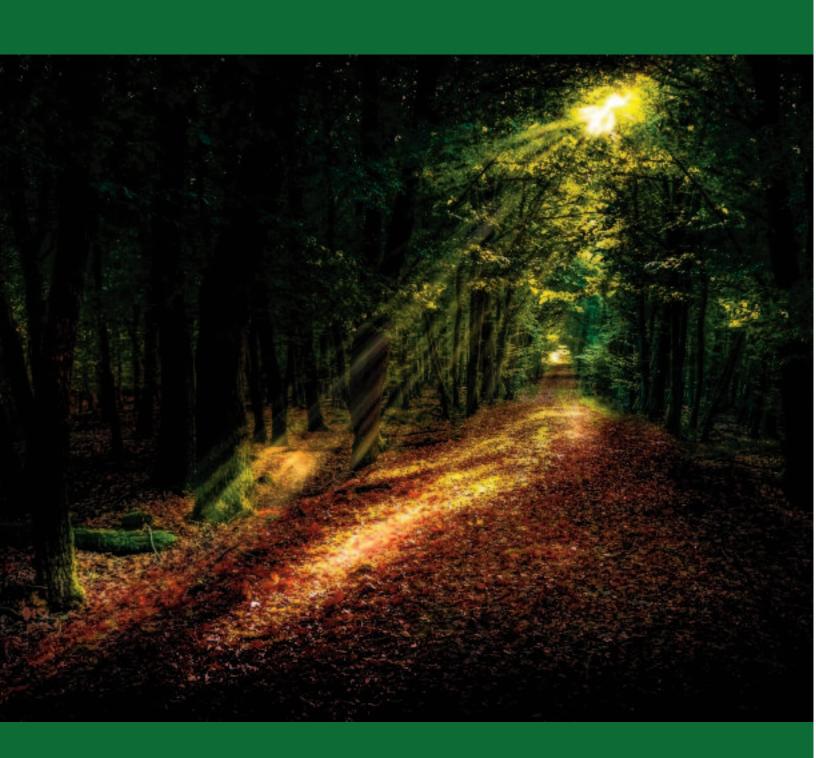
ONE THOUSAND TREES



JULY 2020

ONE THOUSAND TREES

FACILITATING WELLNESS THROUGH CONNECTION, CREATIVITY, AND COMMUNITY SERVICE

Publisher Lisa Browning

REGULAR CONTRIBUTORS
Andrea Lines-Botell, Pat Bradley, Colleen Heighington, Christine Nightingale, Arlene Spencer

One Thousand Trees is published monthly. Submissions for Feature Articles (based on the monthly theme) or Regular Departments are due on the 25th of the month prior to each publication. Full Production Schedule, including summary of monthly themes, can be found at

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Please submit by email, as a Word doc attachment, by the above-stated deadlines. Please do not send PDFs. First-time writers for One Thousand Trees are asked to send a brief (two to three sentence) bio, and a head shot in JPEG format.

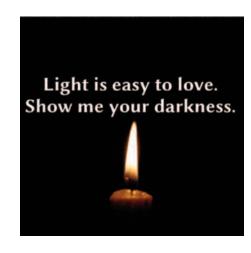
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ONE THOUSAND TREES JULY 2020

DARKNESS VS LIGHT

FEATURE ARTICLE:

BEASTS OF BURDEN by Marilyn Elphick

Maybe you have to know the darkness before you can appreciate the light.

Madeline L'Engle

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This Month's Contributors



Pat Bradley
Inspiration for Living Well

Pat is a relaxation therapist, certified coach practitioner and author. Pat has helped many people overcome insomnia, anxiety and headaches with

the practice of Gentle Touch Therapy. Today, through her generational teachings, her compassionate coaching ability, and her ability to write about everyday life challenges, she has offered her clients an insight on how to manage stress, as well as various relaxation techniques to cope in an ever-changing world. Visit her online at www.gentletouchtherapy.ca.



Marilyn Elphick
Beasts of Burden

Marilyn's first career was as a Registered Nurse in various fields of medicine. Her last position was as a dialysis nurse. She completed an MDiv degree in 2002 and a TH.M in 2013.

From 2002-2015 she worked as the Director of Campus Ministry, and at present she works as a chaplain at a long-term care facility. She recently moved to Orton, Ontario, and she loves to write! Please visit her website at www.marilynannelphick.com.



Amanda Gazzola
The Story Behind the Story

Amanda is a certified personal trainer/ life coach who loves to help women transform physically and mentally. She is a serial entrepreneur and is the host

of the RELOVE+RISE podcast. Amanda has firsthand experience in transformation, competing in multiple fitness competitions, speaking on stages across Ontario and running online and offline boot camps for hundreds of clients. She resides in Guelph with her high school sweetheart Kevin and her dog Iggy and cat Maple!



Colleen Heighington Writings from the Heart

Colleen is happily married to a wonderful husband named Ken. They have been blessed with three beautiful children, and four terrific grandsons. She enjoys reading, writing

stories and poetry, and she keeps fit by walking 3 to 4 kilometres every day. Her summers are spent at their trailer in Orillia, and she really enjoys the time she spends with family and friends. She has been a volunteer with Hospice Wellington since 2015.



Andrea Lines-Botell
Spice, Splatters and Soul

Andrea is a public speaker, writer and wellness practitioner who first started creating steps for solutions in conflict and crisis areas over 20 years ago in

England. Andrea offers gentle and creative support to others through her coaching company, Mandalia House of Healing. With a passion for supporting people facing grief, addiction and loss, Andrea offers a safe space and holistic approach to each individual, incorporating art and music therapy, coaching, energy healing, workshops and support groups. Visit her at www.mandaliahouse.com.



Wendy Monsinger
The Monsinger Family Award

Wendy has been married for 28 years to her high school sweetheart and is a mother to two amazing guys! She is an Eligibility Review Officer with the County of Simcoe and also a National

Representative with CUPE National. She is the creator of "The Monsinger Family Award." She loves helping people, and wants to inspire others by shining light, so the darkness will fade. Wendy and her husband reside in Waubaushene Ontario, living their dream of waterfront living!



Christine Nightingale
Love and Light

After studying Hypnosis for Fertility, Christine found that while working with clients, she would get very clear messages from their miscarried or not yet conceived babies. Her speciality

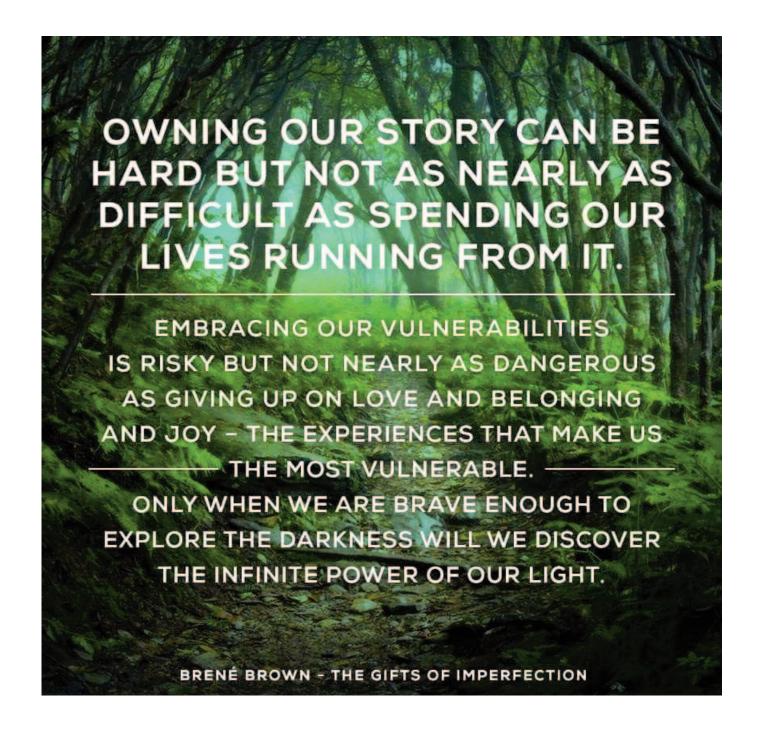
has become getting messages from these babies explaining their difficulties in coming in, and suggestions for making it easier. She has worked with over 400 couples, facilitating communication and pregnancy. For more information please visit her website at www.nightingalehealing.com.



Arlene Spencer Words I Couldn't Say

Arlene is a wife, mother of three grown boys, and a special education educator who has a passion for life, an abundance of energy and a need to be heard because at the end of the day

everyone has "Words They Couldn't Say." You can reach Arlene by email, at Arlenewics@gmail.com.





PUBLISHER'S PONDERINGS

As I took my dog for a walk, just prior to writing this piece, I was struck by the quote: "It is always darkest before the dawn." It was a very fitting recollection, especially given the amount of darkness I have experienced during the last few weeks.

It was that darkness that caused me to (almost) decide to discontinue this magazine, at least in its current format. It was that darkness that got me behind schedule in the first place, which is why this issue is going live approximately two weeks late.

Butterflies have always been a symbol for me ... of hope, of transformation, and of Spirit's presence in, and support of, my life. I usually see one or two

butterflies when I walk on the trail. Today, however, there were dozens. It was amazing! If truth be told, I think they were actually white moths, but they look like butterflies, and I choose to give them the same significance. Even so, my inner critic spoke up yet again, causing me to wonder if the sheer beauty of so many of these creatures flying around me was merely a coincidence.

And then it hit me. There are no coincidences. I firmly believe that, and say it all the time.

As I continued to walk, one of these "butterflies" drew me to a different type of butterfly, one which I had not seen yet this year (bottom centre). It stayed on the ground beside the path, wings moving up and down. I was mesmerized with its beauty. Every time I went to leave, it would fly around, but it never left that spot. When I reached the end of the trail, and was on my way back, that butterfly still sat in the same spot, as if waiting for me.

A little further along, I saw a monarch, and it did the same thing ... stayed in one place until I passed by.

When I got back home, and returned to my office to write this piece, I noticed that I had just (within seconds) missed a call from a colleague. I called her back, and we ended up having the most fascinating conversation, about synchronicity, and life's passion and purpose.

I knew, when I read the absolutely amazing submissions in this month's issue, that I will not be discontinuing or changing this magazine. My colleague was unaware that I was considering it. "Oh no, she said, "you can't do that." It wasn't an admonition ... it was a truth, that she knew and needed to share.

I wanted to put photos of the two butterflies at the end of this piece, so I googled simply "butterflies." To my amazement, the first three photos that popped up were of each of the two butterflies, as well as the Blue Morpho, which is my favourite butterfly and most powerful symbol.

There is, most defimitely, darkness before a very bright dawn!











THIS LITTLE LIGHT OF MINE

Each night, darkness will come but the light from the Lord will always rise.

We didn't know we would have to say goodbye so soon.

A baby brings such joy, innocence and the hope of a new tomorrow and the faith that someone will always be there to love them.

After college our youngest son decided to spread his wings and move to British Columbia. We agreed this would be a great experience and a chance for him to live independently while exploring another part of the country. He was 22 years old and my baby. After briefly meeting someone whom we had never met, he sprang the news of a new baby coming. This news was both unexpected for him and for us. I was devastated. I felt his life was ruined, destined with a future of hardship with a long winding road ahead of him. I slept little and cried for three days.

I wanted to lash out at him, reminding him of how careless he was but I knew it was compassion and love, not advice, that he needed.

As the weeks went by I started to accept the fact that we were going to be welcoming a new baby boy into our family. I soon became increasingly thrilled at the realization that I would be a grandmother. My time became excitedly occupied collecting and buying items for the new addition that I couldn't wait to hold. With them still

living in the West Coast I knew a journey to meet that new little bundle would be nothing short of miraculous.

As the fifth month approached, I received a call from our son. Through his trembling voice he informed us there were complications. After arriving at the small hospital where they lived they were immediately flown to a large city that specializes in premature births. We learned that this little guy would have to be delivered with little hope of survival.

Miles apart there was no salve, ointment, heat or cold I could give that could take that pain away for our son. My heart pulsed with pain. They were told if they kept the baby alive by machines it could be faced with a lifetime of disease and disability. Together they made the heartwrenching decision to let God decide. That little boy was delivered weighing 1 pound and 4 ounces. Nixon Stephen died in my son's arms 22 minutes later.

This news drove me to my knees. I cried again but this time longing for him. We didn't know that day would be his last and we would have to say goodbye so fast. I questioned, where was God? Why was this happening? I felt guilty; was it because I didn't welcome him from the beginning?

The next day those young kids left the hospital with the promise that Nixon's ashes would arrive in the mail six weeks later.

I often think about Nixon and wonder how he would have been woven into the tapestry of our family. Each Christmas we buy Nixon an ornament, always reminding us that he is safe in the arms of the angels.

There were photographs our son wanted to take, things he wanted to show his son, sing sweet lullabies and wipe away his tears but he clawed his way back from the depths of that unimaginable pain that changed his life forever. His life now is rich and full, not despite his loss but because of it. Our son grew up that day and learned one of the hardest lessons he will ever experience in life, to have loved and lost. He will carry Nixon in his heart and someday he will thank God for choosing him to be his daddy.

Losing Nixon taught all of us to love deeper—nothing is wasted in the hands of our redeemer and through the darkness there is always light.



Monsinger Family Award by Wendy Monsinger

When I started out on my journey, I mistakenly thought that laying charges and going through the court process against the man who sexually abused me as a child would take all my pain away. After all, he was not found guilty by a judge or jury, he admitted guilt! I know now, he did this to plea bargain a lesser sentence but nonetheless, he still said that word—"Guilty."

I was not aware then that the healing process would likely never be over, but when I wrote my story for "Sharing: our stories, ourselves, our success" I did it not only for myself, but for others. I wanted to make sure at least one other person knew that they were not alone. The writers in this book each chose a charity to share the proceeds with. I did not have a charity that resonated with me, so I created my own. Staying in line with wanting

others to know they were not alone, I also wanted to acknowledge them for working hard, persevering and overcoming obstacles. I created "The Monsinger Family Award." This award would be given out at graduation (Eastview Secondary School in Barrie Ontario) to a graduating female student who overcame obstacles, persevered and made it to her grade 12 graduation. I did not want it based on grades or popularity, and it didn't matter if it took her 4 years or 8 years - I wanted her to know she mattered, and she should be proud of her accomplishments.

I worked with the school in trying to determine how the selection process would be done. I didn't know the students and I didn't want to make them do any more work to be selected for my award, so I gave the school the ability to select someone who fit the criteria. They know the students and they are the ones who have worked with them in being successful. The school would provide me with the name of the student, and the reasons why she was selected.

My first award was given in 2014 – which was also the year my youngest son graduated, which made it extra special. Presenting that award brought a lot of fear because I don't like standing up in front of crowds and I was putting my story on the front lines, but it also gave me great honour and, for one of the first times in my life, I was proud of myself for creating something good out of a terrible time in my life.

Two or three years later, I decided I would like something more personal and intimate for presenting my award. This type of acknowledgement deserved more than a few seconds on stage handing a gift to someone. I wanted a personal connection to the student selected for my award. The guidance counsellor at the school agreed, so we started meeting in the

guidance office and we were able to spend a few minutes together. I explained how the award came about and talked about our book and sometimes, I would have the honour of listening to the recipient's story.

This year was my 7th award and it was a little bit different due to the pandemic; however, it was also a lot more special. The school connected the recipient and me via email. I explained my award and she shared her story with me. The school could not have picked a more deserving student! She was exactly the type of person I intended this award for. We planned a driveway visit at her home with her family, which enabled us to make a more personal connection. Later that day, I received an email from her. She read my story and shared how much it meant to her to be the recipient of my award. She ended the email with "Maybe I'll see you again sometime, but if not, know that you have just made a huge impact on my life. Thank you so much."



Presenting this award still brings me fear, but those words will forever be in my heart! It's exactly why I will keep this award alive. Everyone has a story and those stories matter! We all need to be heard; we all need to be acknowledged; we all need to know we're not alone and we all need to know that WE ARE ENOUGH!

Congratulations to all the recipients thus far, and I look forward to meeting all the future ones! You are all deserving and you should all be proud!



THE LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS by Andrea Lines-Botell

I feel that part of the reason many of us feel disconnected is that we separate ourselves into darkness and light. We see the big emotions and the more traumatic experiences of our journey as being dark. Some of our life can seem beyond comprehension and beyond our understanding at times. It can feel unbelievable that we have survived some of our past. We often do not want to go back to look at our past because of the pain that it brings. Behaviours or qualities of your personality may feel like darkness. Regretful decisions or resentment towards others can also bring about a feeling of darkness in our journey. Going into phases of sadness, depression or trauma healing can feel like we are going into darker times or dark places. In reality, those times can be a place of our deepest growth and deeper light.

If we feel into this energy it is more a sensation of heavy vs. weightlessness. Pain and sadness feel heavy and joy and love feel light. The more power we give the pain the bigger it becomes. The more power we give to a person or situation the heavier or consuming it can become. We give so much of our power away to fear and the past. When we take the power away from the trauma we can stand and see ourselves and our journey as one. When the power is removed from regret or sorrow all that is left is love, compassion and acceptance. If we give the power to love, then it will grow and becomes all.



Everything in this world has varying shades and tones. Artists use multiple shades, colours, and tones to create depth and beauty. These depths and tones bring forward different detail unseen before. Because of these details, your eyes can travel across the art piece of a million different times and still see something new and different. In its simplest form, the sunrise and the sunset are a representation of how shades and tones create detail. In our world, we need the sunrise and the sunset. Both give life, love, and vitality. Nature needs the shade for the relief it gives from the heat. We need all tones of life for our growth.

We see things differently compared to each other. We can all look at the same tree and see something quite different within it. We can focus on the harsh effects the winter has had on a tree or its new blossoming buds. This is also true of how we view each other and ourselves. Sometimes it can feel like we have no choice of what we give power to.

We can feel so beyond our own level of coping that it can feel impossible to feel the bright light of the sun, the glow of the moon or the warmth of love.

If we can come back to a place of acceptance and love it will allow healing. It will allow the emerging of all colours, tones, shapes, and textures of our life's journey. Shining the brilliant warmth of love on all allows the power of fear to fade and the beauty of healing to flow.

LESSONS IN THE WEEDS by Lisa Browning

My backyard is my sanctuary. It is filled with winding pathways, weaving their way through gardens. The birds love it, as it is one of the few backyards in my relatively new subdivision that has had any landscaping done ... and with my 13 bird feeders, I'll admit, I'm a little over the top!

Not only do I have a walk-out, but the yard slopes, to the back and to the right, which is why I decided to take all the grass out in the first place. "It will be a lot less work," I told myself, "not having to lug the lawn mower down the hill, and then manoeuvre the uneven ground." Ya, right.

It seems like the good weather came all of a sudden this year ... and with it, the weeds. I sat out on my deck last week, somewhat incredulous at how many weeds there were, and how quickly they grew. Bright and early Saturday morning, while the temperature was still cool, I grabbed my gardening gloves, yard waste bags and pruning shears, preparing to go to work.

In the moments of overwhelm that followed, it struck me that this situation was a lot like life. Sometimes, we become overwhelmed by problems ... the weeds in the garden of life. And if those problems are numerous or large, we don't know where to start, in order to free ourselves of them all.

Start with the Bigger Weeds First



In the mess that was my garden, I started with the bigger weeds first. I figured that, once I saw my way clear of those larger weeds, I'd be able to more freely more on the smaller ones. Just like life.

An interesting thing happened, as I worked my way from garden to garden. I became more energized, more hopeful. I started to think that I just might be able to get this done after all. And so, I continued.

Once You Start, Keep Going!



Garden by garden, weed by weed, I worked. Piles of weeds accumulated on my pathways, and when I had enough to fill a bag, I did just that.

As I continued to pull the weeds, I started to see the unobscured beauty of my gardens. Just like life.

That morning, I filled three bags in two hours. As the heat of the day bore down, I put my supplies away. In the early morning hours of Day 2, I began again.

Appreciate the Unexpected Gifts



In a corner garden, one of the last to be pruned, a dappled willow had taken over. As I methodically cut back the overgrown branches, I was surprised to find a pink peony bush that I didn't remember was there. I was so struck by its beauty, and its unexpected presence, that I sat still for a moment, taking it all in. I knew it was important to be still, and take it all in. Just like life.

Hard Work and Determination Pay Off



Five hours and six yard waste bags later, I sat down on my deck to enjoy a new view of my gardens. Despite feeling tired and worn out, I felt proud of my accomplishments ... of my perseverance and my vision. I smiled at St. Francis of Assisi, looking back at me from the centre garden.

There are definitely lessons in the weeds.

* * *

LOVE AND LIGHT by Christine Nightingale

I like to sign my letters "Love and Light." This is because I see the two as inextricably connected.

But is love always connected to joy and caring? Anyone who has worked for a women's shelter (like my daughter and myself) knows this is not so.

Is religion always associated with love? Ask any child who has been victimized by a man of the cloth. Or ask anyone who has not been allowed to marry due to religious differences.

I met the love of my life at the University of Toronto. We were two of the youngest students there, as we had both started school early and skipped a grade. He was sweet, kind, innocent, and respectful. But it was not to be.

My mother told me his Jewish family would never accept me. (As it turns out, I never met them.) She insisted that I break up with him.

I was vulnerable to her influence. My dad had died the May before I started university, and I was the oldest of 4 still at home. I went to school on an academic scholarship and three parttime jobs... there was no wiggle room to rent a student apartment.

My true love came to visit me 45 years later. My daughter was there; he told her she reminded him of how I used to look. I did not answer his unasked questions as to why we broke up. Facebook made it clear that he had been married almost 40 years; he was a dad and granddad. The "Love and Light" thing to do was leave the situation as it was.

Back to the past. When I was 24 I met a Divinity student (in training to be a minister). We married within less than a year. I put him through school from that point forward, working as a teacher, which I loved.

On his first placement in a rural church, the young minister started making inappropriate comments to me about the 14-year-olds in the congregation.

Also, the kitchen in the manse (minister's church-owned home) was next to the study where he did his "counselling." So I heard him when he asked a prospective couple in their sixties about the details of their sex lives. When they protested that they had each been widowed, and they did not wish to discuss this, he said it was a prerequisite before he would officiate at their marriage.

The last straw occurred when we were back in our home province on his second posting. I had just given birth to our son, and my friend from the first posting had come to visit me and the newborn baby.

My husband made very inappropriate comments to my friend. She told me about it, furious on my behalf. So there I was, with a newborn infant, deciding how to escape this dark situation.

I told my mom that I was leaving my husband. She said my baby and I could not come to her home to live. I told her I did not want to come back "home" (which was true). And I made my plans...I would cash in my RRSP from my first two teaching years to cover first and last month's rent, find an apartment, get hired on to supply teach at three school boards, get familiar with public transportation again, and hire a neighbourhood mom who could care for my child at her home.

My older son has happy memories of our first home together. I rented the first floor and basement, which included access to a nice back yard.

The rent was low because the owner, who lived in Ottawa, had no idea how much rents had gone up in Toronto. The family upstairs had a little girl, Chitra, who he played with. It was a neighbourhood full of schools and parks, so we went to every Fun Fair in the springtime. (These are school fundraisers, with games and toys and rummage sales.) It was a time of light. Fast forward several decades...my older son met and married a Jewish woman. Her mom Liz was my bosom buddy from the day we met. She taught me a Yiddish term for "comother-in-law," which has no English equivalent. (It reflects the cultural value that both sets of grandparents should get along with their children's spouses' families. The irony of this situation, given my own lost love, is not lost on me.)

Back to the past...I married again. The young man's mother was the darkest person I have ever met in my life. She told me...

She had only married her husband to "give her child a name." That is to say, she married for the sake of her illegitimate son, her favourite among the 6 boys.

She had not expected her husband to come back from the war.

She had "filled her house with boys in order to get her 2 girls." In other words, she greatly and openly favoured her daughters.

She had "asked God to take her baby" (wanted my boyfriend to die as a young child) because he had health issues.

So after all that, my boyfriend aroused my feelings of care and compassion. We married, and I took care of him for as long as I could. He had four periods of "long-term disability" which had a strong psychological component. Taking his cue from his mother, he

greatly favoured our daughter and was neglectful and unkind to both his own son and my son from my previous marriage. My husband was finally "laid off," and spent three years lying on the couch smoking pot and cigarettes, and drinking beer.

So I told him, "Obviously you are not looking for a job in your field. Here is a related area you can train for at a community college. I will pay your tuition and expenses." He accepted that gift, and finally got a job again. After that I told him we had reached the end of our marriage. (He remarried.)

It's decades later. I have several close male friends but no interest in getting serious again. My three children are all wonderful adults...caring, intelligent. My three grandchildren are all sweet and beautiful and bright (like every grandma's, eh?).

The dark days are done.

With kids, grandkids, friends, art, choir, plays, courses, volunteer work, book clubs, concerts, writing, and my work in fertility counselling ...the days of light are here.

BEASTS OF BURDEN by Marilyn Elphick

Lately the image of donkeys, the role they play in the Bible, and subsequently in my life, has resulted in a kind of thoughtful fascination. One of the most valuable lessons I learned during my theological training was the art of Theological Reflection (TR). It truly is an art that requires honesty, truth and a willingness to delve deeper into one's spiritual psyche. I have been practising this exercise for more than twenty years, and it has assisted me in making some of the momentous life decisions I have faced. During the infamous Covid-19

pandemic, I have felt overwhelmed, beaten up and generally burdened with fear, uncertainty and a lack of control. Recently, my TR partner reintroduced me to this story from Numbers 22:21-33:

Balaam, the Donkey, and the Angel

²² God's anger was kindled because he was going, and the angel of the LORD took his stand in the road as his adversary. Now he was riding on the donkey, and his two servants were with him.

²³ The donkey saw the angel of the LORD standing in the road, with a drawn sword in his hand; so the donkey turned off the road, and went into the field; and Balaam struck the donkey, to turn it back onto the road.

²⁴ Then the angel of the LORD stood in a narrow path between the vineyards, with a wall on either side.

²⁵ When the donkey saw the angel of the LORD, it scraped against the wall, and scraped Balaam's foot against the wall; so he struck it again.

²⁶ Then the angel of the LORD went ahead, and stood in a narrow place, where there was no way to turn either to the right or to the left.

²⁷ When the donkey saw the angel of the LORD, it lay down under Balaam; and Balaam's anger was kindled, and he struck the donkey with his staff.

²⁸ Then the LORD opened the mouth of the donkey, and it said to Balaam, "What have I done to you, that you have struck me these three times?"

²⁹ Balaam said to the donkey, "Because you have made a fool of me! I wish I had a sword in my hand! I would kill you right now!"

³⁰ But the donkey said to Balaam, "Am I not your donkey, which you have

ridden all your life to this day? Have I been in the habit of treating you this way?" And he said, "No."

³¹ Then the LORD opened the eyes of Balaam, and he saw the angel of the LORD standing in the road, with his drawn sword in his hand; and he bowed down, falling on his face.

³² The angel of the LORD said to him, "Why have you struck your donkey these three times? I have come out as an adversary, because your way is perverse^[b] before me.

In some translations the story is entitled Balaam and his ass, which is even more provocative. There is something poignantly sad about this passage. The she donkey is trying to protect her master from a danger that he cannot see or perceive. Her reward is a beating. Why do I call her a 'she'? In some translations the donkey is referred to as a she-donkey. With this realization, I begin to identify with the

donkey even more. In researching animals in the bible, I learned that donkeys are symbols of wisdom and intellect, as is in this account. God opens the mouth of the donkey so she can defend herself. She suffers at the hands of her master unjustly for the grave sin of trying to save him from certain death. She speaks with wisdom declaring her truth; "Have I not been loyal to you? Have I not served you faithfully for your entire life and yet you beat me unmercifully?"

When I reflected upon this passage, I felt connected to the trials of this donkey. The pandemic called Covid-19 has forced all of us to become beasts of burden in one way or another. Along with everyone else. I line up at stores, hoping against hope that I can find everything I need on my list at one place. I line up at the bank, in fact there are no errands which do not require taking my place in a queue. Sometimes people feel like talking but other times they are just fed up.

In Judges 15:14-16:

¹⁴ When he came to Lehi, the Philistines came shouting to meet him; and the spirit of the LORD rushed on him, and the ropes that were on his arms became like flax that has caught fire, and his bonds melted off his hands.

¹⁵ Then he found a fresh jawbone of a donkey, reached down and took it, and with it he killed a thousand men.

¹⁶ And Samson said, "With the jawbone of a donkey, heaps upon heaps, with the jawbone of a donkey I have slain a thousand men."

Like Samson, I want to smash the virus with a jawbone of a donkey for all the lives that have been lost. I want to ease my frustration or loneliness by releasing pent-up energy somehow. I miss entertaining people, hosting lunches or dinners Like everyone else I miss going out to a pub for a Guinness or going out to restaurants



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for a feast of sushi at Spoon and Fork with my friends or Dim sum in China town.

I have had many days of darkness, mostly missing my contacts with people, my friends and family. I thank God that I have done so much travelling in the last four or five years because I am not likely to go far away even after travel bans are lifted. I have no desire to travel outside my own country, at least not for an awfully long time.

I have handled the isolation by playing with my three pandemic toys: an Instant pot, air fryer and the latest, a bread maker. I have cooked and baked until my freezer is filled to the brim. I give away most of it, which makes me feel happy. Making a mess in the kitchen also makes me happy. I have perfected all kinds of recipes, especially since I figured out how to look up recipes on the phone and then get them to print on my printer at the other end of the house. Cleaning up is a tedious chore but that's part of the process. Every Saturday morning, I hang out the clothes on the line. What a change! As a teenager I hated hanging out the clothes but now I am rewarded by the clean fresh scent of the outdoors. On beautiful breezy days, the lightness shoves the darkness aside, making way for hope. Thankfully, my church holds three weekly connects over zoom. It is vital to be connected to some community because this isolation has eroded away at our need to be a part of a group, whether it be social, religious or familial. During isolation I went through closets, unpacked boxes from my move in December to give away to donation centres. When they opened two weeks ago, I filled up my car and took it to the centres. It felt good to shed those things that I have held on to for so long.

The virus has taught me new skills. I know how to zoom now effortlessly. I

have developed disciplines that I didn't have before like devoting Fridays to cleaning. I miss my seniors' centre activities, writing group exercise classes and people. But I digress from the donkeys. In the New Testament, we learn that it is a donkey that carries a pregnant Mary from Nazareth to Bethlehem for the birth of Jesus. When Jesus is born, it is the breath of the animals that keep him warm. His beginnings could not have been humbler. It is the donkey who carries them safely to Egypt to avoid Herod's murderous rage against the innocents with the purpose of killing the newborn king of Israel (Jesus). One of the most famous stories is the parable of the Good Samaritan from Luke10:29-37

²⁹ But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

³⁰ Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead.

³¹ Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side.

³² So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.

³³ But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity.

³⁴ He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him.

³⁵ The next day he took out two denarii, ^[b] gave them to the innkeeper, and said, 'Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.'

³⁶ Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?"

³⁷ He said, "The one who showed him mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

I included this story because I have seen so many examples of Good Samaritans during this pandemic. People are going out of their way to do good deeds, performing random acts of kindness, and being the type of good neighbours we see in this story. The outpouring of charity and love has melted the hearts of so many that have been perhaps oblivious to the needs of the most vulnerable members of society. This is a byproduct of the pandemic, and a most necessary one. Like Balaam, our eyes have been opened to the reality of the 'new normal.'

I wonder sometimes how I can interpret more fully what I am seeing. The experience of living during a raging pandemic has been a constant balancing act. I straddle the precarious space hovering between darkness and light. Like a tightrope walker, I must maintain equilibrium without losing my balance. While the darkness can be frightening, toxic or alienating, sometimes the light can be unbearable. There is no hiding and all idiosyncrasies are exposed. Each in their own way, darkness and light have their own perils.

Like Balaam's nameless donkey, I am trying to sidestep the dangerous abyss of lonely solitude. For now, I am in a holding pattern or a type of treading water. To be frank, this holding space is a place of stillness and no-thingness. As the province begins to open up, I feel we have, because of our efforts, are finally allowed to step into the sunlight, get our hair cut, even hug our loved ones. This is the lightness of being we have all been longing for. Finally. Thankfully.

Do you have a story to tell?

There are many ways to make it happen!





When I read the theme for this month's topic ... a poem came to mind.

Grieving is a part of life that we all will go through at one point in our lives. I have personally experienced grief and decided to write this Poem especially for those who are now grieving and it is my hope, it will bring you some comfort.

LIGHT VS DARKNESS

I have so many beautiful memories of you

They "Light" up my heart each day I remember all of our happy times We've had along the way ...

Sorrow and "Darkness" still creep in When I wish ... you were still here I hold your picture to my heart and then ... the "Darkness" disappears

You "Light" up my life in so many ways By remembering your talks of wisdom ... So lovingly given to me They will be forever sketched in my mind For All of Eternity ...

We've shared so much love and happiness together

Bringing deep peace to my inner core It takes away all the "Darkness" and pain

When the "Light" comes to me ... once more ...

I didn't realize how much you meant to me

But I do now ... since we've been apart Remembering all the wonderful days gone by

"Lights" up my aching heart ...

One day ... The "LIGHT" will lead me back to you

Where "Darkness" will be no more One day ... The "LIGHT" will lead me back to you ... MOM and DAD Inside ... of HEAVEN'S DOOR!!!



SOCIAL MEDIA THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING LIKED



Am I Addicted to Social Media?

While recently sitting in a coffee shop, I happen to overhear two young ladies, whom I'm guessing were in their early 20s, discussing their addiction to Facebook. As one woman talked, the other was feverishly thumb-typing on her cell phone, nodding her head in agreement.

The one woman, who was not on her phone, watched fast fingers McGee take pictures of a half-eaten piece of cherry cheesecake in front of her and post it to social media. I overheard the non-typist say, "Think you could give it a break for five minutes?" to which the typist tapped in a few more words, laid

the phone down on the table and looked up at her friend with an animated clown-face. I couldn't quite make out what the non-typist said to her, but I could tell she wasn't happy.

As I scanned the rest of the room, I noticed that most people, sitting alone or with someone else, had their cellphone clutched in their hands, typing away to the virtual world.

What was refreshing was the little old couple sitting across from each other. She handed him a serviette to wipe the filling from his butter tart that had dripped down his chin, and he wiped his face as he smiled at her and gave a little chuckle. Oblivious to all of the technology that surrounded them, I couldn't help but wonder what they might think of everyone who has their phone stuck in their face today.

Social media, whether Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp or Snapchat, have no doubt broadened our worldview and increased our connectivity with the larger world in a staggering way.

In fact, social media offers many benefits that were unknown to us in the pre-social-media era, including access to worldwide news, networking and collaborations with people located in different geographical zones, and even marketing new business ideas. It is a blessing for business entrepreneurs, consumers, and those looking to build and expand professional networks.

Moreover, social media sites such as Facebook have enabled us to reconnect with our old friends going back all the way to school, expand our online social circle, join a networking event remotely; or perhaps, follow the everyday lives of our favourite celebrities. Social media has literally turned the world into a "global village"—a phrase coined by Marshall McLuhan (McLuhan and Powers 1992)

to describe how the world has shrunk due to immense technological advances in communications.

Most of us are reaping these benefits, but only some of us can control the way we make use of social media and set limits; so that we do not get swayed by the overwhelming information and endless entertainment available online.

People, not just youngsters but also adults, are being controlled by social media, causing serious issues of addiction and low self-esteem.

Obsession with Likes



Social media has changed the way we form interpersonal relationships and connect with the outside world. Replacing face-to-face interactions, our lives are lived to a large extent in a virtual world where we are connected to a large number of friends, acquaintances, and even people whom we hardly know.

This virtual world is unrealistically competitive, with people striving to prove their worth, outdoing one another's efforts to present a perfect version of themselves, and seeking the approval of others. There is an uncontrollable fixation with likes, comments, and tagging on social media platforms.

A person detached from the 'madness' of social media might find this online

behaviour totally ridiculous, to the point of being hilarious. But for the large numbers actively using social media, the world of 'likes' is the norm.

The line between normality and addition gets blurred with the powerful control of social media over our lives. The 'like' button is always active at the back of our minds as we lead our mundane everyday lives that seemingly innocuous activity of sipping coffee at this fancy cafe must be announced on Facebook; that last bite of cake must be clicked and uploaded on Instagram; the casual meeting with a bunch of friends must be pictured and put on social media; the new hair-cut selfie is a must; the book that I am reading must be announced on Facebook and Instagram; vacations, no matter how enjoyable, are not worthy enough, if their pictures are not posted on these sites for everyone to see. Moments of triumph in life, such as landing a new job, are not satisfactory enough if these are not declared and publicized online. The story doesn't end here but instead triggers a desire for likes and appreciative comments on posts publicizing them.

While some people can enjoy this constant cycle of posts and likes; for others, this obsession causes anxiety, depression, and at times, low self-esteem. A 'like' boosts morale only temporarily, driving the person to seek constant self-approval through more posts and likes. The process is cyclic, causing restlessness and serious social media dependency symptoms. It is often difficult to get out of this obsessive trap of social media, given the power it holds on our lives.

Psychology of Social Media Likes

Social media has been a subject of many psychological studies that have pointed to the superficial nature of our virtual lives, where we present the best versions of ourselves.



Everyday online behaviour most often involves posting the best photoshopped selfie, describing how super-amazing one's love life is, declaring how successful we are in our lives, bragging about the best vacations we had in Costa Rica, and so on. It is a filtered, edited version of our lives, and everyone around us looks so happy, accomplished, beautiful, and successful.

This superficial virtual world can have very real psychological effects on many of us. It drives people to prove their worth in this impossibly competitive space. They get addicted to social media, projecting and publicizing themselves, and continually looking for likes and comments.

How many times have you checked your smart phone every few seconds or minutes to see the number of likes on your most recent post? Do you feel excited or happy every time you see new notifications that somebody has liked your picture or post? Has a negative comment affected your psyche in an outsized way? Or have you ever felt unworthy if your post didn't get enough likes?

Psychologists have explained that addiction to social media does not come without consequence. In his book *Irresistible*, Adam Alter (Alter 2017), a professor of psychology and marketing at NYU, explains how the rise of technology, including social media is simply overpowering, leading to addiction and having a huge impact on our well-being, identity, and self-esteem.

Online behaviour or social grooming can affect our self-esteem because everyone around looks like an achiever, and this unrealistic competition can affect our sense of identity. H.T Chou and N Edge (Chou and Edge 2012), who has researched social media behaviour, point out that, to chronic social media users, other people in the virtual world seem to be happier and lead better lives, and this often causes unhappiness and loss of confidence.

A few studies have also stated that it is often not easy to get out of this trap, and it might be harder to avoid social media than other forms of addiction such as cigarettes and alcohol.

A lot of us spend more time on social media, trying to boost our morale and looking for likes and approval instead of having face-to-face conversations and indulging in more creative and satisfying activities.

For those with low self-esteem, a few likes might create a momentary high and make them fixated to social media. But on the other side, if no one hits a like on their posts, or if someone posts negative comments on their updates, people with low self-esteem may feel dejected.

Researchers at the University of Strathclyde, Ohio University and University of Iowa have pointed out a negative link between female social media users and their perception of body image.

Women who spend more time on Instagram and Facebook are fed with super-thin filtered and photoshopped images of friends, models and celebrities all the time. Petya Eckler, of the University of Strathclyde, in Glasgow, was cited in a BBC (Briggs 2014) article as saying that "The fascination with celebrities, their bodies, clothes, and appearance have all increased the pressure that people

typically feel at a time when they seek to establish their own identities and when their bodies are growing and changing." This kind of social media intervention in our lives is bound to create identity insecurities and low self-esteem among women.

It is not just women, but also men, who are feeling the pressure to look good and post perfect selfies. A friend and a colleague of mine told me that he needs to start weaning himself off Facebook, as his constant impulse to check his phone is driving his wife crazy. He also shared that he knows it's become an addiction and said that he sometimes checks his phone in the middle of the night.

Some of us are able to engage in social media in a limited way or are not affected by the evaluation people make of ourselves. But many of us are addicted to social media and unaware of our online obsession and the ways it is affecting our self-esteem and wellbeing.

It is astounding that not just youngsters and middle-aged adults but even elderly people are sometimes affected by the 'like-comment' syndrome.

Overcoming Addiction



The first step to overcoming social media addiction is coming to realize that one is addicted and a willingness to reduce one's dependence on it. A firm belief that one should be in control of one's online behaviour

rather than letting digital technology simply dominate our lives goes a long way in altering social media's effects on us.

Psychologists have suggested minimizing rather than totally eliminating one's engagement with social media sites. One can put a strict timer to keep a check on one's social grooming behaviour and can even use the reward-punishment method to overcome the addiction successfully.

We sometimes need to set limits on ourselves the same way we set limits on screen time for kids. It might sound a little strange, but it is a technique that really works to overcome serious addiction. Gradually, removing Facebook or Instagram apps from the phone has been suggested by many as an excellent idea to reduce frequent browsing. It is better to have these apps installed on our laptops or tablets rather than the phone, since the phone is accessible to us all the time, and creates in us an auto-response of checking our social media profiles.

People who notice serious mental health issues that cannot be overcome by these techniques should not hesitate to talk to someone, and perhaps seek professional help.

Conclusion

Social media can be a powerful medium for connectivity provided its participants use it wisely rather than letting it take control of their lives.

It is important to remember that the real world is more important than the virtual one. In particular, the virtual world of social media is dominated by an overtly positive and happy projection of its users; if not taken with a grain of salt, may lead one to have self-esteem issues in the real world!

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* * *



A DIET THAT WORKS FOR ME by Amanda Gazzola

I wrote this book because I wanted to be a voice for women who never thought that they were special. I wanted to let them know that, even though they may never have stood up in class yelling out the answers, or they were the last to be chosen in class, none of this matters in life.

When I started my weight loss journey I would have never imagined what it would escalate to. All I wanted to do was lose weight, and in the journey I just did was I was told. The magic in

this is that I was open to doing what it took, and I learned from my mistakes.

There was no magic secret or magic pill to what the next 10+ years of what it would look or feel like, but I think it is good to not forecast too much as it can be overwhelming. As many women can no doubt relate to, often our to-do list can get a little out of hand!

This book was meant to be written for the woman who is looking for a lifelong goal and not just a 10-day diet cleanse. You see, I used to believe in quick fixes but I do not anymore. I believe in long-term results in all aspects of our life. Everything should blend in together so that we can maintain some sense of balance, which involves doing things that make us happy. Family, work, personal goals, believing in yourself, and giving back are what makes the world go round, which in turn makes you feel more purposeful and fulfilled.

Long-term results take time and patience. Things will always come up in life, which is why it is good to start slow. Long-term results are not a sprint. It is a marathon and takes persistence, discipline and self-awareness.

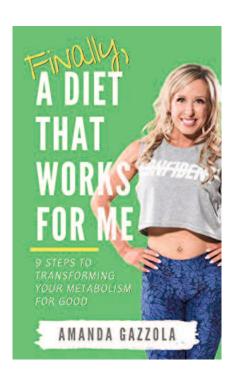
Self-awareness is basically auditing yourself and checking in with yourself constantly throughout the day. So for instance, if you are getting up in the morning: How do you feel? What does your day look like? How do you want to feel with that? After you have a meeting or call with someone: How do you feel? When you go to the gym: How do you feel after? After you eat: How do you feel?

I suggest, if you are digging deep inside, that you be very gentle with the process, and write things down as they come up. The more you can learn, the better things will be for you in the future.

Self-care can be, and feel, unbeautiful. It's more than just getting a pedicure or massage. There is a deeper level and connection to your mind and body, and this may cause you to be constantly assessing yourself and asking what it is that you need to feel better.

I grew up not knowing how to connect with myself because I always felt behind and left out. I felt like there was never time to figure it out, and that I should always just know the answer. I felt unworthy, and feared that when I grew up no guy would ever want me because I was not pretty or smart like the other girls.

Weight loss provides just a glimpse of what transformation can really look like. My journey started off with just wanting to shed a few pounds because I thought that would make me feel more confident. That did happen, for a short time. Then I found out from there that the transformation was only beginning!



"A Diet That Works For Me" is available on www.amazon.ca.



NEXT MONTH IN ONE THOUSAND TREES

August's focus is **Celebrating Our Young People**

"This world demands the qualities of youth: not a time of life but a state of mind, a temper of the will, a quality of imagination, a predominance of courage over timidity, of the appetite for adventure over the love of ease."

— Robert Kennedy

If you know of any community wellness or charitable events/initiatives taking place in June, please complete and send us the Event Listing form found on the magazine page of our website.

Articles are always welcome for any of our "regular" departments ...

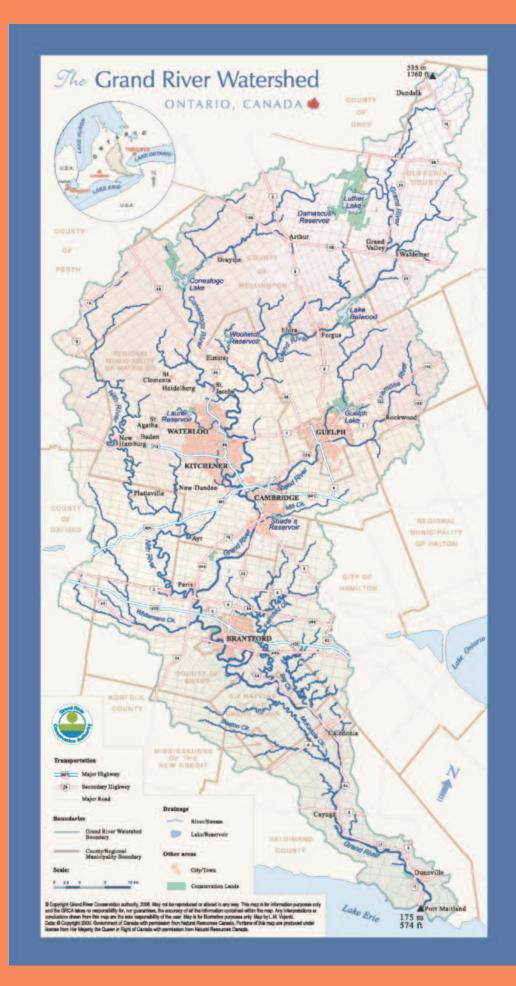
Connections
Creativity and the Arts
Food and Nutrition
Giving Back
Health and Wellbeing
The Library

Deadline for submissions is July 25

As always, we look forward to hearing from you with any feedback or article ideas!

lisa@onethousandtrees.com





The Grand River flows 300 kilometres through southwestern Ontario from the highlands of Dufferin County to Port Maitland on Lake Erie.

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