope of this culture, though, where we are physically and emotionally abused in so many ways. This is why we need to care for one another if this movement is to succeed. We need to make living safe spaces, healing spaces, and spaces to fight back.

We can start by knowing what helps and what hinders us from supporting ourselves and each other. Some things that personally don't help when I'm in crisis mode or feel as though I am approaching crisis mode are: isolating myself, giving up, lashing out, apathy, poor diet, lack of exercise, and ignoring the signals that my body is sending to tell me that it's in trouble. This all means that you should stay conscious in times of despair and stay present in your physical and emotional body. Don't do things that you know will bum you out. Don't push people away as they are trying to help you. Try to eat well and stay active as all these small things can sometimes be the catalyst for a crisis. Some things that I have found that work to help myself in times of crisis are to try and map out or notice, day to day, the things that heighten my sensitivity, bum me out, and make me feel anxious, ostracized, or sad. These are potential triggers. You need to take these things seriously, and give them consideration. Don't look at them as problems that you have to fix, instead accept them and try to do the work of understanding where they come from and how you can start relearning them in

ways that work better for you. You can also entrust these triggers to loved ones or caretakers to be conscious of in times of need.

For me, identifying my triggers has been a long, slow process, but has allowed me to better articulate my boundaries, limits, and needs to myself and my allies. Being vocal about how you are feeling is so very important. Surround yourself with folks that you trust. Tell your friends how you are doing, in that minute, hour, day, or week. Ask them where they are at mentally and emotionally. Practice this. Normalize emotional transparency. Expect support, and tell your friends what you need, if and when you can. When you feel better, think about the support you got and how it did or did not help. Tell your friends what you think about their support and what they could do better. Disperse the weight of your emotions on many people. Having too few supports can burnout both the supporter and the one needing support. Reciprocate support and be open to the dialogue from those you support as well. This will all take time, decades perhaps. Soon you will start to have words for feelings that were previously confusing. You will start to be conscious of how you are acting and why you are acting that way. You will be able to take that knowledge and use it to respond differently in ways that feel better to you and your friends. Take space when you need it, immediately, but don't distance yourself so much that no one knows how to help. Transparency may not be easy for everyone, but it makes the road to healing much easier.

Being creative isn't always the easiest thing when you're feeling low, but always helps. Drawing, writing, singing, playing guitar or drums or spoons, dancing, or sculpting are just a few out of the millions of ways you could express yourself creatively. Some people like to learn new skills, like me. I've picked up fermentation, herbalism, harmonica, spoons, sprouting, brewing, infused oils, salve-making, and lots of other things. Activities like this are good because they take you out of your head with your thoughts and put you back into your body, back into the real world. I think that depression is a manifestation of isolation; and being creative is a release and re-immerses your body and emotions back into the animate world. It's easy, when in crisis, to let thoughts of hopelessness and despair germinate, take root, and even flourish, which can send you spiraling into crisis. Being creative or expressive is in opposition to the self-destructive thoughts in our heads. It gives your emotions and thoughts body and validity. It compels us to affect and be affected by the world around us, the world that lends us speech and movement and life.

Eating well may not seem connected to emotional wellbeing at

all times, but it has been my experience that preparing and eating nourishing foods with the people you love is one of the most restorative and preventative measures you can take. Grow the food you eat. Ferment the food you grew. Soak the beans and rice and nuts. Make vinegars and wines. Smoke the meat. Stew the meat. Make stock. Make jerky. Make teas and tisanes. Make concoctions and decoctions. Make tinctures and extracts. Let the other inhabitants of this earth heal you. Say thank you. Feel humbled to be able to participate in this beautiful dance. Awe of life is a great defense against feelings of isolation.

Be physically active as well. Chemical changes occur when we run or hike, bike or unicycle, hop scotch or jump rope. Build snow forts in the winter. Go swimming in the summer. Run in the rain. Feel like a part of something bigger. Let go. Notice how you feel afterwards. Sometimes exercise is all we need to break the funk we're in. For me, it restores confidence, makes my body ache in the best ways, and helps me to feel real. It takes me out of my head. It defines my hunger and critiques my diet. I am confident that it will do similar things for you. Also, be sure to thank your body, frequently.

As far as supporting other people goes, my best advice is to just listen. Sometimes people just need a trusted friend to vent to or confide in. Perhaps they need to tell you something without fear of judgment. Be that friend. Practice active listening by giving verbal and physical cues that you are listening, like nodding and saying "I hear you" or "I understand". Repeat what you heard back to them for validation. To someone in crisis, this can be invaluable. When offering support, try to put your personal opinions to the side unless you are asked, or feel there is the threat of danger or harm. Pace yourself and be realistic in what you can do and how much you can handle. Do not offer support to someone when you aren't feeling well, as it often results in a lot of frustration and a breach in trust. Structure your support so that there is room for you to voice your emotional state. Never share information that someone you are supporting has shared with you to others without explicit permission. Find friends to help you process what you are dealing with, without breaking the confidence of the person you are supporting. Know the professional agencies in your area and what services they offer. Ask the person you are supporting how they feel about professional or organizational help, and try to respect their wishes. Make resources available to people in need. This means giving numbers and referrals to your friend of trusted groups and agencies or literature. Find or start support groups for any array or combination of mental/emotional health. Research techniques for emotional care.

Cook them nutritious meals. Be consistent. Check in on a daily basis, or more frequently. Guide, but do not force them, away from unhealthy behaviors. Validate their experience. Empathize with them. Give and receive support, always, because we deserve it. You deserve support.



# Snow Leopard

BY: MARY LA

SHE WEARS A long-sleeved sweatshirt to work, despite the stuffiness indoors. All day she stands at the counter and reminds herself to smile when customers and managers approach. The air-con buzzing right behind her, the windows unopened, the electronic ringing of the shop-front door.

Her smile wobbles as if it has taken on a life of its own.

'You look like a scared rabbit,' says one woman, and Erzule takes a deep breath and looks down at the floor as she packages up the order. She checks the script again: double-checks the dosage for hyperactive children. The bearded man next in line complains that Viagra does not work for him. He says he needs sex to take his mind off things and he stares at her breasts, not meeting her enquiring look, just straining at her as if she is in his mind, swallowed up whole. 'Like anyone else, I need it,' he says, tongue thick in his mouth, as if any encounter is better as 'it', the right to dehumanised coupling in some darkened hotel room.. She calls the pharmacist to reason with him, explains she is only an assistant. As the Viagra customer moves away, she shivers with fear or repugnance. A woman comes in looking for ant poison she can use indoors and out in the garden. 'Too many insects,' she says, 'vermin underfoot everywhere I turn, filthy creepycrawlies that have no right to breed.'

There is another customer who jumps the queue, holding out arms fiery and corruscated with eczema, complaining of stress, the anxiety that causes her skin to erupt and blister each time she watches news reports on the television. She has tried every remedy on the market and nothing works. A couple comes in with a crying baby and demands child-safe tranquillisers. Teenagers buy cough mixture with what might be forged prescriptions, a pair of youngsters entwined but with no expression in their eyes, no tenderness or affection.

When she breaks for lunch and goes out into the street, there are shouts and high-pitched shrilling, police and ambulance sirens right there at the corner, an accident between a cyclist and a Volvo sedan. Deafening noise of sirens, voyeurs gathering in groups to look at the cracked windscreen and hoping for news of ghoulish death, suffering, anything to relieve the monotony. The cyclist has been taken to hospital, says a gaunt angry woman, the driver of the Volvo has been

arrested. An elderly pedestrian was injured too, but nobody pays much attention to elderly pedestrians in the city. Vermin to the authorities. Dead rats, dead pigeons, the bodies of teenagers who have overdosed in the alley behind the shopping mall. All of it garbage. Tasteless slices of pizza thrown into the gutters, a strangled cat flung thrown over a brick wall. Everywhere she looks, there is waste and destruction.

This society is unlivable, she thinks, and flinches as if she has said something too real and too close to the truth.

All afternoon there are more customers lining up for medications and palliatives, complaining of unwellness, the pervasive depression, sadness and apathy. Will the new pills enable me to go on without hope? asks a slender woman with fingernails bitten to the quick. There are no answers, but the questions haunt Erzule. It has begun to rain and the streets are dark outside the spotlight shop windows. The customers keep coming in, spluttering and grey with pain, holding out prescriptions, holding out the cash for generic medicines. Sometimes Erzule detects some simmering rage, some suppressed fury, but then she hands across the sedatives and the flicker of anger has vanished. What would it be like to feel well in this city? she wonders. To wake up and feel well enough to want a changed life in a different kind of world? She walks home along the bridge over the river and grieves at the sight of waterborne debris, the sodden packing cases, milk cartons and mattresses, the bloated corpse of a large dog, the sour odours rising from the murky water. Once there would have been forests here and tall reeds for nesting birds, a swift clean river flowing south to the ocean. Now there is a cesspool.

In the basement flat with rent paid two months in advance, she prises open a small aperture of window. The noise of traffic from the freeways will keep her awake, but the stale air is unbearable. She goes to the bathroom cabinet and takes out her bandages and a razor blades. In the evenings she has begun cutting herself again, letting the red blood flow so that she can stay calm.

Her mother rings from El Salvador at 8pm each evening. She takes the call at the kitchen table, hoping her voice will sound calm enough to fool her mother. Blood pools onto the table, dark slow pools of blood that shine in the lamplight, as her mother tells Erzule the family news. Her brother in Chicago has been imprisoned again for dealing in drugs. Her uncle has poisoned himself by eating contaminated fish in old tin cans. The army is beating up students who joined the rioting workers outside the foreign-owned factories. The tap water has been

running rust-red all week, nobody dares drink without boiling it first. Neighbours get up before dawn to queue at the market, but dried beans are the only food in abundance.

‘We cannot go on like this,’ says Erzule’s mother, a phrase she has used all her life. But she goes on all the same.

‘You have your papers now,’ her mother tells Erzule. ‘There is nothing to worry about. Don’t send money until you are made permanent staff. Are you eating properly? Who helps comb and plait your hair each week?’

When she puts down the phone, there is blood all over the table, dripping onto the floor. Erzule wonders if she is going mad, the way so many immigrants go mad when they finally get a toehold in the New World. Back at home life is so much harder, the desperation and uncertainty. Her uncle stockpiling cans of imported food in the cellar, corrugated drums of petrol hidden behind the bedroom partitions. The stinging air gritty with pollution, the rumours of toxic dumping, the rubbish pits burning through the night. Armoured vehicles driving in convoy through the streets, the plazas barricaded. The forests are being cleared in the valleys around the city, a pall of smoke rising from the ravaged clearings, mudslides into the stagnant river, the land gutted and broken. Young boys go out to scour through the undergrowth, hoping to capture exotic birds, iguanas, toads and snakes for export as novelty pets to the rich foreigners with their gilded cages and aquariums in skyscraper apartments.

And she is the lucky one, able to live in a wealthier country, able to walk home without passing through armed checkpoints, not waking to the noise of gunfire at night. Here the war is invisible, like internalised conflict, a war everyone chooses to ignore. She takes a clean blade and slices again, going in too deep. The blade hits an artery and bright scarlet blood gushes all over her sweatshirt. This is bad. No tourniquet can stop the jet spraying her clothes, the floor, the walls.

After several minutes of fumbling with soaking bandages and towels, feeling the dizziness and knowing she will lose consciousness soon, she calls for an ambulance.

Coming around groggy, furious at herself, she stares up into the neon glare of emergency casualty. The nurse is angry with her, telling her to hold still. Her arm is numb. ‘Are you crazy?’ says the nurse as she takes Erzule’s blood pressure. ‘To waste other people’s time and money on your own madness. You could have died if you had not called for help. It is criminal to damage yourself this way, you owe it to the state to stay alive and contribute.’

Erzule looks up at the tired worn face of the nurse, the frustration etched into deep grooves on either side of the mouth. The nurse reminds her of her aunt who worked with battered women in the shelter, would end a long day by raging at the women themselves as they left the safety of the shelter and returned to the men who hurt them. Women needing money for bread and rent, staying on with brutal men because that is what their mothers had done, because that was all they knew. Her aunt who had wanted to help and had found herself helpless.

We age so quickly, thinks Erzule, the masks that stiffen into place, the habit of defendedness and turning away, turning against ourselves and one another. We train ourselves not to feel because we cannot go on enduring the pain and fear. She wishes she could sit down with this tired woman and have a cup of tea, say things that might break through the barriers, explain why she needs to cut, why she is going mad. But the nurse is hurrying, there is another patient waiting. Wheeled in, a small white face against the coarse bedsheet, tubes coiled above an oxygen mask.

After the stitches and blood transfusion, Erzule has to talk with the psychiatrist. A tall greyheaded man with an abstracted manner, as if he is not really here, is somewhere off by himself, in an easy chair beside the fire with a detective novel open and his pipe lit. Avuncular and genial, a man believing himself to be harmless. Clearing his throat as he reads, amused by the fiction, the unsurprising murder in the vicarage, the elegant solving of fictional murders, a parallel universe where everything has a solution for those clever enough to decipher the clues. More tea, vicar? He has the air of a father confessor, a kindly scientist, a man who can finish crossword puzzles. Erzule knows immediately that she will not be able to communicate with him, this white-coated priest of the psychiatric wards. So many professional and irrelevant questions.

His name tag is partially concealed by a crease in the white coat. Dr Whar-, perhaps Wharton or Wharburton. To war with Whar, she thinks, bracing herself. Dr Whodunit, a senior psychiatrist who can pigeonhole Erzule with clinical definitions. He frowns and makes some notes, then tells her she may be bipolar, rapid cycling bipolar, treatable but lifelong. The moods go up and down, he explains, too high and too low. He muses about the likelihood of previous psychotic episodes. Does she feel the world is an unsafe place? Does she suspect she is being followed or watched? Has she ever thought she might have unseen enemies?

All the time, doctor, says Erzule, all the time.



Paranoia, he says. He will give her medications to take each evening and assures her she will feel better once the meds kick in. A counsellor will see her once a week and a community social worker will be appointed to help her adjust, refashion her lifestyle, learn smarter techniques of self-care. It will all get better. Life is what you make of it, he says, that practised crinkly smile. He would pat her shoulder but does not touch disturbed females in his wards, sets clear boundaries between the staff and the patients, the sane and orderly versus the insane and disorderly. Although Dr W does not use the term 'hysterical', it stays with him as he does his rounds. How these sick women spill over into messy emotional disorder, like cats giving birth to too many kittens, like shrieking furies that lash out at themselves with knives, the smashed mirrors in the cloakrooms reflecting only fragments, women flying along corridors like trapped birds flinging themselves against sealed windows, the walls of the consulting rooms smeared with pathetic messages in blood. Bedlam, madness uncontained, avenging women threatening to burn down the hospital, run out into the streets and commit murder or worse. Women who seem hellbent on destroying civilization, all that has been built up over generations, the decency and morality and prosperity of the civilised nations. Homewreckers, arsonists, dambusters, bombmakers, all of them lunatics needing restraint and confinement.

Last week as he had been crossing a recreation room near one of the locked wards, smiling at the quiet rows of patients watching game shows on television, an obese and unkempt woman named Sarah had accosted him and told him she was on a personal mission to destroy the nuclear family, put an end to the farce of mothers and fathers and two-and-a-half children. 'I'd rather we ran free as tribes in the wilderness, I'd rather we lay down homeless on the dark earth each night listening to the stars whirling overhead,' Sarah had shouted at him, her tangled wiry hair falling over her face, her eyes black with hatred. DrW had kept his cool and had the woman restrained, then sedated. But the incident had left him unsteady, reluctant to move around the building unescorted.

'It will get better if you take your meds and be sensible, cooperate with us, be a good girl,' he says again, already moving on to the next bed, the next sad but typical case history. Erzule nods, because she cannot say to him that the madness is out there, a collective cultural insanity. Nobody escapes the madness out there.

A flashlight in the face. She wakes from a drugged stupor and watches the night nurse moving between the beds with a handheld

torch, fixing the beam so that it catches the patients full-face. Surveillance, a system of well-intentioned spying. Lie still and fake sleep, keep your eyes squeezed shut, do not move on pain of death.

Erzule opens her eyes in the half-dark and recalls a school trip into the mountains, years before, an educational outing to see the new dam, then to visit the trout hatcheries filled with imported rainbow trout. Walking along the raised walkways, watching the fish gasping and thrashing together in the hatcheries, shallow pools encased in mesh. The rose-red and white blooming of ulcers and lesions on the trout, those dappled flanks dulled and diseased, the damaged scales cascading into the foul water. She could not move, could not look away.



These suffering sentient beings tortured and confined in such appalling conditions. She could feel her own body memories surfacing, hands gripping her wrists, the probing between her legs, convulsing with fear and shame, the certainty she would be killed, condemned, blamed and driven away from the family home, a disgrace. There is nowhere that does not hurt in this body that is not her own, is used and tormented by others.

A new terrible language comes into her mind and she hears it clearly in the dying throes of the trout: They are suffering as I have suffered but I am alive to tell the story, I am just standing here and they are dying.

This will never leave her: the agony in her chest when she saw the trout struggling in vain. How she could not breathe properly, sucking in fear as if the day had become airless, a refined zone without enough oxygen, the river somewhere deep down blocked and twisting above the towering dam wall, the observation viewing stations and the pillared bridges over the dam, the power thwarted, the life force ebbing out of the depths. The river too in its death throes, the fish dying in meshed pens, the humans oblivious.

In an hour or two it will be dawn and they will drug her again. To go on seems impossible. If she can get to the window, she might be able to open it and breathe fresh air or at least glimpse the sky, something to give her courage for the day ahead. She might even find the courage to leap into the void.

‘Listen to me,’ says the patient in the next bed. All she can make out is his black hair on the pillow, a young strong voice.

‘Up in the mountains of north Kazakstan there is a snow leopard crossing a ravine to reach the far slope. A fully grown female leopard able to spring at her prey from a distance of 25 feet, lithe and agile and uncompromising. She lives and hunts between the tree line and the snowline and against a snowy outcrop she is one with her background, moving out only at dawn and dusk when visibility is poor. At night she sleeps with her tail curled around her face for warmth. There are bullet tracks healing on her flanks. She has survived the murder of her parents, her sisters, her cubs, and right now, just for this moment, she is indomitable. Lie back and listen to her treading snow, moving in that stillness, learn from her.

‘Her fur is the colour of smoke spotted with black markings and she could stand unseen beside you on a slope of mottled screed. She can outwit all but the most heartless of enemies. Keep your mind fixed on the survival of the snow leopard, listen to her moving through the ravine, padding between boulders with her long tail swishing. Keep watching her. Her survival makes sense, her survival is the key to our sanity.’

He goes on talking, speaking of allies and conspirators and another kind of future, a world independent of what crushes us now, but Erzule has fallen asleep. She sleeps deeply until the day nurses come on duty and when she wakes the bed is empty. But she is not alone now and the insanity out there does not matter. The boy in the next bed is gone, but she knows how to find him. And in her mind’s eye there is the snow leopard crouching on that rocky outcrop, free and dangerous, waiting to spring.

# Civilized Sanity is Impossible

BY: LAUREL LUDDITE AND SKUNKLY MONKLY

**NOTE: THE WRITER'S VOICES ARE DISTINGUISHED BY FONT. LAUREL'S WRITING APPEARS IN this font, WHEREAS SKNUK'S WRITING APPEARS IN *this font*.  
Collaberative writing will appear in this font.**

The very psychological qualities so earnestly sought in today's recovery, psychological, and spiritual movements; the social equalities for which today's social justice movements struggle valiantly; and the ecological gains sought after by today's environmental movements, are all the same qualities and conditions in which our species lived for more than 99.997 percent of its existence.

—Chellis Glendinning, in “Ecopsychology”, edited by Rozak, Gomes, and Kammer

STANDING IN LINE, shitting in water, going to work or school, being surrounded by people that neither recognize us nor care if we die, smiling at superiors we despise, walking on past the homeless man with his hand out for help—these things are crazy, and every time we do them we become a little less human. We ignore our own instinct, common sense, and self-respect as we open old wounds and add new ones every day. Then there are the special days when we get an extra dose of trauma: rape, arrest, bombings, bloodshed.

*I am not smiling; I have to bare my teeth to open my eyes this wide.*

The sky is orange. Reflecting streetlights, it hides the stars. In the distance I can hear the freeway—in fact, I cannot escape this sound of a culture gone crazy, though an endless loop of self-destructive thoughts runs through my head trying to drown out the noise.

It's as if something remains in me of the human urge to belong wherever I am, even when that place is as wrong as a suburb. Instinctively, I try to blend in. My thoughts and feelings become as ugly as the neighborhood.

I am tempted to listen to them: maybe it is best to die. I can't live like this: full of rage at the madness around me, and despair at my inability to stop it. Where would I start? With the buildings ripped from ancient forests? With pavement entombing the living ground? In this house or this one, or the next, wherever abuse and pain leak out from closed curtains like the light from flickering TV sets?



Sleepless, I count the days until I can get back to the woods. I count my other options, grateful for them even as I doubt I will ever be happy having come from this place. Happiness seems so distant when you can't even sleep. And I wonder what bothers me more—these nights of total grinding awareness, or the others when I am unaware.

*As a bored child strapped into a car seat, I was at the mercy of my mother and every other driver just a painted line away from mingling (and mangling) lives. I often ripped out thinking about those other people. I wondered if the split second it took to whiz past each other could really be the extent of our interaction. My young mind searched for meaning. How could they matter when there were so many of them? I doubted they were real. They became obstacles in my way, tools to get what I want, or scenery—the background to my crowded life.*

*But the more I objectify others, the less I exist myself.*

Just try to live in an open, interconnected way within civilization. You'll be eaten alive by the absence. You will eat yourself alive from loneliness. If not, civilization will shift its walls to exclude you, and suddenly you won't be within. You'll be against.

Welcome.

Recovery of this lost something—nature, innocence, participation—requires, psychologically, returning to a beginning. That, in turn, requires the destruction of an unsatisfactory world.

—Paul Shepard, “Nature and Madness”

It's understood in most systems of medicine that you can't heal in a sick environment. Western medicine calls this “holistic”. It's just common sense. The conditions that caused your disease will only feed the sickness. If you stay in them and do begin to heal, the chances are high that you will be re-infected or fall back into the same destructive patterns that caught you before.

Since civilization is our individual insanities playing themselves out on a daily basis, it is completely incompatible with sanity. An individual cannot heal without rejecting the basic twisted principles that civilization is built on.

It's a dog eat dog world. We're only human. Natural resources were put here for man's use. We civilized humans are the pinnacle of

creation. All evolution leads to us. We're better off now than we've ever been. Our progress is amazing. Technology can fix it. Bigger is better. More harder faster.

No headshrinker doc has ever come near enough to tag me with a diagnosis. I've just come to expect blackwater days and nights near edges. This is the most honest expression of who I am, in the place that I am, at this time. This honesty is what I owe to Life.



I'm lucky to know others forced to question the polite lies. Sacha has been labeled bipolar (manic-depressive) for his unplanned journeys to places outside “normal reality”. Despite being part of a large network of community that spans continents and subcultures, he was hospitalized three times against his will. He fell through the net. Attempting now to fill in the missing spaces that let him down, he is traveling the country doing workshops wherever people can sit in a circle and begin to break the silence around madness. As people told their stories in the workshop I attended, an image emerged of our society: a collection of insane individuals bound together by preconceptions and the coercion of civilization. A field of diverse flowers cut short into someone's idea of a lawn, where a few adapt nicely to manipulation and the rest try desperately to restrain their need to bloom.

In the workshop I learned that the World Bank determines the impact of “mental illness” on economic activity by calculating “days out of role”. They add up the time when people are not able to fill their de-

terminated roles as worker, soldier, mother, etc. The co-facilitator Ashley offered another equation, a personal one, calculating, the days one is not able to be the person one wants to be. Others in the workshop nodded, and spoke of their decisions to take psychiatric drugs. They said they just wanted to feel human.

I won't judge anyone who says they need the drugs—it's true, I agree, people do need medication to function within this society. The boundaries of "mental illness" are determined by our culture, but the various forms of experience that get classified as illness or virtue are real. I just have to ask why functioning in society is anyone's goal. If there might be something better; a place where no one has to medicate their experience to be accepted, to be safe, to feel human. I have to ask the same questions I ask of everybody these days, medicated or not, diagnosed or not, because I constantly ask them of myself. I know my own answers and I understand they rest upon the risk I take to reach out unrestrained.

*The more I stay in the woods, the more aware and sensitized I become. Generally, it's called being "bushed" and thought of as a temporary mental illness caused by being in the wild too long. Town becomes "too much to take". The speed and sensory stimulation is overwhelming, maddening. Exhaust fumes and rudeness are more potent poisons than usual. I see genocide and oppression everywhere. The examples are not subtle, yet I had stopped noticing when I witnessed (and participated in) them every day.*

*Back in town, everything I see through the brown air is a nightmarish dreamscape of industrial destruction. I feel sick if I let myself feel anything. Sobbing hysterically on public transit will not get me the type of attention I need. Acting to stop the injustices around me will land me in an institution. So I dissociate. I try not to feel, and almost immediately, the cravings return. The tongue I'm biting wants some candy. My mind turns hypercritical and violent, and my heart, feeling rejected, withdraws. Lacking internal guidance or motivation, sleep, work, and T.V. gain new appeal. I'm even thankful for the ads that tell me what to eat.*

In rejecting civilization's basic principles, we step away. We begin to learn—or remember—saner things: We are all connected. Everything is alive.

We can heal, but not in civilization.

And civilization cannot heal. As the effect of our madness, it will disappear when we stop being crazy.

And people call me pessimistic...

# Underground Roots

## VISIONS FOR RESISTING MONOCULTURE AND BUILDING COMMUNITY

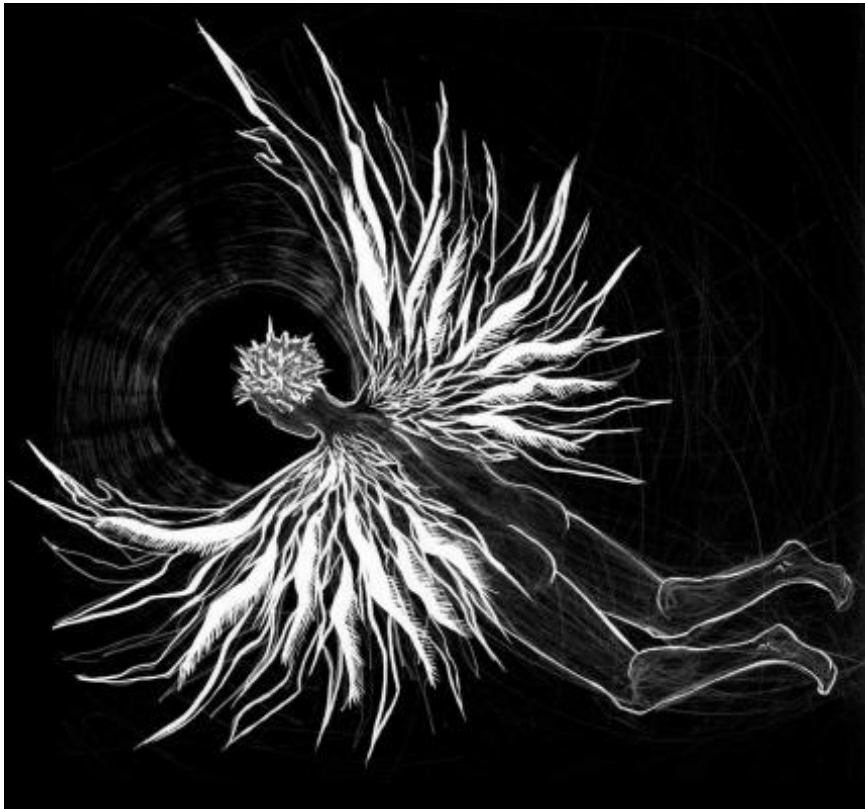
BY: *THE ICARUS PROJECT*

YOU CAN SEE it all from the highway: enormous monocrops of identical corn plants that reach for miles bordered by an endless sea of strip malls, parking lots, and tract housing. You can see it on our kitchen counters and in our classrooms: the same can of soda on the table in Cairo and Kentucky, the same definitions of ‘progress’ and ‘freedom’ in textbooks around the world. Monoculture—the practice of replicating a single plant, product or idea over a huge area—is about the most unstable, unsustainable, unimaginative form of organization that exists, but in the short term it keeps the system running smoothly and keeps the power in the hands of a small number of people.

In the logic of our modern world, whether it’s in the farmer’s field or in the high school classroom, diversity is inefficient and hard to manage. Powerful people figured out awhile ago that it’s a lot easier to control things if everyone’s eating the same foods, listening to the same music, reading the same books, watching the same TV shows, and speaking the same language. This is what we call the monocult, and while everyone is supposedly more and more connected by this new “global culture,” we’re more and more isolated from each other. Things feel more and more empty, and so many of us end up lonely and rootless, wondering why everything feels so wrong.

Out in the wild things are very different. In old forests everything is connected, from the moss and lichens to the ferns and brambles to the birds and beetles. In our human minds we separate all the parts of the forest into separate pieces when a lot of the time it can be more helpful to view the forest as one giant organism with separate parts all working together. The trees of a forest intertwine their roots and actually communicate with each other underground. You see it most visibly along ravines and creek beds where a cut-away hillside reveals totally asymmetrical tangle of roots that no scientist could ever have imagined or planned out with all his laws of physics. Something in that tangle explains how those trees can lean out at all kinds of gravity-defying angles and hang their necks into the strongest winds and still survive, bending but not breaking, adapting with unpredictable curves and an-

gles to the way the world breathes and shines and rains and burns. Concrete can't do that. There are a lot of lessons to be learned from the way life evolves and gets stronger in the wild. Something about the living architecture of chaos and time, multi-tiered forests and microscopic algae, outlasts any of the straight lines and square institutions we're told to believe in.



We believe that people do not belong in grids and boxes of rootless lonely monocultures. Humans are adaptable creatures, and while a lot of people learn to adapt, some of us can't handle the modern world no matter how many psych drugs or years of school or behavior modification programs we've been put through. Any realistic model of mental health has to begin by accepting that there is no standard model for a mind and that none of us are single units designed for convenience and efficiency. No matter how alienated you are by the world around you, no matter how out of step or depressed and disconnected you might feel: you are not alone. Your life is supported by the lives of count-

less other beings, from the microbes in your eyelashes to the men who paved your street. The world is so much more complicated and beautiful than it appears on the surface.

There are so many of us out here who feel the world with thin skin and heavy hearts, who get called crazy because we're too full of fire and pain, who know that other worlds exist and aren't comfortable in this version of reality. We've been busting up out of sidewalks and blooming all kind of misfit flowers for as long as people have been walking on this Earth. So many of us have access to secret layers of consciousness—you could think of us like dandelion roots that gather minerals from hidden layers of the soil that other plants don't reach. If we're lucky we share them with everyone on the surface—because we feel things stronger than the other people around us, a lot of us have visions about how things could be different, why they need to be different, and it's painful to keep them silent. Sometimes we get called sick and sometimes we get called sacred, but no matter how they name us we are a vital part of making this planet whole.

It's time we connect our underground roots and tell our buried stories, grow up strong and scatter our visions all over the patches of scarred and damaged soil in a society that is so desperately in need of change.

Language is a place to begin. Words can be powerful seeds. The medical authorities offer us all kinds of words to talk about ourselves and the troubles we have, words like "depression" and "psychosis." Sometimes these words help us look back on our lives with a new way of understanding what the hell was going on, but too often these words end up putting us in sad, separate boxes where we feel like there's something wrong with us and we can't connect to anyone else.

Language is powerful. It can open the world up like sunrise and it can block out the sky like prison walls.

Language is Magic. Back in the days before mass media, techno culture, and fluorescent light—when it got dark at night and people sat around fires and told stories or sat alone and wrote by candlelight—there was a respect for the spoken and written word, for the story, for myths passed down through generations and adapted through time.

Whether we realize it or not we cast spells with our words. These days we're supposed to believe science has explained away any need for supernatural powers, but spells are being cast around us constantly: spells are in the billboards whose messages eat their way into

our minds; they're in the television's hypnotic glare making us forget our own dreams and replacing them with infomercials advertising convenience and apocalypse; they're in the books explaining one side of history at school and in the pop-up windows overtaking our computer screens.

We have other people's language in our heads and on our tongues. Words like "disorder" and "disease" offer us one set of metaphors for understanding the way it feels to experience our lives through our particularly volatile minds and souls, but it is such a limited view. Metaphors are very powerful. We think in language, constantly filtering all our perceptions through the available structures of words and metaphors in our brain—in many senses the available metaphors create our reality.

Looking around these days it's pretty clear we are experiencing a serious lack of imagination. It's like we're under the spell of the Monocult—a spell of numbed out distraction from the fact that things could be so much better and beautiful. The spell controls how we articulate our dreams and understand our bodies and minds. It controls how we feel about ourselves and whether we connect with other people. It leaves us with strange words in our mouths and on our tongues and horrible catchy commercial jingles and stereotypes about our neighbors implanted in our minds.

Perhaps if we can change the metaphors that shape our minds, we can change the reality around us.

We need to start talking and networking—finding common ground and common language with the other people around us. We need to get together in groups and find language for our stories that make sense to us and leave us feeling good about ourselves. Unlearn social conditioning about what it means to be 'sick' and 'healthy'. We need to reclaim our dreams and scheme up ways to make them happen. We need to share everything we've figured out about how to be a human being. We need to love ourselves as we are—crooked and intense, powerful and frightening, unruly and prone to mess around in the dirt—and understand that weeds are simply plants who refuse to be domesticated and displayed. We need to write new maps of the universes we share in common and find ways to heal together. We need to summon up everything we've got to create social webs and lasting support networks for ourselves and the people who will follow us.

# Decolonizing Mental Health

## *A STORY OF SPLITTING*

BY: BEN BARKER

IT'S NEAR IMPOSSIBLE to have healthy minds or bodies living in the dominant culture. Healthy minds depend on healthy bodies; our minds depend on our experience and we experience the world with our bodies. When we get stuck in thinking and feeling with our heads too much, we start to reside there and our bodies are allowed to go numb. Our experience of the world becomes impaired, weighed down by a lens that's culturally imposed and does not reflect the real world. If we don't look around this lens, we will go insane. As we see. A solution resides in our bodies and in decolonized and once-again healthy minds. Feeling with our bodies, we can begin to regain an understanding of our place in the world: unique and loving human beings intimately embedded in a living landbase and sacredly connected to a community of countless other beings, all unique and loving as well.

My own story, similar to the story of many others, is this: my soul has been split. Years have gone by since my beginning to question—and then actively resist—this system of social and ecological destruction and yet it still can be so hard for me to listen to my heart over the distracting and incessant clamor of this soul-killing civilization. It's as if everyday is a new personal crisis. I've long struggled with allowing myself to fully feel what I know. How does one grapple with the understanding that over 100 species of living beings go extinct every day? How can one come to terms with the privilege that comes with being a beneficiary of this white, human, and male supremacist culture? It's easy to fall back into denial and abstraction, if need be, but this has never made me truly happy. It's also easy to shut off my emotions to the extent of where not even the carcinogens spreading throughout every stream in the U.S.—and indeed my own body—can penetrate my psyche. Of course, though, this only lasts as long as denial permits. Naturally, I can start to feel I'm going insane trying to find myself in this mess. Yet, just realizing this is reassuring, because it is a reminder that my body and soul are resisting the alienation and wrongness I experience everyday living in this life-hating culture.

I've come to know that to be split living in this culture is only natural, but it's how we're split that is important. To begin to see and fight against the sickness surrounding us almost certainly means you

will start to split: a constant struggle of your liberated, sane self to eradicate any and all remaining colonization. Ultimately, though, for us to become truly well again, we will have to aim higher to the source of this insanity and put a stop to the whole colonizing system. This is healthy. This is natural. It's what any sane being would do and must do now in these times of ecological apocalypse.

There can be another splitting, though, that is not so desirable or necessary. Instead of splitting yourself away from the culture, you just split yourself. The messages of this culture have been so thoroughly metabolized that you start to believe you're the crazy one for thinking and feeling differently. The experiences you have still put you at odds with the culture, though, and this is where the splitting comes in. Our souls and wills are not crushed easily; the culture has to be at work constantly to remind us of our wretched existence. We are told over and over again in large and small ways that this is just how life has to be and that we are foolish for thinking things could be different, meaning it's foolish to think we could actually be happy and live in a sane way. It's not always easy to see through this premise, as nonsensical as it is. I know because I still struggle with it. Rest assured, the planet and



our human communities do not have the time for us all to submit to our personal struggles; we must start to give back and fight back for the land that gives us life. Yet, collectively, we can help each other through this mental splitting, and start to see clearly where the insanity lies: in the culture, not in our minds.

When this land was colonized by civilization, not only were the original people destroyed, but the wisdom they had about how to live here was destroyed as well. Now, people live on this land, but they do not live with it and they do not live lives of wisdom. To regain this wisdom is to regain mental, physical, emotional, ecological, and social health. Decolonization is a necessary process. It means eradicating alienation from our hearts and minds, and reclaiming our experiences.

It is the key to becoming whole again and to again start living lives of meaning, lives that make the world better off because we have been born.

For me, decolonizing in terms of mental health means much self-discipline. In my own life this can look like: getting outside and learning about my landbase through experience, eating healthy, curing ailments naturally, getting exercise, slowing down my pace, writing down how I feel, having honest conversation with loved ones, communicating with other-than-human beings and life-forces, reading about radical history, being active in my community, and most importantly making (albeit, usually small) choices that emphasize my alignment to life and opposition to civilization. So often I have to remind myself that I am made of the relationships I have: to this land, to my loved ones, and to the universe. The healthier my relationships are, the healthier I am in all ways, very much including, to bring this back to context, mentally.

Of course this process of decolonizing can seem almost impossible if you're stuck in a deep sickness or in crisis-mode. For many of us, it's undeniably true that sometimes everything can seem really dark and to see light is distant or unimaginable. This darkness can manifest itself in what is called depression, self-destruction, or anxiety: choose your poison, as the diagnosis is endless for a sick culture. For me it has meant identity crisis, insecurity, and apathy. When I start to feel this way, I first ask my loved ones and landbase for support and wisdom. Next, I usually revert back to this incredibly wise story told by author, Derrick Jensen:

One day I was just sobbing, and I called up a friend of mine, Jeanette Armstrong, who is an Okanagan Indian, writer and activist. I said to her, "This work is just killing me. It's breaking my heart." And she said, "Yeah, it'll do that." And I said, "The dominant culture hates everything, doesn't it?" And she said, "Yeah, it does. Even itself." And I said, "It has a death urge, doesn't it?" And she said, "Yeah, it does." And I said, "Unless it's stopped it's going to kill everything on the planet, isn't it?" And she said, "Yeah, it is. Unless it's stopped." And then I said, "We're not going to make it to some great new glorious tomorrow, are we?" And she thought for a moment and then she said the best thing she could possibly say, which was, "I've been waiting for you to say that."

The reason it was the best thing she could say was that it normalized my despair. It let me know that despair is

an appropriate response to a desperate situation; the sorrow is just sorrow and the pain is just pain. It's not so much the sorrow or even the pain that hurts, as it is my resistance to it. It let me know that I can feel all those things and it wouldn't kill me. There's this idea that if you really recognize how bad things are you have to go around being miserable all the time. But the truth is I'm really happy, and I am full of rage and sorrow and joy and happiness and contentment and discontent. I'm full of all those things. It's okay to feel more than one thing at the same time.

As radicals, activists, and human beings living in the perpetual terror of civilization, it is not easy to sustain healthy minds. But, we mustn't forget it is the culture that is crazy and not us. The first step is merely to see the insanity for what it is. Then, we can relish our sane relationships and find the pools of strength that will allow us to never give up on our selves or our struggles for life against civilization. This is what it means to be mentally healthy in a culture gone mad.



#### POSTSCRIPT

I would like to thank the muse and the snow tips of trees in front of a reddish-blue sky for giving me the words that comprise this essay after I tried unsuccessfully to write it alone for months. I'd be lost without you.

Thanks to my mother, folks at a local radical writing club, and other allies for helping with editing.



# About the Contributors

**BEN BARKER**, radical community organizer, zine-maker, organic food grower, and editor of “Mental Health & Civilization”, is also the author of the contributed essay, “Decolonizing Mental Health”. Keep up with his projects at [kidBarker.blogspot.com](http://kidBarker.blogspot.com)

**ASH**, author of the contributed essay, “Monsters”, has also self-published her own zine called “Body Conscious Birth Control” about FAM (Fertility Awareness Method). She lives in Phoenix, Oregon. Contact her here: [losingalltouch@hotmail.com](mailto:losingalltouch@hotmail.com)

**THE CRIMETHINC. EX-WORKERS’ COLLECTIVE** wrote the text used in “Recipe for Mental Health”, originally published in their book, “Recipes for Disaster: An Anarchist Cookbook”. Visit their website at [crimethinc.com](http://crimethinc.com)

**DANNY SHOWALTER** is the author of the contributed essay, “My Dad, in 1984”. He is an activist from Portland, Oregon. He can be contacted here: [fire-eater@riseup.net](mailto:fire-eater@riseup.net)

**LIANA BUSZKA** contributed the essay, “Self-Abusive Thoughts”. More of Liana’s writings on mental health can be found at [experiencesofbeing.tumblr.com](http://experiencesofbeing.tumblr.com). In addition to writing, Liana makes politically- and ecologically-charged artwork, which can be found at [lianaprintsndraws.tumblr.com](http://lianaprintsndraws.tumblr.com). She can be contacted at: [lianabuszka@gmail.com](mailto:lianabuszka@gmail.com)

**ROBERT JENSEN**, in addition to writing the text of the “Anguish of the Age” contributed essay, is the author of several books including “Getting Off: Pornography and the End of Masculinity” and “The Heart of Whiteness: Confronting Race, Racism and White Privilege”. Robert is a professor in the School of Journalism at the University of Texas at Austin. Contact him here: [rjensen@uts.cc.utexas.edu](mailto:rjensen@uts.cc.utexas.edu)

**JAN LUNDBERG** is a former oil-industry analyst who became a nonprofit environmental activist and musician. His contributed essay is called “Celebrate the Stampede or Step Out of it”. Jan founded Culture Change in Washington, DC. Further writings, plus more, can be found at [culturechange.org](http://culturechange.org)

URBAN SCOUT (aka Peter Bauer) is a multi-disciplinary artist and environmental educator. He is a performance artist, filmmaker, photographer, designer, musician and basket maker. His contributed essay, “Meaninglessness vs. Rewilding” can also be found in his book, “Rewild or Die: Revolution and Renaissance at the End of Civilization”. Further writings can be found at [urbanscout.org](http://urbanscout.org)

THE FILTHY POLITICIANS is an anti-civ hip hop music group from the occupied territory known to some as Canada. Their contribution is the lyrics to their song, “Passengers”, which, in addition to other songs, can be heard here: [myspace.com/thefilthypoliticians](http://myspace.com/thefilthypoliticians)

JORDAN KNOWLES contributed the essay “You Deserve Support,” and is an herbalist, community organizer, and radical feminist, environmental, and queer activist. Jordan is also the author of the zine, “Aiding and Abetting: Rape”. Contact Jordan here: [rad\\_ed1215@riseup.net](mailto:rad_ed1215@riseup.net)

MARY LA, author of the story, “Snow Leopard”, maintains a blog with further writings, found here: [africanalchemy.wordpress.com](http://africanalchemy.wordpress.com)

LAUREL LUDDITE AND SKUNKLY MONKLY wrote the text used in “Civilized Sanity is Impossible”, which is an excerpted section from their book, “Fire and Ice: Disturbing the Comfortable and Comforting the Disturbed”.

THE ICARUS PROJECT is a collaborative network of people living with and/or affected by experiences that are commonly diagnosed and labeled as psychiatric conditions. They envision a new culture and language that resonates with our actual experiences of ‘mental illness’ rather than trying to fit our lives into a conventional framework. The Icarus Project contributed the essay, “Underground Roots”, which is from their book “Friends Make the Best Medicine”. Learn more and join the community at [theicarusproject.net](http://theicarusproject.net)

#### ARTIST CREDITS

KAITLYNN RADLOFF:  
IMAGES ON PG. 2, PG. 19, PG. 22, PG. 24, PG. 25, PG. 27, PG. 30, PG. 38, PG. 53, PG. 64, PG. 66, AND PG. 71  
Kaitlynn Radloff is a printmaker from Wisconsin. See more of her work at [kradloff.blogspot.com](http://kradloff.blogspot.com)

STEPHANIE MCMILLAN:

IMAGE ON PG. 17

Stephanie McMillan is a radical cartoonist and organizer. She illustrates a daily comic strip called “Minimum Security”, as well as a weekly comic series about the environmental emergency called “Code Green”. She is the author of several books, including “As the World Burns: 50 Simple Things You Can Do to Stay in Denial”, which she illustrated and co-authored with Derrick Jensen. Visit her website at [stephaniemcmillan.org](http://stephaniemcmillan.org)

LIANA BUSZKA:

FRONT COVER

More of Liana’s artwork can be found on her blog: [lianaprintsdraws.tumblr.com](http://lianaprintsdraws.tumblr.com). Her e-mail address is [lianabuszka@gmail.com](mailto:lianabuszka@gmail.com).

THEODORE BOLHA:

IMAGE ON PG. 47

Title of this contributed image: “Insatiable” © Theodore Bolha. For prints, contact: [ted\\_bolha@msn.com](mailto:ted_bolha@msn.com)

FAE LEAH:

IMAGES ON PG. 33 AND PG. 57

Fae Leah is an artist, activist, and graduate of Brock University with a Bachelor of Arts Honours Degree in Drama in Education. Visit her website at [faeleah.com](http://faeleah.com) to see her prints, photography, and other art. Fae Leah can be contacted at: [faeleah@gmail.com](mailto:faeleah@gmail.com)

THE ICARUS PROJECT:

IMAGE ON PG. 60

This image can be found at [theicarusproject.net](http://theicarusproject.net), as well as other images, writings, resources, and outlets for community for those living with and/or affected by experiences that are commonly diagnosed and labeled as psychiatric conditions.

URBAN SCOUT:

IMAGE ON PG. 35

This image can be found at [urbanscout.org](http://urbanscout.org)

# Afterword and Acknowledgments

## AFTERWORD FROM THE EDITOR

This project began to come to life during a time of much mental struggle in my own life, a time of decolonizing my heart and mind and learning to think and feel for myself. As often seems to happen, the anxiety and alienation I was experiencing motivated me to create something—a book in this case—that I felt could be important and helpful to others going through similar experiences, as it would be important and helpful to me if I found it.

Creating this book took a longer time than I initially expected, and I appreciate the patience of all of those involved. I am absolutely happy and excited with its outcome. Now I just wish that it has the effect I've intended it to have; to encourage those struggling with the alienation inherent in the dominant culture to trust themselves and the natural world, and to begin fighting back with all of their hearts.

Remember, you are not alone.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS FROM THE EDITOR

It has been honoring and humbling to have received so much encouragement and help in creating this project. My efforts would not be much without the support of my allies.

My deep respect and gratitude goes out to the writers and artists who contributed their work, as well as the creators of the “non-copyright” work that was borrowed. Their passion is what this book is made of.

Thank you to my human community and close friends whose love and comradery always inspires me. Particularly helpful and encouraging of this project were Jordan Knowles and Liana Buszka, as well as Val Wesp who proofread the bulk of the text.

I so appreciate those who contributed money to help this book reach printing. You have enabled the possibility of this book reaching far and wide.

Thank you to my friend and hero, the author Derrick Jensen, whose writing has completely changed my life. My understanding of both mental health and civilization is greatly due to his written wisdom.

Finally, I am always and forever indebted to the land where I live, and all of the Birch trees, Black-Capped Chickadees, Squirrels,

and other nonhumans who share this home. Thanks also to the wind, rain, soil, clouds, river, sun, and moon who offer their communion and guidance.

