

Realistic Living

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The Spirit of the 2020s on Planet Earth

anticipating the next decade
by Gene Marshall

In these closing days of the first decade of the 21st Century, we who have the courage to look ahead see both a dangerous and promising next decade. I want to describe (partially, I am sure) the spirit qualities I see unfolding.

I am going to use the definition of spirit that my long-time mentor, Joe Mathews, claimed he derived from Søren Kierkegaard. Here it is: *"Spirit" is an external encounter that occasions an internal crisis, raising an existential question, from which we want only to escape.*

Our External Encounter in the 2020s

We confront the raging onslaught of the climate crisis that is already changing many aspects of our planet into a state unknown to human experience. This crisis is part of a larger development in planetary history in which one species, ours, has become such a powerful presence that the planet can no longer be assumed to take care of itself. Formerly, the planet was not greatly impacted by all that humans could use or damage. We did terminate a number of large easy-to-catch species, but not at such a rate that the entire planet shuddered. That has changed.



We have now entered a new era of Earth history. Some call this new period "the Anthropocene Era"—a period in which the anthropos species (namely us) is now such a powerful force that we humans must assume responsibility for the welfare of the planet. We must provide care for the planet for its own sake in order to enable the planet to care for us.

Meanwhile, our species is in disarray, to put it mildly. Economic inequity on the world scale has become so great that the top 1 percent owns more wealth than the bottom 99 percent, and a handful of billionaires own more than the bottom half of people

around the world—that means more than 3.7 billion other human beings. These “oligarchs” and the corporations they control are able to buy governments and use those governments to assist them in becoming ever-more rich and powerful. This monopoly-game pattern of action is undoing the progress already made in democracy, equity, and ecological sanity. Such foolish economic malpractice is creating grossly reactionary and grimly authoritarian governments that maintain their power with a hatred of truth and a pattern of lying that seems uncanny.

Oppressed groups of many types are awakening from their toleration of this ever-more grim state of economic unfairness, political powerlessness, rank injustice, and even lack of respect, honor, and safety. A growing majority of women are opposing their second-class status, their disrespect, their sexual abuse, their rape, and the persistent social control over their bodies.

Progressive forces are also arising around the need for much fuller democracy and ecological responsibility. This includes a move to empower the democratic governments with an independence from wealth captivity, and thereby with a willingness and ability to set the rules for the economic playing field. Such democratic governments can also help build more honest and realistic patterns of truth-seeking in politics, schools, courts, CIA, FBI, news media, social media, and our religious conversations.

All these developments pulling together put the true lovers of democracy, equity, and ecological sanity in a grimly serious fight with those free-wheeling, power-addicted, greed-indulgent authoritarians.

There are very few, if any, compromises to be made between these two trends of people, money, and organized power. This horrific planet-wide tension between human forces will surely dominate our lifetimes, and a few more generations to come. At all costs, this cultural, economic, and political conflict must be won (and won non-violently if possible) in favor of the lovers of democracy, equity, and ecological sanity. The historical outcome, however, of this clash of forces has not yet been determined.

Our Internal Crisis in the 2020s

The internal crisis occasioned by the above external encounter might be characterized as being *overwhelmed* by these times of great tragedy, great change, and great challenges. Perhaps we want to quit watching the TV news, internet news, or reading news magazines. Perhaps we are still curious, but feel helpless to do anything that involves us in the anxieties involved in a deeper participation.

Some take a more active way of relating to the truth of these times—making up “conspiracy theories” that make everything seem more comfortable. This course can bring up another internal crisis—the fear of having our lies exposed, including our paranoia that this whole century is against us.

Perhaps we want to do something helpful, but everything seems so huge compared to our littleness that we feel ashamed or useless.

In terms of just being someone who is doing what we can, we may still feel like we are being boiled in the hot water of challenges and choices for which we are barely prepared by our millions of years of human experience.

Our Existential Question in the 2020s

The question of our identity—“*Who am I?*”—has been with many of us for most of our lives. Some of us have become aware that we simply do not know who we are, but that we humans are a *mysteriousness* that we will never fathom. Perhaps we have moved on to the existential question: “*What do I? What do I with my one precious life?*”

Perhaps this has led us to notice that I am “able to respond” to everything that is happening to me, so I am response-able for this entire planet and every human, animal, tree, and blade of grass. I must choose where to focus, but I must indeed *choose*.

Perhaps our existential question has moved on to “*How be I?*” In the midst these intensities of responsibility, how can I maintain my equanimity, my joy, and my activist energy within such a whirlwind of awareness and ambiguous choices?

Our Characteristic Escapes in the 2020s

The intensities of the 2020s are so great that we escape them through various distractions and other suppressions of our dread, horror, anger, responsibility, and even our potential for the joy in at least dealing with the challenges of our times. Perhaps we say to ourselves, “This time in history is simply too much for me.” “I am not to up this.” “I am not made for this.” “I am the exception among humans to any call to maximize my possibilities.

Perhaps I blame my parents for my being so weak. Perhaps I blame my circumstances. Perhaps I have opted for a long vacation trip, seeing the sights, indulging in addictions, working puzzles, finding distractions, backing into whatever I already know or find comforting.

A second characteristic escape that we the people are taking from these 2020 spirit intensities is open defiance of the objective truth. Facts like climate crisis or gross injustice are simply denied. “Truth” for we defiant ones becomes whatever *brand* of manufactured reality pleases us. We discredit any counters to these fact-less escapes from Reality with whatever insults and lies it takes to put down opposition to our falsified worlds of phony living.

The Opposite of Escape

Openly facing and living our encountered and inwardly lived realism is the opposite of escape. This path takes courage, for Reality is challenging and unrelenting. Reality’s rewards are surprises.

I am going to illustrate this spirit realism with political urgencies in the United States in 2020. Following are five considerations that call to each citizen of the United States who is committed to live his or her deep life of here and now realism:

1. Ousting Authoritarians
2. Opposing Confederate Racist Backlash
3. Promoting Post-Patriarchal Uprising
4. Providing Medicare for All
5. Enacting the Green New Deal

1. Ousting Authoritarians

Ousting Authoritarians has become a top issue in the U.S., because in 2016 authoritarians took over our federal government. An open fight with the institutions, norms, values, and spirit of democracy has shaken this nation to the core and damaged domestic and foreign polices in ways not easily corrected. A surprisingly large number of various types of authoritarians have gone along with this disaster. The full truth of this development is clouded in a host of often-told and well-financed lies. The truth is that above-the-law-king-like pretenders have joined other authoritarians across the planet—Putin, Erdoğan, Orbán, Xi Jinping, Bolsonaro, and Mohammad bin Salman, to list a few.

Removing the anti-democratic authoritarians from the U.S. Oval Office and both Houses of Congress may take a while, but doing so is what must be done by those citizens of this nation who are even minimally interested in realistic governing of a democratic sort. This truth cannot be said too strongly. Even the slightest love of democracy recommends a clean sweep of these anti-democracy forces from every powerful office.

Meanwhile, lovers of democracy are split between (1) bipartisan cooperation for minor improvements, and (2) fighting hard for long-term solutions in healthcare, the climate emergency, assault rifles off the street, and other pressing issues that require taking on the big-money oligarchy that has been gaining excessive strength for decades.

The big-money oligarchs of the United States apparently prefer an authoritarian like Vladimir Putin, but are willing to settle for a far less competent dictator for this country.

Realism in this historical situation requires removing the scourge of reverse-gear politics from every office, from local school boards to the U.S. Congress and the presidency. Nothing less than this qualifies as realism. Realism, let us recall, is the key quality of any viable and vital next Christian ethics, and realism is the essential ingredient in all programs of justice conducted by our U.S. institutions of democracy and in our outgoing national presence on the world scene.

2. Opposing Confederate Racist Backlash

Opposing Confederate Racist Backlash remains a prominent issue. A large percentage of the U.S. population of European descent unconsciously or even consciously embody a backlash of Southern Confederacy life styles. The Civil War is not yet won. The civil rights movement is not yet complete. Institutionalized forms of racism remain to be done away with promptly.

The racism woven into our personality formations may take several more generations to heal. Such healing, however, will happen only if our institutions strongly support further progress in our personal lives. It is true that Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X led civil-rights revolutions that made remarkable institutional progress and enabled personal transformations among millions of people. But let us not suppose this revolution is complete.

This “*we-are-done*” view must be treated as a form of racism, which it is. Having our first black president must not be interpreted as a sign of final victory. The Obamas were severely hated by a significant portion of the population, and the recent administration has reversed almost every change the Obama administration made toward greater justice.

The current U.S. social-justice emergency with regard to institutionalized racism centers in severe flaws in our criminal justice system—arrest biases, police overreaches, court corruptions, improper convictions, excessive incarceration, and unjustified executions. “Black Lives Matter” is a significant symbol for this far-reaching malady. The entire experience for a black, brown, tan, man or woman is different than it is for those who can pass for white. Conservatives who rant the obvious truth that “police-lives matter” are actually implying that protecting white lives does matter, but protecting black lives does not matter.

3. Promoting Post-Patriarchal Uprising

Promoting post-patriarchal uprising means joining women of the U.S. who are moving against every instance of rape, abuse, disrespect, unequal

treatment, and control of women’s bodies. This oppression is still ignored or dismissed by millions of men and also numerous women. For example, there are women who now have jobs that only men used to hold, who still say publicly that they could never vote for a woman president.

A far greater number of women and men now acknowledge that it is not fair that women are paid 80% or even 50% of what men are paid for the same work. What we face here is another hangover from the past; one that has at least 5000 years of momentum.

Like racism, sexism is still in us. A few more generations will likely pass before our sexist personality patterns lose their hold on us. Nevertheless, our institutionalized sexism can and must be corrected promptly. Failure to do so slows or prevents the needed changes in the personality qualities of male entitlement and female disempowerment. Religious bigotry as well as racism overlap with promoting this second-place standing for women, robbing her of control of even her own body. Liberating women is not an extreme political opinion; it is a realistic priority for our basic Christian ethics.

4. Providing Medicare for All

Providing Medicare for All is a real solution to the problem of denying affordable healthcare to millions of people within the U.S. geography. By saying this I am not speaking about doable politics. I am speaking about ethical truth, the challenge of Reality.

Medicare, like Social Security and the Post Office, is one of the most successful programs in the history of this nation. The vast majority of seniors love it. To limit Medicare to old folk is plain wasteful. Medicare works fine, not perfect, but fine. No other healthcare system in the US works fine. And like everything else, Medicare can be improved.

The well-written *Medicare-for-All* bill is already on the floors of both House and Senate. This bill includes improvements to what Medicare is already providing our seniors. A restored Obamacare plus a public option is not affordable healthcare. “Public option” means the opportunity to buy into Medicare.

Neither the choices offered by the current health insurance companies nor the choice to buy into Medicare results in affordable healthcare for most people. The public option is a step hated by the healthcare establishment, but it is not affordable healthcare. This is simply the truth.

The worry some people have that *Medicare for All* will raise taxes is a huge misunderstanding. *Medicare for All* lowers healthcare costs for everyone but the super rich. For the middle-income majority, *Medicare for All* means approximately this: for every \$1000 you give the government through the tax system for *Medicare for All*, you would have had to pay \$2000 for similar coverage from the current broken system of health insurance provision. So it is misleading to call this a tax increase. It is at least a \$1000 savings on the average cost of health insurance.

And for those too poor to pay taxes at all, health insurance is simply free under *Medicare for All*. No other system accomplishes this. Those who are in the largest income-tax brackets will pay a bit more than they may pay now for their health insurance. But this "bit more" goes for the people who are dying from a lack of healthcare for the mere reason of being poor.

Billionaires, who don't need health insurance at all, are given the most opportunity to help finance a system that provides affordable healthcare to every person. In other words, *Medicare for All* is a justice system—providing justice that is not provided by even the best of Obamacare plus public-option plans.

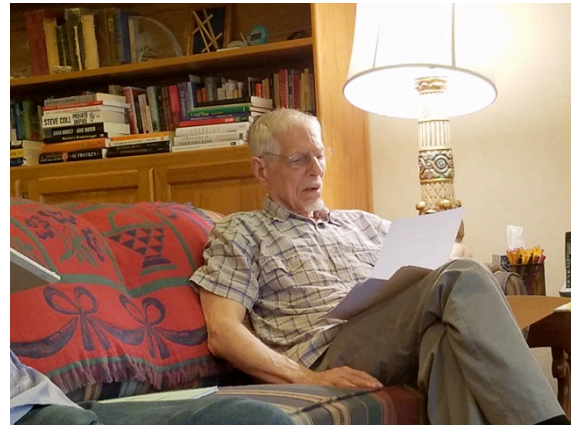
Any plan that continues using the current privately administered healthcare system is unstable. Even if you are getting a good deal from some employer, you can lose it if you are fired; move to something else; or if that company goes into bankruptcy, changes CEOs, or just decides to change plans. The *Medicare for All* system relieves the pressures on employers and employees both. This is one of the reasons why 70% of the voting population favor *Medicare for All*. The federal government could indeed give those 70% what they want.

Consciously or unconsciously rejecting the *Medicare for All* goal is working for the current healthcare insurance establishment's continued profiteering.

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The United States is a come-lately nation for this common-sense government-administered way of doing healthcare insurance. This is not-at-all an extreme way of doing health insurance. Something similar is already being done in Canada, England, France, Sweden, Norway, Cuba. etc.

"Money-making over citizen care" corrupts the healthcare system. Some things are best administered by government: health insurance is one of them. Highways, fire stations, police departments, and the post office are other examples where government, especially democratic government, is the best way to administer such services.



5. Enacting the Green New Deal

Even more than healthcare insurance, the climate crisis is a challenge that calls for a full leap forward—no half-way measures will do. *The Green New Deal* is a resolution on the floor in both the US Senate and House of Representatives. This resolution is waiting for a vote. It's passage is even more controversial than Medicare for All. Oil Companies and their politicians are willing to say that global warming is a hoax and give up democracy in favor of an authoritarian government rather than phase out their product.

So, what does the "Green New Deal" mean? It is a huge jobs program that promotes millions of good-paying jobs for our under-employed, mis-employed, and non-employed workers. It will offer coal miners and oil-field workers better jobs, as well as good jobs for millions of others.

Enacting the Green New Deal also means building the infrastructure and needed institutions for moderating the number and extent of the hurricanes, the tornadoes, the forest fires, the floods, the mud slides, the ocean rising, the loss of food sources, increased poverty, social chaos, and the extinction of species. The *Green New Deal* can help us avoid the increasingly unmanageable social chaos that will result if we continue to postpone making the basic energy system changes that we so desperately need.

Many are expressing their terror over the very idea of raising Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal from its sleep with this new, relevant, workable, and exciting new New Deal. Some left-of-center thinkers are likewise frightened of the *Green New Deal*. "Too big," they say. It does indeed violate what many have come to treasure as "normal politics."

"How can we pay for it?" is a question raised by moderates, as well as a loud scream being uttered by the wealthy recipients of big tax cuts and preposterous CEO salaries. Most of these screamers have had no qualms about paying many trillions to a military-industrial complex that has channelled money to the rich while wasting trillions on useless wars, needless weaponry, sheer corruption, and astonishing administrative snarls.

Yes, the *Green New Deal* will redirect trillions of dollars of the wealth of this wealthy nation to solving real problems, and it will significantly moderate the climate crisis without dumping the cost of revising the energy system on workers and other middle-class tax-payers. The *Green New Deal* is indeed a "significant leap" for both economic justice and ecological sanity.

The *Green New Deal* is not nearly as extreme as its opponents claim. It is as modest, in its own way, as the Post Office and Social Security. And it will take a while to phase out fossil fuels and build a next energy system. The actual doing of the *Green New Deal* will be a step-by-step, get-things-done sort of doable activism. We have done hard things like this before. We can do this one now.

We do not have to scale back to ineffective programing in order to get-things-done. The *Green New Deal* is often opposed by a "do-it-someday" style of thinking. These go-slow excuses cloud our

wisdom about starting now with long-range, emergency-solving, large-enough policy adventures. With the climate crisis, only "big leaps forward" are realistic action.

Perhaps compromising with oil companies was the best we could do in recent decades. Even that is debatable. Nevertheless, I am willing to thank those diligent persons who did succeed in getting some progress made. But times have changed. We now need to demand that our moderate politicians lean progressive, rather than asking our progressives to continue leaning moderate.

Beginning now with some *Green-New-Deal* enthusiasm could end the current authoritarian side trip with true alternatives, rather than simply returning to the politics of 2015 and before. Yes, the *Green New Deal* will entail pushing some powerful forces to the sidelines of political power. Nevertheless, it is surely high time to enjoy the excitement, as well as the pain, of phasing out oil company wealth-kings, big-bank corruption, and greedy oligarchs not fit for any age.

The *Green New Deal* is a perfect example of how there are no moderate solutions to the climate crisis. The climate crisis requires full-speed ahead for the rest of our lives. We are already grossly tardy.

Conclusion

The spirit realism of both a Christian and a secular ethics of visionary imagination is present in these critical U.S. topics for action:

1. Ousting Authoritarians
2. Opposing Confederate Racist Backlash
3. Promoting Post-Patriarchal Uprising
4. Providing Medicare for All
- and 5. Enacting the Green New Deal.

If these challenges seem Utopian, it is because they are. In her book *NO is Not Enough*, Naomi Klein quotes Oscar Wilde's 1891 comment, "A map of the world that does not include Utopia is not worth even glancing at, for it leaves out the one country at which Humanity

is always landing. And when humanity lands there, it looks out, and, seeing a better country, sets sail.”¹

The Role of Religion in Human Affairs

a scrap of theologizing
by Gene Marshall

It is the role of all good religion to assist us to shift from our tendency to *escape* from our awareness of our social confrontations and *move* in openness toward our vision of the possibilities that are present in our encounters with that historic Mysteriousness that is resulting in our internal crises, existential questions, and real world responses.

First of all, good religion can mean simply standing still before the horrific and glorious actualities that are our one and only life and not looking away. The name I will give that state is *equanimity*. “Equanimity” is such a wonderful word; it means tranquility and unflappability in the face of our impending realities. It means a lack of hastiness that is not an escape or a closing of our eyes. It means wide-eyed openness to the moment by moment gift of our actual lives.

Secondly, the role of good religion is to assist us to shift our tendency to rage against our social confrontations and move instead toward *compassion* in response to our encounters with our historic challenges. Such un-hasty compassion combined with our essential freedom is the key to our making a positive difference with our lives.

The role of religion in human affairs is to assist us in accessing these blessed qualities of equanimity and compassion.

Equanimity

Equanimity can also be called “*effortless letting be*.” This *effortless letting be* is the opposite of *escape*; it is trusting in Reality’s trustworthiness—a devotion or commitment to the fullness of Reality, an opting for frank realism in our daily, weekly, yearly living. Such realism is a surrender, not an achievement. One of my favorite Beatles’ songs contains these repeating words: “Let it be, let it be, let it be.”

Effortless letting be becomes possible when we can trust that we are loved just as we are, just as we are being formed from our entire past into our present moment of relatedness to all events. We are accepted by the Ground of our Being. We are loved by that Absolute Mysterious that provides our life, our survival, our limitations, and our death. There is no possibility for effortlessly letting be to reign in our lives until we trust that Reality is indeed our friend, our rock, our foundation, our beloved, our ground for aliveness and meaning.

Some slaves in about 1290 BCE Egypt chose to trust Moses and his trust in Reality’s trustworthiness as possibilities for their new life. They followed him into the wilderness of unknown possibilities and into a new social ordering of their lives.

The core disciples of Jesus followed him into a severe critique of the religious hypocrisies and hatreds of that time and place. They followed him into his vividly imaginative mission of attack on the despairing sicknesses of spirit that gripped a people captured in the horrors of the so-called “Peace” of Rome, symbolized by hillsides of crucified rebels, and of foreign soldiers bossing you around on your own lanes of travel. These disciples followed Jesus through the consequences of the raging rejection of their mission. They followed him to the breaking point of experiencing their mentor’s crucifixion. They followed him into an ongoing resurrection of

¹ Klein, Naomi. *No is Not Enough*. Chicago: Haymarket, 2017, page 221

THE ROLE OF RELIGION

the un-defeatable realism exemplified by this “Son of Profound Realism.” This is what the *equanimity* of effortlessly letting be looks like.



Compassion

“Loving the neighboring person as you love yourself” is not a duty we try to do, but very often fail to achieve. “Loving the neighbor” is a possibility given with our essential being—it is a surrender to realistic living. It is not a work of righteousness we struggle to produce. It is being our own healthy tree bearing fruit worth eating. *Compassion* means serving the neighbor as a joyous privilege of simply being my being in relation to encouraging everyone to being their being, and do so in relation with the whole round of personal and social living.

Such compassion is also equanimous in the sense that there is no resentment over having to love. There is no co-dependent having-to-accommodate someone. *This divine compassion* is like a discovery of our own empathy for others—their feelings, struggles, despairs, hatreds, change potentials, transformations, joys, goodness—however that neighboring person or society is neighboring us.

Compassion is an expressing of our good-tree essence. When compassion is seen as a duty which you do with hidden or open resentment and perhaps with irritation that you are failing to be compassionate by your own standards, that is not equanimous compassion.

Living your *equanimous compassion* will not mean being loved back, in many instances. It can mean being rejected, hated, and even harmed. Living our real lives does not mean being devoid of inner frustrations, limitations, foolishness, and gross imperfections in your living. You remain human. You will one day enter the black hole of death. You also remain a sinner, even though you are also a sinner being saved by the grace. We never rise to a higher status. We are always starting fresh starts in our capacity for this *equanimous compassion*.

“Loving everybody” does not exclude being angry over the injustice and the foolishness that abounds around us. One does not need to be angry to change society. And we can be angry and still love everybody. Anger is an important emotion that alerts us to various types of truth we need to know. The responses of equanimous compassion can even use anger compassionately.

Being angry, gloomy, joyous, happy, and a thousand other feelings is only part of the ongoing reality of our finite lives. The motivation for our actions can come from a deeper place—from our essential *equanimous compassion*.

Conclusion

Equanimity and *compassion* are gifts of the spirit. It is the role of good religion to assist us to discover those gifts in our own lives and in the lives of others. Our deep place of stillness is also our trust in Reality, our love for everybody, and the wildest sort of openness to making those free choices that so often seem unimaginable to we mere human beings.





Lauchlen's Kiss

Today we're on the floor,
crayons strewn all around us,
giant poster paper between us.

We're scribbling, scribbling.
His chubby hands, so strong,
fiercely meet the paper,
traveling its surface over and over.
His industry captures me completely.
I am spellbound.

I recite the color words,
murmur some encouragement
"Nice Lauchlen, nice green ... is that your tree?"

It doesn't matter what I say.
He seems not to hear me so absorbed is he.
We are together. That's what matters.

Suddenly he lifts my hand with his ten tiny fingers
and draws it to his face,
planting one perfect kiss on the back of my hand --
then ... back to scribbling ...

The moment so brief,
brief as life itself feels to me lately
and as precious,
as enduring as seven decades of love, family love,
that moves inside this still beating heart.
Today is a very good day.

Pat Webb, September, 2019

Reflections on a Life Journey Part II

diaries, honesty, and friends
by Joyce Marshall

As I continue to read my personal journals (I am now to 1995) I have looked again into books I was reading at that time and have seen again movies that impressed me. I picked up Tristine Rainer's *The New Diary* recently and turned to her chapter on "Rereading the Plot of Your Life." I found this sentence to be true to my own rereading experience:

Since diaries contain the struggle for growth and emotional equilibrium rather than the final achievement, it is essential to reread with an acceptance of your human, incomplete, in-process nature.

I could also relate to one of Rainer's diarists who reported:

Sometimes it was uncomfortable, because I saw destructive patterns I'm still playing out and mistakes I still make. But I also found wisdom and honesty I hadn't realized I was capable of.

Overall it is a very intense experience. And one of constant discovery. I read with an attitude of curiosity—to see how it is going to play out. In one of my 1991 journals I came across this piece I wrote about my friendships:

There are friends and there are friends. Those you hold on to are those who are upfront about what is going on with them. Those with whom you can have your feelings. Those you feel safe with, can open up to. Those you connect to. Those you simply love. If you have such a friend, don't bore them with trifles or platitudes. Don't give them advice. Just be real.

Here is a poem I wrote at that time after an evening with such a friend.

ART ON THE HUMANNESS SCALE

Some Kind of Magic

What mysterious magic did you do?
As we sat across from one another
at Steak & Ale
Eating our lobster bisque and salad.

I don't know what it was
But you painted your pictures
in words -
Told me what you saw
And I was transformed
Right there in that restaurant!

My angry defensiveness fell away
My paralyzing fear vanished
And I was filled with the
(dare I say such a phrase?)
The power of love.

My, my!
You are some woman.
My softening heart
is grateful.

Another aspect of friendship that I noticed in exploring my past journals is that I have friends I never met who author books. In 1991 I was friends



with Virginia Woolf, Joanna Fields, and Carolyn Heilbrun. They were talking to me about being a woman who writes – a subject which interested me then and has a renewed interest now. So I am renewing my friendship with them. We talk together, though all of them are long dead.

My responses I sometimes write in the margins. They inform me, inspire me and encourage me. They were women ahead of their time. If there are three kinds of people—those ahead of their time, those of their time, and the belated—to whatever degree I am of my time, these women are among those who inspire me; to whatever degree I am ahead of my time, they encourage me. Goddess help me never to be belated.

ART ON THE HUMANNESS SCALE

reviews by Joyce
Marshall

NOVELS



Gene and I read novels together. That is, I read them aloud to him. He loves to be read to and I love to read good literature aloud, finding that it is thereby more powerfully moving emotionally. Since the last RL Journal we have read three novels.

Pevevil of the Peak
by Sir Walter Scott

This is Sir Walter Scott's sequel to *Woodstock*, which we read last year and I reviewed here. It takes place during the reign of Charles II. Scott is such a fine author. His one on one scenes are intense and fascinating and every chapter brings the wonder of surprise. The story follows two neighboring families who are on different sides of the religious and political dispute taking place in England. It includes a Romeo/Juliet story and gives you a taste of the fanaticism of our Puritan ancestors.

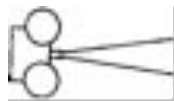
The Time of Our Singing
by Richard Powers

We so appreciated Richard Powers' book *The Overstory* earlier this year (reviewed in our July journal) that we decided to read his earlier book, *The Time of Our Singing*. German-Jewish physicist David meets black, classically trained singer Delia at the 1939 concert of Marian Anderson at the Lincoln Memorial. Their marriage produces three musical prodigies. In *Overstory*, the author stunned us with his knowledge of ecology and trees in particular. In *Singing* his understanding of musicology and physics is mind-blowing. Gene resonated when the topic was physics, and I delighted with everything musical. And, imagine a mixed-race marriage in that era – 1939-1990s. Most of all, Powers is one helluva storyteller, placing this family in the midst of the events of this historical era.

The Way of All Flesh
by Samuel Butler

My reading of feminist literary scholar Carolyn Heilbrun led us to read Samuel Butler's semi-autobiographical novel, *The Way of All Flesh*, which neither of us had read previously. Ernest Pontifex is the second generation to be bullied toward becoming a clergyman in the Church of England. His slow recovery from this oppression gives Samuel Butler an opportunity to demonstrate his aversion to the patriarchal family and to sick religion of all kinds. It is a painful read for many chapters, but an honest depiction of English society and the harms inflicted across classes.

MOVIES



Ken Burns: The Viet Nam War. Over the past year we have seen the ten 2-hour episodes of this documentary. It is painful, illuminating, and excellent in its production. If you don't want to go through the entire process, at the very least please see episode 10. It details what happened after the conflict itself ended. Not a pretty picture in the way

we left, but both America and Viet Nam began a healing process that is very encouraging and deeply moving. After seeing it, I begin to believe we might eventually heal even this present fiasco.

She's Beautiful When She's Angry is a fantastic 2014 documentary of the women's liberation movement of the 60s and 70s including archival footage and present day interviews with the women involved. Only an hour and a half long, it is surprisingly comprehensive and truly inspiring. We see the conflicts between the different groups, such as NOW and POC, class issues, and LGBT issues. It tells how women's bodies, childcare, workplace discrimination, abuse, and rape were dealt with. Seeing this film makes it clear that the fight is not yet over. I felt like hitting the streets before the film ended.

One Sings, the Other Doesn't. Acclaimed French filmmaker Agnes Varda died in March this year at the age of 90 and was making films up until her death. I have seen several of her films and this one from 1977 is my favorite. It is a saga of the lives of two women, Pauline and Suzanne, and their friendship spanning the 1960's and 70's. It follows the ups and downs of their separate lives, with occasional meetings but more often communication through postcards. They are both activist feminists and willing to help women as much as possible with pregnancies and countering strict abortion laws. I found it to be a delightful movie, filled with low-key feminine emotional power in dealing with the struggles of relationships, families, and life itself.

Another Agnes Varda film, **Le Bonheur**, translates as "Happiness" and appears to be a perfect example of happiness. Visually stunning, the film opens with a family picnicking in a beautiful park. The husband, wife and two young children are the idyllic family. He is a carpenter, she a seamstress, and the children well-behaved. The quiet development of this film ends up taking your breath away and leaving you questioning our assumptions about marriage and relationships. I won't say more.

RECOMMENDED READING

Hair. I saw the stage production of *Hair* in Amarillo, Texas (believe it or not) in 1968 and liked it very much. I didn't see the 1979 movie until recently and, though it is different from the stage version, I found it truly liberating. The music is the same (I love it!) and the movie hippies challenge assumptions in a wondrously refreshing way—those of the establishment, and even their own. I couldn't keep still or quiet. I sang and danced along. The choreography was by the fantastic Twyla Tharp.

Educating Rita is a 1983 film that wears very well. A young Julie Walters is a hair dresser in her mid-twenties whose father and husband want her to be “normal” and have a baby. She has other ideas. She secretly takes her birth control pills, takes on a college tutor in literature (the great Michael Caine) and begins to change her life. This modern day Pygmalion story is a delight, balancing the innate wisdom of the “ordinary bloke” and the helpful sophistication of the “educated.”

RECOMMENDED READING

reviews by Joyce Marshall

In the process of re-reading my personal journals from the past, I have been aware of the complexity of healing the human being. As I looked again at resources that I made use of in the past, I noted that focusing simply on spirit methods did not fully deal with issues if attention wasn't given to the psychological aspects and to body awareness. Also, I became aware that relationship skills are a part of the whole picture and that relationships take place within a cultural system of patriarchy which requires sharp clarity to move beyond.

Carolyn Heilbrun has been a seminal figure for me in clarifying the issues women deal with. Professor of English at Columbia University for 32 years, she was an outspoken feminist. I reviewed two of her books in this journal in 1990 and 1991. Looking at them again in 2019, I am sobered by how far we still

need to go in society at large and how deeply ingrained are the patterns in my own psyche. I still recommend her *Hamlet's Mother and Other Women* and *Writing A Woman's Life* as highly relevant. I recently read *Reinventing Womanhood* (1979) and *The Last Gift of Time: Life Beyond Sixty* (1997).

In *Reinventing*, Heilbrun credits her mother for giving her the clear message: “Do not pay with your selfhood for male admiration and approval: the price is too high.” Raised to be a nice Southern “girl,” seeking that admiration seems to be in the cells of my body. I do see that today women overall have overcome one of the barriers Heilbrun noted: they are now more likely to bond with one another and stand up for one another.

In *Life Beyond Sixty* she gives wisdom on what the old have to give to the young. She says the old reassure the young that life continues. And not by “tirelessly insisting that the past was better” or by “recounting ancient anecdotes.” She says instead that our gift is “our very presence. . . . It is the essence of having lived long, it is the unstated assurance that most disasters pass, the survival of deprivation and death and rejection.” Finally, Heilbrun notes that those of us past sixty are clearly aware of the changeableness of life. Legs that can walk today may not be able to tomorrow. In fact, elders know that all the “ordinary” things we might wish to take for granted will one day be no more.

Gay and Kathlyn Hendricks. We read and used their book, *Conscious Loving*, in the 90s. I recently read their 2015 book, *Conscious Loving Ever After: The Journey to Co-Commitment*. The Hendricks' approach juxtaposes codependence over against co-commitment. It thereby requires work on one's individual psychological issues and taking personal responsibility, overcoming blaming and complaining about the other. They emphasize telling the “microscopic truth” which focusses on what is going on in your own consciousness, without interpreting the other person. The original book has a co-commitment program in the end that has over 30 exercises. The *Ever After* book is focussed on couples beyond age 40. The Hendricks share personal issues that came up for them as they aged

RECOMMENDED READING

as well as examples from many couples they work with. There are fewer exercises, but very good ones with emphasis on knowing what you want and asking for it, without demanding. One of my favorite things in the book is *Appendix B: The Four Pillars of Integrity*. The four are: Emotional Literacy, Healthy Response-ability, Impeccable Agreements, and Speaking from Discovery and Listening Appreciatively. Both of these books are full of excellent resources.



Jack Rosenberg. In the early 80s we were clients of Jack's colleague Marjorie Rand. Neo-Reichian therapists, they formed the Institute of Integrative Body Psychotherapy. We recently read his 1996 book, *The Intimate Couple*, written with his wife Beverly Kitaen-Morse. It has extensive work for each person to do on their own in exploring their primary scenario, character style, emotional agency, and existential attitudes. I found the area of emotional agency to be extremely relevant and imagine it is for many women. It relates to taking on responsibility for others and losing touch with your own well-being and needs. Gene related strongly to the character style described that combined a fear of abandonment with a fear of inundation. The details of these patterns have been a great gift to us in moving beyond them. Their exercises for personal and couple work emphasize breathing and subtle body awareness.

Anne Hastings. We have also re-read Anne Hastings' 1993 book, *Discovering Sexuality That Will Satisfy You Both*, which I reviewed in our journal that year. This revolutionary book helps you identify your own "cross-wiring" and listen to your own body and connect to your partner. It remains totally relevant to us today.

Judith Blackstone has combined her work as a therapist with her experience in exploring the spirit systems of the East. I recently read *The Enlightenment Process* (2008) and *The Intimate Life* (2011). She discusses the integration of body and mind and the unity of self and other. Then she points out defensive patterns that hold us in unresolved conflicts. Her exercises are to help us live in what she calls the subtle core of the body with its essential human qualities of awareness, love and sensation and thereby feel more kinship with people in general.

Catherine Ingram's book, *Passionate Presence* (2008) intrigued me this past summer with its seven qualities of awakened awareness. I will list each of the seven with a short quote from her book from the section on each.

Silence: Thich Nhat Hanh said of Martin Luther King Jr. "He understood the things you did not say."

Tenderness: There are possibilities for tender mercies for each one of us throughout our day. Letting love flow through us is its own reward.

Embodiment: In quiet witnessing presence, we can actually feel our own embodiment inextricably connected to the atmosphere.

Genuineness: The first thing you have to do is tell the truth.

Discernment: We know right and wrong in our own hearts.

Delight: If we are not bringing joy to a circumstance, our service is questionable.

Wonder: Our wonder and fascination is unique to each of us.

Realistic Living Mission Statement

While Realistic Living has been deeply engaged in the secular world, our core focus has been and remains fostering a viable and vital next Christian Practice.

The core mission of Realistic Living is to clarify the essential Christian message and to promote and inspire Christian practice through small, intimate group life and action.

We carry out research into the core challenges of our times. We write essays, books, journals, newsletters, and manuals. We maintain a website, blog, and electronic ministries. We organize training events and circles that meet weekly. We are involved in inter-religious dialogue, solitary religious practice, innovative leadership methods, bioregional organizing, and progressive social change. We offer these works as a homeopathic drop in the ocean of need.

Highlights of 2019

(1) Long-Range

The significance of Realistic Living's long-range future was signaled when in 2018 a chapter written by Alan on Joyce and Gene, their lives, and the work of Realistic Living was published by Palgrave Macmillan in a textbook on Radical Theology. Joyce and Gene are the only couple profiled in this book which includes chapters on such luminaries as Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Harvey Cox, Mary Daly, and Paul Tillich. The work of Realistic Living (Joyce, Gene, and Alan) is featured in this book as the only chapter that goes beyond theory to on-the-ground practice. The resources that Realistic Living work has created over three decades need to be gathered and passed on to posterity.

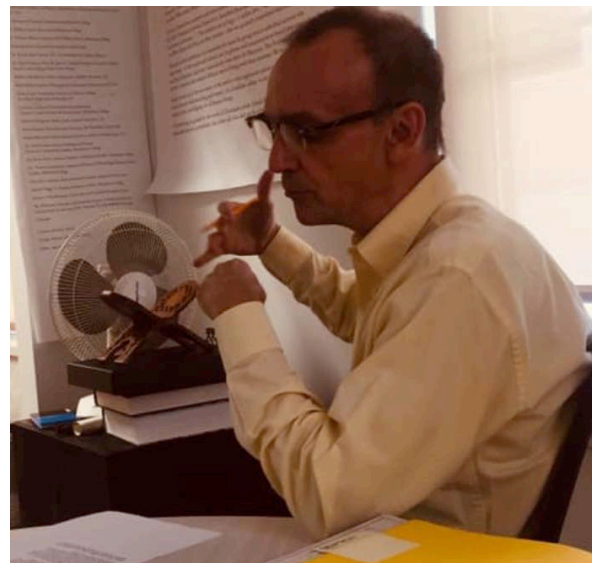
(2) *The Thinking Christian*

Gene has been working almost every day since the June 2018 Training School and Symposium Meeting on a book that puts in written form the thrust of eight talks given at that 2018 event. This book will be published by Wipf and Stock and is projected to be available in the Spring of 2020. Wipf and Stock is an unusual religious publisher, republishing old works by authors such as Paul Tillich, as well as new works by groups such as the God Seminar and the likes of us.

Gene's completed manuscript is due to Wipf and Stock December 1, 2019. At this time he has completed a strong draft of all 23 chapters. Alan Richard has provided feedback on every chapter. Marie Sharp has carefully edited the first 19 chapters. And Jeff Robbins has provided suggestions for the first 10. Gene considers this book a most important pull together of the last 35 years of Realistic Living explorations.

(3) Outreach

As previously mentioned, Alan's two chapters in *The Palgrave Handbook of Radical Theology*, including one on Joyce and Gene, were published in January.



In December 2018 Wipf & Stock published *Doing Theology in the Age of Trump*, a project of the Westar Institute's Seminar on God and the Human Future. Alan's chapter in this book is about the relationship between industrial elites' reaction to labor organizing and the rise of the Moody Bible Institute. Realistic Living friend Jeff Robbins serves as chair of the God Seminar, and Alan is a fellow. The Seminar will be collectively writing a book called *Varieties of Post-Theism* beginning with the November 2019 meeting in which Alan will participate.

In June and July, Alan worked in New York City with Holocaust scholar Dr. Mehnaz Afridi to implement an inter-religious training event for faith leaders from Muslim, Jewish, and Christian traditions and geared toward the prevention of inter-religious violence. (See the photograph on the back page)

(4) Interpersonal Research

Joyce has specialized this year doing a multi-dimensional body of research on interpersonal wisdom, processes and methods. She is digging through decades of her personal journals and finding challenges and resources for our work today. Joyce and Pat Webb have now presented the *Beyond Patriarchy Course* six times, twice each in Texas, Oklahoma and California. The feedback has been so positive and the relevance so obvious that they have decided to explore an on-line version. For our Bonham weekly Circle, Joyce has created most of our study guides and the quarterly manuals for our weekly ritual. This past year she has selected short pieces from Meister Eckhart and from Thomas Merton for our weekly conversations.

For more on our work, please visit our website: RealisticLiving.org. Notice the blog site link at the top of the main site heading. On the blog site you will find many recent articles, videos, course outlines, and downloads. You can also find on the main site: books, reviews, courses, course outlines solitary manuals, and many other features.

Realistic Living Finances

Financial gifts to Realistic Living go directly into needed services. We spend all our income on the costs of doing our work: office expenses; outreach trips; business travel; research books & movies; and the costs of our publications—ink, paper, printing, and postage. It is easy for us to spend our budget of **\$32,000 a year** on programing that is useful to our constituency.

It is usual for our income to be less than our expenses in the early months of the year. We count on year-end giving to meet our budget. This year we need an especially generous response in November and December (about \$4350 per month) to make our \$32,000 income budget.

We encourage more of you to join the increasing number of people who are contributing on a **monthly basis**. Your bank can work out a way to send these contributions for you. If you are a customer of *Amazon.com*, you can set up through *smile.amazon.com* for a small portion of your Amazon purchases to be contributed to *RealisticLiving.org*.

The Board of Realistic Living

Following are the members of the Official Board of our nonprofit 501-C3 incorporation:

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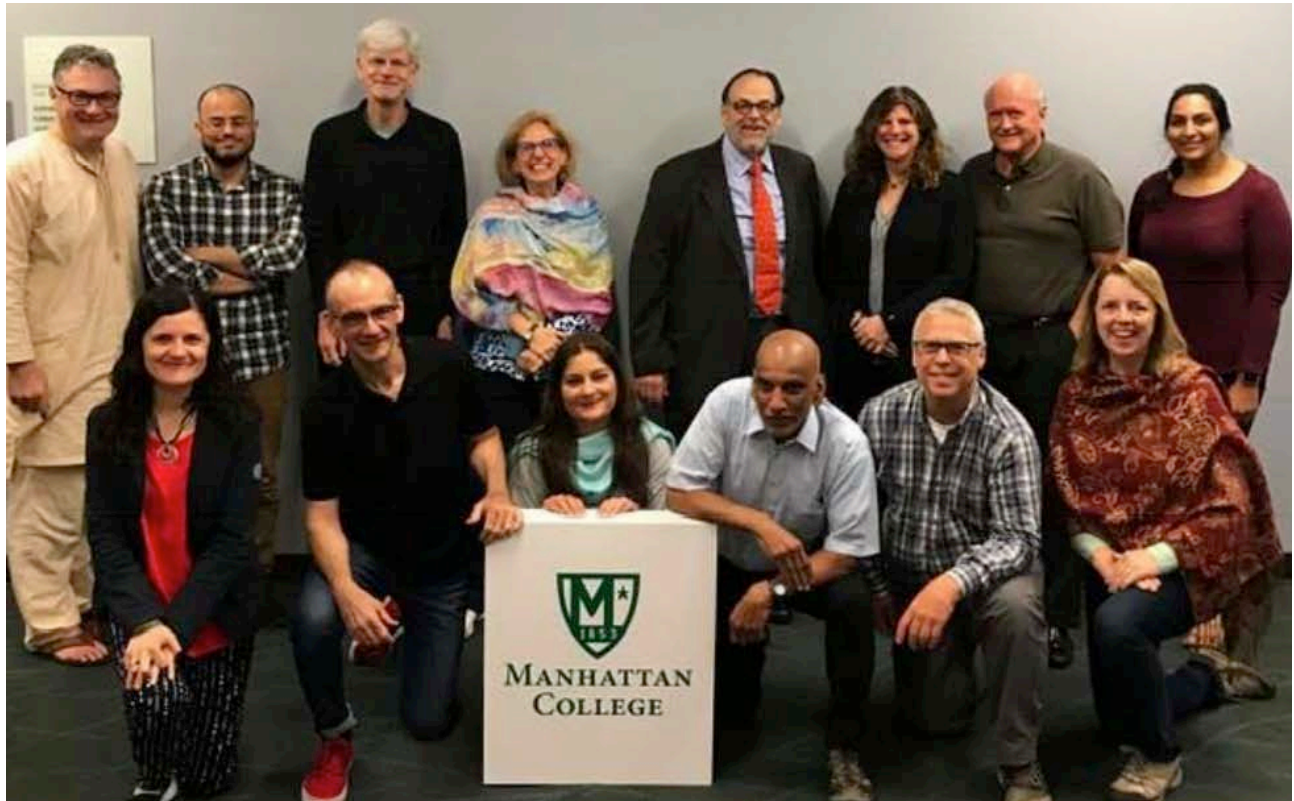
We thank you for seeing the worth of this long-range project of envisioning and building a viable and vital next Christianity.

Realistic Living

is contemporary language for "Holy Spirit."

Check out our newly revised web site: RealisticLiving.org

Also, check out our Facebook page: facebook.com/realisticliving



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