
BSTTW TEEN NEWS

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Permanent Good Health

By: Michael Appleman, CEO

The six essentials of life are a very important part of good health and happiness. Those choices determine the lifestyle you have chosen for yourself. Even though you are burned does not stop you from having control of your health and happiness. Some issues medically you cannot control 100% but a large part of your recovery and future depends on your self esteem, emotions and positive thoughts.

The six essentials of life are as follows:

1. What do you eat?
2. What do you drink?
3. How do you exercise?
4. How do you rest?
5. What do you breathe?
6. What do you think?

Your doctor can help you make the healthy choices in the six essentials. However, it is always your choice. While you can begin your journey to good health with any of the six essentials, it is very important that you understand that improving your self-esteem is an essential ingredient in the process. Unless you feel good about yourself, all of your other efforts may be in vain.

GENESIS

By: Richard Baayeh (Iron)

Let me commence my story with the very beginning of my life. I was told and I believed that I was born on a Sunday, at one o'clock at noon. It was said that the clouds began to gather, thunder and strike. I cried out loudly. My presence was acknowledged by my parents and others around at that time. I was born Richard Kwesi Kootibe Baayeh, in the remote areas of the Northern Region of Ghana, the son of Patrick and Florence Baayeh.

I grew up so quickly and developed a deep love for athletics, which I later realized I was great at. I discovered this talent in Bishop Herman College (BIHECO) with the aid of my school coach. Soon I reached the athletic dream, which I worked hard to bring

hope and meaning to. An important part of that dream was to become a world champion some day. By the end of my second year in BIHECO, for short time, I had become the school, zonal, and the regional champion in the 100 and 200 meter

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A FAMILY AROUND THE

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aces as well as the discuss throw. Before I graduated from Bishop Herman College I had become the National junior champion in the discuss throw and was running 100m in 10 minutes and 11seconds and the 200meters in 20 minutes and 21seconds respectively. At 21 the future was bright for me and my ambitious dreams of becoming a world champion was definitely in reach. I wanted to be like Carl Lewis, Michael Johnson, Maurice Green, Donovan Bailey, and Frankie Fredricks.

Time passed and it was early October 2000. The rains had stopped and the dry season had begun setting in. Every year in the dry season, the town of Koforidua in the eastern region of Ghana, where I lived experiences water shortages, and as such preparations were being made to contain the situation. It was in view of this that my mum, whom I love very much and would gladly do anything for, asked me to mend and paint her licking barrel for her. But when she asked me to mend and paint her licking barrel, little did she know that it would turn out to be a tragedy, one that would change my life.

On the 14th of November, I decided to honor my mum's request. The responsibility of painting barrels has been mine since time immemorial. On that fateful day I had finished melting and mixing the coal tar with petrol which was a little less than a liter. I have taken it away from the fire and had left it to cool for an hour. Now the temperature was down and I didn't anticipate any unexpected contingencies. I had started painting and was almost halfway through the painting when suddenly and unexpectedly, I heard "whoop!" the coal-tar (Bitumen) which was not on fire and no where near the fire caught flames. Instantly I quickly redrew my hand and face but no matter how hard I tried luck seems to have run out of my side as I slipped and fell. Still desperate to escape unhurt, I struggled from the ground but as hard as I tried it all seemed fate and circumstances had all combined against me as my leg kicked the container with the coal-tar in the process and the whole content poured on my legs. Aaaah! What a pain it was. During this period it was as though time never existed. I felt as if I never existed. It was like the world never existed. Groaning

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with pain and terror, I managed and made my way to the tap which mercifully was flowing. At the tap I painfully extinguished the flames that had caught my shorts and the heated coal tar that stuck my pitiful flesh. I didn't know why but I tried to pray but as hard as I tried I couldn't. After a long struggle, "God have mercy" was all I could say.

Running from the spot of the accident to the tap was enough to cause damage to my already miserable skin. The chocolate layer of my inner thigh had peeled off leaving a horrifying white layer with greenish blood vessels and veins neatly woven right beneath the white layer around my thigh. It was an artistic masterpiece of God. Amazing wonderful nature of God was at it's best . It was a stunningly beautiful work of aesthetic art by the all-knowing eternal merciful father in Heaven. A blend of beauty and pity "God is wonderful". Even in the midst of this unfortunate devastating situation I found myself, I still gave credit to God because it was due. So I did pitifully but, without regret because I knew in the horrendous journey towards recovery I am going to need him for sustenance. I got frozen at the spot, I stood up with a feeling of trembling sensation in my knees. As I stood there trembling pitifully, the thought of a possibility that I may never be able to run again engulfed my mind. I had big dreams. Dreams of growing up to like Donovan Bailey, Maurice Green, Michael Johnson and Frank Fredrick. My grandmother had also predicted before her death that I was going to be an outstanding athlete when I grow. My late grandmother's prediction and wish was on course of coming to light and her soul would have had a perfect, sound and everlasting peace. But how? How am I to make it all happen? Rage and frustration blurred my vision. My heart was filled with hate for life, because without athletics there was no life for me. As I stood there trembling like an injured bird, I felt an agony of pain in my heart. It was so painful that I shut my eyes; I gulped with hurt and disappointment as agony of despair begun to fill my entire body.

When I came back to myself, or when I was restored to the land of the living from the

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wonderland, or which ever it was, I found myself surrounded by neighbors ready to help me. While many assisted, others stared at me in shock and fear. The mood of the atmosphere had changed into a pitiful outlook. By this time, my world was shading down into darkness. The good neighbors of mine tried to help me by cutting the remains of my jeans shorts with a pair of scissors. At this moment in time, there seems to be fire burning in my throat which was spreading very fast through to my chest. I was getting terrified I will die as a result of shortage of fluid in my system as my legs were discharging some colorless fluid. A bottle of iced water was made available which I gulped greedily like a mad dog before seconds and was asking for more. My legs looked like I have been playing in the mud while my thighs looked as white as snow. Pitifully enough, the incidence took place in the absence of my dear mum. Then suddenly there's a shock moan behind me. It's my mum. She looks at me with wide starring eyes. The way my mum stared at me from the back, I wondered what other injuries I have.

She even frightened me to death the way she coiled her hands on her head as if I was dead. She even made me think that it was over for me. "If only I had known this will happen I wouldn't have asked him to do it" She laments bitterly. I have every reason to be loyal and obedient to her. I remember as vivid as memories of yesterday when she used to carry me at her back with gallons of "Akpeteshie"(palm wine) then she would walk great distances climbing mountains and stuff like that. She walked, and walked until the sole of her foot developed horrible and painful blisters. I became guilt-ridden because I thought I was smart enough to have escaped unhurt. How could it happen? Why me at this point in time in my life? Is that a price I pay for being obedient? Is this the price good people like me pay for being respectful? My mind, in that confused state was jammed with questions that I couldn't really figure out the answers. Why does it have to happen this way? But that's a real loser's attitude. But I knew I have never been a loser, neither do I expect to become one. Not now, not tomorrow, and not ever. After all I chose to do it because it was right.

As I sat in the taxi, I started thinking I was never going to see my father. I could die any moment without getting the opportunity to say goodbye to my father. To tell him how much I love him. He was away on trek. "Don't worry, I will get you there soon", says the driver. In this state of uncertainty nothing looks soon enough for me. The roads were narrow, rough and jammed with cars. Now the blinding heat of the sun burning me is worsening my predicament. Maneuvering was virtually impossible. We were stuck. Now the sun was scorching and I felt like my body was burning in eternal fire. The pain was getting worse. I try to speak, but when I speak, nothing happens. I became confused. What has burns got to do with my speech? But my voice wasn't working. Then I realized something terrible was wrong. My mum stared at me bitterly, while eyes were welled with tears. I thought hitting the dashboard was going to solve my problems. My mum tried to calm me down but it didn't work. She thinks I'm delirious. Again it was as if there was fire in my throat, while my heart started to beat faster and harder. I have to put that fire which was burning in my throat out now. I was beginning to feel giddy. I was dying from great thirst but the lamentable fact was that I couldn't speak. I point painfully to my mum. As she gives me the water I gulped greedily. I must have more but I feel a little better. But still, I'm thirsty. Now I was sure I would get to the hospital alive no matter what. But how soon, I never knew. The pain was getting terribly worse again. But I must fight it.

Eventually, we were there, the hospital at last! They got me out of the taxi and lifted me upon a wheel stretcher. I moan with pain, fear, and regret, while crowd of other patients at the OPD kept gawping at me.

Then suddenly there was a look of terror in my eyes. "Don't cry my brother", said one of the nurses. "You are going to be alright", she said again but, this time in a rather gentle and kind voice. "Don't cry, we're going to take very good care of you".

The compassion in the little nurse voice for a moment eased my pain. I began asking myself thoughtfully. Yet still in the blend of painful guilt and

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sorrow, I wasn't quiet sure if I really deserve such sympathy and pity from this nurse. She looked rather pretty and determined in her mid-twenties. I thought that I knew better and was much smarter I shouldn't have allowed myself to be a victim of such a dream shattering horrible accident. This was my pre-conceived idea and this was exactly the source of my guilt. I just couldn't forgive myself. But I had forgotten that life is full of uncertainties and unpredictable circumstances and that it's the unexpected that happen. "Life is full of ironies". I refused to give up and continued to torture myself. I felt resentful that I have lost control of my life.

Thoughts of my dreams, dreams of growing up to become a world class athlete were flashing my mind over and over again making me want to give up on hope for the future. My dreams, reminds me of my grandmother. It was her wishes that I grow up to become a great athlete. I have to get out and build my dreams for the sake of my grandmother, mankind and to the glory of God in whom I have absolute trust. Now I didn't want to think that this is the end of my dreams as I knew I would get out of this mess, run again and even soar like an eagle.

"Mum do you think I can run again when all this is over?" I asked. "Yes my son, the lord will course you to run even faster than you used to".

As to how far this is true, time will tell. Many sedatives were shot into my body to calm me was so much that it almost rendered the drugs ineffective. It was casualty at the Koforidua Central Hospital. There's a sharp piercing pain in my arm as they hook me on an intravenous. I watched with eyes that really didn't see, the intravenous tube that was hooked to my arm and into my vein, my eyes were fixed upon the rubber sachet with the pale yellow liquid as it's contents that seemed more water than anything else, so quickly it was depleting. I couldn't believe it. I thought it was suppose to just trickle into my arm. It was running out very quickly too, so quickly it beats my imagination. I was getting scared. Something was terribly wrong but, I didn't know what. At that point in time, nothing was safe or was certain either.

Within a period of thirty minutes I had taken nine of the big sachet. The nerves were calming down and I could feel the sedatives taking control. I remained stable but out of focus. My physical being was present among the living but spiritually; I was far from the living. Since I was out of focus, I could not see.

But, I heard different voices. I see human beings in the form of gigantic shadows. I heard my mum's voice. That was it. My mum's voice was the last thing I heard and could remember.

A Story of Hope

By: Carmella Hayes

My family and I moved from New York to a Manchester, a little town in New Jersey, which is near the ocean's shore. I remember that fateful night back in December 1970. We all do. There had been a gas leak that ignited, an explosion, then our house engulfed in flames. My mother was at her friend's house that night when she heard over her friend's short-wave radio, her friend worked for the rescue squad, that there was a house fire. Mom said she just knew it was her house. My mother had just told her friend that she thought she smelled gas in the house. Mom's friend was just about to pick up the phone when it rang. She answered it and found out that the fire was at our house. My mother went running down the road to find her house ablaze. "My babies!!" She cried. Father, was unable to save us and he jumped out of the second story window (he survived). I was badly burned and was hele-ported to Shriners' Burn Center in Boston, Massachusetts.

The next day, all our friends and the whole town read about the fire in the local newspapers. They got a picture of my little brother, with burns all over his little body and published it in the newspapers. My eldest brother, who was 7 at the time, escaped unharmed. My oldest sister Julie, who was 6, died of smoke inhalation.

I went into a coma and did not wake up for 5
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months. When I awoke, I had a feeding tube, colostomy bag, monitoring machines and intravenous lines. Eighty percent of my body had 3rd degree burns. I felt like I was imprisoned in scars. Immediately I began to wonder if I would ever get paroled. What would it take, to be paroled, good behavior, faith? What was I to learn from this?

The doctors told my mother, that I would never walk again. The doctors were wrong. Every chance my mother had, she made me get around by myself. Every time my father picked me up to carry me up the stairs, my mother made him put me down. "Let her walk." She would say. I had to drag myself up those stairs. But soon after, I was walking, and then running up and down those stairs. I had to relearn who my family was. The doctors said I wouldn't remember anything, not even the night fire. But I did remember that night, and for many years I re-lived it over and over again in nightmares and I also knew, that this was not my body. The skin grafts and hospital stays were constant.

A short time after I awoke, my family told me about the donations that poured in from the community, furniture, dishes, clothes, televisions, etc.. The thousands of dollars that had been collected for us, was done by an individual managing a fundraising campaign. When I found out that we received everything, but the money, my mother told me that the fund raising individual, ran off with it. That matter didn't seem important at the time since my mother had a family to rebuild and move forward. When we all arrived home, my mother had us use a variety of soaps on the market. Each one would cause me, my brother and one of my sisters, to break out all over in rashes and dry my skin out. I had continuous bleeding and oozing sores. I found the healing time, pain and severe itching to be a major physical and psychological test. Many nights for years I couldn't sleep because of these scars and the lengthy healing process. During the next eight years, for me, my brother and one of my sisters, as soon as the area healed, it was time to go back to the hospital for more grafting.

During the recovery process, I knew that my Mother was a strong woman and she would be able to manage taking care of 4 very badly burned children. Every time Christmas comes around, I think back to my many hospital rooms. I think of the bandages and many others who were suffering in the same state I was in. Some even worse than me. I remember the "Battle Scars on every part of the body. Some of them had even lost their faces. Today I still cry for them. What can I do to help *us all*? My Mother enrolled in school for nursing which *seemed natural*. When she was not in her nursing books or encyclopedias, I pored over them in interest. I could stomach the many explicit pictures and descriptions of diseases. I was greatly interested in skin trauma and scaring and read up on them wanting to understand the mystery of this skin we are in. My mother started to research herbs and their natural healing properties. I read up on that with great interest. I started to see hope. My mother started bathing us all in witch hazel and using many other herbs in our healing regimen. Finally we were able to feel the relief.

Over the years I've always been a fighter. This experience has taught me how important it is to be just that. What really built up inside me was the reaction of so many people who were and still are concerned about my tragedy. Some of these people felt sorry for me. In school most of the children were mean. They called me such things as burny, burnt toast, etc.. I was sure I wasn't going to be stuck in this skin, these scars are not supposed to be here. They're not natural.

When I came of age, I concluded that maybe I should have plastic surgery. I remember during a consultation, the doctor and I discussed the different types of procedures offered. One was putting something under my skin to stretch it and grow for up to 8 months to a year. Then the doctor would cut the old scared skin and put the stretched skin over it. That procedure bothered me. I didn't sit well with that at all. I thought to myself that with all this technology today and the many strides that man has made in engineering, we can't re-new our *own natural* covering? The human skin is the largest

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organ. Have we not come so far into knowing what to do to maintain it? I opted not to do that procedure and left disappointed that day.

During the course of my several sales jobs, I received many written and verbal praises from my customers. I then went for a sales job interview in New York City. I had done an internship there and had done pretty well, working sales on the floor. In the application stage I check that I had scars, the woman in the interview picked up on this and inquired deeper asked me to show her. I felt violated, and uncomfortable about this. She then said and I quote. "*Why don't you try to get a job where no one can see you, like a switchboard operator.*" I was crushed; I left that interview in tears.

I then attempted again to try for plastic surgery. I knew it was to be expensive. I knew of a way to get help with these charges. Shriners has an after care program where alumni of there hospital kept in meetings of support. There were Doctors that volunteered their reconstructive services at a discount or free. First you had to meet with a counselor and explain your situation and story. I remember the depth of what I had told her. I said that this is not my body, when I woke up in this body, I knew I would never accept this. I want my old body back." She told me I had to love and except myself. I must love my scars they're a part of me. Now I can learn how to love me, but I can not and will not except a situation that was forced upon me. I was appalled by the thought of embracing that which God never intended to be as natural. Think about it, I said to her. "I have seen in school, teenagers having nervous breakdowns when a zit would pop up on their face, their whole world seemed to end, I wonder how much stronger I am now because of my situation, how much more I can handle, but still, you see on TV so many commercials telling these teens to get rid of that wicked little pimple. Get rid of it, it's not suppose to be there. And now I have this counselor telling me to *be one with my scars.*

I will not claim what is not natural, and it's wrong to tell another that their not beautiful with acne (Zits) then turn around and tell them to live at one with my

scars. I left that interview in tears. I guess I didn't give her a good enough reason to qualify for receiving treatment to rid myself from my plight. I do know that I am a fighter you have to go against the grain, go against what so many others say to try to crush you politely. If one finds out they have cancer, some may just lay down and die excepting it, others beat it by fighting through it, by way of Doctors advice and procedures, diet or whatever information they can find.

Just a Note: I have people I know *in my life*, one who was even on his deathbed, the doctor given him no time to live. His daughter was told by my mother to let him drink Dandelion tea every day, 6 months later he's walking around full of life, the cancer receded. This same herb is a great remedy for skin cancer and you can wash in *it topically* on drink *it internally*. This is one of the main herbs in DermRenewal. Pharmaceutical companies or Doctors won't tell you that Dandelion herb is a natural cancer remedy. It would ruin their careers *if everyone were walking around healthy*. But if I have this knowledge, and don't share it, then yes, I'm responsible for millions who suffer and die from it.

I remember a prayer, I prayed to God. I said. "Lord, if you don't heal me overnight with one of your miracles, then just show me how to heal my own skin and I promise that I would pass it on to others." I know he created me, he created skin. If anybody knows how to re-birth it, re-create it, I know He does. And I know He answered me. Because my interest rose up even stronger about natural healing and He challenged me to incorporate all I know and always stay hungry to learn more. I found great interest is *specific herbal combinations*. Over the years I researched my mother's findings and researched even more in depth and discovered findings on my own. I just *knew* these herbs can do more. The administration and the combination is the key. I know this is what He is revealing to me. If we only knew the very importance of "specific combinations" Human existence would not be riddled with so many deadly diseases today. My studies have peeked, not just American Herbs research, but also Chinese herbs and Indian herbs and found a

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wealth of very important facts and information and how other societies secured the common wisdom on natural healing. We are from the earth and what maintains our bodies, as well as our minds come from the earth. There was even a special blend of herbs that the Chinese blended that was only blended for the emperor, that strengthened his internal organs and regenerated his whole body assuring him long life and a healthy reign over the kingdom. I incorporated all that I have learned and I am still searching and growing in the knowledge of the bodies healing powers. Also finding in my studies that particularly in the *washing* with certain herbs drenches the skin and heals and renews it and is an excellent way of herb remedy delivery. Also finding the powerful combination of certain herbs when combined together they excel each other's healing properties. Over the years I had formulated my own skin care products, not caring to buy what was available on the market, which many products overlook the many needs of the skin and how the needs of it regenerating it self everyday, growing new layers and shedding the old, and how to minister healing to the skin in the cases of severe skin trauma. By way of cuts, bruises, burns, rashes, pimples, wrinkling, etc.. Just like that of a snake when it sheds it's outer and reveals a whole new covering. Our diets, what we put in our bodies and what we put on our skin or neglect to put on our skin raises many problems. I found with my findings on formulating DermRenewal, first the thickness of my scars, thinned, revealing elasticity, softness, smoothness and the hard shine faded. Then I discovered the tone of my skin evened out. New skin grew in, but not how it use to since the scaring. This skin was different. This new skin was soft, pliable, full of elasticity and oil ducts were reborn, discovering the natural moisturizing and skin protecting element skin is suppose to have. Beautiful healthy skin, skin that I'd never thought I find again was revealed. It's an ongoing process of shedding and renewing, it was as if the herbs helped my skin remember who it really was, and its state before the fire, the trauma.

Still so many today needlessly suffer and so many just bare with the pain of their bodies degenerating

and just crumble under from the battle scars of life, not really believing that provision has been made in nature to maintain that which was birthed from nature.

I thank God that I didn't listen to the neigh sayers. I know that in tragedy, it is for one to take that as an opportunity to shed the answer, the light on ones situation that in this way would shine illumination on another who is in that very same situation. To lift them up and out of their pit of desperation in all to bless others. To experience is to live, but also in this life, let us give, more insight, more knowledge, to answer the many questions that still remain. Just know in your heart, there has to be an answer for me, I will search and if provision is not made I will create that which is healing to the masses. For what you accomplish will benefit many generations to come.

Remember: You will never stand if you're not willing
to take a chance at *falling*.

Challenge: "If it's not imagined, imagine it. If it's not invented, invent it. That, which has not been conceived, conceive it. Reality comes from that, which had not yet been realized, *until now*."

Me and My Burns!

By Delores Gempel Lekowski

Do you know why I put burns last in this title, this is important, so pay attention? I put burns last because you come first, not your burns, they are just along for the ride. While they are not the best thing in the world to have hitching a ride on your journey through life, they are the last thing that should dictate who you are and how you want to live your life. You are in control of your life; don't ever leave your injury take over. I bet your thinking, that's easy for her to say. Well it is easy for me because I have been there, it has been awhile, but I have been there just the same.

How important are visual appearances? At the end of the day, looks will only get you so far, there has to
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be more substance to a person than the way they look. The more a person views their looks, the less substances. Do you think happiness only belongs to beautiful people? Think again, I know a lot of outwardly beautiful looking people who are miserable and I am sure if you looked around you also know a few. We all have flaws; I don't know anyone who is perfect. I do know people who present themselves to the world in such a way that the world can't help but overlook their flaws. These people know how to highlight their substances, make it shine through, and here lies the secret of happiness. These truly, genuine, beautiful people have accomplished the art of revealing their inner gifts to society, and this is what society respects and admires.

So how do we get people to look beyond the burns? I know how difficult this is. We live in a world that focuses too much on looks and not enough on substances, such as in advertising, but I think our times are changing the perception of beauty and is digging deeper into it's true meaning. The way for you to show your substantial beauty, that deep genuine beauty that you possess, is to show the world its existences, don't keep it hidden, believe in it, and show it. Society admires our courage and strength, should we think any less of ourselves than society does? Let your true self-shine through; don't keep it hidden from yourself or anyone else. Look in the mirror and tell your burns to hold on, because their free ride is over, from this time on, you are in-charge, not them, and then make them work for you, not against you.

Ok, you've done that, now what? Where do you go from here? After years of giving my burns a free ride, I decided it was time for them to either go away, or to use their existence to make my life and other lives, better. Since they weren't going anywhere, I choose the latter. I decided my burns could go a long way in teaching fire and burn prevention and help to support others who have to deal with burns. I have found as a burn survivor, I have a powerful voice and a powerful tool, people do listen to me. I write and visit politicians about various flammability issues, I testify at committee meetings to help keep safe fire codes enforced, I write

monthly fire and burn prevention articles and I have written two books to help other survivors. In order to keep up to date on fire related issues I work closely with, "The National Association of State Fire Marshals," and I work hard to bring awareness to the burn community. The need for my experience as a burn survivor is endless. Now I can honestly say, my burns are an asset to me; I wouldn't have been able to achieve what I have, without them. Now this doesn't mean I am thrilled about being burned, what I am saying is, I am proud of who I am and what I stand for.

What can you do? Maybe you don't want to take the same path I took, this is ok, but it isn't ok to not find your own path. We all have a talent, a passion, find yours and use it to make a difference. Use it to bring your beauty to the forefront.

If you need some ideas or want to know where to start, ask Michael Appleman, info@burnsurvivorstw.org I am sure he would be more than happy for your help or to give you advice, after all, look what he has accomplished. You may also get in touch with me at dlekowski@neo.rr.com I can help you with ideas or any questions you may have. There is so much work that needs to be done, as the burn community continues to grow so does our help.

Tell your burns the free ride is over, they work for you now!

Love of Life

By: Michael Appleman

So much has happened
I thought it was lifes end

During my recovery
I thought happiness was done for me

As I listened and learned
I realized all of me was not burned

Accepting the help in so many ways
I could see happiness of life in all the days

Living together as a team
Helps us all to reach a dream
Sharing the happiness in so many ways

Allows us to destroy the blaze

Open up your mind and heart to all
Reach out and pick up any that fall

Michael Appleman

Join A Support Group

By: Mary Ellen Copeland

In my last column, I discussed ideas and strategies for relieving loneliness. About 12 year ago, I began my studies of how people who experience troubling emotional symptoms like loneliness, anxiety, depression, mania and psychosis relieve these symptoms and go on to do the things they want to do with their lives. I wanted to learn the simple, safe, everyday things that people do to help themselves feel better - both for myself, to help relieve my own depression and anxiety, and to share with others through my work.

Over the years, I have talked with thousands of people about this topic. One finding that is consistent is that the number one way that people relieve loneliness and develop systems of support is by joining a support group. In this column, I will describe some of my own experiences with support groups, and will give you information that may be helpful to you if you decide a support group would be useful to you.

My Experience with Support Groups

When I first learned this intriguing piece of information about support groups, I was a bit "put off." "Me go to a support group?"

In fact, I had some misconceptions about support groups. I think they got some bad press for a while. I thought I would have to share everything I was thinking and that others might judge me. Perhaps they would talk about me behind my back or tell others what I had said. Maybe the other members of the group wouldn't like me. They might demand too much of me. What if it was all "touchy, feely" - I'm not sure why I was afraid of that.

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Being a brave soul, I talked to some people I knew who had symptoms similar to mine about starting a support group. They didn't seem to have my reservations and began holding weekly meetings for anyone in the community who experienced mood disorders. The group was a great success. It's been going for 12 years now! Some members are still the same, but new members keep joining, while old ones move one. Happily, many friendships, begun in this group, have lasted over the years and are still strong. I continue to attend occasionally and it is a warm, wonderful experience.

Not long after this first positive experience with a support group, a friend came to me and said, "I want more women in my life - more friends. I want to start a support group." I was interested. We spread the word and had 12 people at our first meeting. This group is still strong and active 10 years later. It has gone through many changes - in membership, style, process, and focus - but one thing has remained: a strong commitment to friendship and mutual, respectful support. The group has weathered the storms of change and loss and strengthened its commitment as a result.

Each Monday night, the group gathers at the home of one of the members and, while sipping herbal tea, spends two hours discussing our feelings, the rich everyday happenings in our lives, and topics like aging, parenting, commitment, purpose, and spirituality. While these weekly meetings remain the central focus of the group, those friendships have provided a circle of support that is there whenever it is needed: the illness of an adult child, a parent's dying, a career change, the death of a spouse, divorce, family discord, hurt feelings; when living seems like a journey that is too difficult to maneuver. Recently, members of the group climbed to a mountaintop to share their grief as a member of the group was dying. And together we celebrate the joys of life - the marriages of our children, new grandchildren, our own achievements and those of the people we love, the beauty of the natural world, and the richness of our everyday experiences.

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Finding and Attending a Support Group

As you can see, I have become convinced of the value of support groups. If you are not a member of a support group, and want to widen your circle of friends and connections with others, you may be asking, "How does one find a group to join?"

You can begin by looking at the Community Calendar in your newspaper. They may have notices of support groups that are open to new members, including:

1. Groups for women or men;
2. Groups for people of certain ages (like a group for women in menopause or for men who are retiring);

Groups for people with special needs or conditions (like caregivers, cancer patients, diabetes patients, people attempting weight loss, or people working to address addictions or bereavement);

3. Groups for people who have "special circumstances" (like having a parent with Alzheimer's, being recently divorced, or being a crime victim); or
4. Groups for people with common interests (like book clubs, bridge players and hikers).

A "12-Step" group that addresses an issue in your life, such as alcohol addiction or weight control, may sound right to you. You might locate a group by calling your local mental health center or community help line. Your physician or counselor might be able to direct you to a group. Ask your family members, friends, neighbors and colleagues for help in locating groups.

The next step is the hardest - going the first time. Everyone has a hard time going to a support group the first time. Sometimes, it's hard to make yourself go, even if you enjoy the group and have been attending for some time. Excuses like the following may keep you from going:

1. I'm too tired when I get home in the evening.
2. I'm fearful of meeting new people.
3. I'm afraid I won't be liked.
4. I'm afraid I won't be welcomed.
5. It feels very risky.
6. Transportation is difficult.
7. I can't find a group that seems to fit me.
8. I don't like to tell others what's going on with me.

Try to get past those issues, figure out how to do it, and go.

Attend a support group *several* times before making a decision about whether it is the right one for you. Every group can have an off night in which things just don't "gel." You will know if this is not the right group for you if, after a few meetings, you still feel like an outsider. Don't give up! Search out another group.

If you are going to attend a support group and connect with the other people in the group, you must feel safe there. Many groups address this need by having a set of guidelines or rules for the group, sometimes called a safety contract. At one of the first group meetings, the members can discuss what they need to feel safe in the group. While this list varies from group to group, depending on the purpose and focus of the group, some of the most common guidelines are agreements that:

1. Personal information shared in the group will not be shared with anyone outside of the group meeting.
2. Group members do not tell people outside of the group who attends the group.
3. There is no interrupting when a person is speaking or sharing.

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4. Everyone gets a chance to share. Some groups limit each person's sharing time to 10 minutes to insure that everyone gets time to speak.
5. If you don't feel like talking or sharing, you don't have to.
6. Members are respectful of each other and treat each other with mutual high regard.
7. Judging, criticizing, teasing or "put-downs" are not allowed.
8. Group members give other group members feedback only when it is requested.

A person may leave the group whenever she or he wants or needs to take care of personal needs, to be comfortable, or to attend to other responsibilities.

9. Attendance is optional.

Starting a Support Group

If you can't find a support group that meets your needs, *consider starting one of your own*. It's not a difficult thing to do. One simple way to do this is to invite several people you know to come to a meeting and encourage them to invite other friends as well. Setting it up with another person makes the process easier and more fun. There are many options for groups and there is no one "right way" for a group to be. The following ideas may help:

1. When a group is always open to new members, it may be difficult to be closely connected to the other members and to share personal information. For this reason, the group may want to put restrictions around when people may come into the group. Group members can decide if the group will always be open to new members (an open group) or if it will accept members

- until a certain number of members has been reached or until a certain date and then no longer be open to new members (a closed group).
2. Sometimes, groups get so big they become hard to manage. You may want to restrict your group to a certain number of participants. If a group is so big that not everyone gets a chance to speak and be supported, or if there are so many people in the group that people can't get to know each other well, you may want to divide the group into smaller groups.
 3. Decide when you want to meet and for how long. Many support groups meet in the evening, but they can meet any time that is convenient for the members.
 4. Find a place to hold the meetings. Libraries, churches, schools, hospitals and health care agencies are good places to look for free space to use for support group meetings. If there is a charge for the space, you might have to ask group members to pay dues or to pay a certain amount each time they attend. If your group is small and is limited to a few people who know each other well, you may decide to hold the meetings in one person's home or to take turns hosting the meeting.
 5. Depending on the kind of group you are starting, you may need to think about or discuss how you are going to get people to come to the group. You may want to:
 - Ask each person who has worked on setting up the group to invite several friends or others he or she knows by personal invitation, phoning them, mailing them a note, or sending them an e-mail;
 - Put a notice of the meetings in the local newspaper or newspapers;

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- o Ask your local radio station or stations to announce the group;

Ask that the group be listed on your

- o local community access television bulletin board; and/or

Hang posters describing the group in places where interested people might congregate (for instance, if it is a group for people with a particular illness, you might put up posters in doctors' offices and hospital waiting rooms).

Formats for support groups vary widely. The members of the support group decide how they want the meetings to be. If things don't work well one way, the group can choose to do them another way.

Support Groups Are One Piece of a Plan

I hope this column has helped you to understand the value of support groups and given you information that will be helpful if you decide you want to be a member of a support group.

While I feel that the right support group is a valued addition to anyone's life, please remember that it cannot be expected to meet all of your needs for support. A support group can be one part of your plan for wellness, but does not replace the need to maintain close connections with your family and friends, nor does it substitute for having people available with whom you can share the details of your daily life.

BSTTW CONTACT INFORMATION

Emergency Contact

We have an Emergency Email Form on the Internet. Go to: www.burnsurvivorsttw.org/emergemail.html

You, your family and friends can also reach us by phone at 941-364-8457 or 800-503-8058. If we are

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not in the office or it is after hours, leave a message in the emergency mailbox. A support team member will respond to you within 24 hours. **BSTTW** has at least one individual on call 24 hours day/7 days a week.

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As a 501 (c)(3) Non Profit Organization, all donations, big or small are tax deductible to the extent of the law. **BSTTW** accepts donations for our general fund, the "Dwight Lunkley Racing To Victory" fund, USA & Asian Burn Camp funds, Burned Children fund, Vietnamese Burned Children Fund, BSTTW Healing Weekend Fund and the World Burn Congress 2003 fund. Donations from Companies, Churches, Organizations, Communities and individuals will help **BSTTW** to do the work that is needed for all Burn Survivors, family members and the public around the world. Remember your donations can be money, clothes, a used bicycle etc.. All will help burn survivors and their family. Many families loose their homes and property. Please personally think about and talk to your family and friends about donating to **BSTTW**.

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Burn Survivors Throughout The World, Inc.
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To Donate on line go to:

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If you have any questions call us at 941-364-8457, 800-503-8059 or email **BSTTW** at: donations@burnsurvivorsttw.org

Volunteering your time to **BSTTW**

We always can use your help. There are many children, adults and families around the world that need support and other help. You can take part in rebuilding the lives and helping people reenter their community. Go to

www.burnsurvivorsttw.org/volunteer.html in order to learn more about volunteering with **BSTTW**. Feel free to contact **BSTTW** by telephone at 941-364-8457 or 800-503-8058 or email us at volunteers@burnsurvivorsttw.org

Purchases

BSTTW has an online store were you can purchase Skin Care Products, Books and Video Tapes. Got to: www.burnsurvivorsttw.org/sales.html

You can also purchase Skin Care Products by telephone at 800-503-8058.

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