

At the Black Lives Matter protest downtown yesterday, a central theme was that if we celebrate or even accept the status quo in this society we are not just tolerating but *abetting* systems of oppression. One speaker noted that the traditional taboo against talking about politics, for example, encourages us to bury our heads in the sand, or at least to keep our mouths shut, and thereby to support the status quo. The taboo against talking about politics is a big part of what sustains political systems of oppression.

We have taboos against talking about religion and sexuality as well. And this chilling effect helps to sustain the most pernicious paternalistic aspects of religion, including the demonization of LGBTQ people.

As I was thinking about this I noticed (it wasn't a lot, but) some of the speakers broke another social taboo: the one that tells us not to use profanity over a very loud public address system to a very large crowd. And I thought about how, growing up, profanity was described not just as impolite, and unacceptable, but "ugly." Ugly. As if ugly was a crime. As if seeing what some people don't want you to see, and talking about something that makes us uncomfortable is might undermine the very foundations of the social order. Well.

My mind may have gone off in that direction because we've been preparing this week to talk about art. We've got a great group to share their thoughts and hearts with you today: Pam, Carrie, Steffany, Andrea. But as we've been talking about this for the past couple of weeks, it's been impossible to set aside the sickness, and ugliness, all around us.

So yes, we're celebrating art today. Not any particular *genre*. Not the *products* of art but the process. *And*: not necessarily beautiful art. In the context of pain and hatred, political perversity and lies, our deepest personal expressions might not be pretty. The making of meaning, and certainly *the process* of making meaning, is going to be messy, and maybe painful to look at. But *this* is a place where messiness is ok. When we gather in beloved community, we create a safe space to make mistakes, to be imperfect, and to seek deeper understanding of our *whole* lives, not just the pleasant and the perfect.

We're speaking about art as a tool—and source for healing—to acknowledge that *art shapes who we are*. And later, we will encourage you to think about, and actually *make art* in response to this question: *Since* art shapes who we are, *how* does the art that we experience, *and* the art that *we create*, shape and expand our connections with one another?

And now I welcome Henry Ohana who will share with us today...

Eracism Henry Ohana

Teacher Recognition Erica Mallin for Genia Allen-Schmid

On Dance Pam Kuntz

I am a dancer, dance maker, and teacher. I dance with people because that is what I have to do to fully live my life and be happy. I rarely dance alone. Actually, the only time I dance alone is when I am preparing class...when I am in a task to prepare me for being with others, for dancing with others.

Shelter in place? I was of course concerned about a lot of things in the beginning of this time, and one of them was my truth with regards to dance. Just when stay at home became our truth - On March 13th - a friend sent me a link to a blog post that helped me understand me better.

Blog: Muscular Bonding: How Dance Made Us Human (can't find the author's name but I do have the link) <https://fs.blog/2020/04/muscular-bonding/> "muscular bonding" – a term created by historian William McNeill – defined as a sense of euphoric connection that is sparked by performing rhythmic movements in unison to music or chanting.

Author goes on to say: "If you've ever danced with a group of people, you may have also noticed a remarkable sense of connection and unity with them. This is the effect of muscular bonding.

THIS IS MY TRUTH.

The author goes on to write: "...there is tremendous value in considering how we can bring connection back into our lives; we must figure out how to help alleviate the dangerous effects of isolation and alienation from each other. There is an incredible precedent in history for using dance to create a sense of community and intimacy. Physical movement helps us forge connections that can override our differences.

"...when we move together we have an experience that deepens our connection to one another and gives us the openings for unity and cooperation."

I was struck by the timing of receiving this blogpost – just one or two days after the call for Shelter in Place. It both broke my heart and inspired me to figure something out.

The next day, On March 14th I decided I would make a screendance journal. I didn't know what I was doing (not unusual) but dove in with a movement at my kitchen table and then we were off to the races.

- There are 3 phases to the journal, trained and not trained, ages 6 months to at least 80 (my mom)
- I narrowed the dancing population to women, an artistic choice born from recent movements in our culture
- It was always about process and not product. It was about connecting humans through movement
 - create an opportunity for people to "meet" another person by experiencing their movement and allowing that movement to turn into their own movement
 - to let the participants see what that exchange looked like by creating a screendance.

Phase 1 captures the first 6 weeks of Shelter in place 132 dancers; Phase 2 captures week 7 with 35 dancers; Phase 3 captures week 8 with 11 dancers.

Phase 4 was in the works with 55 dancers and then I stopped it because my energies moved onto developments in our world that needed my attention.

One last thing – I wrote about my feelings each week and sent this writing to my friend Richard Scholtz. He then created a sound score, mostly based on my feelings, for each of the phases. Here is 2 minutes of Phase 1 – the first 6 dancers and the last 4 dancers. It is 2:00 minutes long. The entire phase is 28 minutes long. <https://vimeo.com/419128155>

On Writing

Carrie Koehline - Journaling toward Healing

Good morning. I'm going to share with you this morning about some ways I've been using journal writing to find balance during this time of pandemic sequestering. I hope it will inspire you to give it a try.

I've been writing regularly in my journal to help me navigate the various waves of emotions and thoughts this challenging time brings up. I've also been inviting my journal to help me deepen myself during this pause from so much running around—to listen past the news and the noise for what this time might potentially teach me.

I'm a great believer in the healing powers of journal writing. One of the joys of journaling is that you can practically do it anytime anywhere. But I have found that some preparation and intention increases the possibility of rich and satisfying journaling. It also keeps me from getting sucked too deeply into a pit of despair or whipped up into a whirlwind of anxiety. It helps that I have a writing desk. It's not fancy. It has a jar of pens, a little bouquet of flowers, a candle, and my coffee cup, and the desk has a slot underneath where I store my journal. And I have a special fountain pen that I just use for journaling.

Before I start to write, I light the candle, take three deep breaths, and say a portion of May Sarton's poem, "Now I become myself." Then I open my journal. All of this helps me to enter a more sacred space. A space of deeper attention and deeper listening to myself. When I feel deeply listened to, I yammer less and can fish more deeply in territories that are often a little beyond my conscious awareness.

Some days I just write and go where it takes me. Other days I give myself a specific assignment and set the timer on my phone for anywhere between five and twenty minutes, depending on my mood and time constraints.

After I've written, I read it aloud to myself. Hearing it in my own voice, I often hear things I didn't realize I wrote. I take a moment to note anything that strikes me. Then I close my journal, put it back into its slot, blow out the candle, and transition back into my day. This keeps my journaling time safe and protected. And if I've explored challenging emotions, it gives me a way to come gently back to the surface after my deep dive.

One journaling instruction I sometimes give myself is to just describe the state I'm in as accurately as I can, reaching for images, metaphors, and similes. This is especially helpful when I'm feeling swamped by an emotion, or overwhelmed with too many feelings to keep track of.

One stressful day I wrote:

I feel pressed and creased. I'm a pair of pants in one of those pressing machines at the dry cleaners but the wrinkles are being pressed in.

It wasn't an elegant description. But describing it in that unexpected way helped me to feel a little less pressed. A little less constricted.

There's a poem that I love called the homeopath. It asks questions like

Do you feel forsaken like a rose denied water?

Disoriented like a seal in the desert?

Angry like a poisonous toad?

Do you yield to touch like sheep's wool or feel hardened like granite?

I find there is something delightful about accurately describing even the most uncomfortable feelings.

If there's a day when I'm judging myself for having thoughts I deem unacceptable, I might weave into my writing some sentences that combine my inner contradictions. For example:

I love my dear ones and I feel like humanity should be wiped off the planet. I want to save the world and I want everyone to go away.

I embrace diversity and I wish to have an open mind, and I also really want my own personal version of the rapture where every mean or dangerous or wrongheaded person is lifted off the planet and taken away somewhere where I don't have to deal with them.

My journal is my private territory, a safe place where I can just name it all without judgement. I don't have to suppress some thoughts and emphasize others. And I notice that honestly naming my contradictions gives me more breathing space inside.

Sometimes I go to my journal for balance. If I've been too nice and restrained, I may need to write an angry unsent letter. If life is feeling too oppressive, I might choose to write lists of gratitudes or moments of joy.

Or I might revisit an ordinary or extraordinary experience that went by too quickly, stretch it out, and savor all the details with all of my senses. It's a way of gathering the treasures of my life and reminding myself that it's good to be alive.

Not all my journaling is solitary. Sometimes my wife and I journal together and then share what we've written and it helps us to know each other more deeply. I've also met regularly with a journal group for many years. These days, of course, we meet by Zoom. We start with a prompt, write, and then read to each other. Over time it has built a community of trust and authenticity that is sustaining to all of us through this time.

Lately, I've been experimenting with a new journaling approach - writing about my life in a storytelling voice, as if I were a character going through this time. I usually start with a conflict that I'm struggling with and I just see where the writing takes me. I never know where I'll end up.

So I'll finish by sharing something I wrote, using a storytelling voice to describe myself grappling with what to share with you today.

She had too much to say and nothing to say. When she'd signed up to share about journal writing during a pandemic, the assignment seemed easy. She'd been the one who brought to Paul the idea of exploring "Let's face the music and dance," because that old song had been visiting her, knocking on the door of her consciousness. She had explored it in her journal, seeing images of Fred Astaire dancing up and down stairs, over couches, incorporating everything in his environment into his dance. And she was drawn to that phrase - facing the music. Facing reality. Facing into troubles.

But then dancing. Making art of it. Engaging with it creatively. She was sure she'd have lots to say about using journaling to Face the Music and Dance during pandemic sequestering.

But that had been a couple weeks ago, in the good old days, back when they were only dealing with a pandemic, sequestering, huge unemployment, entrenched racism, dismantled democracy and an out-of-control thug of a president.

But in the past week, after the millionth horrendous thing happened to one more black person, all hell broke loose, the tinder box exploded, with rioting and looting and peaceful protests infiltrated by white supremacists in every city, and all the unsolvable problems of the world seeming to be even more infinitely unsolvable.

Carrie went mute. She had nothing to say. She was, after all, a sensitive, quiet type who required spaciousness and deep listening. What did she have to contribute in a world where no one was listening and there were so many conflicting versions of the truth? How was she supposed to face the music and dance when it seemed like her worst fears were coming true?

But as she pondered that, an image came. She imagined herself on the floor sobbing. She wanted to push that image away, but it occurred to her, maybe that was the first step in the dance. Maybe sobbing on the floor, giving in to her grief, was the dance step that joined her with people all over the world. And maybe, if she faced the music, and let her grief flow forth, then her body could move again, she could breathe again, and she would find what it was hers to say, even in a time like this.

Now Steffany is going to share about her version of Facing the Music and Dancing—using art as her medium.

On Process Art Steffany Raynes - Why I recommend Process Painting

Good morning, I am honored to have been invited to be part of this creative service. I have been doing Process Art for many years; when we went into “shelter at home” I was so grateful to already have process art in my tool box. In mid March I started doing paintings that I call “Notes from the Pandemic;” there are 21 pieces now. This kind of art is not about the product; it’s not for display or critique. The process is very much about being not doing, tuning into myself and letting the paint and the brush express what is beyond words. The time in my art studio painting has become sacred time for me. Because of that it is somewhat paradoxical to try to talk about it. I’ve struggled to find words that convey what process painting offers in these challenging times but I am hoping I might inspire you to consider trying it.

Usually my paintings begin with not knowing what it is I am going to paint. Often I sit and wait, looking through my art supplies to see what grabs my attention. This process works with fancy art supplies (I use water color) and it works with crayons or art pens or even a pencil on a scrap piece of paper. I like to use color because colors speak to me. Watercolor has so many surprising special effects and that too draws me into the process and out of my head. I let myself be curious and notice what I am drawn to - be it color or texture or line or paper and then I try to get out of my way and let the painting evolve. It is important to avoid evaluation—good or bad, although that can be tricky because I am also always noticing what I’m drawn to, which is not necessarily what I like. The other thing to avoid is interpretation

or working hard to assign meaning to something that appears although sometimes a painting will speak to me about something that is going on in the world or in me and ask for something to be added or highlighted in the painting. Often when I've finished a painting I dialogue with it, asking what it wants to tell me. Listening deeply is a highly intuitive meditation that seems to function more and more powerfully the longer I practice this form. I have found this kind of creative process to be life-giving. Through the painting process I often feel more connected to my core, my spirit, and to the interconnectedness of all life. It has come to be a very spiritual practice for me. And it helps me to be with very difficult experiences and feelings which move through me in a way, freeing me from feeling stuck and helping me to "face the music and dance."

What I am going to share with you next is a series of slides that show the beginning, middle and end of one of my paintings. I ask that you please try very hard to put your art critic to sleep for this experiment. I invite you to a time of quiet reflection while you view them and listen to piano improv from Andrea.

What might it be like to open to more of your own creative expression? What wants to be expressed? What creative forms have you used in the past that might be calling to you to try again?

Musical Meditation Andrea Rackl

On Music During the Pandemic 2020 – Andrea Rackl

I think music is a pretty darn powerful medium, but what I've been specifically pondering is its superpowers during the Covid-19 pandemic. For my students and me, those superpowers fall into two clear categories.

The first is the category you might expect: Music's ability to touch us on a deep emotional level.

While words are a powerful tool for processing and expressing our thoughts and feelings, music can go to a place within us where words don't reach. (Maybe that's why I struggled to figure out what I wanted to say today.) *Listening* to music can move us to tears or give us a great energy boost, even if we can't really describe why. *Playing* music is an even more powerful emotional experience, but *creating* music I find the most profound of all.

To improvise, one must be completely focused in the moment. I find it be an incredible practice of mindfulness. To be in the process of creating music, one's mind and heart and attention are totally engaged. I have to be willing to give into wherever the music and feelings want to go. If I try to control it, it fizzles out or becomes contrived. When I'm on my own, improvisation is a powerful personal tool for processing my feelings. And when I improvise for a group, like I do at BUF, I'm attempting to be a conduit for group processing. I try to tune into what we are experiencing together and find sound for those experiences.

Improvisation is the tool that can eventually lead compositions. Composition is the process of editing an improvisation into a permanent form that can be written down and replicated. My thirteen-year-old student Liam decided to compose a song about his experiences during the pandemic. His take was to write a heartfelt-sounding pop song making fun of the situation we find ourselves in. It starts like this: (demo opening)

And 16-year-old Sophia is writing a very serious song about missing a significant chunk of her high school career. She misses her friends dearly and is grieving all the social events that didn't happen this year. The song expresses her feelings of uncertainty and yet hopefulness because of the companionship of a close friend. Here's the end of her song: (Play end clip)

The second and more unexpected superpower I've seen music take on during the pandemic has been its ability to give us the experience of normalcy.

For most people, the last few months has been a time of figuring out a very different way of life. There have been so many unknowns, and those unknowns keep changing. When kids were let out of school, it turned their world upside down. Everything was uncertain - How long? Do we have schoolwork? Will we see our teachers? When can we be with our friends again? Hey, is it summer break already?! Throughout all this time, our piano lessons continued every week like usual. Sure, we are fully online for now, but our routine hasn't changed. For most of my students, this was the **ONLY** thing that remained pretty much the same throughout this year. They still meet their mentor every week. They still practice every day. They still gather every month for group lessons, albeit on Zoom. There are still clear expectations of them, which haven't changed. So, their piano lessons and their practice became a stronghold of the "Known." Something they can rely on. One thing that doesn't change.

During the pandemic I've been attempting to remodel an old home we recently purchased, homeschool the new 11-year-old triplets in my life, nurse a broken leg, and navigate all sorts of new technology to make piano lessons and things at BUF run smoothly. That's a lot of **NEW** which makes me question my abilities, but when I sit down to play the piano, I remember who I am. Making music is me. It's what I do.

So, as the caterpillar from Alice in Wonderland would say: Who are you? What creates normalcy for you? What tools do you have for processing deep unnamable feelings? What practices do you have that cultivate mindfulness, being fully present? Perhaps some these ideas about the arts today will help you to remember.

Dance/Improv

[Pam described how, now, in our own homes, we might respond to the physical dance prompts that she was about to give us—akin to what we saw earlier on the video—while Andrea played, improvisationally.]

We dance – write, draw, sing, play music...

Inspirations could include:

LANGUAGE:

Carrie's language:

"I feel pressed and creased"

VISUAL ART:

Steffany's image

MUSIC:

Andrea's piano improvisation

OTHER MOVEMENT:

Me moving? Others moving?

SELF:

Whatever you are experiencing

On Our Own? Paul

Jane and Ben and I walked to Elizabeth Park yesterday to join up with neighbors to walk together to the downtown park to the protest. Among the many feelings that I felt, then, even as we were approaching the first park was this: Ah, so this is what it feels like to be around people! I forgot what that was like! I'd been to the grocery store and on a few errands over the past couple of months, and there are lots of people walking and biking through the neighborhood. But we're crossing the street to avoid one another. And even at Costco it's not an experience of bustle, but more like looking down dreamily on this strange world. A real sense of disconnection even when I am within six feet of others.

So, although I'm *less* isolated than many (I live in a small house with my wife and son), and even though I'm an introvert, I miss the energy, the mass, the music, and the choreography of proximate human bodies. My primary form of artistic expression is writing, and I'll talk about that in a second, but first, in regard to the energy, the mass, the music, and the choreography of proximate human bodies, I'll note that my second most favorite form of artistic expression—one that I deeply miss—is basketball. I am not a *good* basketball player. *Certainly not an artist* in the sense of graceful movement and fine motor control. But yes, in the sense we've been talking about today, basketball requires me to completely move out of my head and respond *only* to the moment. Basketball is simultaneously improvisational and very predictable in its patterns of action and response. When I move one way, it's entirely predictable how my teammates will respond, and how my opponents will respond. It may sound strange because there are elbows flying everywhere, but for me there's a sense of solace in this ritual with its loose, but clear, rules. For 999 milliseconds out of a thousand, we all know what's going to happen, but then someone throws in an unexpected twist, or makes a tiny mistake, or the ball takes an unexpected bounce, and then, up from the solace, rises adventure.

I'd like to take a moment to pay tribute now to a basketball buddy who died last month, Jim Murfeld. Jim was about ten years older than me and played like he was twenty years younger than me. He was great to have as a teammate, but even more fun to battle as a competitor. Jim stayed on the court through three years of cancer and though he readily acknowledged that he wasn't going to be around much longer, I'm very sad to not have had the opportunity for all of us, black and white and brown, short and tall, young and old, fast and slow, to have had an opportunity to get together to honor his relentless good cheer and ferocious rebounding. So I lift a ball now to Jim.

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Basketball is like improv, in this way: In improv the first rule is to accept reality. Whatever the other person does becomes our reality, and then it becomes our role to respond with a "yes, and..." A fascist is elected to the White House. "Yes, and..." Environmental protections are rolled back. Yes, and...this is real, and in the next moment I have the opportunity to respond. A novel coronavirus plagues the world. Yes, and...we withdraw from the World Health Organization. Yes, and... in the next moment I am going to respond. Another Black man is murdered by police. Yes, and I am going to respond. With practice our responses become more intuitive and fluid. With physical, emotional, and spiritual practice,

our responses become more intuitive, and fluid. And in fluidity, there is solace. And in fluidity, there is power.

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But mostly I write. I find writing sermons to be a terrific intellectual, emotional, and ethical challenge: to be able to express something in my own voice that is timely and relevant and authentic. To craft a Sunday services is definitely is not a solo activity. I'm very grateful to the musicians and additional speakers, tech people, ushers, greeters, those who prepare the orders of service and clean the sanctuary. But even when I write for a less intricately woven service, or write for the newsletter, it is not a solo activity, because, hopefully, it is a dance, a call and response, with each of you, and with the congregation as a whole.

And finally, I have another writing outlet: writing fiction. I honor Carrie's approach to journaling, but sometimes healing can come from describing worlds that don't yet exist. And it can be helpful for me to obscure a painful personal story just enough that I can get an outside perspective on it. I'll conclude by noting that I consider all that I write to be akin to "essay." In this sense: the root of the word, essay, is "to try"... not "to be finished."

We are not on our own. Earth forms and enfolds us. Art enriches us. Community depends on us. We are connected to and shaped by all that we do and experience and create. So I invite you to create with me, over the next couple of weeks, to mark the beginning of summer. Not this coming Saturday, but the next, I invite you to stop by BUF for a moment some time between the hours of ten and two. That should be enough that there will only be a few of us there at a time. Bring a flower, or several, to place on a large sheet that will, all together, take the shape of a mandala. This will form the centerpiece of our service the next morning, which will end at Whatcom Creek where, in acknowledgement of the majesty of transience, I'll tip the mandala into the creek.

If you happen to be anywhere along the creek, south of Dupont Street, around 11:30, with masks and keeping a safe distance from one another, you'll be able to quietly witness a rich symbol of the fluidity of nature and humanity.

If you can't bring a flower on Saturday, please send me a picture of your own flowers, or, over the next couple of weeks, create a simple mandala your own and send me a picture. You'll see a few examples in just a minute.

Intro Collection

Let's consider for a moment how generosity is like art. Generosity is certainly a form of self-expression, a form of stretching ourselves, and generosity can be a way of bringing what begins as an intangible notion into real form.

May this community be a workshop in which we create a culture of generosity. Please contribute to this vision as you are able. Checks can be written to BUF and sent to our office on Ellsworth Street. Contributions may also be made on your phone with the "Give+" app, or at buf.org via Visa or Mastercard. Thank you so much for being a part of this humble creation.

Offertory

Song

Blue Boat Home

Closing Words

After the postlude please stay for a few minutes to share with one another in small groups. Zoom will break us up at random and I invite you not just to chat, but to share together your reflections on this question:

Since art shapes who we are, how does the art that we experience, and the art that we create, shape and expand our connections with one another? [repeat]

Circle Round

Postlude