



BEYOND THE BUBBLE BATH

There is a simple and always available answer to lightening up the mood, releasing tension, or grey clouds above our heads: a sense of humour. Instead of asking, "What is wrong with me?", try replacing it with "What's right with me?" and see how that shifts your attention and redirects your thoughts. Humour is one of those tools that people hardly ever talk about—similar to crying, which is perceived as a sign of weakness rather than a tool for healing. Both laughter and crying are of crucial importance when it comes to "feeling your feelings". So... have a laugh! Or a good cry <3

TRAUMA TALK

Talking mental health with the Founder of Whole Hearts Matter
Out-of-Trauma Coach Dominika Kosowska, BA, MA

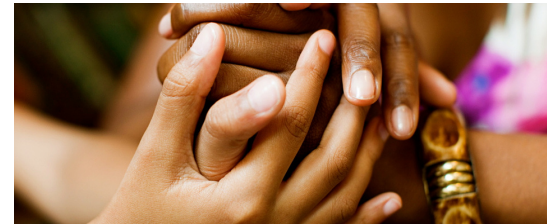
Having lived through and now healing from various traumatic life events, Dominika Kosowska brings her own experiences and a rather different approach to her work as a trauma coach and peer support professional through WholeHeartsMatter.com. Suggestive of her open-minded approach to her clients and their needs, Dominika does not schedule appointments in 60- or 90- minute increments but in 15-minute slots: to her, clients should not be bound by arbitrary industry standards. Instead, they can work with her for two or even three hours instead of being told, "Your time is up."

PM: How do you define trauma, and what kinds of trauma exist?

DK: Paraphrasing Gabor Maté's words, the word "trauma" comes from the Greek word for "wound", but it's not just a physical wound – like a broken bone – but it is a psychic wound that disconnects us from ourselves, from our feelings of joy, excitement, pleasure and playfulness. It's not just what happened to us but what didn't happen: children who were not given enough love, affection or attention but treated like a nuisance, and a button-pusher, and there is that lack of being seen and validated. This is also deeply damaging.

Not everything that people think is "traumatizing" has to be traumatizing. A divorce or personal loss can be a traumatizing experience for children and adults if there is no support for them, but if they have support from the very first or early on, those experiences do not have to cause traumas.

In the literature, we often see the terms "big T" and "small t" traumas, such as a major car accident versus the loss of a job, just to compare two examples. This invalidates one type of trauma over another while in truth every trauma has a huge impact on a person's life, and every type requires support and help to be processed. It is crucial to acknowledge the types of traumas that exist: acute, chronic, developmental, generational, historical, racial, relational, war, vicarious, secondary, re-traumatization and complex trauma, to name a few. It is not as simple as "big T" and "small t" trauma; it is important to stress that any event can be traumatic to an individual who does not have community support, resources and understanding people in their close circles—generally people they trust and feel safe with.



THE 3Ls OF HOLDING SPACE: Love, Leadership and Liberation

What is Holding Space? When a person supports someone else (or themselves) in a way that is compassionate and non-directive.

It is to show up for another without trying to judge, to fix, to shame or blame, or to control the outcome. When we merely witness and accept what is happening, there is so much space for love, transformation, peace, and good outcomes. How can we do this more, and do this better? Stay tuned for future articles in this newsletter!

by Emily Gillies



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TO STRIVE FOR

- Mutual respect
- Encouragement
- Honest communication
- Supporting each other
- Apologizing to each other
- Setting and honoring boundaries
- Common goals
- Making time for each other
- Not judging and criticizing
- Learning more about each other
- Choosing not to keep score
- Playfulness
- Openness
- Commitment
- Empathy

EBBS & FLOWS

REALationships & TWOgetherness

"I just don't know why I attract this kind of people." (-> red list). Often, the issue is not the "Why?" but rather "What in me makes me stay?" When asked, "When did you know that you were with the "wrong person", going against your intuition?" The response usually is, "Oh, I know exactly!. I knew very early on we were not right for each other." Hmmm.... What if I challenged you and said that when our needs for love and affection are not being met in childhood, our intuition radar is off and does not quite recognize what is right or wrong for our hearts... or we simply do not listen but rather second guess ourselves and doubt our judgement. What if that judgement comes from not being heard, seen or validated when we were children? What if we have an attachment wound that we are not aware of? (cont. in Issue #2)

by Dominika Kosowska

TO RUN FROM

- Humiliation and control
- Jealousy/possessiveness
- Invalidating
- Withholding affection
- Manipulation
- Pressure for sex
- Enmeshment
- Lies, hiding, half-truths
- Criticism
- Inconsistency
- Chaos
- Does not feel safe
- Lacks empathy
- Anger, blame, guilt
- Mind-reading

HEART WORK

children are people too

Earlier this year, my 6-year-old son came home from school for the umpteenth time not having eaten any of the vegetables in his lunch. Irritated by this, I remarked, "You ate your sweet lunch treat but not the veggies even though I told you not to!" "But they didn't taste good," he pleaded. My response? I sent him to his room and he slammed the door. Flying into a rage, I forced my way into his room, grabbed him by the arm and spanked him, ultimately, for not wanting to eat bland, unpalatable carrots and cucumbers. Realizing I had not only overstepped my bounds but lost ALL control of the situation, I felt sick. He stood there seething in frustration and sadness having done nothing wrong. If a friend had come over for supper and not eaten something that tasted awful, I'd have politely apologized. With my son, I jumped down his throat.

Modern parenting is often like this: parents talking down to their children, or not talking but mindlessly scrolling social media. When we don't take the time to put ourselves in their shoes, whether in regard to lunch choices, where to go on a Saturday afternoon or what clothing to wear, we infantilize our children and assume they lack the ability to decide or have any agency in their lives. Author Alfie Kohn, who has written extensively on healthy parenting and how to rethink punishment and rewards with children, says that "... with each of the thousand-and-one problems that present themselves in family life, our choice is between controlling and teaching, between creating an atmosphere of distrust and one of trust, between setting an example of power and helping children to learn responsibility, between quick-fix parenting and the kind that's focused on long-term goals."

Kohn affirms that punishments (or rewards) don't help: if we're more interested in our children's behaviours or values than in achievements, we miss the point of developing a sense of commitment in our children to seeing something through to completion, to treating others with self-same respect, and having a sense that their choices matter, not whether they've done exactly what they were told.

The next time you think your child needs a timeout, perhaps what s/he really needs is a hug or a few gentle words. Don't demand, "Why did you do that?" but acknowledge feelings: "You hit your brother and made him cry. What happened that made you so angry? Do you want to talk about it?"

Even as adults, we often simply need a shoulder to cry on in times of need, not criticism for self-destructive or hurtful actions. Children, like adults, seek validation for their feelings and rarely act out when given a chance to voice the hurt or frustration inside them.

In the end, I begged my son to forgive me. His face was raw with emotion, tears filled his little blue eyes, his little fists clenched. But he gave me a big hug back and said, "I forgive you, Dad."

That moment changed me forever. I'm still nowhere near the parent I want to be, but the relationship I have with him has improved immeasurably since then. I'm gentler, more patient and I try to always keep the big picture in focus. Children are people; we need to develop and deepen our relationship with them, not bark orders at them like dogs and demand their perfect obedience.

A letter from a Father to his Son

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"BEING HEARD IS SO CLOSE TO BEING LOVED THAT FOR THE AVERAGE PERSON THEY ARE ALMOST INDISTINGUISHABLE."
- DAVID AUGSBERGER

PM: Society often oversimplifies complex ideas, so what kinds of misconceptions exist about trauma?

DK: Driving on Saskatchewan roads is not "trauma." People overuse this term to describe anything that is annoying, frustrating, inconvenient, angering, disappointing, etc. This takes away the significance and severity of the word "trauma" and what the word actually means. Traumatic events breach the attachments of family, friendship, love, and community; they shatter the construction of the self that is formed and sustained in relation to others; they undermine the belief system that give meaning to human experience; they violate the victim's faith in a natural or divine order and throw the victim into a state of existential crisis, commonly (mis)diagnosed as depression.

PM: How does your counselling and peer support service, WholeHeartsMatter.com, address the underlying causes of trauma with your clients?

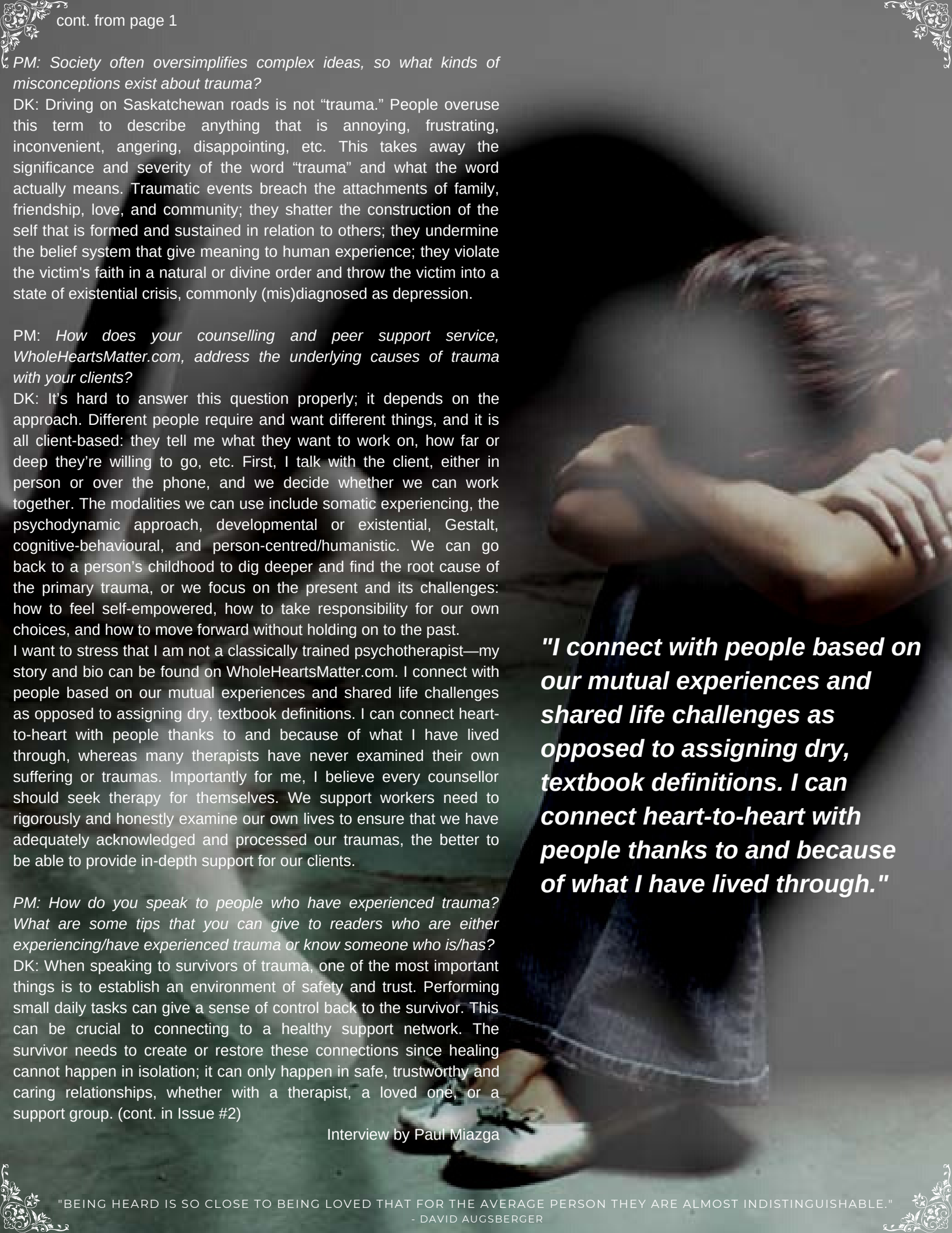
DK: It's hard to answer this question properly; it depends on the approach. Different people require and want different things, and it is all client-based: they tell me what they want to work on, how far or deep they're willing to go, etc. First, I talk with the client, either in person or over the phone, and we decide whether we can work together. The modalities we can use include somatic experiencing, the psychodynamic approach, developmental or existential, Gestalt, cognitive-behavioural, and person-centred/humanistic. We can go back to a person's childhood to dig deeper and find the root cause of the primary trauma, or we focus on the present and its challenges: how to feel self-empowered, how to take responsibility for our own choices, and how to move forward without holding on to the past.

I want to stress that I am not a classically trained psychotherapist—my story and bio can be found on WholeHeartsMatter.com. I connect with people based on our mutual experiences and shared life challenges as opposed to assigning dry, textbook definitions. I can connect heart-to-heart with people thanks to and because of what I have lived through, whereas many therapists have never examined their own suffering or traumas. Importantly for me, I believe every counsellor should seek therapy for themselves. We support workers need to rigorously and honestly examine our own lives to ensure that we have adequately acknowledged and processed our traumas, the better to be able to provide in-depth support for our clients.

PM: How do you speak to people who have experienced trauma? What are some tips that you can give to readers who are either experiencing/have experienced trauma or know someone who is/has?

DK: When speaking to survivors of trauma, one of the most important things is to establish an environment of safety and trust. Performing small daily tasks can give a sense of control back to the survivor. This can be crucial to connecting to a healthy support network. The survivor needs to create or restore these connections since healing cannot happen in isolation; it can only happen in safe, trustworthy and caring relationships, whether with a therapist, a loved one, or a support group. (cont. in Issue #2)

Interview by Paul Miazga



"I connect with people based on our mutual experiences and shared life challenges as opposed to assigning dry, textbook definitions. I can connect heart-to-heart with people thanks to and because of what I have lived through."

Resmaa Menakem in his book on Racialized Trauma writes: *"We humans want to belong. We experience belonging – or the lack of it – in our bodies. We experience it deeply. When we belong, we feel that our life has some value and meaning."* As an immigrant myself, I have gained firsthand knowledge, understanding, experiences and feelings of "longing for belonging."

THOUGHT EXPANDER



Racism is not a foreign concept to me because despite not being recognized as a "visible minority", I have been a target of many hurtful comments, beliefs and misconceptions. "Anti-racism" is not only attending workshops and cultural events, but rather meeting with people, having cultural conversations, asking questions and getting to know people from Indigenous nations and other countries. By becoming involved and immersed in others' culture, one helps to build something bigger than oneself and that needs to be reflected in what one does and how one treats and responds to other people, i.e. shows respect, appreciation and deference. Let's use employment as an example. Three different employment counsellors and a government worker, advised and encouraged me to changing my name to sound "more Canadian."

This type of comment has an immediate potential to make a person feel less than. Despite the credentials, professional experiences and a very unique set of skills, I found it to be a harsh truth - being minimized and devalued to pretty much nothing besides "a foreign sounding" name. It is important to remember that every person with Canadian citizenship is indeed an immigrant, a refugee or a descendant of one. It is crucial to understand that "a movement" or "a strategy" is not culture! Those "movements" do not entail or reflect ideas, philosophies, convictions, principals, laws, rituals, habits, celebrations, etc. Culture creates a sense of belonging, which every human is designed to desire. No movement or strategy can replace that. I moved to Canada eight years ago and am yet to figure out what Canadian culture is, as it is very obvious to a fresh eye that there is none, per se. Not having deep roots is like being an air plant - growing in shallow layer of soil, prone to breakages and falling out, not requiring much nurturing and caring. That sounds very sad, yet the culture that has been on this land from the very beginning - Indigenous - is becoming a thing of the past. Anthropologist, author and educator Angeles Arrien says that *"the argument that native people are not members of their own nations has long been used as a rationalization for the denial of native rights to land, water, and livelihood [...] There have been standing policies in this hemisphere that assert that native people are not legally human beings because they do not possess a status as recognized nationalities, and therefore have no rights whatsoever."*

by Dominika Kosowska

YOUTUBE: Cultural Despair/Systematic Systems by David Freeman, Luthier: timelessinstruments.com



SUNNY SIDE UP

What Physically Stands in the Way of Your Greatness?

"Every man takes the limits of his own field of vision for the limits of the world." - Arthur Schopenhauer

During a conversation with my partner over coffee the other morning, she asked me what physically was standing in my way. What was preventing me from making headway with some projects I've been talking about? My answer probably differs little from those who also consider their own mental blocks. The reality is, there are no physical limits to something that is entirely in our head. If we view the world as having limits instead of possibilities, we are already setting external barriers to the (largely) untapped potential of the human mind. But going deeper than that, my partner helped reveal to me something that hadn't dawned on me before: if I define the end goal of my projects in monetary terms or in terms of popular success, then I've put my focus on the destination as opposed to the journey, for appreciating new skills acquired and the sense of accomplishment that comes with finishing something for its own sake. If my dreams remain mired by others' definitions of success, I will always be let down and see barriers every step of the way. The coffee hadn't had time to turn cold before I realized how subtle this sense of accomplishment can be. What my partner said in speaking of her own experience was that if she

she learned something tangible in putting together a pitch to business X, Y or Z, regardless of the outcome, there's reason to celebrate; that personal growth, in and of itself, is a measure of success—not whether I got someone to sign a contract for my services. There's no antidote for pessimism other than to go for a walk, get out of your head space, do the opposite like the character George Costanza once did in an episode of Seinfeld. The results may very well surprise you enough to make you smile or even laugh.

by Paul Miazga

K-9 AT HOME

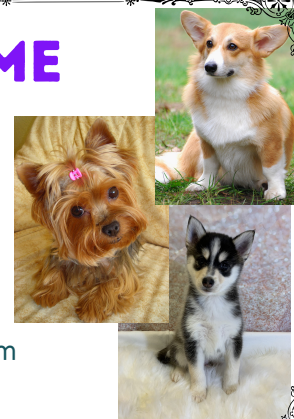
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"BEING HEARD IS SO CLOSE TO BEING LOVED THAT FOR THE AVERAGE PERSON THEY ARE ALMOST INDISTINGUISHABLE."

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