

What to do Where to Start

We felt some urgency in bringing these stories out, we have been too secret with our stories of ascendance and our stories of descent, we have been too secret all around. In the balance are lives. We searched out ways to reach more people, to lift the shame curtain on our addictions and our depressions and our imprisonments and our secret illnesses when the inner world goes dark.

I felt that our spiritual and our social institutions were like gated communities behind which stories are kept to ourselves. I think we could work better together to serve our communities with more intelligent strategies. The first step: tell the stories.

Some of the stories are triumphant, some difficult. All are true. Though the stories are stripped of details, names, identifying qualities, the individuals mentioned are all heroic meaning they all value the necessity to serve. They all want to turn their experience into benefit for someone else. Confidentiality does not mean secrecy. Secrecy is part of the problem.

Thus this series: *And These Are The Stories.*

Into the Dark, Story #3

I don't know all the details, but I do know this: she died alone. At the penultimate moment, just before it became too late to change course, she was alone. Sometimes she went deep into the dark and you have to have been there, you have to have spent some time there to know that when you visit there, even briefly, something terrible can happen.

It is not a well lit place and not well understood. Something irreversible can happen in twenty minutes of a swing downward, the overwhelming sense of futility and pain and helplessness that you have to have been there to understand, this least understood part of the most private world of especially creative people, you have to have been there to understand that you can visit there and not come back so easily. You can not come back at all. Sometimes even with the best help, the most patient family, the most supportive friends, the most understanding community, you may not touch that darkness.

Sometimes it is something that cannot be penetrated and not easily dissipated and you have to have been there to really understand that but that's the way it is. It happens. And for those of us who do understand, we have to start telling people what it's like, help other people understand, let everyone know so we can treat each other with kindness, above all, kindness and gentleness and understanding and respect and without judgment. Without judgment most importantly, and be easy on ourselves for not knowing for not having known for having done this or not done that, we have to treat ourselves with kindness and with mercy because it's right and we need to heal. And we will only heal with mercy.

We have to do this together.

For No Shande*

jsg

*Shande means shame there is none

How to Start a Mental Health-Mental Illness Initiative

Declare a start.

Then open up and get honest and vulnerable with each other.

Then get ready for reluctance to get hands dirty.

Then get your hands dirty.

Then call in the right collaborators.

Then luxuriate in the courage of people you are helping.

Then receive their thanks.

Then thank them.

Then get stuck in that loop: thank you, no thank you.

Then say this: we began.

Then write down everything that happens.

Then become a nudge.

Then remind your community we can do more.

Then do more.

jsg

For Shande means Shame There is None