

Mental Moments Assoc To file

In A Nutshell

"I could be bounded in a nutshell and count myself a king of infinite space..."

Wm. Shakespeare

Summer 2006

Biological Brain vs. Metaphysical Mind

by Paul Strashok

Herein are contained a few thoughts on a subject that, to me, is very important and vital to the issue of mental health. These few thoughts cannot do justice to the importance and validity of the argument, however they may plant seeds that would lead others to consider the truth of these matters.

In discussion with those who have taken courses in modern psychology and psychiatry, I have heard that the anatomy of the brain and brain chemistry are a large part of the curriculum that students must master before they get their degree. Rather than providing training in solution-oriented therapies, students are taught 'maintenance' of psychological problems through the use of medications to manipulate brain chemistry. It is very much 'in vogue' these days to speak about the brain as the center of consciousness and the highest part of the makeup of the human being. There is much talk about left-brain, right brain dichotomies and integration with all the attenuating processes and exercises designed to release creativity and a heightened consciousness.

In my day, when I was studying psychology at the U. of A. (Edmonton), I was most impressed by Maslow's 'hierarchy of needs' and 'theory of self-actualization'. From my viewpoint, at that time, it seemed to be a very enlightened approach to the psychology of mankind. There were other thinkers, psychologists, and philosophers that influenced me in those days, including Erich Fromm ("The Art of Loving"), Fritz Perls ("In and Out of the Garbage Can"), Abraham Hoffer (who pioneered the use of LSD treatment in Saskatchewan and later advanced the orthomolecular theory of medical treatment for mental illness) and Maharishi Mahesh Yogi (I was initiated into Transcendental Meditation in those years).

To me, the sadness of the commentary on the state of modern psychology and psychiatry (I know that there is a difference, however, for the sake of this article I will lump them together because, from that which I have heard, it seems they are melding ever closer together) is that there is no philosophical distinction made between the biological organ we know as 'brain' and the metaphysical entity that can only be described as 'mind'. There has been much talk about the differences found in brain function, size and activity of those who have had a long-term diagnosis of a 'brain disorder', but to me it is the old story of which came first, the chicken or the egg. That is to say, is the brain merely reflecting the state of consciousness within the mind or is it controlling that state? An altered state of consciousness may be reflected in the brain chemistry and I also know (from my experiences with heavy doses of medication) that brain chemistry can alter your state of consciousness. Also worthy of mention are the long-term effects of the use of

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MPA Society
122 Powell St.
Vancouver,
B.C.
V6A 1G1
Tel: 604-
482-3700
Fax: 604 -
738-4132
Website:
vmpa.org

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medications and the altering of brain chemistry thereby.

'Mind' as I know it and experience it is far beyond mere biological brain. When we see the accomplishments of humanity in the arts and sciences, we must admit that the mind of mankind is far beyond mere biological processes. We must admit, even as the threat of world-wide war and strife looms over us, that the 'mind' of mankind is capable of far better, far more positive and fruitful endeavors, as long as humankind is not reduced to the mere sum of its parts.

Throw into this mix the advent of the modern computer and 'cyborg' battle technology and we have a recipe that leads to either more true freedom or the enslavement of humanity to 'thinking machines'. Many futurists and science fiction writers see the next great conflict to be not country vs. country but man vs. thinking machines. As an acquaintance of mine aptly wrote – "A computer is a tool, not a companion."

Along these lines, I was reading a book on the development of artificial intelligence entitled, "The Society of Mind". The author was purporting that all thinking processes within the humans mind could be broken down to sub-routines, thereby allowing the

development of 'thinking machines'. It was an interesting thesis, but I came to a place in my reading where the author, out of the blue, stated, "Everyone knows that a belief in a soul is just an excuse for your own mistakes." He offered no logic or explanation for that statement. Suffice to say that I had read enough.

In this time, and especially dealing with the problem of a psychiatric diagnosis and the search for mental health that remains, let us have an exalted view of both the creature and the Creator. Let us admit that the human mind is much more than that biological entity that sits in our head between our shoulders. When we freely admit that the mind is a metaphysical entity made up of much more than just the sum of its parts, we have a working model that allows us to progress and grow in both understanding and wisdom, and, as well, we open ourselves to a 'recovery' model for mental illness – something that seems to be sorely lacking amongst those who would reduce humanity to just another species of animal and specimens worthy only of dissection and analysis rather than wonderful, awesome creations of a loving and guiding Creator.

"...let us have an exalted view of both the creature and the Creator."

Quote:

"The mind is the greatest of all human forces.
Control the mind and you control the body."

Griffin Jay, Randall Faye, and Lew Landers

The Editorial Board of **In A Nutshell** welcomes letters, articles, and poetry on mental health issues from you, our readers.

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The Music Inside

by Oliver Cross

We could say that meditation doesn't have a reason or doesn't have a purpose. In this respect it's unlike almost all other things we do except perhaps making music and dancing. When we make music we don't do it in order to reach a certain point, such as the end of the composition. If that were the purpose of music then obviously the fastest players would be the best. Also, when we are dancing we are not aiming to arrive at a particular place on the floor as in a journey. When we dance, the journey itself is the point, as when we play music the playing itself is the point. And exactly the same thing is true in meditation. Meditation is the discovery that the point of life is always arrived at in the immediate moment.

—Alan Watts (as quoted in Jack Kornfield, *A Path with Heart*, 1993)

What is meditation? I ponder the question routinely, as I have over the years, when I sit down to meditate.

Meditation teaches us to let our thoughts simply pass, not grasp onto them or take any too seriously. When we find ourselves slipping into conscious activity, to simply recognize the fact and lovingly, gently, forgivingly let it go again.

When we listen to music, we know better than to think

too hard to determine meaning or interpretation—we know that it isn't there to be found. Music is metaphor, an emotional experience that inspires the imagination. We enjoy it, we enjoy the rhythm and the rise and fall of the phrase.

All language is like this.

*“We begin to
move to and
participate in
the music
inside...”*

In meditation, recognize the power of music to move us, to motivate us, to inspire us, and when it comes to us, we are an audience of our own performance. What goes around comes around, and the music we listen to transforms our lives over time.

We begin to move to and participate in the music inside whether we like it or not. We dance to the music we hear. Physically, dance is rhythm, intensity and coordination.

We cannot move through life without exercising these elements in the body.

When it comes to the music we generate, we take requests. We eventually hear the music we ask for.

Listening well takes diligence, diligent practice over time. Over days, over months, over years we learn to listen. And, attending internally or outward, we get to know—we are taught by, we become familiar with—what we've listened to.

Book Review

The AIMS Test, Mad Pride & Other Essays

By Ron Carten

Published by Keewatin Books (www.keewatinbooks.ca), 2006

Reviewed by Paul Strashok

Available at Magpie Books and Peoples' Co-op Bookstore

In this book of essays, Ron Carten is not afraid to confront the questions, personal issues and systemic problems that confront anyone who has been diagnosed with a major mental illness. Starting from his own youth as one who was disenchanted with the status quo and sought answers in the slums of Vancouver in the Downtown Eastside, he takes his readers on a journey through lunacy, delusional thinking, psychosis and a battle for survival that is intensely personal but

one that also speaks to all those who are involved with mental health, either as consumer/survivors or providers of services.

With candid honesty and poignant detail, Mr. Carten chronicles his own story as a 'dharma bum' working and travelling across Canada fighting for the basic needs of human existence; food, clothing and shelter. He describes the onset of delusional thinking

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Minute Particulars

by Andrew Feldmár

Maybe he was seven years old, maybe only five. Billy isn't sure. His parents left him alone with a three-year-old little girl who was supposed to be looked after by them as a favor to the neighbor. They were just going to see a movie; they would be right back. They showed him how to sit the little girl on the potty, what buttons on her clothing to un-do and re-do. Should she need to pee or poop. Just in case. He couldn't believe his good fortune. That evening the little girl was undressed and dressed every five to ten minutes and made to sit on the potty. Just in case. He was gentle with her and attentive; his fingers explored her tenderly, his entire body trembling with excitement. He knew he was doing something forbidden, he knew that he was being bad, and yet he had permission, he was left in charge...

He is in his fifties now and tells the story, for the first time ever, to his therapist. He feels that the story proves that he was born a pervert, or became one at a very young age. He is ashamed of himself, he feels terribly guilty, even though he believes that he has been suffering from a *mental illness*, which would grant him diminished responsibility. His experience, until now, has been unspoken, unspeakable. His therapist is astonished at his parents' negligence, and says so. Billy looks incredulous; it has never occurred to him that the responsibility for what happened did not belong to him at all.

"What actually happened is nothing compared to what could have gone wrong," continues the therapist, "I know of parents who would not leave a twelve-year-old alone without a much older baby-sitter, let alone leave the twelve-year-old in charge of a younger child!" Billy begins to understand. He now recalls that when he was no more than three, he woke up one evening to find that he was left alone in the locked-up apartment. He felt overwhelmingly terrified, ran to the open window of their fifth-floor home and started screaming, as loudly as he could manage, calling out for his mother. A neighbor heard him, she got frightened that the child might fall out the window, rushed right over, only to find the front door locked. She had the ingenuity to keep Billy

amused by sliding strips of newspaper under the door and moving them helter-skelter every-which-way. This game kept Billy occupied and away from the window and away from his unmitigated terror of annihilation that seized him upon awakening to his abandonment. When his mother came home, she apologized for her son's unruly behavior to the neighbor, and to Billy, she said, "Oh, you silly Billy! How could you think that I would leave you?" And that was that.

The neglect wasn't named, acknowledged or referred to. It was taboo for him to think of his parents as negligent. He was no pervert; he was an intelligent, curious child, left to flounder in intense experiences for which no words were supplied or could be found. The experience could not be digested, could not be thought about, could not be talked about, so it became the generator of shame and guilt and a compulsion to repeat the scenario, one way or another, hoping to be able to understand it, humanize it, normalize it.

In most of his relationships up until now, either he neglected his beloved or he felt neglected by his lover. He hasn't been aware of the pattern, until now, now that the concept of negligence wasn't unthinkable, now that he could feel his grief over the loss or total absence of parental care and concern. He so wanted to love and care for the women in his life, yet he felt compelled to turn away, get distracted, disappear, make them wait for him, make them feel abandoned by him. Until they had enough and in their own agony they decided to turn away from him towards more rewarding relationships. At such moments he felt abandoned, betrayed, punished. His pain was excruciating even though he knew he had it coming. He felt trapped in this pattern, compelled, obsessed, driven, out of control.

No child can argue with an adult who expects too much from the child. The seduction of being treated older than one actually is, the implied honor, the sense of being special, far outweigh the sober reality: "Please, I am so much younger than you think, give me a break, back off, let me be, get off my back!" Whenever I had to work with a family in which a child

*"It was taboo
to think of his
parents as
negligent."*

was incontinent, bedwetting or otherwise, I never even once had to meet with the child. If I could convince the parents to treat the child as if she were much younger than she actually was, to indulge her, to baby her, playfully and lovingly, within days the incontinence stopped. As if bedwetting were a scream to alert parents that they shouldn't want their child to grow up too fast.

Many of us were humiliated in kindergarten, or grade one, like my patient, who didn't want to go to school, and whose parents, oblivious to the magnitude of the occasion, left for Europe before the first day of school, leaving him to the nanny. She delivered him to the class, he cried all day, and in his distress peed in his pants. The principal publicly humiliated him by calling him a baby, wondering out loud, what was the matter with him? It occurred to no one that the child that he actually was, felt unsupported, unloved, uncared for, unseen, unappreciated, and at the same time he was being pressured to be the child his parents wanted to have, or the nanny wanted to take care of, or the principal wanted to have in his school.

The most profound practices of self-reflection on the Buddhist path amount to not much more than trying to pry ourselves loose of attachments to ideals that we compare ourselves to. Instructions to find and keep to the Way were composed in India, over twelve centuries ago by the sage Shantideva. One verse reads, "No evil is there similar to anger, /No austerity to be compared with patience. /Steep yourself, therefore, in patience – /In all ways, urgently, with zeal."

It takes faith, courage and determination to practice patience: faith in the possibility of effortless growing, maturing, change. It's not easy to be patient with one's children; it's not easy later to grow to be patient with oneself. Further on, very simply, Shantideva says, "Pain, humiliation, insults, or rebukes – /We do not want them /Either for ourselves or those we love."

Self-recrimination is also to be avoided. Through gentle forms of mindfulness, meditations such as *vipassana*, we can learn to be observant and loving, aware yet non-critical, of others and ourselves. This form of meditation can be called *maternal*, for it teaches one to become the loving, attentive, ever-present, gently-holding, knowing, compassionate mother, whom one never actually had.

Billy's task now is to wake up from the nightmare that held him prisoner until now. To free himself from the momentum of delusion that is sustained by unexamined habits, conceptual, emotional, and perceptual even. To be allowed to distinguish what exactly constitutes neglect and to realize that not everyone is negligent, brings home the tragic accident of having been born to neglectful parents. It also restores his own freedom to renounce his own habit of neglect. The irreparable loss needs to be mourned and grieved, but then we can proceed with a much lighter heart and a richer palette of future possibilities. And it's never too late!

*"It takes faith,
courage and
determination to
practice pa-
tience:"*

Book Review

The AIMS Test, Mad Pride & Other Essays

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that began to erode his self-confidence and survival skills and the personal epiphany that led him to seek training and education so that he could work as an agent of progressive change in the area of mental health.

For me, the high point of this book is the essay entitled 'Mad Pride' in which Mr. Carten describes his involvement, as a worker, within the consumer/survivor/ex-patient movement. In this essay is laid out, not only the networking and useful resources of agencies across North America and Europe that are fighting for the rights of survivors, but also a new working model for the distribution of psychiatric services – one that is well thought-out and is a far cry from abuse and the denial of basic human rights in the present system.

All-in-all this book is not only about mental health. Mr. Carten has a personal story that has to be told. In the light of this story, encapsulated in these essays, questions are raised about youthful idealism, politics, poverty, homelessness, the legal system and yes, mental health. Many of the questions find answers in the progress of this book, but, shining through the words, comes the essential care and humanity required to make a difference for all those who find themselves impoverished or disenfranchised by a system that, oftentimes, shuts out the voices of those who have been oppressed or marginalized by indifference.

Bookworm

Toxic Nourishment

By Michael Eigen
Karnac Books, 1999

Reviewed by Andrew Feldmár

Eigen is one of those authors whom I keep an eye out for, and read everything they write. He is prolific, and all his books and articles are rewarding. The writers he reads I also count among my favorites: Bion, Winnicott and Lacan. Adam Phillips recommends this remarkable book: "No one in contemporary psychoanalysis writes with this cunning, wholehearted openness."

The book is dedicated "To all who live through the unlivable. To the Life no poison can kill." My own list of poisons that make nourishment toxic, include resentment, reluctance and regret, all varied flowers of the evil of ambivalence. I remember working intensively with a woman who suffered from chronic headaches. After exploring all the possible factors that could cause her pain, ranging from nutrition to pollution, from psyche to soma, from repressed emotions to hostile environments, eventually we settled on *reluctance* as the most likely cause of her suffering. She seemed to be allergic to reluctance, both her own or anyone else's in her vicinity. She needed to make some major changes in her life to be able to eliminate all traces of reluctance from her experience. She had to change her work; she had to get rid of her husband. Before we knew what triggered her headaches, there were occasions when she would ask her husband to give her neck and shoulders a vigorous massage in the hope of avoiding a headache due to tension. He would comply, yet strangely, soon she'd get a worse than usual pain. Later he confessed that he was sick and tired of her complaints and didn't really want even to touch her when she begged him for massages, but, *reluctantly*, he applied himself. The poison of reluctance turned out to be more damaging than any comfort she could gain from his compliant massage.

I remember early in my present marriage hearing cupboards slamming, dishes crashing, pots banging around dinnertime. Entering the kitchen, I could see that my wife was cooking, but with a definite attitude. Right then and there we came to an agreement that we'll only cook, or perform chores for the benefit of the other, if and only if we can do it gladly and enthusiastically. Otherwise, we'll just confess our reluctance or resentment, and find alternative solutions. I told her that I'd rather go out to eat, or eat leftovers, than have a dinner laced with resentment.

If after the initial consultation I notice that I can't say an enthusiastic "Yes!" to committing to work with someone, I feel honor-bound to refer him/her to someone else. Reluctant participation would poison both of us. I wish I could relate to and feel loving towards all who come to see me, but at the present state of my own evolution, I have my own limits, my own shortcomings. Love is always a miracle; it's an existential possibility, never a necessity. It's up to me to notice whether it's present or not, and deal with the reality. Wishing, pretending, trying to make it happen would be confusing, misleading, and *crazy making*. *Imitatio Christi*, the imitation of Christ, was often advocated as a way to be good. Yet, Christ imitated nobody, he was unabashedly himself.

*"Love is always a
miracle; it's an
existential
possibility"*

For a three-year-old, the optimal way to grow into a five-year-old is probably without pressure, without effort, without pointers, simply by learning from experience, being happy with, and significant others also being happy with, who one is at the moment. When a three-year-old starts imitating a five-year-old, feels pressured to do so, a smart one might pull it off; it can be accomplished. A deep split occurs, however, and one begins to hide, become ashamed of one's true self,

one puts oneself on hold. The applauded false self keeps developing, achieving, bringing one honors, yet it all feels empty. One has become a performer, an actor, suffering from stage-fright (anxiety), sensing appreciation for one's performance, but feeling unloved, unknown in one's true being.

It's worth quoting extensively from Eigen's **Epilogue**: "Fusions of trauma and nourishment mark all our lives. Sometimes the balance tips very much to one or the other side. Trauma may be so severe that nourishment becomes less and less possible. Personality becomes so occupied with dealing with wounds that little is left over. Difficulties are even greater when trauma becomes nourishment. Still, *there are cases in which deep lines cut by trauma provide access to depths that are otherwise unreachable*. In such instances, nourishment follows trauma to new places. We wish things could be otherwise... easier. But we have little choice when *illumination shines through injury*." [Italics are mine, for emphasis]

Eigen seems to agree with Winnicott that we seek our madness as well as our normalcy. Our core, perhaps unreachable, madness may be what gives us our character, our most unique, individual self. He writes, "Our trying to be normal is plagued with a sense of underlying madness or madness at the borders. If we fail to address deep madness, life may feel unreal." What is the madness referred to here? It is the experience, in infancy, in a state of total dependency, of falling apart, of disintegrating, when we are not held together properly by a devoted caretaker. One screams when one is in pain, or in agony, or frightened. If the screaming chronically fails to bring a loved one or a care-taker, one may lose consciousness, one may learn that everything is meaningless, one may learn to respond to pain with numbness, stupor and just blanking out.

Rather than pushing the patient into sanity, the therapist can help the individual find a rhythm of her own to go in and out of bits of madness, going in and out of what bothers her. The breakdown we fear has already happened. Winnicott used the symbol X to suggest this original madness that is too overwhelming to be experienced, yet so very personal that it cannot be ignored.

Perhaps all we can hope for is to get "a sense or 'feel' for going in and out of X offshoots naturally, as part of life. This is different from the prevailing attitude that madness X ought not be part of life, and that one should be able to find a way of living without it. It also differs from the belief of some in touch with agony X that life outside it must be phony." The last sentence illuminates for me the difficulty many of my patients have with just getting on with their lives, nevertheless. There is a deep, even if faulty, emotional logic to equating the possibility of present happiness with a phony denial or betrayal of past sufferings.

I particularly like the chapter entitled, **A bug-free universe**. Many parents resent the disturbance caused by children. We tend to bug each other. More generally, life bugs life. One's own aliveness can be a bother to others, and vice versa. An irritating bug can be squished, or it can be chased away, even though one

may be amazed by the bug's intricate beauty. Eigen notes, "To be alive is amazing, but it is often also disturbing. A child's aliveness may be gratifying but upsetting. Destruction and messiness follow a child's lively interests. Children push adult buttons and boundaries. Adults try to teach children to control themselves. Sometimes control goes too far."

The book contains many personal, actual stories, case histories, and clinical examples. There is Alice, Ben, Candy, and Coreen, all the way to Milton, Penny, and Wanda. I'll close my review of this highly commendable book by quoting a few lines about John. When Eigen sensed a sadness tinged with rage and pointed it out, John "virtually became a little boy on his first day of school:

"I was crying. My mother wanted me to cross the street and go into the school by myself. I wanted her to bring me to the class-room. I cried and cried. I cried through the entire first day. I learned to get through it. I learned to stop crying. But now I wonder if I ever stopped crying.

"I hated myself for being so weak. Why couldn't I be a big boy, like most of the other kids? Why did I have to be one of the cry-babies? I never stopped attacking myself for being weak. All through school I put myself down. Hating myself was a way to hold back tears. Self-hate is the great sealer." ■

*"Our core,
perhaps
unreachable,
madness may be
what gives us
our character..."*

One Weekend in February: A Loss and Find

by Frank G. Sterle, Jr.

It was at least dusk on a cloudy Friday night
and our precious sweet whiskered feline was quite missed,
not answering our calls, indeed nowhere in sight;
Where could've she gone, we thought, that feline too free
when the bell she wore should've told us where she be.
As the clock tolled nine, we were stricken with worry
and we called out her name as we roamed the still streets,
but the night's silence revealed naught of her story.
And the hour neared twelve as we feared tragedy,
"Mimi, come home!" we called her in futility.
Oh! the grief of belief that one so loved is lost
-the pain of conviction that you'll see her no more-
put doubt to the notion that love was worth the cost.
When dawn greeted us from very few hours' sleep
we prayed that she'd come home, ending worry so deep;
but looking outside we saw naught of her we adored
and it sunk like heavy lead down into our bleak souls
that we'd never again hold her-she, whose spirit soared.
"I'll take a last look around," sighed one who loved his cat
as he put on his coat to seek where she may be at.
It's for naught, my thoughts said, we'll not hold her again,
as I returned slowly with heavy heart to my room
where I viewed my cat pictures, as I did now and then.
"Come! Come and see who's here!" exclaimed he after a while,
bursting into the house, flanked by Mimi with a smile.
"She was locked in the neighbor's shed," said he with a grin,
"and she cried as I neared and called for her," he added,
holding her close to his bosom, scratching her sweet chin.
She then ran to her kibble and salmon and fresh cream,
having naught to eat forever to her it did seem.
My mind drained of energy from that night's loss of hope,
I took to sleep next to Mimi, my precious feline,
while thinking, Oh, what about next time-how will I cope?
To have loved and then lost is by some better than naught,
though such a claim is too simple, I'd been cruelly taught.

www.mentalhealthconsumer.net/FrankGSterleJr

No Promises

by Oliver Cross

Giving someone a psych diagnosis
is making a generalization.

"My car is broken. Is it fixable?"
"Depends what's wrong with it."

"I have a psych diagnosis. Can I heal?"
"Depends what's wrong with you!"

"I fixed a broken car!"
Of course you did, and all you did is try.

Bullshitters

by Oliver Cross

I spent years searching for something,
for lack of a better word,
Call it "the truth."

I vested myself in it,
Invested in it
Became interested in it.

Then I found "it" doesn't exist,
The truth is timing,
Responding in the moment.

Starting afresh,
Boy am I bad at it
Starting anew.

With less than I had,
much less...

I hope,
I pray
What I still have is enough to give

To learn,
To grow,
To practice...

With good people
Around me
To trust

The Creature

by reinhart

Gregor Samsa was a gigantic insect. As such he was wont to walk on the walls and the ceiling, and indeed on every surface of his smallish, ten square meters, upstairs room. His torso was encased with a hard, shiny, black, armour-like shell and his spindly, stick-like arms and legs were covered by sparse, coarse, black hairs. Above his head wiggled two long, thin antennae. His round, dome-like belly seemed too large to be supported by his six, spindly, multi-jointed limbs; nevertheless he was able to negotiate and carry his weight for short periods of time. Often he would rest and recuperate by lying on his large, hard-armoured abdomen. Inbetween meals he would feed on the grease and filth on the floor, and even on some of the scum on the walls. Once a day one of his family members would deliver some food to his room. Gregor Samsa had developed a taste for rancid meat and mushy, rotten vegetables. The aromas and flavours of these nourishments were pleasing to his senses and his sharp mandibles made short work of these meals.

Eventually the grease, filth and scum on the floor, walls and ceiling blended with the insect's tactile gluestuff at the ends of its limbs, and Gregor Samsa found it increasingly difficult to negotiate the terrains of his living space. A few times he almost became permanently stuck and had to carefully extricate himself from the goo. The gluestuff at the extremities of his thin, spindly arms and legs, which allowed him to walk on wall and ceiling, had become an impediment to his movements. Gregor Samsa decided that he must venture beyond the confines of his room and escape his sticky prison cell.

One particular day Gregor's sister came and brought his daily meal. She placed the plate on the floor and quickly left the room. Upon her exiting the door latch failed to catch and the door was left unlocked and slightly open – enough to facilitate Gregor's plans for escape. He crawled into the hall, looked everywhere around and then silently made his way down the stairs. At the entrance to the kitchen and dining room he stopped. There, sitting at the dining room table, were his father, mother and sister. They were, as yet, unaware of his incursion into the family home. Gregor's father, a security guard at the local

bank, happened to look up and spied the giant insect that was his son. With a shout he rose from his chair with the intent of driving Gregor back to his room. Gregor crouched down low and remained perfectly motionless. Thereupon the father began flailing his arms wildly, waving furiously, and shouting even louder and more extensively than before. Still, Gregor remained still. The father then picked up an apple from the basket on the table and hurled it at the enormous bug that was crouching by the wall at the entrance to the kitchen and dining room. Gregor gasped as the fruit missile struck him in the back and lodged itself beneath one of the plates which made up the armoured shell that covered his body.

Slowly and gingerly Gregor crawled backward away from his angry assailant. The wound in his back oozed blood, water, puss and bile. He backed himself into a corner of the hall and there made himself as small as possible, waited and rested. He grew weaker by the minute. Soon he was unable to move hardly at all. He was utterly defenseless and had no strength left for any kind of escape. The voices of his family members, and especially that of his father, became ever more faint, and despite the pain of his wound, Gregor gradually slipped into unconsciousness. And as he lost consciousness, Gregor began to dream. And he dreamt a very strange and disturbing dream.

He dreamt that he awoke in a room, lying on his back on a soft, comfortable bed with white sheets and a soft, white, quilted blanket. He further dreamed that he had been somehow, oddly and inexplicably, transformed into a naked human being – as it were – a man. Gregor Samsa tossed the blanket and sheets off the bed and meticulously examined his human arms and legs and thoroughly inspected his entire human body. Then he looked about the room and noticed that, beside the bed, there was a dresser, a small desk and chair and an average sized closet. Above the dresser was a mirror and the sole, single painting in the room depicted a tall ship upon a stormy ocean.

Gregor Samsa rose from the bed and walked over to the closet. He opened the door and peered inside. Hanging neatly upon a wooden rod he noticed a

modest wardrobe. He saw two dress suits, one grey, one black, two white shirts and two blue shirts. He took out a blue shirt and the black suit and calmly dressed himself. In the dresser he found a pair of socks. And at the bottom of the closet he found a pair of black, leather dress shoes. When he was completely attired, he beheld himself in the mirror. Everything seemed to fit. Glancing once more about the room, something gone before unnoticed caught his eye. He approached the desk and discovered a stack of papers lying on its top. Upon examination all the pages bore the same letterhead; that of a downtown insurance company. This must be where I work, Gregor thought to himself. And since it was seven o'clock in the morning, he thought that the right thing to do would be to go to work at the office. Once more in front of the mirror, he straightened his tie one last time and promptly left the room.

Gregor's father had already left for work at the bank; his sister had left for classes at the university and his mother was busy in the kitchen washing the dishes. Her back was toward him as he walked past on his way to the front door. He left the house without incident or hindrance. It was merely a fifteen-minute walk to the train station and the train would take him right to the downtown core. But every day a great crowd accumulated on the train station platform. Often one was forced to let several trains go past without boarding them because there was no room inside the cars. And when one was at last able to board, every day the scenario was the same – people pushing and shoving and trying to wiggle themselves into a spot on board. Many ill-mannered riders would attempt to sneak on board at the same time that people on the train were trying to disembark. These inconsiderate, myopic, ill-tempered specimens having no scruples about breaking the rules of the road; and all that for a measly five or ten minute advantage. And the only thing accomplished was a hopeless, undignified congestion around the doors of the train cars. And an indignity that was spread from one commuter to another just as sure as if it were a virus of some kind. Who know how long it's been since this sickness has infected and permeated the entire city. Once aboard the train, there were never any seats. All the standers were squeezed in and pressed against each other. The scents of soap, perfume, sweat and body odour mingled with the exhalations of stressed out commuters aboard every car of the train until the atmosphere grew foul and fetid and condensed on the windows.

By the time Gregor Samsa arrived at the office he was already in a bad mood, irritable, depressed, fatigued and with a cold rage gathering in the pit of his

gut. The office was located on the sixth floor of a downtown high-rise. He entered through a double, glass door which was embossed with the company name and logo, and stepped into a large open area which nevertheless was partitioned into a dozen small cubicles. Five-foot high movable dividers separated one cubicle from another and from an elevated position the entire layout of the office appeared like a gargantuan maze or a monstrous hive. Within each cubicle sat a single worker droning at his files and hunched over the keyboard of his computer. Gregor found his spot, his little corner of the maze or hive, sat down and turned on his computer monitor. Talking, conversation and face-to-face communication was prohibited in the office. Any necessary, indispensable communication had to be done by e-mail from one computer to another. Except for background noises, such as the whirring of a fan, the shuffling of papers or the clicking of the keyboards, the office was silent. If a worker's computer mouse was inactive for more than fifteen seconds, that fact was displayed on the office manager's own computer monitor. From the privacy of his own office, the manager monitored each and every worker each and every minute of the working day. And this position, this promotion, is what most of the workers aspired to. Once every hour the manager would make a tour of inspection around the entire office. He rarely spoke a word and the workers usually kept their heads down and focussed on their computer screens. All of them were stressed out, alienated, withdrawn and isolated. Eye contact was indeed a rarity at the office.

Occasionally, every few days, the manager would call a specific worker into his own, personal office. Most times he would start a conversation in the same manner, or a variation thereof. How goes the battle, he would ask. This was meant to indicate that he was approachable, friendly, helpful and genuinely interested in the worker and his work. How goes the battle he would ask. Gregor always found the question ridiculous. He could never think of any appropriate response or any reply that made sense. Often he would begin to stammer or blurt out some disconnected inanity such as, onwards and upwards sir, or, what goes around comes around sir. Sometimes he would become completely tongue-tied and have to launch into a coughing fit so that he might have a reason to excuse himself. There's no answer to a question like that. It's like a fucking maze which has no solution. But, you know, maybe, he thought to himself, maybe the question was intended to and

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supposed to fuck one up. And he felt the rage in his belly grow just a little bit more.

So thus Gregor Samsa sat in his cubicle and day by day would anxiously check his watch and count the minutes until lunch break. But quitting time in the afternoon was always an eternity away. Sometimes he would try to cheat the clock by not checking the time. He began to live for the freedom and release, although quite fleeting and temporary, which 4:00 p.m. would bring. But day after day he was forced to return and relive the entire hateful schedule over and over again. It did not take Gregor very long to loathe his work. And after work came the dreadful and detestable train ride home again. Perhaps, he mused, the same torture as in the morning except in reverse. However, even after the day's work was done, Gregor found that his rage and hate were not exhausted. These feelings and emotions remained unresolved and largely repressed. Not surprisingly the internal conflicts engendered melancholy, depression and despair. In time he began to find his social contacts distasteful and proceeded to progressively isolate himself. He became very antisocial. Soon he began to dislike his own kind and indeed his entire species.

Gregor Samsa arrived home from work every day just before five o'clock in the afternoon. He would eat dinner with the family and thereafter retire to his room. Because he was unable to complete all the work duties and files at his office, Gregor was forced to, each day, bring some of his work files home and work on them in the evening on his own time. When the files were done it was often time for bed and he would have a few hours of dubious rest and fitful sleep before morning came and he would have to drag himself out of bed and face the whole day's drudgery all over again.

On one such evening, after finishing his work on the files, Gregor lay down on his bed and started to meditate. He began by relaxing and regulating his

breathing. He focussed on relaxing his muscles, starting at his feet and slowly working his way up his legs, into his midsection, up into his chest, along his arms and finally into his head and mind. He let his breathing become even and regular and let his mind become clear of all distractions. Random thoughts and feelings flickered across his consciousness and he let them wash over and through him. And he let them gradually dissipate. In time these flickering perceptions slowed until his mind became clear, still and devoid of all distractions. His breathing continued deep, steady and even. An hour passed but for Gregor time had dissolved and in his awareness it could have been merely minutes which had elapsed. When he came to himself, a single thought occupied his mind. My life is a nightmare, he said to himself. A little while later he fell asleep.

When he awoke once more and regained consciousness, Gregor Samsa found himself lying on the floor in a corner of the downstairs hall a few meters from the kitchen and dining room. He lay in a pool of his own blood and gruesome body fluids. His blood had mingled there on the floor with water from his body, puss and bile. The apple was still lodged in his back and the wound continued to bleed profusely and excrete the water, puss and bile. Gregor was completely immobilized. He had no strength left and could not move any part of his body. Even his antennae were inactive and listless. They were pitifully bowed and now and then one or the other would twitch spasmodically. His limbs were spread-eagled on the floor and were completely useless and inert. It looked as if they were rays emanating from his body. He was no longer able to hold up his head and simply let it drop to the floor, resting on his mandibles. His breathing had become shallow and laboured and made small wheezing sounds. Slowly but surely the vision of his multifaceted eyes grew dim until his world grew dark. And then there was only blackness. Gregor Samsa had fallen asleep forevermore. ■

These Things Just Don't Happen!

(The Unmaking of a Teacher)

by Ben Nuttall-Smith

On Wednesday, December 6th, 1989, Marc Lepine entered the University of Montréal's School of Engineering building and shot fourteen women. A

year later, Thursday, December 6th, 1990, as I sat at the back of my class listening to student presentations, a young man entered my classroom dressed in army

boots and fatigues and wearing a balaclava over his head. He pointed a black submachine gun and shouted, "I want the women!" All pandemonium broke loose as he shot several girls sitting at the front of the class with water from his gun. Angry and shouting "stop!", I darted after him, amidst screams. Bright lights seemed to flash before my eyes; my head swam as I chased the boy down the stairs and past the vice-principal.

The vice-principal called after me, stopped me, and ushered me into his office to "cool down".

"Who's looking after your class?"

"I don't know."

I told him the best I could what had just happened.

"Why are you making such a fuss over a silly prank?"

"He had a gun."

"You were yelling in the hallway."

"I tried to stop him."

"You were disturbing classes."

The next morning, I went to school early enough to see the principal. But he was busy. When I did get to see him at the morning break, he told me to take it easy over the weekend and come talk to him on Monday. On the Monday, nothing was done. The gun incident was not important. I was making a "big thing out of nothing". "Forget about it. These things just don't happen".

Nobody ever found out who the young "terrorist" was. My memory became a confused nightmare. The following weekend, I related the incident to my friend the Surrey principal. He advised me to report the episode, in writing, with a copy to the School Board and one to the local Police Department. But I was too frozen in fear to act. I'd allowed too much time to pass. Worse, I got to the point where I couldn't recall the date of the occurrence. Soon, the entire incident became a blur in my memory. And then I forgot it altogether until I remembered it, with horror, a few years later.

In the weeks and months to come, I became increasingly confused, until I could no longer identify my students. In October, 1991, on the recommendation of my family doctor, I was given a battery of tests at the U.B.C. Hospital Alzheimer Clinic. A follow-up examination was scheduled for January, 1992. The doctors found no specific organic cause for memory loss which was getting steadily worse. Noise was increasingly troublesome. A soft drink machine in the hall outside my door irritated me with its constant jangle. I had dizzy spells. Doors slamming made me jump. Tinnitus caused constant hissing. A hearing specialist prescribed hearing aids. In class, they amplified surrounding noise, causing further discomfort and confusion. Pranksters dropped books behind my back.

Keeping attendance records became almost impossible in one Communications class. Students exchanged

seats so that seating plans were ineffective. One by one students disappeared until there were but a handful in class. I gave spot quizzes, hoping to use the results for my attendance register but signatures were often missing or illegible.

One lunch hour, I fell in a school hallway and broke my ankle. While students gathered around, I got up and hobbled into the staff lounge, then stubbornly returned to class for the afternoon sessions. After school, I visited my doctor, who sent me for x-rays. Sure enough, my ankle was broken. I returned to school the next day with crutches and wearing a cast. In April, 1992, I started regular appointments with a psychiatrist. As in so many recovery scenarios, I had to feel the worst before I experienced anything better. I had nightmares of burning schools, bombings, snipers, and lost classes.

On May 6th, 1992, I talked to one of the school counselors about two students in a Communications 11 class who were being very disruptive. She suggested I talk to the vice-principal. In turn, he called in the principal who, instead of offering support, asked me if I'd considered retiring. I broke down. That was my last day at school. I didn't even retrieve my personal belongings; I couldn't return to class.

For a long time, I couldn't read. My mind was so overloaded, I'd read a passage and not remember what I'd read. I spent much time sitting in silence, watched little television, unable to listen to the radio, and only skimming the newspapers. Sometimes, I'd pick up a video only to realize, upon viewing it, that I already had seen the film weeks earlier.

For no apparent reason, I'd burst into tears and sob audibly. In the end, I had to get my wife to drive whenever we went anywhere. After church one Sunday morning, I blacked out and was totally disoriented when I came to. Panic attacks and blackouts increased. Deeper, ever deeper, I slipped into the whirlpool. I couldn't claw my way out. My chest ached. I couldn't breathe.

I had frightening nightmares that the school was on fire. I couldn't find my classroom. Snipers in the hall were shooting at me. I dreamed of jungles and little men with sharp jagged teeth.

Between horrific nightmares and apparent and imagined threats, I sat day after day through the month of June, praying for peace, and waiting for my troubles to go away. Time dragged on.

***THE CHAMELEON SINGS* (Trafford Publishing 350 pages – \$26.95 Canadian) is a biographical journey spanning 70+ years of Survival and Healing from childhood sexual abuse.**

Websites of Interest to Consumers/Survivors/Ex-Mental Patients

(This list is not intended to be comprehensive or exhaustive, and has left out many well-known sites that are widely available and easily accessible from local directories. — B.F.)

Organizations (General)

www.mind.org.uk www.power2u.org www.mhselfhelp.org www.wnusp.org www.tao.ca/~pact
www.u-kan.co.uk www.mentalhealth.com www.icspp.org www.oikos.org www.icomm.ca/csinfo
www.aapd-dc.org www.mindfreedom.org www.geocities.com www.mdri.org www.breggin.com
www.cvdfinobase.ca/mh-atlas/ www.szasz.com www.antipsychiatry.org www.peoplewho.org
www.walnet.org/llf www.mentalhealth.org.uk www.fsu.edu/~trauma/ip.html www.radpsynet.org
www.contac.org www.buildfreedom.com/ft/psychiatric_survivors.htm www.samhsa.gov
www.nucknfuts.com/index.php www.cam.org www.lino.com/~raidat <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Antipsychiatry> <http://aix1.uottawa.ca/~nstaman/alternatives/OVNVinternational.htm>

Advocacy and Activism

www.mental-health-matters.com/activist.html www.m-power.org www.narpa.org
www.protectionandadvocacy.com www.cchr.org www.popan.org.uk www.advocatweb.com
www.gamian-europe.com www.hri.ca www.hrweb.org www.iahf.com www.benzo.org.uk/prawi.htm
<http://members.aol.com/jimhofw/jimho.htm>

Alternatives

www.talkingcure.com/index.asp www.alternativementalhealth.com www.medsfree.com www.mosher-soteria.com
www.transtherapy.org www.patchadams.org www.healthfreedommovement.com
www.weglaufhaus.de www.elcollie.com www.stopshrinks.org www.lstpm.org
www.emotiosinbalance.com www.the-bright-side.org/site/thebrightside/ www.doctoryourself.com
www.emotionsanonymous.org www.projectresilience.com www.bu.edu/cpr/rr/alternative/
www.religiousfreedoms.org www.wildestcolts.com <http://stopbadtherapy.com> http://nht_amh11.blogspot.com <http://essence-euro.org/iasp/> <http://myweb.tiscali.co.uk/erthworks/nonmain.htm>

Drug Information

www.larsmartensson.com www.drugs-and-medications.com www.drugawareness.org
www.outlookcities.com/psych/ www.canadiandimension.mb.ca/v35/v35_5ab.htm#three www.nmsis.org
www.antidepressantsfacts.com www.socialaudit.org.uk/1.4.html www.chemsense.com
www.prozactruth.com www.quitpaxil.org www.talkingcure.com/archive/drugs.htm www.truehope.com
www.astrocyte-design.com/pseudoscience/index.html <http://members.fortunecity.com/siriusw/Biochemical-Imbalance.htm> <http://groups.msn.com/SIDEEFFECTS> www.benzo.org.uk

Children & Youth

www.voice4kids.org www.aspire.us www.hearmyvoice.org www.ritalindeath.com www.p-a-r.org
www.adhdfraud.org

Tardive Dyskinesia/Dystonia

www.power2u.org/selfhlep/tardive.html www.wemove.org www.dystonia-support.org www.dystonia-foundation.org
www.iatrogenic.org/index.html www.breggin.com/tardivedysk.html
www.caromont.org/16036.cfm www.emedicine.com/neuro/topic362.htm www.drugdigest.org/DD/Articles/News/0.10141.513136.00.html www.psyweb.com/Diction/tardived.html www.thebody.com/pinf/phenos.html
www.reglan-lawsuit.com www.ninds.nih.gov/healthandmedical/disorders/tardivedoc.htm www.easyweb.easynet.co.uk/simplpsych/tardive.html

Electroshock

www.ect.org www.banshock.org www.idiom.com/~drjohn/review.html <http://bmj.com/cgi/content/full/bmj;326/7403/1363>

Bulletin Board

The Self-Help Resource Association of B.C. (SHRA) conducts regular Facilitator Training Workshops for Self-Help and Mutual Aid Support Groups. They also publish a quarterly newsletter and the Directory of Self-Help/Support Groups in Greater Vancouver with approximately 600 listings, many of them dealing with mental health. The latest edition (2005 - 06) of the Directory is now available for \$20.00 for individuals or \$25.00 for professional organizations (order forms available at www.selfhelpresource.bc.ca). SHRA is located at Suite 306 - 1212 West Broadway, Van. B.C. V6H 3V1. Tel: 604- 733-6186. Fax: 604- 730-1015.

The Alternative & Integrative Medical Society (AIMS) at UBC publishes the free AIMS Wellness Directory: Lower Mainland Guide to Complementary Health. It contains approximately 250 paid and many unpaid listings dealing with a broad spectrum of mental, physical, and spiritual aspects of healing. For a Directory and/or more info. about the Society, phone 604-822-7604. Fax: 604-822-2495. E-mail info@aims.ubc.ca. Web: www.aims.ubc.ca. AIMS, University of British Columbia, Box 81 - 6138 SUB Boulevard, Vancouver, B.C. V6T 1Z1. Office: B80A Woodward Building, UBC.

Vancouver/Richmond Mental Health Network sponsors many self-help groups including a Women's Circle. Their address is #109 - 96 E. Broadway, Vancouver, B.C., V5T 4N9 and the Co-ordinator of the Network may be reached at 604-733-5570.

Named after Vincent van Gough's homeopathic doctor, Paul Gachet, **Gallery Gachet** works to provide a safe, borderless place of artistic expression. It strives to be a place of healing and a center of artistic excellence. Founded in 1994 we provide opportunities to exhibit, perform, publish and sell work and to offer a place for support and community. We aim to use the canvas of the outside world to educate and demystify the public on issues related to mental health and abuse.

Websites of Interest to Consumers/Survivors/Ex-Mental Patients (continued from previous page)

Forced Treatment

www.freedom-center.org www.namisc.org/newsletters/August01/MindAid.htm www.hri/doccentre/docs/gosden.shtml www.garynull.com/issues/Psych/Index.htm www.psychlaws.org www.kqed.org/w/hope/involuntarytreatment.html

Mental Health Law

www.bazelon.org www.ac.wvu.edu/~knecht/law.htm www.psych.org/public_info/insanity.cfm www.forensic-psych.com/pubs/pubADment.html www.psychlaws.org www.imhl.com www.ialmh.org www.justiceseekers.com www.safe-trak.com/main/competency1.htm www.abanet.org/disability/sites.html www.experts.com www.expertpages.com/psychiatry-psychology.htm www.psych.org/advocacy-policy/leg_res/apa_testimony/testimonysub-crimeposted91800.cfm www.ilppp.virginia.edu www.law.cornell.edu/topics/mental_health.html www.helpforparents.net/LegalResources/1LegalResources.htm

History of Mental Health Care

www.psychiatricsurvivorsarchives.com www.webcom.com/thrive/schizo/kdarch.html www.cwu.edu/~warren/addenda.html www.epub.org.br/cm/n02/historia/psicocirg_i.htm

Online Publications

www.mentalmagazine.co.uk <http://members.aol.com/asylumpub> <http://userpage.fu-berlin.de/~expert/psychnews/>



Reinhart