

Mindfully Incarcerated

By Daniel Labbe

Compassion. I truly feel that it wasn't until I was able to see through my own pain and connect to the pain and suffering of others that I began to heal. This holiday season was a tough one for me - they always are in here - but I do have the love and support of family and a few friends in here, so it wasn't all bad. There are guys in here who have been completely abandoned by their families. They may have done some terrible things, who knows, but I don't see how shunning them helps. The road of recovery and healing is a tough one and cannot be done alone (or in despair and hopelessness).

For a week or so I became depressed and anxious. I binged on honey-buns, cookies, and chips - comfort food. I watched Christmas movies and had to hide my face so the other inmates didn't see my tears. Every year, between November and January, I'm thrown off balance. First comes Ashley's birthday - my daughter - then Thanksgiving, my b-day, and finally Christmas. It's like a crazy marathon or something. I think, if I can just make it through today, and the next day, and the next,....

Two thoughts float near the surface of consciousness during the holidays: 1. How is Ashley? I wonder if the holidays are joyful for her, or if they bring up pain and sadness, and if ~~so~~ they do bring up less cheerful memories how is she coping with them? This thought brings a lot of shame, ~~and~~ guilt, and anger toward myself. 2. Family. I think a lot about family this time of year. All through my life I enjoyed family gatherings.

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Getting to spend time with brothers and sisters, uncles and aunts, and cousins, nephews and nieces... Warmth, laughter, silliness, and family drama including the occasional fight... Uncle Joe's wild stories of meeting Big Foot in the Canadian mountains, Uncle Fred so happy to see everyone, Jo Anne's warm hugs and kisses, Ron's creative surprises, and all the craziness that goes with such gatherings. These times with family are some of my best memories.

But for a time I got lost in my own struggles and when I was in these dark places from time to time I became very self-centered. my depression, my loneliness, my anger at the world, how unfair life was to me, my bad memories... all of these thoughts separated me from the world, and as a separate self-conscious being my pain would overcome me. Drugs, alcohol, and total dysfunction always followed.

Compassion would have helped back then. To know that Uncle Joe and Fred and Ron and Jo Anne and everyone else also feels deep loneliness, sadness, anger, and confusion, that each person has a story of struggling, of cruelty done to them, of being scared, to see this in even the people I felt had hurt me the most... Such a connection has the power to burst the bubble that isolates us.

I see this now. This knowledge has helped me to heal and grow and let go of so much anger. It helped me get through this holiday season. By connecting to the pain in others and in their joys as well, I wasn't so alone. My problems were not so big. The asshole C.O. wasn't such an asshole anymore - at least, I saw his human side. In fact, the

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the more miserable or cruel someone is the more I see how much pain and suffering is fueling that person. This being human is tough for us all. I still may not like a cruel C.O. or a miserable hostile inmate, but I no longer have to hate him or stew over how much I don't like him or over what he did. Compassion allows for the view of a bigger picture.

I have a sister who refuses to talk to another sister. She also refuses to talk to me. She can hold a grudge and just cut family out simply because she finds it difficult to relate to them. I often wonder what it takes to be able to do that... and what it does to a person spiritually, emotionally. I made the worst decisions of my life and lost those I loved the most when my mind was caught up in my own pain, anger, and judgements of the world. If only I had known about the power of compassion, ~~or~~ who knows? I had love, as much as I was able to love, but very little compassion in those days. Today compassion is my key - a key out of the dungeon of my own toxicity and a key to connecting to others and releasing resentments. It helped me through the holidays this year and has healed the wound that once separated me from... well, from everyone else.

I know this post wasn't very cohesive, but I hope I conveyed a message about compassion. Without it we can become distorted monstrous versions of ourselves, and with it we can heal and find greater love, warmth, and unity in the world.

Please, if there are family members or old friends you no longer talk to, if you feel isolated and alone, ~~it~~ or if anger fills you, consider compassion and experiment with it. You

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might be surprised by its Power.

No word on the mindfulness class yet. I got some good news today: Ashley called my mom. Mom was quite happy, and so was I. I ~~was~~ watched two very good movies this holiday season: If I Stay and August Rush. Looking forward to the new Star Wars, yeah, I know, December 18 then at least 6 months after that for DVD (we don't get Netflix here). Been watching the Walking Dead reruns on MyTV. I lost 20 lbs last summer, probably gained 5 of it back, but I'm back on the work-out schedule and healthier diet. (Run 3-4 miles 2/week, weight training 2/week). Watched a fantastic documentary on PBS about Martin Luther (Reformation). My Chess game has gotten a lot better lately, oh, ~~and~~ I won my first RISK game the other day. Mom came for a visit the weekend before Christmas and not much else is going on. I'm in a Therapeutic Program that keeps me busy and is helpful. Other than that, I wish you all a HAPPY New Year!

Peace

P.S. 21 months left and I'll be out!
See you soon!

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