

# Thinking on Things Letter

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

## Hello Loyal Readers

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

It's 2021 and we're hoping that the anguish humanity experienced this past year ushers in a healing and renewal of life as we knew it before the pandemic. A universal period of mourning has sustained the collective unconscious that binds every soul in the world. Now we must renew ultimate faith that we can restore meaningful and purposeful living while navigating a new landscape with a sort of free floating anxiety that will pervade life for all. We can incrementally reach out physically soon to friends and family; meaning we can gather and hug one another when the time is right. For now – I'm grateful I'm working and able to communicate with my family, friends, students and residents at the facilities I visit. Please continue to be safe and have faith light will penetrate the veneer of darkness that's blinded us to all we've missed the last year. We are in the process of rebirth and all the anticipated joy that comes with this realization. We will self-create our life as we knew it and all of its splendor soon. As always – be safe and may the Lord continue to show you eternal favor.



## Things Going On

We're all good at Founders House of Hope where I'm at 4-5 days a week. On Sunday, Feb 14<sup>th</sup> the residents received their second vaccination. The other facilities are in line to also get their second vaccinations if they haven't already received it. I'm happy to announce that we implemented a supported employment program at Bay Breeze Care, our facility in Long Beach. There's a free standing, enclosed gazebo that's being used as a canteen now and we stocked it with chips, soda, crackers, candy, granola bars and we'll add apples, bananas and yogurt soon. We selected a couple of residents who will be working as clerks in the canteen and earning a stipend for their hours worked. All of the profits from the canteen will be dedicated to enhancing the quality of life for the residents. For example, we purchased two Amazon Fire tablets and we gave one of them to a resident. He wanted a Bible downloaded on it – so we did that and he's learning its functionality. We will give the other tablet to another resident soon.

I'm visiting Bay Breeze Care a couple of days a week: Monday and Saturday to run psychosocial rehabilitation groups. The other week, the residents and I discussed the idea of writing a book of poetry like we did at Founders and Windsor Hall. So – we'll start doing creative writing and produce free verse, prose and narrative poetry to create an anthology of poetry that we'll self-publish. This project typically takes a year and a half to complete. If you're interested in looking at our books, go to my website: [www.elijahlevy.com](http://www.elijahlevy.com) and look at the menu on the top header of my home page. On the menu, click on Books by Elijah Levy and once on this page, you will see a list of books produced by these facilities.

The residents at Windsor Hall are learning about self-determination, empowerment and how to more effectively manage their mental health conditions to avoid relapsing. We're also doing some creative writing and skill building groups such as symptom management, self-esteem building and goal setting. A few residents have expressed interest in returning to school at a local community college.

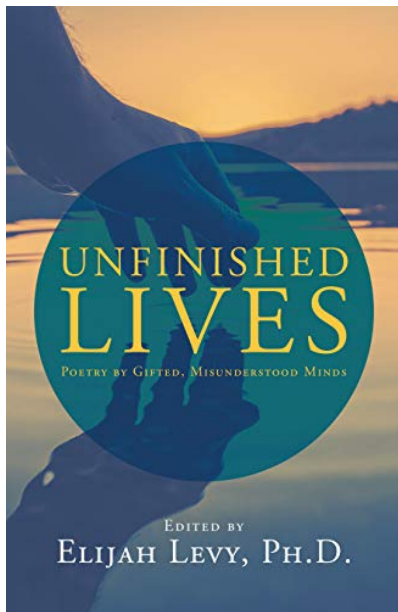
At Woodruff Care, the residents are interested in exploring diverse topics such as how to develop new leisure skills and how to continue communicating with family during the pandemic. We've explored how and why certain individuals are vulnerable to developing anxiety and depressive disorders as a result of the difficult adjustments made during the pandemic. It's so nice seeing how the residents are supportive of each other and their experience of the group as an anchor and secure emotional base.

## My Schedule at TruCare Facilities

Founders House of Hope: Tuesday through Friday  
Windsor: Wednesday 1-3:00  
Bay Breeze: Monday 10-11:00 and Saturday 9-11:00  
Woodruff Care: Monday 12-1:30 and every other Saturday 12-1:00

## PROGRAM ACCOMPLISHMENTS

In March of 2020, 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.

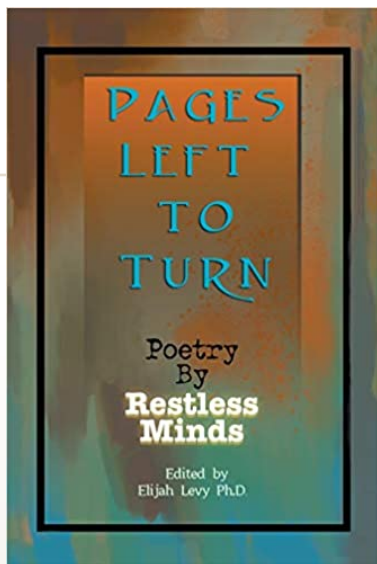


Book of poetry published by residents at Windsor Hall in 2020.

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.



Book of poetry published by Founders residents in 2014.

In this collection of poetry, individuals living with mental illness convey in an intimate, evocative and vivid style their longing for acceptance, meaning and recovery. The therapeutic benefits for the mentally ill writing poetically is a journey of self-discovery and the writing process organizes and clarifies their situation in life. For the mentally ill, writing poetically by using imagery and metaphor is a safe passage to reclaim who one was before the illness emerged. The metaphor relies on an analogy or symbol to create new meaning by expanding the imaginative mind that ultimately pushes one into a new reality that generates insight. The metaphor is fascinating because of its power to silently express a complete picture in an instant. Individuals living with symptoms of Schizophrenia and Bipolar Disorder are a vessel of truth and writing poetically about suffering transforms that truth in a way that makes it meaningful and amenable to healing. What is dormant, and undoubtedly shameful to disclose is awakened, and although it describes the limitations the illness imposes in their lives, it energizes one to act in some way to heal the pain, overcome and defeat ongoing devaluation, loneliness, stigmatization and alienation. In the end, it is hope that gives life meaning and sustains faith for the good life. Without hope, one lives in despair and futility. Meaning gives one the strength to overcome. The evocative nature of poetry transforms silence, alienation and insignificance to sound. The mentally ill live in their safe, beautiful, intimate and private world. The written word-- the poem, allows one to share this experience in a public forum for others to identify with and ultimately connect them to the larger world to reduce alienation and increase integration. At some level, the healthy mind will invariably understand the depth of suffering and through empathy, the ability to take the role of the other, appreciate and render compassion to the mentally ill."

# What does compassionate policing of the mentally ill mean?

by Elijah Levy, Ph.D.

The traits of a police officer include emotional stability, incorruptibility and being strong of mind and body. In addition, good judgment, justice, integrity, resourcefulness and the capacity for empathy and compassion are required. Officers are conferred power and trusted to use it to perform their work, which can be dangerous, given they are first responders. Unless officers have the capacity to treat individuals with respect and dignity, they may act outside the parameters of the law. In sum, every action of a police officer has implications for every moment of their shift, and in the lives of the public. Finally, police officers are the heroic because their actions achieve moral outcomes.

Who is the mentally ill individual the officer is encountering? It's likely this individual has experienced countless devaluing interactions in his/her life. Being victim to pervasive devaluation and stigmatization psychologically incapacitates the mentally ill individual and causes him/her to abandon hope; and without hope one cannot appreciate the possibility of meaningful living. The mentally ill individual is ultimately disempowered and unable to exercise effective self-determination while psychotic and homeless. This ultimate vulnerability is analogous to a sort of social death – being victim to the elements due to a diminished capacity to exercise effective decision making. Schizophrenia is a cruel, debilitating, functional thought disorder that attacks one's sensory and perceptual systems-- leaving one incapacitated, vulnerable and unable to exercise effective decision making to ensure he/she is safe in the dark, dangerous alleys and underground of our cities.

To enact the concept of compassionate policing of the mentally ill means that police officers be sufficiently trained to interact with these individuals in respectful and dignified ways that achieve the desired outcome. If unnecessary or unreasonable force is used with an individual perceived to be mentally ill, the potential for injury or more tragic outcomes increases. We know that officers are trained to control and give instructions to their subjects to ensure the safety of the officer and subject. In encounters other than with a mentally ill subject, this procedure will more likely achieve desired outcomes. We also know that the mentally ill are not more prone to violence than anyone in the general population. It is estimated that the mentally ill account for 3-5% of the violence in society. Undoubtedly, a myth is being perpetuated that the mentally ill are dangerous and violent. The reality is that the mentally ill are often too disorganized and lack the means and resources to commit crimes. The myth is sustained because some people believe that strange people with unusual mannerisms, delusions and weird ideas revealed by their symptoms are dangerous. In the end – the otherness we perceive in the severely mentally ill become a threat to our safety and as a result, the mentally ill are the most severely stigmatized human beings. The self-esteem and self-concept of the severely mentally ill continuously erode; depriving the individual of dignity, respect and the opportunity to make meaningful contributions to society. Unless officers understand and appreciate how interacting with a mentally ill individual requires a different set of communication skills, the potential for escalating force increases significantly. A psychotic, homeless Schizophrenic may be responding to a voice advising him/her the officer is actually a devil disguised as a police officer, and to not respond to their instructions. In this instance, a sufficiently trained officer should recognize that respecting the mentally ill individual's space, and reassuring him/her that he/she is not a devil could diffuse a potential use of force incident. Unless the officer appreciates that his/her mentally ill subject is terrified of him/her, and that this accounts for their defiant attitude to not sit on the curb and cross their legs, he may escalate the encounter which will invariably lead to a use of force. The use of force may leave the subject or officer injured.

Thus, training for officers, who are not mental health professionals, provides a practical guide to increase their knowledge and skills to arrive at desired results when encountering the mentally ill. In an ideal world, training officers on mental illness will reduce stigma, devaluation and will divert the mentally ill from incarceration to appropriate treatment facilities. Based on our experience over the 1 years of training we have conducted for law enforcement, officers sincerely wish to honor their code of ethics by showing compassion for the mentally ill and as much as possible, direct them to needed treatment.

## **Our Training for Police Officers Wins an Award**

Well – I've got great news to share about the training we're doing for police officers on how to interact with the mentally ill. On May 5<sup>th</sup> of 2015 – The Violence Prevention Coalition of Orange County selected our class to receive The 2015 Ambassador of Peace award. We are honored to receive this award for the training we've been providing since 2011 to law enforcement departments in Southern California. We were invited to a luncheon on June 5<sup>th</sup> at the Promenade and Gardens in Costa Mesa to receive this award.

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### New Developments at My End

About a month ago I began volunteering to train outreach counselors called Peer Support Specialists at JVS (Jobs, Vision, Success) a division of US Vets. One of my former students from Pasadena City College works as a peer support specialist for this organization and he mentioned his regional director wanted his counselors to receive training in various areas including basic counseling skills, crisis intervention and the major classifications of mental illness. The peer specialists perform outreach activities to link homeless and underserved veterans to needed resources including mental health services, medical services, transitional housing and vocational counseling/job readiness programs. So – it's been very rewarding facilitating training sessions for this valued group of counselors attempting to lift underserved veterans, some of who are homeless into housing and needed medical and related services.

I'm also continuing to be a preceptor to Biola Nursing School by having a few nurses come to my weekly zoom class to learn about Founders House of Hope. Every Friday from 5:30 – 7:00 three nursing students enrolled in Biola's RN program come to my zoom class to learn about the psychiatric rehabilitation program we're operating at Founders.

### Quotes by my favorite – Kafka

Anyone who cannot come to terms with his life while he is alive needs one hand to ward off a little his despair over his fate... but with his other hand he can note down what he sees among the ruins.

You can hold yourself back from the sufferings of the world, that is something you are free to do and it accords with your nature, but perhaps this very holding back is the one suffering you could avoid.

The relationship to one's fellow man is the relationship of prayer, the relationship to oneself is the relationship of striving; it is from prayer that one draws the strength for one's striving.

### Observations

By Dayne Hammond, former resident of Founders

The eddy of the well swirls within.

The spider, tied to its web is haunting the threshold.

The alligator, a deep, scaly green catches his prey, spewing rubies into the air.

The Chinese merchant stows away change for his daughters allowance.

The pitiful drunk pisses on a stoop near a hotel lobby.

Oil sizzles and bubbles as frozen fries enter the cauldron.

A mystical sage, atop his hilltop cave bares his body to the moon at night.

A death row inmate sheds a tear as he approaches the electric chair.

A baby is born into the arms of a woman who barely loves herself.

A book is burned for telling a story too true.

My mother kisses my forehead in between sips of her wine.

Music plays in the glowing room of two teenage lovers.

The scent of engine smoke is smelled by diners on the canal.

A women's red heel gets caught in a crack on a Grecian veranda.

A leaf grows heavy under the weight of thunderous rain drops.

A swan tucks her head into white feathers as she grows tired.

The Latin family gather around in a small room crowded with candles as their matriarch slips away.

God kisses the cheek of Jesus in their Heavenly home as night falls over North America.

Morning light dances upon the ridges of Tibet as the red-sheathed monks eat breakfast.

Life ends, never for a second to the eyes of the great observers.