

Thinking on Things Letter

An indispensable letter that's better than a bagel with lox, onions, capers, cream cheese and an expensive latte.

Hello Loyal Readers

The Founders Report

Hello friends – it's time for an installment of this mighty letter to nourish your intellectual appetite and soul.

As we bring 2020 to a close, we're painfully reminded of how this epic pandemic has radically altered the lives of everyone in the world and the approximate 1.8 million lives lost. We're collectively grieving and investing hope and assurance the vaccines available will immunize us from further infection and enable us to return to life as we knew it; being with others and appreciating the value of belongingness. Each of us is a global citizen; honoring our responsibilities to each other and showing unconditional care and positive regard to our brothers and sisters; acknowledging the noble principle that we're here for the sake of each other. We share a collective consciousness and empathy is the universal virtue that will sustain us as we recover and resume life in meaningful ways. If we redefine empathy as one's capacity to take the role of the other, then we can throw each other a lifeline and we become the emotional and spiritual anchor vulnerable people need. We become a secure base for others to turn to in their moments of desperation, fear and vulnerability. In sum, please be available to lonely, fearful souls needing to be rescued from their anguish.



We're all good at Founders House of Hope. Three residents are working at Founders Hut (the on-site store) and they're earning a small stipend. All the profit from the hut directly supports residents working on their recovery program such as buying laptops and bicycles for residents attending Cerritos College. In the last six months, we've been making a profit at Founders Hut because I've got Los Alamitos Donuts donating donuts and Grocery Outlet donating non-perishable products to us. All the profit from the hut is dedicated to providing the resources and services to residents pursuing their rehabilitation/recovery goals.

For the last couple of years, I've been visiting Windsor Hall to support their psychosocial rehabilitation program. We've created a vital, unified group of residents invested in pursuing opportunities to generate meaning in life through pursuit of rehabilitation goals. As much as possible, I've begged them to ask the questions that matter the most to their life – the ones that can make a big difference in the quality of their life if they achieve the goals. We've landed on residents interested in returning to school, living independently and pursuing work opportunities. It requires making a big emotional and financial investment in their recovery program – and we're investigating all the possibilities. I very much appreciate the support from all the staff at Windsor. Thanks lots.

I also started spending time at Bay Breeze Care about a month ago. I've been welcomed nicely by the staff there too – and I'm learning all the resident's names and we're building a nice team of group members interested in recovery. Thank you to the staff at Bay Breeze for being so supportive of my work. Finally – my time at Woodruff Care has also been meaningful and we've explored how to generate additional meaning in life in the later years. Undoubtedly – the residents are older at Woodruff and with aging comes the challenges of managing health decline, purpose in life and regeneration. We've looked at strategies to renew purpose in life through engagement in activities that elevate self-esteem and self-determination. Thanks to all the folks at Woodruff for the ongoing support of my work.

That's it for now folks – and have a blessed holiday season ending with the big bang of a new year. Oh – Oh – are we ready for having an amnesiac disorder? I certainly am – I'm desperate for forgetting this disastrous year none of us deserved. We can only hope that the Lord will shine His countenance on us beginning January 1 and show us eternal favor and a path out of this cosmic event that's darkened this past year and that we've dreadfully endured this past year.

Where I'm teaching these days:

University of Redlands

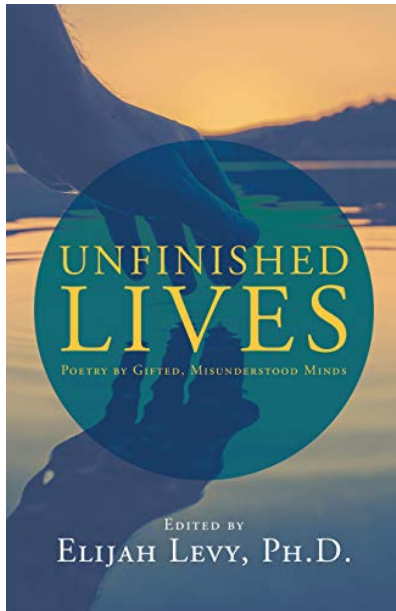
Southern California Univ of Health Sciences

Pasadena City College

Long Beach City College

PROGRAM ACCOMPLISHMENTS

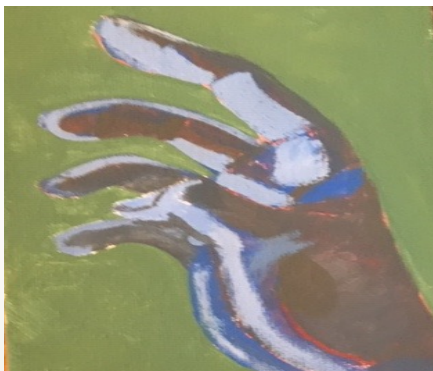
In March of this year, the residents at Windsor Hall self-published an anthology of poetry titled *Unfinished Lives: Poetry by Gifted, Misunderstood Minds*. I trained the residents how to write poetry the last couple of years and we collected enough free verse and narrative poetry from 10 residents to self-publish our book of poetry. In 2014, we also self-published an anthology of poetry at Founders House of Hope. Below – you can read the synopsis of the book that I wrote.



For individuals living with special conditions, writing poetry is healing and the material derives from a world of creative ideas, dreams and reflections on the meaning of life. Poetry drives self-expression and is not bound by rules constraining the creative process. It empowers and silences shame, isolation and the despair. The poetry in this anthology invites the reader into a world where metaphors reveal vulnerability, anguish and shame associated with having a special condition. The evocative nature of poetry transforms silence, alienation and insignificance to sound. For these individuals, writing poetically is a safe passage to reclaim one's life. The metaphor is fascinating because of its power to silently express a pure, complete picture.

The storytelling, prose and free verse poetry here is vivid and evocative, illuminating the inner, subconscious mind in a metaphorical and symbolic medium. It is spiritual, deeply intimate and contemplative. The poems unleash emotions connected to loss, pain, vulnerability and to living with these special conditions. It is healing and natural to disclose in words the limitations imposed and to allow the reader to enter a mind often infiltrated by unwelcomed, malicious demons and devaluing voices.

The poets in this book reveal their suffering and longing for acceptance. The writers share their dreams, sustained hope for recovery while educating us about their special conditions and the enemy within. We hope that the healthy mind will understand the depth of suffering. In the end, it is hope that gives life meaning and sustains faith for the good life. Meaning gives one the strength to overcome. We celebrate the poetic genius of our brave souls who share to educate us so we can support their desire to live with purpose, meaning and self-determination.



This piece was created by Dayne who was a resident at Founders for about a year. A few weeks ago he moved to Savannah, Georgia to pursue a writing career. You can view his art on my website: www.elijahlevy.com

The art will be on the page titled: Art & Poetry by Dayne.

This Thing Called Work by Elijah Levy, Ph.D.

I'm going to try to write briefly about this activity called work which is a verb and a noun. Work is an inescapable activity people pursue to earn money to buy a pint of Ben & Jerry's when it's on sale – and you've got that Ralph's club card to get that deal. It inextricably involves mental and physical effort toward a meaningful and purposeful end. Right? Meaningful is open to interpretation though and it has to be because it's culturally and socially defined. Although we could explore this concept called meaningful much more, I need to limit this piece to one page. Let's agree that meaningful is a relative concept anchored in culture and society. Let's start by asking should our work mean more to us than just a pay check? I'll answer for you and say yes. But --what's wrong if work is just a pay check to us? Work is an indispensable activity for defining our self-concept. However, work alone does not pull for or engage our total self. It represents one dimension of our multiple identities from which we draw self-esteem; feeling worthwhile and valued. You know work influences how others see and think of you. We can say work is instrumental; a traditional American view, a consumerist perspective of work which may or may not fulfill our yearning for meaning and purpose in life. If we define work as an activity performed for financial security and sustenance, it is instrumental and a means to an end. In contrast, work that has its origins in a calling is an activity carrying deeper, inherent value for the individual. Here the individual sees clearly how their true work contributes to enhancing the lives of others or connecting to the larger community. There's also sacred work which, for example includes individuals in the clergy. Most of us we want to work and we have a peculiar curiosity about what each of us does. Some people work, even if they don't need the money. The individual who works benefits by gaining self-worth.

How About Work Alienation: Work alienation is likely to occur when one experiences less control over the process and content of their job. Their job seems overly routinized and the individual doesn't feel they are being utilized effectively at their job. The job denies this individual opportunities to be imaginative and alter how their work is performed and modifying the content of their duties. The job is simply rote procedures – habitual and unvarying in nature. The individual experiences a disconnect between their values and the organization's norms, rituals and values. Now this individual experiences futility. It's the same synchronized dance – day to day, week to week and month to month. This individual will likely describe their job as meaningless. Also – a natural extension of this idea leads to this individual not connecting what they do to the successful performance of the organization. Studs Terkel (1974, p. 557-558) describes the following blue collar worker's expression of his dissatisfying job:

After forty years of workin' at the steel mill, I am just a number. I think I've been a pretty good worker. That job was just right for me. I had a minimum amount of education and a job using a micrometer and just a steel tape and your eyes—that's a job that was just made for me... Bob (his son) worked in the mill a few months during a school vacation. He said, "I don't know how you done it all these years. I could never do it." I said, "I been tellin' you all your life never get into that mill."

Now we need to discuss connectedness. We need connectedness; where work provides deeper meaning and one sees how their job brings value significance to their organization. Ideally – they see how their work makes a difference. It can be tough trying to determine how what one does makes a difference in some types of work. Obviously – it depends on the work. Know what I mean? But if you think about it enough you'll discover this connection. It's a complex abstract activity. We need to see this critical connection because it has the potential to express our deepest yearnings for validation – and it suppresses the psychic angst about how one fits into the world. How we fit into the world is partly settled by knowing how the work we do brings value to the world.

The Search for Our Meaningful Work. So -- what should drive our search for meaningful work? Should it be charged by spirit; by a need that enriches our lives; that allows us to connect the work we do to ends outside of ourselves? Meaningful work is experienced when one finds a genuine connection between their work and how it adds to their purpose driven life. We have needs for validation; to know that our work brings significance and purpose to the world; that it enables you to discover additional meaning in your life. If you have it then you will experience clarity, direction and genuine and enduring happiness. William James said "I will act as if what I do makes a difference." Remember, you want to make meaningful contributions to the world—and you do this by clarifying the values that drive your life and aligning them to the work you do. I think true and fitting work is something you truly inherently value—it's work that pulls for the best in you; something that is intrinsically motivating and it's work that is valued for itself. If one feels that his/her work captures their knowledge and creativity then they will be passionate about their work. Passion comes from deep inside of us—it's charged by spirit and it intrinsically drives us to perform at our highest levels.

Since childhood, our socialization process taught us we needed to be something; to become a nurse, plumber, lawyer, bus driver, firefighter, pilot, mechanic. The cultural problem though is that we're also reminded and reinforced to define our success in life by what we have which is called conspicuous consumption. There are individuals in America obsessed with flamboyantly expressing their possessions of status because of the competitive nature of society. In addition, people's shaky self-concept and insecurities drives the relentless pursuit of material possessions. There are individuals who need to present a public self that impresses others – and some embrace the idea that displaying their objects of status will enhance their public image and demand adulation. The individual who understands how they fit into the world through their work, family and private and public self resists the temptation for unrelenting recognition, attention and an enhanced social status revealed by what they possess.

New York Skyline by Jay Derifield, resident at Founders



Quotes by my favorite Ernest Becker.

The real world is simply too terrible to admit, it tells man that he is a small trembling animal who will someday decay and die. Culture changes all of this, makes man seem important, vital to the universe, immortal in some ways.

People create the reality they need in order to discover themselves.

The Meaning of Life

I've collected what some of the greatest thinkers have to say about the meaning of life. Enjoy.

Abraham Maslow – Meaning is experienced by the self-actualized, growth motivated person who delights in using his creative powers for their own sake, and who can affirm himself and simultaneously transcend himself through peak experiences.

Paul Tillich – Man can choose to make his life meaningful by surrendering in faith and love to Jesus. By opening to Jesus and experiencing His acceptance and forgiveness, one experiences the joy and freedom of new being and the courage to be oneself.

Abraham Joshua Heschel – Man experiences his life as meaningful when he lives in G-d's presence—not simply by encountering G-d in the world, but primarily by serving G-d in everyday life, infusing every moment with the spirit of G-d and by dedicating himself to ends outside himself.

Rollo May – Meaning is experienced by a person centered in himself, who is able to live by his highest values, who knows his own intentionality, feels the power of his will to choose, and is able to love.