

fire

for dr. eddy machtinger

what a thing
to live with HIV,
violence and neglect,
fueling fires of trauma,
silent and screaming,
telling stories we must hear,
we must heal.
let's speak for rose,
lured from safety, murdered by her husband.
let's speak for pebbles,
in and out of juvenile foster homes,
mother of HIV free baby,
could not find life within her control,
no one like her to find support,
to take her pills.
lifelong trauma
(abusive partners, depression, suicide, PTSD,
murder, homelessness, addiction)
leaves women needing
something more than medicine—
a model of care that says
body, mind, heart, spirit,
there's room for you too.
what a thing
to live with HIV,
violence and neglect
fueling fires of trauma,
silent and screaming,
now being heard,
being helped,
seeing how fire
makes light,
make life
more healed,
more whole.

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grounded

for dr. leigh kimberg

be like the redwoods
rooted to the earth and
one another's strength
as we work the work of healers,
finding the broken branches
trauma leaves in relationships,
communities, societies, and holds
out of dark forests, into light.
we must remember our experiences
build our brains, bodies, behaviors.
nature and nurture are parents
holding every child's hands.
oh, how differently we're grown—
safe stable nurturing lives or
toxic stress. remember
the classroom experiment
growing seeds?
one in complete dark.
one in harsh light.
one without water.
one with complete balance.
remember those stages of flourishing?
and death? adversity adds up,
affects not just at seed level but
every stage of grounding,
becoming, being adult.
it carries through generations,
needs resilience,
healthy relationships,
connectedness,
communities responsible for rooting us
to one another's strength like the redwoods
accustomed to fires flashing through.
we too need to make our nature recovery,
responsiveness, safety, collaboration, trusting time,
what pulls us together not apart,
what welcomes new growth—
forests of contained, coping, calm,
compassionately rooted care.

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walking toward right now

for gina, naina, and linda

because someone was bad to you, you became a bad girl looking for attention, wanting someone to hold you on their lap and say, “what’s wrong?” wanting someone to see your self-taught intelligence beyond encyclopedia A-Z, life lived surviving addiction, abuse, getting clean, eventually an april fool’s day phone call speaking too much truth, then a nurse’s hand touching you deeper than skin, then a life of thriving, speaking up, speaking for, building yourself from brokenness, seeing where girls like you need the friend you never had.

because you were told women like you could not be cared for here without dirtying and destroying, you went across town, then came across the ocean, keeping your status undisclosed, working politics while the personal worked you into deciding to see a doctor who spun a cell, offered a prescription your biology degree just couldn’t understand until a person living with HIV tells you it’s going to be okay, so you choose the non-medical way to treat yourself and lead you to a positive women’s network advocating for policy change, for seeing how violence and trauma need attention, how your life was not so different from those you advocated for.

because you know your story begins before your birth, you came into this world blindfolded to love, to knowing the sweetness of a peach, and settling for a man your mother said was good, then got pregnant though wanted to not be so tied, then diagnosis of HIV and a choice from the faces of people who hurt your mother, your mother’s mothers, and so you walked out, gave birth not just to a son, but in the midst of your best friend’s death, gave birth to a transformation, to wanting to leave a legacy, to be more resilient than the life from which you came, wanting to live, to heal, to become a healer of all the secrets pushed into the closet of your hurt then spilled into the room which you leave holding the most important thing—the heart birthed from your strength.

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to become a healing organization

arise.
find partnership.
give access.
offer early intervention.
educate.
care.
remove risk of retraumatization.
investigate treatment options.
work as a group, a family.
offer autonomy.
improve safety and empowerment.
put principles into practice.
work toward recovery.
remember to treat the symptom as well as the people.
support. study. teach.
sustain. train. practice.
share language.
speak empathy.
make meaning of the past.
practice compassion and dependability,
cultural humility and responsiveness.
be a refuge, an advocate, a strong voice.
be the blind therapist who knows how to see.
be the professional who asks what's wrong.
make the commitment to change.

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gifting change
for linda scruggs

hear community and be educated
about what courses of action
want to be disclosed.
know what seat you sit in.
do what you can that's not
necessarily in procedures or policy
but in a sense of urgency.
show change is needed, necessary,
an important opportunity.
be intentional. choose the coalition
that will direct, support, influence,
work as a team. remember:
learners are always learning.
develop a vision connecting
short term with long,
morals with purpose,
communicate clearly, simply.
explain affects, effects,
to individuals, groups.
remove potential barriers.
take risks. offer reward.
make achievable goals.
working toward win-win makes
everyone feel like a champion.
and no matter what, don't give up.
thank the past for all the lessons.
tell the future you're ready.
talk about progress. make it stick.
be okay with what doesn't move.
you're in it for the long haul.
you're making smart goals.
you're not gifting the sweetness of
a bar of chocolate disguised as a million bucks.
you're gifting change.

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