

No Ordinary Moments

by Mary Kolb, PRH Educator Bellevue, Washington

While driving on the floating bridge across Lake Washington on a recent sunny afternoon, I suddenly realized that I was not seeing the wind-whipped waters, the bank of low clouds obscuring the top of Mount Rainier, or the evergreen trees crowding the shores. I was hunched tensely over the steering wheel, feeling overwhelmed by the tasks remaining on the day's "to-do" list. As anxiety washed across me, I had the suffocating sense that there was no possibility of anything new or fresh – I was trapped in the "same-old, same-old." It was the sensation of flatness, boredom and drudgery that clued me in: these are signs to me that I have "checked out," that I am not present in the moment.



Mount Rainier

In a flash, I realized that preoccupation by future events was blinding me, narrowing my vision to my dashboard, the bumper of the car in front of me, and the "to-do" list on the seat beside me. In that moment I breathed out my new mantra, "There are no ordinary moments!"

After the mantra came a deeper breath, and return of my peripheral vision. Suddenly, my senses registered the wildness and beauty around me, and a feeling of open-ended possibility sat me up straighter. The energy of the waves enlivened me, the span of lakeshore exhilarated me, and I felt amused by the strange shapes of the clouds. Freshly attuned to what was NOT ordinary, I was able to move through the remainder of my day remembering my intention to live my life fully. My satisfaction, as I crawled into bed that night, came from my presence in each moment rather than from my completed tasks.

"No ordinary moments" is an affirmation of the gifts available to me in each instant. Whether I recognize and take them in or not, abundance and beauty surround me. But they can't touch me unless I cooperate, unless I open to them. Simple moments like this one on the bridge teach me that I have the power to choose to experience my life. "Ordinary" is an illusion that comes from not paying attention, an illusion that takes me in again and again because of my old habit of hunkering down into anxiety about what will happen next. My mantra helps me shift into embracing my extraordinary, surprising life, which is already happening in this moment. ■

Look Up

Look up.

It requires so little,

be born

breathe

look up.

Look up

at dawn clouds, sunlight,

they stir me

like nothing else,

all for so little.

Be born,

breathe,

look

up.

by Gus Bliese, Missoula, MT

In This Issue...

We celebrate the power and possibility of the present moment. On Page 2, **Mark Mariner** shares how he uses PRH tools to remain present in parenting his teen. **Carla Orlando** (Page 3) and **Robina Scott** (Page 4) touch on how PRH Education can support one's spirituality. And **Roy Holman** (Page 3) explores paths for cultivating presence.

It Is Not Happening Anymore

— Even Though It Feels Like It Is

by Mark Mariner, PRH Educator, Auburn, Massachusetts

Driving my ninth-grader to school the other morning was not a pleasant experience. Already overwhelmed by starting a new, more academically challenging school, he was particularly anxious that morning because he had forgotten his homework at home. At the height of his frustration, he turned to me: “Why are you the one that always takes me to school anyway?” I was already worn out by a long work week, so his words felt like a knife. I hardened myself to him and gave him the silent treatment as he left the car.

On the drive back and during my exercise workout, I felt increasingly angry and judgmental. I could not believe he was so unappreciative and I wanted to teach him a lesson. As my seething toward my son continued, however, I began to suspect that something deeper in me was fueling my righteous indignation. I stayed with the hurt and anger in my body and gradually connected to an older, more pervasive emotion. I felt like a disheartened child crying out in anguish for his absent mother and, at the same time, so convinced that nobody cared. I moved with and through the feeling for several minutes until calm came over me.

When I picked up my son from school that afternoon, he apologized for his remark. I calmly accepted it and we went on with our evening together as if it never happened.

One of the most critical, yet difficult, challenges in managing intense negative overreactions lies in distinguishing between the present “triggering event” and the deep pain that may be activated from our past. This separation, also described as “de-dramatization,” is difficult because the pain in the present can be so intense that we can easily lose perspective and objectivity. Moreover, our past pain often gets incorporated into our self-image and becomes a way of interpreting life events. We, in effect, become identified with the old pain and think that is what is happening again.

Children who experience hurt often develop certain core beliefs, such as, “Nobody cares,” “My needs don’t matter,” or “The other shoe is going to drop,” in an effort to make sense of the pain. These, along with a variety of defenses, help children survive in challenging circumstances. Once developed, however, these beliefs and defenses become part of our sense of self. Even into adulthood we cling to them because they are familiar and comfortable, even though they are often distorted perceptions and make our lives miserable. We unconsciously look at reality selectively, seeking to reinforce and confirm what we already “know.” If my core belief is that nobody cares, for example, I will be inclined to find that “truth” in every interaction, and then react as if it were true, effectively recreating it for myself.

Strong negative overreactions occurring again and again in a

current situation or with a specific person are opportunities for personal growth and healing. But it is vital to be attentive to how we may be projecting core beliefs and defenses into the present and future. We must make the separation: I am feeling intense pain right now but the events which caused this pain are not occurring anymore. What is happening today is that a present trigger resembles the past and activates the old pain with its accompanying beliefs and defenses. When distinguishing between past and present (de-dramatizing), I tell myself: “This pain did happen in the past and it is understandable that I developed beliefs and defenses. But it is not happening anymore. I cannot continue to transfer them onto persons and events in the present.”

Once the separation is made between the present trigger and the past pain, the next step is to hold the past pain that is felt in the present with compassion. Turned toward the past, I let all the thoughts and emotions well up and give them full expression. Often, the presence of another can be very helpful in allowing me to enter fully into this pain. ■



Mark Mariner

Steps to support yourself in a disproportionate reaction

1. Become aware of your reaction. The disproportionate reaction can be explosive, hyper-energetic, subdued, or a lack of reaction.
2. Locate the reaction in your body. (*Ache, tightness, numbness, etc.; in your face, shoulders, abdomen, etc.*)
3. Take time to identify the emotions that are creating inner discomfort.
4. Gently accept yourself. The reaction only indicates that unconscious pain and needs from a painful past have been stimulated by a current experience.
5. Ask yourself: When did I first begin to have this reaction? How often do I have this reaction, and what brings it on?
6. Take time to explore your reaction in writing to discover what it can teach you about your feelings and needs from past painful experiences that are stored in your unconscious.

A Place for Art and Faith

by Carla Erickson Orlando, Seattle, WA

The spiritual journey comes naturally to Carla, who has used PRH Education for many years to explore her interior world. She recently invited people from diverse traditions of art and spirituality to benefit from self-reflection in an atmosphere of trust and freedom. The results Carla shares below illustrate the potential for drawing closer to one's being, regardless of education or background. To learn more about the summer program at the Grunewald Guild, see www.artfaith.org

Tucked beside the Wenatchee River in Washington's Cascade Mountains is the **Grunewald Guild**, a retreat center that encourages connections between faith and art through morning and evening prayer, art classes, and a closing liturgy each day. While leading a class there last summer, I invited participants to explore the connections between art and faith in a new way.

Inspired by the PRH creative expression workshop, *Way to Being, Way to God*, I developed *Creative Expression: a Way to God*, five half-days with the themes: Intimacy with God, Obstacles in Searching for God, Listening to God, and God in Others. Participants explored these themes while remaining close to their current inner experience.

The class attracted a diverse group of participants. A few had

never used art materials in a workshop setting. Some were spiritual directors or had an active spiritual practice. Others were visual artists, brand new at looking inward to their relationship with God in this way.



Carla Orlando and her daughters

Over the week, trust grew. Participants' sharing shifted from referencing ideas to referencing feelings in their bodies. They shed tears, body tensions and discomfort; they laughed more; and they grew more physically energetic. I enjoyed being simply myself in my role as facilitator. I felt at ease in my natural gifts of sensitivity to, and interest in, others. My appreciation and respect for each participant grew, and I was surprised by my capacity to listen from a deep place in me to each of them.

"...a great way to let go and experience the 'NOW.'"

Participants enjoyed the introspection and creative expression, delighting in "free play and reflection for its own sake." One noted, "I moved forward in my spiritual journey . . . [and] got in touch with God in a powerful way". Another affirmed, "It was a great way to let go and experience the 'NOW.'" ■



Here I Am!

by Roy Holman, Everett, WA

I once heard a yoga teacher say that if you want to practice presence under the most challenging circumstances, do so in America where the competitive and busy culture lures us outwards, away from ourselves. We lose ourselves while pondering the past, fretting about the future, or focusing on changing others. But we cannot heal and grow if we are not here!

As a yoga and meditation teacher, one of my joys is witnessing the radiance and aliveness in a student's eyes at the end of class. They often seem not fully present when they first arrive after a stressful day. To me, presence is simply nonjudgmental, mindful awareness. Being present is coming home to this place and this moment, bringing my attention and my essential energy back to my body.

I set out to develop greater awareness in myself after unexpected experiences of presence

left me wanting more. I recall one of the first times I felt a genuine sense of presence. It was during the year I was traveling around the United States in a van. I finally found enough space and freedom to actually just be: of all places, I was sitting on the toilet when I distinctly recall the feeling of calm presence: "Here I am, right here and now, unhurried - this is it!"

Simply be present. It sounds so simple doesn't it? It is simple, but not easy. Personally, I practice presence one breath at a time and draw on tools and seek environments that invite me back into myself. Nature soothes me and gives me a sense of connection. Children and my pet cat teach me presence. Like yoga, PRH tools invite me back to the present with wholeness of mind, body, emotions, and spirit. Written analysis takes me straight to the core of whatever is alive in me, whatever needs attention and compassion. Yoga, meditation, Tai Chi, and PRH tools all sound the chimes of aliveness and invite me back to my heart.

When I wander into unawareness – which I do -- I don't kick myself. For when I notice that I am not present, I have become present again! ■



Roy Holman

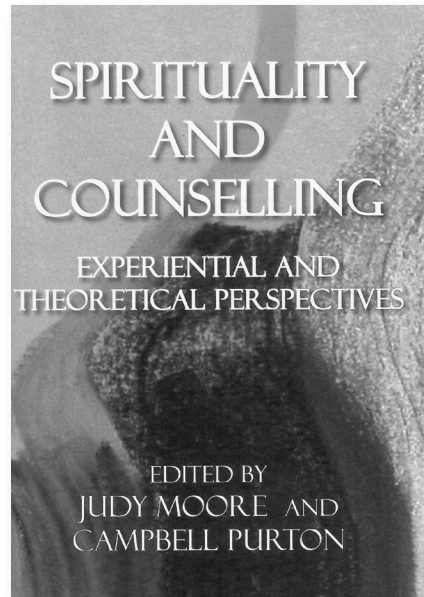
Risk Being Fully Alive!

by Robina Scott, PRH Educator, England

Robina Scott presented a clear, concise summary of PRH Education at an international conference in 2004. The presentations and workshops offered there have been published in the collection, ***Spirituality and Counselling: Experiential and Theoretical Perspectives*** (J. Moore and C. Purton, eds. PCCS Books, UK, 2006). Mary Kolb, newsletter editor, asked her to reflect on presentations that resonated for her as a PRH Educator.

Are you aware of the power of presence, its benefits and effects? Are you prepared to risk being fully alive? If so, do you know how to go about achieving it? These questions connect PRH Education to some of the theorists and practitioners who contributed to the book *Spirituality and Counselling*. Two contributors in particular highlight for me PRH Education's unique contribution to becoming fully present.

Veronica Prüller-Jagenteufel, in her chapter "The Power of Presence," talks of the importance of having no distractions in order to be present. By this, she means both external "noise," such as from the media, urban living, superficial communication, and over-scheduling, and "noise" from within. "There can be a multitude of distracting thoughts and



feelings within us, there can be inner blocks of different sorts, and the person who wants to be present in a deeper sense has to sort through them. To become really present seems to be a life-long process." (p. 119).

In PRH Education, we have tools to help minimize those distractions so that people can stay present to themselves and to their gifts and inner truths. In particular, workshops like **Leading My Life** can help people to develop healthier functioning at all levels of themselves: their thinking and feeling, their relationship to their body, their ease in making

choices based on their positive core (which we call their "being").

Brian Thorne, a professor experienced in person-centered therapy, gave the keynote speech entitled, "The Gift and Cost of Being Fully Present" (pp 35 – 47). Inspired by Carl Rogers, much as André Rochais was, he spoke of the ability to be fully present as a "gift which could transform the other's experience of his or her reality." Human beings can become fully alive only when "they have given themselves and each other permission to be fully alive." Even though Thorne was referring to a therapeutic situation, I believe this can occur in any relationship, including our relationship with ourselves. In PRH Education, we learn how to be present through our method of staying close to, and expressing, our present reality. In this way, we learn to give ourselves and others permission to be fully alive, to be free.

As these two chapters illustrate, PRH Education is not the only place where people value presence and becoming more fully alive. However, it offers a detailed and grounded methodology that is effective in helping us stay present to ourselves and others in concrete ways. PRH Educational tools allow those who desire it and who persevere, to journey along a path to being fully present, to relating deeply, and to being truly alive. ■

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