

Realistic Living

A Journal on Religion and Ethics

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REALISTIC LIVING

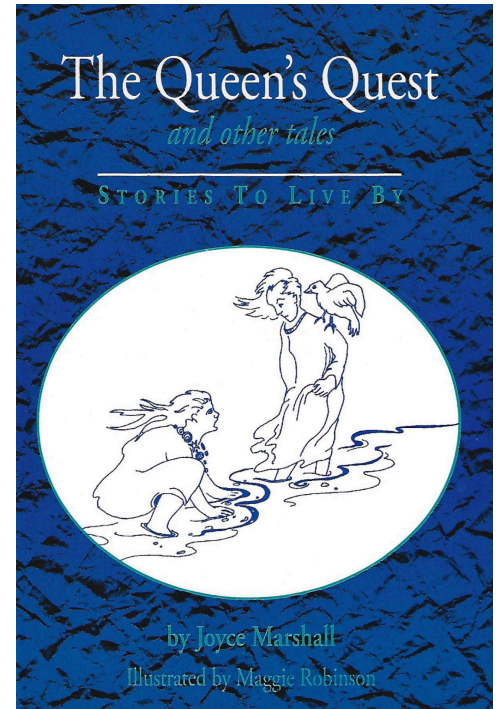
share here some of the introduction of the book. It might even encourage you to write your own fairy tales.

INTRODUCTION to Queen's Quest

If you want your children to be brilliant, tell them fairy tales. If you want them to be very brilliant, tell them even more fairy tales.
-Albert Einstein

We tend to associate fairy tales with children. Actually, oral folk tales, containing wondrous and marvelous elements, have existed for thousands of years and were told largely by adults and for adults. Their purpose was to awaken wonderment and to nurture hope that we can seize possibilities and opportunities to transform ourselves and our world.

Here is how this book of tales started. A few years ago I was reading a book called *Losing A Parent*, by Alexandra Kennedy. I had recently lost my mother. Kennedy suggested an exercise to access the deeper levels of grief. You make five piles of small cards



Queen's Quest & Other Tales

Fairy Tale Writing
by Joyce Marshall

Gene and I are old. And our attic is full of "stuff." (See Stuff article in this issue.) One aspect of that stuff is boxes of about 200 copies of the book entitled *The Queen's Quest & Other Tales: Stories to Live By*, a book I wrote in 1994. I looked at the book again recently, and I think some of the stories are quite good. I'd like you to consider asking us to send you a number of copies free of charge (requesting a donation to cover postage) which you would share with friends, children, and grandchildren. I will

QUEEN'S QUEST

(about 12 in each pile) and draw one from each. One is of objects (i.e., a pea, a sword, a mirror), one is places (the village, the forest, the sea), one is people (boy, girl, queen), one is animals (owl, wolf, cat) and one is magical beings (ghoul, dragon, unicorn). You write a story and use all five elements. At that time the exercise helped me discover some of the feelings and issues connected with my mother.

Later I used the exercise in creativity workshops I led. Others found it helped to access their creativity. Then I took a notion that I wanted to write a fairy tale every day. Each morning I drew a card from each stack and whipped off a story. I wrote about 40 or so. Most of the stories in this collection came from that fertile period.

The stories virtually wrote themselves. I drew the cards, began with "once upon a time" and just looked to see what happened, listened to hear what was said. Sometimes a story would seem so ridiculous that I would end it just to be done with it. Then the next day I would read it and decide I liked it. The stories were always a total surprise to me, not in my control in terms of figuring out what I wanted to say or what I wanted to happen.

The elements of the fairy tale draw from a deep place within us, take us out of our ordinary world and allow us to experience the heroic nature of our journey between birth and death. They nurture our desire to grasp the mythic quality of our lives, to become kings and queens of our own destinies. They nurture the art of seeing and intuiting.

When I return to one of these stories, I often find myself surprised into laughter and sometimes tears, and sometimes both at once. I hope they do as much for you.

And here is one of the stories from the book that hasn't been previously in this journal.

CROWNED MARTHA

Once upon a time there lived in a village by the sea, an old woman. The old woman worried a lot. She woke up nights in her little hut and lay there thinking about things that had gone wrong, were

going wrong, or might go wrong. The next day she would be so tired she didn't have the energy to go work in the garden or to go to the market, or to mend her husband's clothes. So one day she decided to visit the conjurer to see if she could work some magic to help the woman overcome her obsession with wrongness.

She got up and put on her dress and shawl and went straight to the conjurer's hut down by the cove and back in the trees. She knocked on the door.

"And who is it?"

"It's me -- Martha," answered the old woman.

"So come on in," said Mary, the conjurer.

Martha went in and sat down, tired as usual. Sad and worried.

"My, my," said Mary. "You look depleted."

"Yes, that I am," said Martha. "Depleted for sure. All my spark is gone and left me. Can you help? I need help for sure. I need help."

"Well," said Mary, "I don't know. I don't know." She looked at Martha's eyes. "This is very difficult. Very difficult indeed." She paused a bit. "I'd say you must go out fishing with your husband. Go fishing with him. And do whatever the fish tells you. Go today."



Drawing by Maggie Robinson
Color added by Alan Richard

So the old woman rushed back home and climbed into the boat with her husband. Clancy asked no questions. They rowed out and he dropped his lines

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and Martha watched for the fish who would give her a message. Sure enough, she saw a large fish looking at her, so she bent over and it stuck its nose out of the water and said, "Wear the crown."

Martha didn't quite know what to make of it. The only crown she knew of was in the church on the statue of the Virgin Mary. So straight away she and her husband rowed back to shore. She climbed out of the boat and walked to the church while Clancy went back out fishing.

The church was empty. She walked up the aisle and stood on a pew near the statue, reached up and removed the crown from its head and put the crown on her own head. Then she went and sat on the rise behind the altar where all who came to pray could see her -- sitting there -- crowned.

As she silently wore the crown and watched her neighbors pray she became aware of their worries. They were directing their concerns at her. Soon they began to come up from the pews and kneel at the altar to pray. Soon they no longer prayed silently but voiced their fears and longings and heartaches aloud and to the crowned Martha. Soon Martha began to walk over to the kneeling supplicant and place her hand on the person's head and say, "Bless you, my child. Your prayers have been heard."

Martha spent five days in the church -- going home at night to cook and rest. By the fifth day she was sleeping better. If she woke in the night she prayed for her neighbors.

As time went on she took to regularly going to the church -- for an hour or so. She didn't wear the crown. She just sat in the back and knelt and watched her neighbors come and go. If you were to visit her village, you might see her there. And you might sense that the old woman was praying -- for you.

Stuff

A Personal Memoir

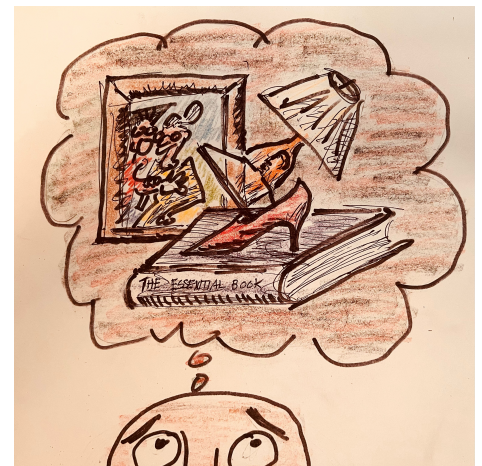
By Joyce Marshall

I found this article recently which I wrote, as noted, in 1998. I have followed it up with a 2023 update.

It is December 1998, and we are coming near the end of a very demanding project. Two projects, really. We began the finish work on our new house nine

months ago -- Gene and I tiling 2,000 square feet of floors, he tiling the two bath room showers, I painting and he hanging all the inside doors, the two of us laying the foundations for the two decks and he and John Howell building them. There is still a deck and a half to build and a bath room shower to tile.

In July, we moved my stepfather, who lives in the Texas Panhandle, to a nursing home. It was no longer possible for the women we were hiring to care for him in his home. We decided to rent his house, which brought about the second project: going through the accumulation of "things" going back 70 years and more kept by people who part reluctantly with anything. This collection included objects from both my parent's families, my stepfather's family, things belonging to these three people and to my brother, who was killed in Korea. Since he was my only sibling and had not married and left a family and my stepfather had no children, all these things were for me to sort and decide about. Thankfully, I was assisted by my husband, one of my daughters, and a good family friend. These things included seven rooms of furniture, dishes, cookware, crystal, silver, recordings (78s, 33s, 45s, 8-track and cassette tapes, and videos), one reel-to-reel movie camera, and eight still cameras, lights, projectors and screen, boxes and boxes of slides, many movie reels, six large boxes of family pictures and many albums, personal letters from various family members, documents, my stepfather's Marine footlocker and uniforms, my brother's Air Force footlocker and uniforms, five guns (deer rifle, two 22 caliber rifles, two pistols), two vintage cars, fishing gear (my stepfather had already given away or sold his shot guns, some fishing gear, and seven cars), a garage full of tools and equipment, and on and on.



Drawing by Alan Richard

STUFF

This accumulation of stuff (minus what we gave away or put in a sale) is entering a family who has lived a relatively frugal existence up until now. We owned almost nothing but clothing and some books when we married 22 years ago. We lived in apartments until seven years ago, buying most of our furniture used. Then family moneys made it possible for us to buy a piece of land with a doublewide mobile home and finally to build our present home with the awareness that all these “things” would be coming to us.

So our present relationship to detachment is being worked out in the midst of plenty. Having spent two weeks sorting through stuff to the point of exhaustion I can see once again the value of simple living. And yet, as I place family objects in our new home, I am also enjoying the pleasure of beauty and history: eating at the large oak table my parents bought in 1952; seeing perched high atop the kitchen cabinets the boots my brother wore in college in the 40s, the iron my grandmother heated on her wood stove, and the kerosene lamp she and my grandfather and great grandmother used to light their farm house when I visited them as a child.

One vow I am considering is to never again take any pictures. It is difficult to throw away pictures. My mother even kept all the Christmas cards she received that had family photos on them and put them in picture albums -- including those of Billy Graham and his wife (which she received as a donor to his work). As I went through her albums I watched the Billy Grams (along with other people I know and don't know) age, year by year.

The last boxes I went through were those filled with family letters, papers and memorabilia -- newspaper articles, ribbons won at fairs, programs, invitations to graduations and weddings. I have read through my letters to my parents from high school graduation in 1952, through college, my brother's death when his plane was shot down in Korea, marriage, child birth and mothering, my father's death, my mother's remarriage, my divorce and remarriage, moves from Texas to New Mexico, to Chicago, Los Angeles and Dallas until my mother died in 1989. I observed a “perfect” daughter who reported mostly the good news. I said little about the

struggles: bouts with a peptic ulcer, issues around sex, marriage with a bully. Politics and religion were topics not discussed, particularly as I grew more and more toward the opposite poles of my mother's Southern Baptist right-wing conservative positions and less and less perfect from her perspective.

I read chronologically through my brother's letters to my parents from his going to college in 1947 until April 25, 1953 when the message of his missing in action arrived. When I got to March 1953 I took a breather, dreading the end. It was strange to read his last letters, knowing what he didn't know: that they were, in fact, his last.

My brother also kept our letters to him. When his footlocker arrived, it also contained all the letters he had received while in the air force.

As these projects begin winding to a close I find myself able to see past my nose again, and reflect on what all this means to me. The shift from being poorish to living in digs that feel luxurious to us has caused some of our relatives to feel we are finally “making something of ourselves,” whereas our concern is to live simply, even with a few more accoutrements. Building a house and sorting through many things and deciding what to keep has raised our awareness of who we are and what we want our lives to be. I'm aware of choosing to use objects within my own context—that is, using family belongings with an appreciation for the family while at the same time giving no allegiance to some of their life philosophies and life styles.

My brother and father died young (at 23 and 49) and my mother at 78, nine years ago. I am the only person left in my family of origin. Having the family “treasures” come in to my possession reminds me that I am the principle keeper of the family memories.

I'm not one to spend time and effort on genealogy and family history or keeping track of pictures and relics. But I do find myself resolving to live representatively for my family, recalling the sense of each of their beings and how I am forever shaped by them and yet am my own being. I will remember them and, as the one who survived, live as fully and uncompromisingly as I can for as long as I am given.

A 2023 Update

So, 25 years later, my reflection is on how we have used this house and belongings.

For 20 years, we have had meetings of various kinds here. **Symposium** gatherings brought Realistic Living cohorts from across the country and beyond twice a year, usually about 25-30 people. Part of those meetings were planning and consensus building and one section was training. We now meet by Zoom for an hour once a month.

The **Realistic Living Board of Directors** also met here twice a year even before we built the house.

Our local **Christian Resurgence Circle** of nine stalwarts has met regularly each week sharing roles of leadership for our two-hour meetings. We zoomed during the initial Covid pandemic and now meet face to face again.

Four times a year we had day-long **Bioregional** gatherings of those in our Upper Blackland Prairie area - usually 15-20 folks.

EcoTheater training programs and rehearsals for local performances have involved a number of people here beginning even before we built the house. We retired that program in 2014.

A number of individuals and couples spent time here on **Sojourns**, usually residing at the Green House -- our new double wide where Alan lives -- and doing events here.

So I would say that the property has been well-used.

And now at age 91 and 89, Gene and I are sorting our own belongings: archiving many records from all these meetings and courses taught and research done; and looking at organizing and passing on all this "stuff."

My Life Story

A Bit of Existential Interpretation by Gene Marshall

My story began long ago. It was Peace on Earth—a peace established by the Roman soldier, by the Roman centurion of a 100 men, by patriarchs like Pontius Pilate who was assigned to the captive nation of Israel. From Emperor to local tax collector

this was an organization of great power challenged by no other power on Earth. It was the high point of the Roman world. Anyone in that part of the planet who wanted a scrap of power and wealth had to play ball with this Roman Peace.



Nevertheless, the aware people of Israel knew that this Roman Peace was a lie. It was only a first century form of the similar lying known by Moses, Elijah, Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and other such luminaries. A protest movement during the Pilate time in question was led by John, the Baptist, reminding the people of Israel of the capacity of the human species for living deeper than these basic lies. John called his current people of Israel to repent of their collaboration with this lying of the Roman world and have their whole body washed in the River Jordan from this evil era. After John was beheaded by one of the Israelite collaborators with the Roman style of status, a disciple of John's appeared announcing Good News that the full truth scheduled for the end-of-time was in Final Judgement right now. Any further wait for all these lies and lives to be revealed and audited by the advent of the Kingdom of God

MY LIFE STORY

was over. Any of us might be called right now into this wondrous Good News common life.

My life story begins walking with Jesus down all those dusty roads to all those tiny villages of Galilee. Indeed, I was sent out as one of the seventy that Jesus sent out in pairs to those villages announcing the Good News. I shook dust off my feet and walked on from some of those places. I returned to Jesus and reported with joy the healings that did occur. In dread, I joined in the march with Jesus on Jerusalem. And I was shocked to the core along with all the other disciples with the horrific death of Jesus.

Seventy days after his crucifixion, I gathered with all those others at the Pentecost memorial. I found myself being inwardly at one with people that did not even speak my language and did not look like me. I heard Peter's interpretations of the strange Awe that was happening to this gathering. Peter said that these flame-like manifestations of Awe were Yahweh's resurrection of this Jesus whom we humans had rejected and viciously crucified. Jesus' undying Awe, said Peter, was the spirit of the Almighty Yahweh poured out upon us, and that experience was the appointing of us to take this Good News to the ends of the Earth.

Strange as it might seem, this is my story. This started being my story when in about 1952 a black preacher at a religious emphasis week at Oklahoma A & M College challenged me to identify with Jesus in all these old stories. He had written a book on making the Jesus story his story. I did not realize how deep a probe into New Testament interpretation that was. I have come to understand after many years of theological education to see that such existential interpretation of scripture is not only meaningful, but a good way for all of us to handle all religious myth. Any mythic story that cannot be my story is either a poor myth whose "truth" needs to be rejected, or a mythic expression of an experience that I have not yet experienced. All religion is expressed in mythic narratives or in other metaphorical symbols, for plain rational philosophy is incapable of reaching into that deep Land of Mystery of the essentially human. Some of these myths can be quite long. For example, I see the Gospel of Mark as one

long myth, not a scientific biography. The other Gospels are even longer.

Let me give another example of New Testament existential interpretation. Here is the message that Jesus is said to have taken to the villages of Galilee, according to Mark 1:14-15:

It was after John's arrest that Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the Gospel of God, saying, "The time has come at last—the kingdom of God has arrived. You must change your hearts and minds and believe the good news."

According to the mythic stories of that time this "Kingdom of God" was scheduled for the end of time when our true humanness was to be restored from the fall of humanity into the estrangement of living lies about our humanity. So understood, Jesus was preaching as good news that this end-of-time judgment-and-restoration was happening now. The teachings of Jesus, when heard in our hearts and minds, were bringing into play our essential humanity. This Holy Spirit humanity had never been entirely absent. The fall told in the Adam and Eve myth was a fall from the good humanity indicated in the Genesis 1 myths of Creation. We remain good creatures who have fallen away from that goodness. The fall does not mean that there is something bad about our biological being or its evolution. We are each a good being, although a fallen good being. Jesus is announcing that this created goodness is Now being restored. It is a judgment upon the mess we have made of our humanity, a forgiveness. and a call to live this restoration.

As we join in this message, we become "In Christ," as Paul called it. We, like Jesus, are Now among the post-fallen. Jesus has wrought the judgment on our fallenness and called us to a new birth of our created goodness. All this is myth. The Creation is myth. The end of time is myth. The fall is myth. The rebirth is myth. We are not talking about matters of biological evolution or some merely psychological or sociological change. We are taking about "end-of-time" or "Eternal" matters, matters of our essential being that require myth for sharing these matters among us.

Living this Eternal or Final dimension of our lives is happening in history and is having historical results, but our understanding of this happening is an examination of our relationship with the Eternal, the Void, The Fullness, the Total Demand, the Land of Mystery, The Unconditional, the Final Power, the Creator, Yahweh, and “God” as this word is used in the Old and New Testament references. This “Eternal” dimension of our lives is a real experience of “Reality” in her most Profound Aspect.

In our profound awareness of Profound Reality, we can now speak of our temporality and of the lasting or the Eternal as a polarity in One Reality rather than in two realms of Reality—the Eternal realm magically penetrating the temporal realm. Also, this Profound Reality experience is not expressible in a scientific type of speech. Mythic narrative is more, not less than scientific biography.

The Intimate Christian Circle

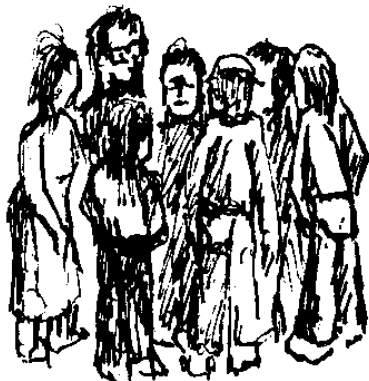
A New Wineskin for the Christian Wine

by Gene Marshall

When two or three have met together in my name, I am there among them.

Mathew 18:20 New English Bible

What does it mean to meet in the name of Jesus, the Christ? It surely means more than merely saying the name “Jesus Christ” aloud, or lighting three candles, or any other symbolic act. What “reality” do such symbolic acts symbolize? If we understand Jesus, when viewed by us as the Christ, to mean our becoming who we truly are—the authentic human—then our meeting in the name of Jesus Christ means our openness to birth into this “Body of Christ”—this “resurrected body” of the authentic human—this body of the Awed Ones



whom this Awesome Mystery of Profound Reality is filling with Awe.

Jesus was a singular human being—an event in history with all the biological features and sociological crassness of a real human life. But Jesus, as the Christ fulfillment, is a group of people, a resurrected body of living human flesh in ongoing history. The resurrection of Jesus is the body of Christ as an ongoing feature of the human story. Jesus can thereby be proclaimed as more than a singular human. As Christ, he is the son of Adam and Eve. He is the human species restored from the fall—from humanity’s multiple forms of estrangement.

This fall, symbolized in the myth of Adam and Eve, applies to the whole species. That fictitious first couple ate an illusory certainty that did not make us wise like God, but delusory about our finitude. This eating was a fall into a ditch of estrangement, not a step up in awareness. When we are rescued from this ditch, we can then see with our conscious self, the ditch as well as the restored aliveness. We can now also see that we are not completely rescued from the ditch. Nor are we completely realized in our restoration to realistic living. As Paul put it, “We press on to the full stature of Christ.”

This new birth “in Christ” does not mean that we return to some sort of pre-hunter-gather human antiquity. Rather, we who are “in Christ” press on to the full stature of this Jesus-Christ, post-fallen human—the resurrected human. And we do so as part of a fallen humanity that is pressing on to our true being as the post-fallen human. This so-called “spirit journey” is not our biological evolution, nor our human history, but the eschatological appropriation in the living now of who we truly are in our essence. We join now in that “Kingdom of God” that in the old myths is scheduled for the end of time. However strange, this “realized eschatology” provides the best of our radical Christian theologizing. We are picturing our spirit journey as more fully realizing right now the true being of the human. Our weekly-meeting Co-Pastor Circle invents and uses spirit-nurture practices that are designed to make that gift of authenticity more likely, and thereby our witnessing love to others more effective.

These long-tested symbols tell us what our temporal reason cannot—that is, what it means for

THE INTIMATE CIRCLE

Christ to join us when two or three or more of us meet together in his name. In the radical theologizing that sustains the Co-Pastor Circle, Jesus is not merely a ghost or a memory floating in our psychic space. He is simply each of us living within this gathering in his name, being to each other his and our essential humanness to each other.

If we are indeed open to being this body of Christ in history, then we are open to receiving the forgiveness of our estrangements, the gifts of our realism, and the full powers of the Christ. This openness and this meeting together is a fresh start in the journey of our lives from our fallenness.

Even though each of us has our personal story, being “in Christ” is a group event. Each of us in *this* group, remains a creative individual characterized by our own most personal acceptance of trust, love, and freedom. These Holy Spirit qualities are not accomplishments, but gifts from the end of time. In our witnessing to this whole story or in our own lived presence, we do not give these gifts to others, but make them more likely to be given by the Giver. And we, the witnesses, also live by the power of the Giver. Our witnessing is whatever we have to do to make more likely an *Echo* of these truths and powers from the Eternity of the Awesomeness of Profound Reality and from the end-of-time “fullness of life” that is being given to us NOW.

It is such radical theologizing that sustains the Co-Pastor Circle. This is why we have no one leader of this circle-sitting group. Each of us in the Co-Pastor Circle can reach into the center of the assembled circle where the Christ symbols sit for our power to lead the assembled circle. We are all ordained to lead with whatever gifts we have. Such is the democracy and the intimacy of the Co-Pastor Circle. And this symbolism makes Christ, rather than one ordained human, our true leader.

In this basic symbolism, I see a fresh vision for the future practice of Christianity. I view all those who choose to join a weekly-meeting Co-Pastor Circle of freedom-loving Christian practices as being thereby washed with a spirit sort of baptism and also being ordained to a spirit sort of priesthood. We become pastors to one another. We become a co-pastorate to the specific community where we live

and to the specific bioregion where we live, as well as to the whole planet within which we dwell. Such an interpersonal intimacy of Christian “life together” is step one toward a viable and vital contemporary Christian practice of renewed Christian religion.

The details of what any group of us do together in our Co-pastor Circle can be important as an illustration, but these details should not become a prescribed pattern for all Circles. The patterns for each Circle are only correct when they are decided through a true consensus of those Circle members. Each Circle needs to design its own stabilities—stabilities that nevertheless come up for review on a regular basis, perhaps quarterly. “Consensus” here takes place within the context of a common mission of witnessing love within the context of this end-of-time (Kingdom of God) revelation lived within a particular place and historical moment.

My Circle

In the circle to which I belong, we open the meeting by lighting three candles and singing a triune song to a secular tune. We end the meeting singing the same song, while extinguishing these three candles. This ritual has worked well for us. We have kept this bit of ritual stability for decades. Nevertheless, this is only a suggestion not a prescription for other circles.



Photo by Paula Brennecke

The overall drama of the evening is flexible and evaluated each quarter, but a broad stability of patterns does persist: confession, celebration, and dedication are ritual activities that are done in that order. This order of nurture also has an “inner flow” of conscious states described by these words: humility, gratitude, and compassion.

The first hour of our two-hour meeting is devoted to various exercises that provide ritual content to the above ritual framework. These ritual components include singing, dancing, confession, absolution, celebration, and a personally grounding conversation on a small portion of poetry or scripture. Such carefully thoughtful ritual speaks to us at levels that are unconscious to our operational reasoning.

The second hour of our two-hour meeting is devoted to the study of a small portion of well-suited written material. We intend to become good students and teachers of one another, using methods that help each other become personally thoughtful about some of the best written resources that are accessible to non-specialists. Study of written material is our default pattern. Occasionally, we see a video and hold a spirit discussion of it. Or we may conduct a workshop, hold a celebration, or do an evaluation of the quarter. If a video is the assignment of the evening, the screen sits in the circle with us. A guest from anywhere on the planet might visit us on that screen. Perhaps a film drama visits us. Perhaps a white board sits in the circle with us, and on that white board is a chart of the material we are studying or perhaps the brainstorming of some workshop.

The word “study” has a wide spectrum of meanings, but in our circle we require each of us to be a good study facilitator who makes our study a spirit-deepening event or an ethical prioritizing event for the living of our specific lives. Good group processes are as important as good written content that is carefully selected for this purpose.

The details of this CoPastor Circle practice do matter, but they do not matter ultimately. What matters ultimately is the quality of the interpersonal contact sought in each of these specific activities of these two-hour weekly meetings. This quality has to do with accessing our profound consciousness of Profound Reality—our essential Reality that is never

absent, though we can be absent from our essential Reality. Our aim for having a meeting at all is to occasion openings within our lives toward a return from our ditches of estrangement to our essential Reality, and to learn how to live this realism in the temporal flow of our lives. We need this Christian language to help us access these deep realizations. And we have the task of sharing afresh the meanings of this language with humanity.

The specific events of each person’s return to this core realism will differ, but it is the same body of Christ that we are joining. Christian life is a group affair. By choosing to attend a Co-Pastor Circle, we are each allowing the ongoing process of becoming Christ-quality priests or pastors for one another and for our local community. We trust in our forgiveness and in the reality of our fresh starts upon this ever-opening journey into the profound consciousness of Profound Reality.

In this weekly Circle meeting, we follow the study period with a period of oral prayers for others, for specific causes, for specific outcomes in our general planet-wide history. This is a ritualization of our compassion, and of our commitments, stated and unstated in this ritual.

This description of the realism and freedom of these interpersonal meetings is only a sketch of this deep topic, but we need our sketches to organize these Co-Pastor Circles.

Teaching Radical Theology

Similar values can apply to other-than-Christian religious practices. This next more-relevant Christianity must retain the humility of recognizing the parallel gifts with other-than-Christian heritages. We are also witnessing to Christian gifts and offering them to the planet-wide discussion of religion. All participants of these depth-seeking religions can come to see that they are not competitors for members, but teammates on the same huge team for releasing humans to their deep humanity. Our various religious heritages can live and work next door to each other, and even share many causes of working together as allies in healing our humanity of our many flights from realism. We also accept the call to the common

ART ON THE HUMANNESS SCALE

tasks of love for the creation of justice for the social structures of injustice.

Most people will need a good radical Christian theology course before they can see fit to opt for an even more radical Co-Pastor Circle discipline. Here is my suggestion for such a course.

Part One of *The Call of the Awe*

Here are brief readings for 10 one-hour sessions

- Session 1: Intro & Ch 1. Encircled by the Awesome
& Centered in Awe p: xi-10
- Session 2: Ch 1. Encircled by the Awesome
& Centered in Awe p: 10-19
- Session 3: Ch 2. Awe as Great Thinks, Great Feels,
& Great Resolves p: 20-27
- Session 4: Ch 2. Awe as Great Thinks, Great Feels,
& Great Resolves p: 27-39
- Session 5: Ch 3. God and History p: 40-51
- Session 6: Ch 3. God and History p: 51-57
- Session 7: Ch 4. Jesus and the 2nd Third
of the God Experience p: 58-71
- Session 8: Ch 4. Jesus and the 2nd Third
of the God Experience p: 71-90
- Session 9: Ch 6. Infinite Awe & Finite Religion p: 122-133
- Session 10: Ch 7. The Authority of Authenticity p: 134-147

Here is a simple method for teaching these 10 sessions:

1. Ask the class to read before each of the 10 sessions the short reading assignment listed in the course outline above.
2. Preparing to teach each session, the teacher chooses 4 one-page readings from the text of that session to have read aloud and then each is discussed following the oral reading. Attempt to choose from the overall assigned reading the most needed texts for this class—perhaps those that need most help in their grounding.
3. Then after one of the chosen one-page selections has been read aloud, ask these three sorts of questions in this order.
 - a. texts of the oral reading they found noteworthy.
 - b. their personal feelings about any of that oral reading.
 - c. interpretive comments, questions, and further discussion.

Repeat this basic process for the other 3 one-page-oral readings. Take 10 minutes or less for each oral reading and its discussion in order to have time for all four readings.

4, If you have 12 or less people in the course, open each hour class period with a go-round (everyone responding in order as called upon)—something simple like: **What caught your interest in this reading?** Also, end with a go-round—again something simple like: **What did you find helpful in this session?**

This whole teaching process is applied flexibly—following the facilitator's creative intuitions, noting the state of this particular group, their responses, and their needs as the facilitator guesses them to be.

If you decide to teach this course, you can order books from Amazon, or from the publisher, iUniverse.com, for \$20.95 each for a new paper back. Amazon may have bargain books. E-books are also available. To use either [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com) or [iUniverse.com](https://www.iuniverse.com), simply press author, enter my name, Gene W. Marshall, and view my publications, choose *The Call of the Awe*, and proceed.

Such minute details of our living hold the wonder of our our Holy Spirit living and of our shaping of the new wineskin for Christianity of this network of Co-Pastor Circles.

ART ON THE HUMANNESS SCALE

reviews by Joyce
Marshall



MOVIES

Our Souls At Night—This 2017 Jane Fonda/Robert Redford film is about two aging widowers in a small

RECOMMENDED READING

Colorado town who decide to pair up for sleep and talk. They deal with the issues of what will their grown offspring think and what will the neighbors say, as well as the histories of their former relations with their deceased mates. I don't think you have to be old to appreciate this film. Very well done.

The Secret Life of Words—This film stars movie director Sarah Polley and Tim Robbins and takes place mostly on an oil rig in the ocean where Polley is brought to nurse Robbins who has been severely injured. She has been traumatized by the war in Yugoslavia, and they slowly make friends. A beautifully acted and very satisfying film.

She Said—This docudrama of movie producer Harvey Weinstein's story of sexual harassment over the years focuses on the two female reporters from the New York Times who wrote the story that made it public. It is directed and written by women and one of the finer films I have seen recently. Simply outstanding. Don't miss it.

Elephant Whisperers won the Oscar for documentaries this year and it was well-deserved. The setting is a hundred-year-old elephant camp in India where a tribal group has for generations devoted itself to caring for elephants. The film documents the relationship of Bomman and Bellie, two elders, as they care for abandoned baby elephant Raghu, forming a family of three. Many times I was moved to tears by this beautiful story.

Mrs. Harris Goes to Paris is set in 1957 London when a widowed cleaning lady, Ada Harris, becomes obsessed with a Christian Dior dress of one of her clients. When she unexpectedly receives a war-widow's pension she uses it to travel to Paris where she acquaints herself with workers at Dior, and eventually with Dior himself. This is a delightfully funny and touching film which I highly recommend.

How the Beatles Changed the World—This 2017 documentary is a surprisingly good history of the Beatle's influence on everything from music, art, and culture to fashion and politics. After seeing it we

listened to all our Beatles CDs over several days and were amazed at our familiarity with their music.

The Crown—We have now seen all 5 seasons of this serial - the 6th to come later this year. I was frustrated with cast changes in seasons 3 and 5, and it seemed that the scripts became less powerful as well. But seasons 1 and 2 are phenomenal - each episode featuring at least one scene that is breath-taking.

RECOMMENDED READING

a review by Joyce Marshall

*How Minds Change:
The Surprising Science
of Belief, Opinion,
and Persuasion*

by David McRaney
Portfolio/Penguin 2022



Journalist McRaney spent time with three groups exploring mind changing: Street Epistemology, Deep Canvassing, and Smart Politics. The gift of this book is the steps each developed over the years that resulted in people changing their minds. They dealt with issues like LGBTQ, abortion rights, flat earth, covid vaccinations, and political candidates. The principal discovery is the need to connect in a friendly way to the other person. Also, don't assume that beliefs are based on facts. The idea is to create a safe environment and invite the person to explore their feelings and values around the issue. Also, to demonstrate vulnerability and to mirror back to the person what you heard them say in your own words. At some point you share your own perspective, but not as argument. These groups have kept records of how many minds have been changed, showing the success of these methods. I highly recommend this book.

a review by Alan Richard

James Baldwin,
Collected Essays,
edited by Toni Morrison.
Library of America.

Although a complete collection of Baldwin's published work does not exist, Baldwin's Collected Essays is the most comprehensive one, 25 years after publication. Toni Morrison's editorial choices, informed by her direct experience with Baldwin as editor, student, and friend, ensure the essentials are here. A decade after Baldwin's death, she gave the world a "deep dive" into Baldwin's "witness." (The fiction works are contained in two volumes, *Early Novels and Stories* and *Later Novels*. I will review these in the fall RL Journal.)

"The quest of the artist" was for Baldwin a metaphor for the task of every living human being to achieve a true "yes" to life by confronting her interior history, the habits and assumptions by which she has been taught to live her life and the traumas and fears they serve to keep at bay at the cost of blindness and delusion. Baldwin challenged his readers to "do your first works over," a fragment of Scripture concerned with the primacy of love and the tragedy of its neglect, the major themes running throughout Baldwin's fiction and essays. These essays, collected in a single volume and arranged as they were in the five books of essays published in Baldwin's lifetime, are all variations on his "gospel."

Baldwin's reputation as a novelist has risen, fallen, and risen again in the years since *Another Country*, but his reputation as an essayist has never wavered. Baldwin, the essayist is more accessible than Baldwin the novelist. In this edition, titles and start pages of individual essays are listed, so that one need not read them in their original context. Selecting one or two short essays with intriguing titles is an excellent way to introduce yourself to the power of Baldwin's insights. But since each of his books of essays is also a self-conscious journey and the report of a journey, the best way to read the Collected Essays is to start with the first chapter of *Notes of a Native Son*. Read each book of essays as it appears in the volume, and read the succession of books of essays as a coherent and unified attempt to say something important to America about what it has done with its soul and about the urgency and price of the love that alone can save it. Reading the volume this way, one experiences the shocking juxtaposition of Baldwin's most famous nonfiction work *The Fire*

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Next Time, written at a time when the promise of change hung in the air, with the equally brilliant but deeply disillusioned tone of *No Name in the Street*, written after the promise had been harassed, jailed, and assassinated out of existence and ignored by elite critics as if any description of the enormity of America's crimes during the 1960s were just sour grapes.

The Collected Essays of James Baldwin is indispensable for building a Next Christianity, because the form Baldwin's peculiar repudiation of the church took was also a practice of Christianity centered on love and an intimacy deep enough to speak our pain and to hear our own in each other's pain. For Baldwin, love is not always or even often pleasant, but it is the indispensable route to our maturity. His practice of Christianity as love, described in terms similar to those with which Gene has described what he calls "witnessing love" in the pages of this journal, wasn't restricted to people who shared Baldwin's understanding of it. It was an expression of his own sense of religion to sense love as sensual, organic, and not in our control, but vulnerable to our refusal of it, as an affirmation of and joy in life as it is, not in general, but as each one's life full of limits and unimaginable suffering is.

Love's mystery is for Baldwin buried deep in the body rather than hidden in the mind, and our society's pathological mistrust of the body, the war of spirit on flesh, is for him our culture's original sin and the original sin of its form of Christianity. It must give way to a respect for and joy in the flesh if we are ever to recover the power of love as the "greatest" of the familiar trinity of human responses to the divine. And this recovery, he reminded us, is our only hope.

Realistic Living Mission Statement

The core mission of RealisticLiving is to clarify the essential Christian message and to promote and inspire a new Christian practice through small, intimate circles and their action as members of a local bioregion.

An Update on Realistic Living

During the four decades since Gene and Joyce founded Realistic Living, we have made regular appeals for support to the readers of this journal and to participants in Realistic Living's programs. On rare occasions in some of the leaner years, we've made special appeals. Each time we've made them, enough members of the Realistic Living constituency responded with what they could give, and untenable budget shortfalls were avoided.

This year, we are also seeing a greater than usual gap between monthly giving and the expenditures for materials, operating space, travel, and the like incurred in our work because, while our expenditures have remained largely the same and are even reduced from some previous years, giving has not kept pace. For this reason, we are making another appeal to you to consider giving more than you'd anticipated at the beginning of the year.

With Gene feeling the weight of his aging during his ninetieth decade and Joyce becoming 90 February 19, 2024, Alan is the only one of us who is up for long distant travel. It is our intention to continue the vital work of this organization as long as we can, with at least one more issue of this journal promised for November 2023, and two more under consideration for July and November of 2024.

We still do a few gatherings at our home base in Bonham Texas, including our weekly meeting Co-Pastor Circle. Gene will continue facilitating Zoom Seminars for as long as he is able. We are intentionally giving away copies of books, booklets, and old journals to constituents who may benefit from them. Gene and son Wayne are re-doing the website, and Wayne will continue website service so that it can continue to be a central point for sharing information about the movement of which we've been privileged to be a part. He is also helping us move our mailing list onto a more up-to-date application usable by others. And we are working on archiving materials so that future offices that emerge can use the wisdom gained in this effort.

We have demonstrated that a service office for the renewal of Christian practice can be feasibly maintained without compromising with the

theological cacophony of the church on the corner. And we have proved that it is not impossible for a determined handful of people to do a radical task without having to bow before the powerful to bring in the big bucks or to seek the large grants with all the strings attached to them.

Also, when we find it best to close down this non-for-profit organization, we will be handing along to other non-for-profit organizations of similar mission our remaining financial resources. So let us encourage you to see that no gift will be unneeded to aid our last years and to pass along our baton to others.

Those of you who give us the extra boost we need this year will serve this movement of ongoing creativity that can outlast our forty years of companionship and common concerns.

How to Help

Financial gifts to Realistic Living go directly into needed services. We raise and spend a budget of **\$30,000 a year** on programing that is useful to our constituency.

We do not pay salaries to our three staff members, but only expenses that sustain our programing, electronic outreach, physical travel, and program attendance. Our 12-member official board is responsible for our non-profit 501-C3 corporation. The staff—Gene, Joyce, and Alan—seek the advice of this board, and our finances are legally reviewed by them.

So thanks once again for sharing with us in this task and for the years of support so many of you have given Realistic Living for enlivening a movement to assist a next Christianity to find its place in the drama of history.

The August 5th Zoom Seminar

I, Gene, have now conducted 14 Zoom Online Seminars on my 2020 book *The Thinking Christian*. Number 15 will begin on August 5, 2023 featuring Part One of this book.

Part One of this book is on the general topic of religion within which Christian practice is one of the great long-lasting religious practices. In our now well-tasted twenty-first century, "the general religious" comes before the specific religious practice.

REALISTIC LIVING

In the 1950s and 1960s this was not so for me. I was rather well rooted in a grasp of the Christian revelation, and I ventured into the inter-religious as into a foreign land from which I was visiting from my Christian home.

We are now living in an inter-religious era within which we must now be born in order to properly re-learn what it means to practice a Christian practice. Part One of this book is on “What is Religion and Why do we need It?” This topic properly precedes Part Two of this book on Christian theologizing and Part Three on Christian ethics and a Christian communal restructuring.

There have now been 47 participants, 30 of whom have graduated from all three Zoom Seminars. Some of the 47 have had 1 or 2 of the three seminars, but not Part One. If this is you, you are a prime candidate for undergirding those experiences with the experiences of a Part One Seminar. And if you have never joined in one of these Zoom Seminars, Part One is the best place for you to start.

For this **August 5th Seminar**, I am seeking 10 people, 5 women and 5 men who will join me studying Part One of *The Thinking Christian*, beginning August 5th and continuing until October 7th—10 Saturdays in all, at 1:00 pm to 2:00 CST by Zoom.

I am using a wide invitation list for this seminar, for it may be my last opportunity to facilitate this Seminar, and I want to be sure to fill it. I will be 92 on January 3, 2024. I am in rather good health for my age, as they say, but I am still in “extra innings,” each one of which may conclude my game.

Let me furnish a few more details about this Seminar. We meet for one hour each of these Saturdays having read 11 or less pages of text and have come prepared to do an art-form style of dialogue in companionship with other inquirers. I initially offered these seminars for persons who consider themselves being religious leaders, or hoping to become so. But who knows who will be called to such leadership? If at some point in your spirit

journey you participated in an RS-1 weekend, that will be more than enough qualification for this inquiry. And if all this is completely new to you, talk it over with me (gwesleymarshall@gmail.com). I can imagine that a 5-day Buddhist meditation retreat may have introduced you to these topics. No specific religious practice is required. Mostly, what is required is an interest and the ability to attend at least 8 of the 10 sessions. These Seminars were built for busy people, but good attendance is key for a small-group program of this nature.

So let me know right away of your interest in doing this Zoom Seminar. There is no fee for the Seminar, which is a gift of Realistic Living for the inquiring spirit.

If you do not already own a copy of this Wipf and Stock published book, *The Thinking Christian*, the publisher has published a second edition correcting most of the typos in the first edition. You can order either an e-book or a paperback from Wipf and Stock or through Amazon. This book is a 398-page pull together of 60 years of studying and teaching these topics. You need it—in your library and read.



Realistic Living has launched a new program: The Great Give Away

We have in our house a lot of books, booklets, and old journal copies. We would rather give them to someone who can use them to read and teach rather than store or recycle them. So if you do not have one of the following books, let's guess you need it.

Joyce has already indicated earlier in this journal that she has boxes of her book, *The Queen's Quest and other Tales: Stories to Live By*. 1994.

We also have boxes and boxes of *To Be or not to Be a Christian* 1994, A Gene's early self-published book.

We also have in our house for free give away:

20 copies of *Radical Gifts: Living the Full Christian Life in Troubled Times* 2018

8 copies of *Great Paragraphs of Protestant Theology: A Commentary on the 20th Century Theological Revolution and its Implications for 21st Century Theology* 2005

30 copies of *The Road from Empire to Eco-Democracy* 2011 by Gene Marshall, Ben Ball, Marsha Buck, Ken Kreutziger, and Alan Richard

8 copies of *The Love of History and the Future of Christianity: Toward a Manifesto for a Next Christianity*: 2014

20 copies of *The Enigma of Consciousness: A Philosophy of Profound Humanness and Religion* 2015

The following book is only available as a free download from our website:

The Creator of Christianity: A Commentary on the Gospel of Mark. 2019

The following books are not available in our house, but are available for purchase

See our RL Website for descriptions and purchase instructions:

The Call of the Awe: Rediscovering Christian Profundity in an Inter-religious Era 2003

Jacob's Dream: A Christian Inquiry into Spirit Realization 2009

The Thinking Christian: Twenty-three Pathways of Awareness 2020

For free copies of any of our old journals, we have boxes of hardcopies mailable from our house.

To remember which ones you want, see our website under "journals."

<https://www.realisticliving.org/journals/>

For free copies of our 8 1/2 X 11 booklets see our website for a list of these:

<https://www.realisticliving.org/realistic-living-books-and-booklets-order-form/>

Realistic Living

is contemporary language for "Holy Spirit."

Check out our newly revised web site: RealisticLiving.org



The road that we walk everyday
between Alan's and the Brennecke's
Photo by Paula

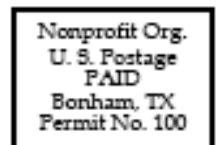
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