

W: I was medical director of a couple hospital departments and one was a department of preventive and stress medicine. We have this wide stress simulation lab where we'd stress people psychologically and monitor their physical responses, and we were doing work with corporate people in that lab and then I had something called the patient potential center. We'd get groups of people like with high blood pressure together and teach them how to control their blood pressure using biofeedback and teaching them skills with self-mastery to do what pills do without taking the pills.

I was very interested in Psycho-physiology and internal locusts of control activity. On the floor where I was, the adolescent care unit, where kids went with chemical dependencies, so I went down and I talked to the therapist there.

I said why don't you start letting me do group with kids to teach them internal locust of control activity because when you're using chemicals there's an external point of control for your internal process. So why not teach them how to control mood themselves. So I started doing groups of chemically dependent kids, started looking more into family systems and me and my boards were in family medicine.

I was always interested in that, but really looking at dysfunctional families. And started hearing things that made me think about my own upbringing and how in my family system there was no alcohol ever consumed, yet there were things going on in my family, for instance, my sense of things is when my father came in the house everybody put their antenna system up to sense dad's mood because his mood tended to drive the mood of the rest of the members of the family. Well that's sort of classic in alcohol families.

The dependent person, the person dependent upon alcohol comes in the home and the co-dependents, the rest of the family, tunes into dad to check out his mood to see can I get close, should I stay away, whatever. And as I kept looking at this I looked at many of the dynamics that were occurring in my family, although it was a very prominent family, my father was a surgeon, mom was a professional prior to the marriage and had supported my dad during some of his trainings, six kids, country club church.

Looking at my own family system was where I discovered normal wasn't healthy. How the socialization process itself here and what I call the excited States of America may be normal but it's not healthy.

M: What are some of the high points of what you discovered when you started looking?

W: It has to do a lot with how we relate to each other.

So looking at relationships, I think one of the fundamental problems we have is we have trouble having co-equal, non-controlling, loving, accepting relationships with other people. And that includes our own children.

Much of what we do with children ends up reinforcing their feelings of inadequacy and insecurity. The very thing we don't want to do we end up doing simply because we're doing with them what was done with us. And plenty of people rationalize it, making the comment if they're successful in they're grown-up careers, and I turned out all right. Worked out okay for me.

It must be okay then. We've developed one school of philosophy here in our country, it's pragmatism. Pragmatism says if it works, do it. So people have been doing something that sort of worked and they did it without thinking. So in terms of relationships, people don't say what they need in their relationships with other people. They expect other people if they really care to know what they need without saying it.

M: I need more examples.

W: How many of you have been to communication seminars? People raise their hands. What's the fundamental problem with communication? Listening. People say listening is a fundamental problem so okay so you want to listen to what people are saying and then maybe paraphrase back what they're saying to make sure that you understand what they're doing and what they're saying so you really communicate.

My next question is if I'm not telling you the truth, but you're listening to me and you're paraphrasing back what I say, are we communicating? If I'm not telling you the truth, but you're listening to me and you're paraphrasing back what I say, are we communicating? See the fundamental problem with communication isn't that we don't listen. The problem is we don't tell the truth.

We're not honest. One of the things I noticed with the kids, what was going on with those groups and in that dynamic, in that setting, kids were risking being honest. And I noticed in those recovery units, the only place in the hospital where people were being honest was there. And I noticed in family systems people are not honest. You hear honesty is the best policy, but what happens when you're honest.

M: Those kids, those kids were keeping me honest. They're looking for sensing issues, then to sensitivity to see whether or not your strength... incredibly challenging.

W: The family systems, dad sitting in a chair when junior comes home. Junior comes in the back door, dumps his books on the counter, gets something out of the refrigerator, walks in the living room, dad is sitting in a lump. He's sitting there, his head is in his hands, he's sighing, he's shaking his head. There's an empty glass on the floor. I wonder what was in the glass? Maybe something for medicinal purposes. So dad's sitting in a lump, he's in what a friend of mine calls a highest state of bum. Dad is bummed. Now when junior walks in the room he tunes into dad, knows something's wrong with dad, so he comes in to sort of his psychological space and says, "Gee dad, what's wrong?" What's dad say?

M: Oh nothing son.

W: Oh nothing son. Nothing. Now what do you think his father said when he asked his father the same question? Now what is the child learning in the interaction?

We wonder why don't our kids talk to us. How's it going son? Fine. Any problems? No. Five minutes later we find out he's gotten somebody pregnant, he's going into a treatment facility and he's flunked out of school. You talk to your kids and you say son, what happened? Why didn't you tell me? Why? Well he learned well at our knee. How's it going? Fine. Any problem? No. We don't as parents risk being authentic and real and honest and vulnerable with our own children, so why would we expect them to vulnerable and honest with us? The father says, well I don't want to bother, I don't want to worry my son. He wouldn't be able to do anything about it. Why burden him with the fact that I'm having problems. So the son thinks the same thing. Gee dad, I didn't want to worry you. I didn't think you could do anything about it. We just pass it on.

M: Why is it that we have developed a culture where it's a risk, what are we risking when we're being honest?

W: Well I think it's connected to what I call our best kept secret and I think it's connected to the fact that we're born in a dependent state and we're dependent for a long time and that

because of our long period of dependency upon the grown-ups, not being adequate to take care of ourselves in the jungle that is the world, we're all going to have feelings of inadequacy and insecurity. So it's part of our inheritances, human beings to enter the world stage and have this experience of the world in which we're dependent. We can't, you know the five year old kid says you know dad, I want to go to the store and get some candy and dad says, you can't go to the store by yourself, you haven't learned to be paranoid yet.

You've got to go with me. And by the way, it's not can I go to the store, it's may I. You know the child has to learn how to do things in order to learn how to play the role of grown-up. We have to make a lot of mistakes and we make the mistakes, the grown-ups point them out and end up reinforcing our feelings of inadequacy. So I think the reasons that we don't risk being vulnerable with each other, it's not, what's the guy, Bennett, former Secretary of Education, whatever, drugs are, writes a book on virtues. Check it out. Being vulnerable isn't one of the virtues. I mean it's not part of our socialization process. What you want to do is not be vulnerable. If you're vulnerable you're open to attack. If you risk being honest with the other person, they might see you as inadequate.

So don't risk authenticity. Because of our insecurities we stay safe and we project images to the surface of life that we think people want to see so they'll hold us in high regard. We want to build the steam in their eyes because we don't have self-esteem.

M: What are some of the fundamental reasons why we have developed a culture that breeds increasingly self-defense, self-centered defenses..?

W: The insecurities I think are part and parcel of being human. In terms of trying to explain it because of a long period of dependency, not being adequate to take care of myself, I'm going to have one, feelings of inadequacies. I need the protection of other people. Why? I'm not adequate to protect myself. That seems to me to be a logical, the insecurity, well the stuff I don't know about, stuff that's scary to me, that isn't explained.

And, I think the grown-ups don't have them because they don't admit they have them. And when I talk about them, no there's nobody under the bed, there's no boogie man in the closet, you know. They don't talk to me about their fears. They don't talk to me about their insecurities, and because

As a parent we show the world how adequate we are as parents through the performance of our children, we focus on their behavior and their behavior is a reflection of our competency as parents. So the most important thing in the relationship between parent and child is the behavior of the child, not the being. And they're going to do things wrong to learn the correct behavior sets, they're going to make mistakes and then I as a parent correct them when they do it wrong and then reinforce their feelings of inadequacy and don't create a scenario by which they're really going to be open to share the mistakes that they make with me. Because I haven't risked creating the environment where they feel safe enough to do that because I haven't been vulnerable. I haven't modeled the possibility.

M: You made a point this morning in the presentation that we as a culture really have the right way, right?

W: Yeah.

M: Now there is the right way and everything else is wrong. So there's this infinite possibility for failure and one little tiny possibility for doing it "the right way." And that is definitely built into our system and I think essential to what we're talking about. Can you explain that and explore that development?

W: Well I think it's everywhere.

I think everybody knows how to complete the sentence. There's only one way of doing things, that's the right thing. Anything worth doing, worth doing right, if you can't do it right, don't do it at all. So we know how to celebrate our victories and not our defeats, losses and mistakes and failures. So we tend to cover them up. We tend to hide them and not share

them with each other. That's part of the way the culture functions. In organizational systems, they don't have mistake of the month meetings. They have the employee of the month, employee of the year. They don't have the mistake of the month meeting. We don't know how to celebrate that process and I think what we ought to do is figure out ways to pay attention to that so when someone makes a mistake, it's not necessarily celebrating the mistake as much as it is celebrating the learning that's earned through the mistake making process.

We can learn anything. One of the most fundamental things I've learned as a person is that I may not be that smart, I may not be that intelligence, but there isn't anything I can't learn. I can learn anything. You may learn it faster than I learn it, but it doesn't matter how quickly you learn, what's important is what you do with what you learn. So learning requires making mistakes. So I'm not as concerned with the mistake making process as I used to be.

M: Given your experience and the kind of people you deal with, how do you bring about a learning environment where failure is not a possibility?

W: **I think it's not a matter of eliminating failure as a possibility, but accepting it as inevitable in the process of learning how to do what we do better and just taking the negative charge off of it. For one thing, sharing the failures that we've had in our lives with our children, with other people. Not taking ourselves so dog gone seriously. And lightening up a little bit. What do people say when someone sneezes? What do they say?**

M: Bless you.

W: **Bless you, God bless you. And what do we say when someone makes a mistake? You dummy! You idiot! I think we should just switch the process. You're out at a restaurant, somebody sneezes, you say you dumb shit, what are you doing? You're blowing germs all over the place. Get out of here. Somebody makes a mistake, they drop the dishes, we say bless you, you're only human. So we just switch. I mean mistakes are much more frequent than sneezes. Any way that we can trick ourselves into figuring out another way of changing our orientation to that learning process, helps us bring energy available to help push culture, and I think our own, when stuff happens, okay.**

Did you see the movie Regarding Henry?

There's this wonderful scene where he's sitting at the table and they're having a meal and his daughter knocks over her milk, knocks over the milk and looks up at him and he looks at her and he says that's okay. He knocks over his milk, I do it all the time. I thought that was so great. I mean how many families in America do you think when a kid spills her milk

the adults say that's okay, bonk, I do it all the time. I mean it would be an anomalous phenomenon.

God do we have to get shot in the head to wake up? I don't think so, but we have to do is have the energy available to intercede in ways that are different than what we saw modeled for us. We'll only have that energy available if we're paying attention to it as a possibility or as a necessity to contribute to culture in a positive way. That's giving kids permission to feel safe failing with us because in a sense we're not using their mistake as a way for them to experience distance between us, but the mistake that they make as a way of experiencing a connection to us. Which I think allows them to feel safe or to risk more and risking more they're going be learning more.

M: Pearce talks about entering into the experience without pre-judgment. Entering into experience without prejudice basically eliminates failure because there's no preconceived focused goal that you have.

W: Kids know how to do that until we teach them to do something else. That's already seeded in the psyche. It expresses itself in behaviors until we do something to repress it, which I think is pretty interesting. It's a fundamental component of our isness.

M: How about the challenge to do what we might call real play?

W: **f I as a parent want my kid to be really good at some sport, well by golly I want them to be playing it as early as possible so they can really develop their gifts. So you go to the soccer field, you know, will the pre-school league please meet on the midget field and the kindergarteners meet over on field number two, and we've taken that original play time and organized it into zero some games with winners and losers.**

And I have had the experience as a parent, my kids wanting to play soccer and seeing my second grade daughter out there playing soccer. She's a wonderful soccer player and the games over and they lose the game and I say, "Jordan wow, you did a great job. You kicked that ball. I couldn't believe it. That was really neat." "Aw it doesn't matter. We lost." "Jordan it doesn't matter whether or not you win or you lose. I mean sometimes you win sometimes you lose. Did you have fun?" "Aw it wasn't fun, we lost."

Relatively speaking, I mean I'm interested in this stuff and I see there's so much going on in terms of the culture that's so focused on the winning and losing aspect that kids are sucked into it. There's this great sucking sound, competition is, you know that's gonna help kids get a, have a head start, and you've got to be able to compete. And so what we teach kids how to do, we teach kids how to compete. They knew how to cooperate

but they have to be taught how to compete and guess what they forget to do? They forget about the cooperation piece and it's really sad.

And I think that a lot of it has to do with the parents through the performance of their children, if they can be really good at what they do, it shows how adequate the parents are once again. And I think it's, the parents are driving the process. You see the parents out there yelling at their kids. You just cringe.

I mean I don't know, I played sports as a kid. I had coaches do that to me, humiliate me in front of my teammates, reinforce my feelings of inadequacy. That did not help me access and express giftedness. I don't think I was nearly as good as I could have been if someone would have been more supportive of me and less critical. That would have been wonderful.

M: What's the relationship between this lack of self-esteem, this lack of confidence, this self-doubt ...

W: **Well I think it makes us sick. I mean everything's connected to everything else in the body. What you do between your ears reflects itself as physical change at a distance in the body. It's a principle called the psycho-physiological principle. For every change in my mental emotional state, conscious or unconscious, there's a likewise a change in my physiological state. And also the reverse is true, for every change in my physiological state, there's a change in my mental emotional state; conscious/unconscious. So that psychological, psycho-physiological principle is at work.**

I mean you mentioned working with athletes. I wrote, my senior thesis in medical school was called a coaches clinic and I wrote the paper because who do kids look up to? Rock stars, movie stars, athletes. Didn't know anything about movie stars, rock stars. I knew something about sport, was very interested in sport. I figured kids look up at athletes, why don't you start working with coaches. Have coaches learn about the mind/body connection. Have coaches learn some of this material and then what they end up doing with children or with athletes, the athletes that the kids look up to, then if they start saying well this is what I did, then kids might start doing what their heroes did and then you'd be able to have this positive impact on culture by working with coaches, there'd be a multiplier effect.

So it's interesting. So I was interested in the psychology of sport and interested in the mind/body connection. That's a huge connection because so much of what takes people to physicians are, they're stress related problems. And what happens when we get stressed often times it's impacting that part of us that's frightened, that scared one inside us that feels anxious. And then what do we do? We drink alcohol to cope, or we eat inappropriately, and we do things, we

eat in a way we get fat. We get diabetes. We get high blood pressure. We get heart disease. We become alcoholics. We get depressed. We get anxiety disorders and phobias and all sorts of different problems.

I think the immune system doesn't work right. And I think that it's all part of one thing. It's all connected together and I think we need to look at health in a much broader way than this disease treatment model and see what may be some of the root causes underneath the process by which disease occurs. And when I do, I have hour and a half appointments with patients and we look at physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually, when you see,

you peel the onion and you're talking to the patient about why do you think you're sick now? What's going on in your life physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually, what's happening with your relationships? What you find underneath there's this stuff that they haven't dealt with.

Although they're an achieving person and really good at what they do, they don't feel good about who they are. And not feeling good about who they are, they still gotta work harder, do more, more success, be more driven because you know they need to get the critical mass of success or stuff to finally cause the transformation to take place.

But they never get to the critical mass. You never have enough esteem in the eyes of others to have self-esteem. And once you have self-esteem, it doesn't matter what other people think of you. So it's ironic. People are working so hard to build esteem in the eyes of others because they don't understand what, they really don't understand what self-esteem means. And see I feel that I can have self-esteem even though I have feelings of inadequacy and insecurity. They're not mutually exclusive. I have to be able to value me in spite of those aspects of my nature that cause me to feel insecure.

M: Let's talk about clowning.

W: Well I always saw myself as pretty goofy and a fun guy. And in 1991 I went to Russia with a clown troop to visit children's hospitals and orphanages. Now the people that organized this trip, the nutty doctor named Patch Adams, Patch is a good friend of mine. We're involved in a project trying to build a free hospital in West Virginia, medicine for fun, not funds and we'll provide at your service, but he had talked to me, he had been doing this people to people diplomacy piece where he would take a clown troop to Russia every year in November to visit sick kids. And I thought well that sounds fun. I'd like to go. He said, okay, all you've got to do is come up with \$2,500 and create a clown character.

So I don't really want to create a clown character, I'll just go. No, no. You don't understand. Everybody that goes on the trip has to goof with the kids, has to clown with kids. I said, well I've never done that. Well you don't have to know anything. The people that go have never clowned before, most of them. So I

said okay. So in 1991 I went to Russia and created this clown character for, specifically for that reason. And in Russia what happened was

I had this experience in Red Square where we, we had been to a few hospitals and I started doing some clowning stuff and we went to Red Square to clown with, do street clowning. So like 20 of us arrive at Red Square and we spread out and I start goofing with somebody, one person, and then another person comes and another person comes, and I have juggling stuff in my clown bag, I juggle. I'd start interacting with this group of people and what happens, it goes from this one person to two, three, four, five, six and pretty soon there's a circle of like 30 people and I'm interacting as a clown with this group of 30 in this circle and I have no idea what I am doing.

I have no idea what I will do next, but I am fully present in that moment. I am fully alert, alive, awake, and enjoying myself to the max. I cannot speak Russian, so there's no language, verbal language, but there's something happening energetically that hooks me. For one hour. I am goofing with this group of people and I'm experiencing full spontaneity. I am playing with these people. We are adults and we are playing and it is fun. And that, something happened there. It took play, what I considered play, to another level of spontaneity and intensity.

And what I discovered in short, during the trip to Russia,

I discovered that as a clown you have license for lunacy. You can get away with a lot more stuff than you can as a regular person. And it's a way to lighten up and to have fun with other people in character, but when you're not in character, there's a residual effect in the psyche. So that I would notice there would be an impact in terms of interacting with other people that was wider and more buoyant, even though I wasn't clowning. And I noticed options for fun and playfulness that I hadn't noticed before.

So I learned a lot during that, actually it was a three week experience with the Moscow, St. Petersburg, and then Tial and Estonia, and it was three weeks of on-the-job clowning. And it was, I learned so much about myself.

My clown character has a very large butt and is a proctologist and it was about one week into the trip that I discovered my clown butt. And I, you know as a male you're suppose to have a little tiny tush. I come from a big butted family and I have always been kind of insecure about my big butt, but when I was fooling with these balloons, I'd put them in my big baggy pants, when I put them around and had this now, this big butt, it was like, WOW! I can have a big butt and be proud of my butt! Now I'm a spokesperson for big butted people. I'm no longer self-conscious about it. It's like therapy.

So I learned a whole bunch of stuff that I had no expectation. It's interesting how things work. And because I learned so much about myself and had so much fun doing it, I've kept doing it.

M: Your psyche, your vulnerability areas are disassociated from this, and it is therapeutic, it's very interesting to look even more deeply and how play affords us that opportunity.

W: I guess one of the most common fears of people is public speaking, or as I call it, public speaking because there's this fear of being exposed. When you're going one on one with someone you can tune into them and try to figure out what they want you to say to please them or meet their needs, but when you have two people or three people or four, how are you possibly going to meet the needs of a whole group of people.

So there's the scare one inside us I think has a lot of anxiety about being seen as inadequate. Because how are we possibly going to pull this thing off? That we risk exposure? Well as a clown, you're an entirely different character so it really downsizes your risk. Fred says, Fred goes away. I guess what I would say, it may be the same thing.

What's happening is your ego isn't driving the interaction. Your ego isn't trying to control whatever is occurring. You're just fully present and there and maybe it's not that you go away, at some level maybe you're fully present at another level.

M: I'm going to suggest this is the only function of what we consider our ego.

W: I know I can't get rid of mine. I know it's always going to be there but I know that it doesn't have to drive my interactions and if I can let go of my need to run the universe, and be available and be present to see the possibilities that may be occurring, I'm probably not being defensive in that place. I'm open and vulnerable to what's going to happen. The ego is a tricky, it's a tricky thing.

M: When you're operating at peak performance, Fred, that image, disappears. It's only function is a defense. The only reason it's there is because of ... and things that it feels like it has to protect.

W: **I create a safe space in my office by having a sign that says "caution, beware of doc, enter at your own risk. I make mistakes every day." I didn't put that up for my patients as much as I put it up for me. Because I needed to own that, but I'll tell you this, I think it helps create a safe space for my patients to be in. Allowing myself to be human allows other people to be human around me. Allowing myself to laugh at my foibles, allowing when my ego has to run things to be able to laugh at it and not be so defensive when it occurs. To admit that I'm wrong when I'm wrong. To not have to be right provides incredible freedom.**

M: If there's something that has been universal throughout this whole project, play only exists in an environment with trust and safety.

W: If it's not safe it's not play.

M: So there's something about being in a safe learning environment, safe but challenging, not that it's not challenging. Challenge is essential

W: I think the quality of the energy that we carry into the interaction with the other, **if we're accepting, if we're accepting, because the way I treat you is a reflection of how I feel about me, the more accepting I can be of me, the more accepting I can be of you, and I think there's something about that. We know people that we're safe with. We feel it. There's some, our sensors pick it up. We don't feel like somebody's trying to manipulate or control us. But I think all of us can make the choice to enter that space and to be a safe person to be with, even if other people aren't.**

W: I think one of the things that I have benefited from is mentors that have helped me appreciate what's important.

Mentors have been incredibly important to me, incredibly important. And I have benefits so much from other people participating in my life in a meaningful way, children have been mentors for me, as well as adults my age and people older than me. And I notice that I seek them out and I know this, that I want to be around people that are playful. They're much more fun to be around than people that aren't and I make conscious choices to spend time with people that are fun, fun to be around. And I think that reinforces me staying awake more and taking myself less seriously,

and also seeing the way other people operate, how they function, how their minds work, how they deal when they get, something happens. What do they do?

I called a friend of mine, this friend of mine Patch Adams, the guy that got me into clowning, I called up his home one morning, I said Patch, how you doing? And he said mom died last night. Okay, I'm thinking to myself, oh my God, his mom died last night and you're trying to figure what is the right thing to say, and I'm sort of bumbling and his other line rings and I say, "Go ahead and take the call." I'm thinking okay, his mom died last night. What should I say? I'm not sure what to say and when he gets back on the phone, and I haven't figured out what to say yet and I just say, "Well was she lucid?" and he said, "Well she couldn't get a job." Okay.

Well that response made me instantly say and comfortable to say, tell me about it. And what he told me was that his mom has died last night and the night before she died it had been really tough and in the middle night she had lost bowel and bladder control and he had gone in, she was done to 67 pounds and he'd gone in and taken her out of her bed, into the bathtub, and put her into the bathtub, and washed her and cleaned up her bed and put her diaper on her and put her back to bed. She had a very tough night the night before.

But that night, the next night, after everybody went to bed, Patch got out all of the photograph albums from Hawaii and went through her entire life until this last moment and it included pictures of a food fight they'd had at home a few days earlier. This was a blue-blooded Virginian woman and she was participating in a playful event shortly before her death. And he told me the story, he said you know, he went through her life and then she went to bed and I woke up this morning and she was dead. Well that taught me something. I mean you know, any time at any moment we're not sure what's coming, disaster will strike. People will experience unfairness and discomfort.

How will we meet it? Well we can tarry within us a perspective that's open to that as a reality but not let it dominate how we function. And I think the more we play, the more we stay in touch with the ability to do that. And I think that mentors have helped me see that. I had a friend, a mentor of mine, who was a very spiritual person and he had got involved with, he and I do this team building program called "The Agopy Bank and Trust."

It's about putting lug to work in the work place. Well, one time he was telling me about some friends of his who were coming to Kansas City and his son was in the seminary at the time and he'd come to Kansas City to visit. People from Chicago were coming to Kansas City on the train and his son and the seminary and he went down to meet this group and they'd been involved in some small group process and spiritual work together, and they go down and they dress up as monks and they have these poster boards on them, front and back, and each one says, "I am holier than thou" and there's a finger pointing to the other guy. I love that.

I mean even the most sacred, I mean doesn't God have a sense of humor? I'm sure we've given him plenty of laughs. I think, I wanted to take my clown to church, knock on the door, "God home! I was hoping he'd be in today!" Is that okay? I mean I think authentic prayer and authentic play are connected. There's something going on where there's some kind of union, some sort of connection that's holy. And nothing else is required. No explanation. No theology. No rationale. Something is happening that's holy and sacred in that space. It's interesting how that works.

M: Can you tell me about the boy ...?

W: Oh Graham, graham cracker. An eight year old kid that came to see me with the brain tumor and taught me a lot about how to be with suffering people in a playful way because he had this brain tumor, he had to go through all manner of pain and suffering to deal with the treatment, including getting your head shaved which was humiliating 12 years ago, and going into a hospital system where people knew his secrets and never talked to him and he was totally exposed. The day after he got to the hospital, which is a scary enough place, he knew he would have his informed consent. You inform the kid what you're going to do. You're going to open the cranium and operate on the brain and take out the

cancer. So he had the clear information about what was going to happen, and also had the courage to go through it.

And found out upon his recovery that they couldn't get all the cancer with surgery so he had this certain knowledge cancer was left in his brain. And he went back to school, his schoolmates did not include him in their circle. He was different. At recess he wasn't chosen for the team because he was a sure out. Because they were competing against each other and you wanted to win and beat the other. It's amazing that kids at the age of 8 could learn to be non-supportive. But he went through all of that. He went through all of these treatments, chemotherapy and radiation.

He'd go see the doctors at the big medical centers and then come see me in these hour and a half appointments. One day after he finished all his x-ray treatments, he came to his x-ray specialist for the last follow-up visit and then came over to see me, and when he walked into see me he handed me a gift, a sack of noses; pig nose, elephant nose, different kinds of noses. And I said, "Hey Graham, thanks a lot." He said, "Doc, let me tell you what happened today when I went to see the x-ray doc, had my last visit with him and sometimes when you go to see the doc you have to wait and I was getting kind of bored and looking at the old magazines and stuff and I got an idea.

I got the noses out, I got a pig nose out and I put the pig nose on and I waited for the doc to come to the door. And when I heard him begin to turn the door handle, I turned up, stood up, and with my back to the door, he came in and said, "hey Graham, how you doing?" and I said, with my back to him and the pig nose on, well doc, as I slowly turned around, there were certain side effects from the radiation you forgot to tell me about." I just thought that was so great. I mean it was like, it was an aha moment.

My mind just went limp in terms of something slipping into place in my psyche and I saw this as an incredible lesson, this is grandma's teaching me something here something here. That dealing with a heavy serious problem doesn't mean you always have to be heavy and serious. He was going through all of his treatments, he wasn't in denial, he was accepting face on what he needed to do, and with courage he was doing it. But also with the playfulness and lightness and buoyancy of a child. And that just seeded my psyche and really gave me a push to risk being more playful, even in serious situations.

Playing with really sick terminally ill people. I've gone, down at Duke Medical Center, I've gone there to do a bunch of stuff and I've been on there, where people are waiting for hearts and goofing with people and in clown and taking my fake poop and having, I found really sick people like to laugh and have fun. Why? They're not dead yet. They're alive. And they want to be in the moment fully. But most of the people that come to see them, oh Mike, I'm sorry to hear about your cancer. That's the worst possible, the whole neighborhood is upset. We'll feed your cat and everything, but it's just the terrible worst possible, terrible,

terrible, and I'm sorry it's terrible. Not exactly an uplifting interaction for the sick person a lot of the time.

So what I decided I wanted to be was something different in that milieu and I noticed that patients really appreciated it and looked forward to having a chance to play and not just be heavy and serious, even though everybody else might have wanted to be and encourage them to play tricks on their care givers and take back some power and control in the process. And what I discovered is they took back some power of control. They often times didn't die on time, they got well when they weren't suppose to and broke the rules. And that was interesting to sort of watch that process. They weren't doing it to make something go away. They were doing it to live fully in the present moment. And I think play, they were playing.

M: You mentioned the Neoteny..

W: Yes.

W: It's so sad. Actually Monique's definition of health in Growing Young is the ability to work, the ability to love, the ability to play, and the ability to think soundly. And I think what we are good at doing is one of those. I think we know how to work and I think the Japanese know how to work. I think we know how to work in first world culture, but I think we've lost the ability to play, the ability to love, and the ability to think soundly because you can't think soundly if you lose your sense of play, your creative prowess is zapped, it's gone if you can't be playful.

M: You mentioned that ...sacredness.

W: Someone that knows more and more about less and less until they know everything about nothing. I love it.

M: The experience that you shared in Red Square, sacred bonding ... play and there's something that you articulated by drawing that prayer and play together ... I think it's really quite special ... Fred talked about a sense of not belonging to this group or that group or anything cultural.

W: I think what you said just now, in terms of creating a context for my response, what it triggered in me was the idea when I am the best,

The most authentic prayer is the silent prayer. But something close is the prayer of Thanksgiving. Thank you for this life, for this moment, for this chance, for this opportunity. My scared guy feels safe when I'm in a right relationship to the mystery we call God. When I play I feel safe so I think there's a real connection between those things and I think in that place we can risk, we can risk when we feel safe.

When I was in Russia, the last trip I was in a children's hospital for children that had facial defects. We went in to that, the clown troop goes into the hospital, we're on this floor and this kid comes running at me and grabs a

hold of my leg, a little kid, and a woman says in perfect English, “He thinks you’re going to take him outside.” And I said boy, that’s good English. She says, well I’m from Wales and they were there with the surgical team to do plastic surgery on children in this hospital and she told me that they were going to operate him but he was too malnourished to operate. And we started talking and I said, what do you mean take him outside? She said, “Well you see he has a coat on.” And I said, yeah. So, what’s the big deal about going outside. She said, “He’s never been outside.” I said, I don’t understand. How old is this kid? “8.” I don’t understand how an 8 year old kid could not have been outside. She said, “Well when we got here to start this work, he didn’t have any clothes, he was sort of curled up in the dark in the fetal position and while we’ve been here he’s sort of come out. And we discovered his parents just dropped him off here because he had this problem.

They didn’t know what to do and they never came back.” That’s what she surmised. “And he’s just been here in the hospital and he has these problems like he doesn’t talk. And so he’s been neglected. And what we did is, he’s come out. He wouldn’t, initially he wouldn’t look out the window. It was scary to look out. Well once he started looking out the window, well now he wants to go out there.” I said so, why don’t you take him out? “Well we haven’t gotten permission to take him out yet.” And I said wait a second.

You mean it would be possible right now to take this child outside who has never been outside? “Well, yeah, but it’s not, we haven’t got.” As a clown you don’t ask for permission. And I’m holding this kid in my arms and there’s nothing to keep me from risking breaking the rules to take him outside. And so we start down the steps and this gal, big nurse starts yelling at me and I’m with this other clown, guy clown, and he’s with me all the way. I mean we were going outside and we take this kid outside and I mean it was a sacred moment.

I mean it was so incredibly special. I mean this kid goes outside and he looks up and just takes in the world. Wow! To be there, get out of here, I can’t imagine a more wonderful experience in my life than that experience. And somehow it’s connected to breaking the rules and taking the risk, being willing to be in the moment, to see the possibilities, not simply the socialization and the norm and constrictions of the freedom that’s available. And I think we experience freedom in play and we experience freedom in prayer and safety.

So I think they are related. I like what you said. What you said was it. I was responding to what you stimulated in me. It’s one of the wonderful things about dialogue.

M: It allows us to put aside all of the cultural identities.

W: I was interested in trying to create a life that made sense to me and not just go along with the program of my conditioning and made choices that were different than other people had made in terms of how I did my practice, the things that I pursued. But when I started clowning I was able to then take another level of risk that I hadn't taken before when I wasn't clowning.

Clowning, just doing the clowning in the first place for me was a big risk. It was something I never before, it wasn't even something I was interested in doing because I already myself as kind of fun, funny guy, you know, but I took the risk, I learned the stuff, and it was like that carried over because it's one psyche, that part of me that's that clown feeds. It's like I see him in therapy and I remember, I remember to carry some of that back. So if I can do this, what else can I do? If I can do this as a clown, what can I do as me? And letting go, I mean the thing about letting go of having to be in control, letting go, being more open, I really think that I have a long way to go relative to my clown.

My clown is ahead of me. Okay. He is ahead of me. But yeah as I say, I'm slow to train, it takes me a while. I do notice I'm awake about 29% of the time. I'm not waiting to feel better until I'm awake more, but I notice maybe it was 28%. I notice there's some progression relative to my own development. That I'm not sure would continue in the same way if I didn't clown. And I can't imagine giving it up. I mean it's so easy to bring joy to the world, to other people. You go see, I mean it's so simple to have fun. It is so easy to have fun. And my clown knows that and when I'm awake, I remember it and I'm thinking about fun, you know. I notice possibilities I didn't notice before.

M: The quality of playfulness ... competition ... the original play that we've talked about, that sense of belonging, safety and play.

W: Yeah, isn't that what we're preparing them for Peat's sake? Isn't that why we do it? So you know, if we can just get them to be miserable earlier, than they'll fit in nicely. They'll downsize their expectations.

Kids notice stuff, in fact they notice everything. They notice when we don't think they notice and they notice if the only time we're affirming them is when they do it right or they do it well, and they may seek to please us and the idea of some parents you know deciding that the way to, in order for our kids to be successful what they need to do is they need to do well in school and besides if our kids do well in school, it's obviously a reflection that we're great parents. So we see the bumper stickers.

One of the ways that we as parents show how adequate we are as parents is through the performance of our children. That's why you see the bumper stickers that say, "proud parent of honor roll student at Maplewood School" which is really a statement that's saying I am an adequate parent. And then the joke on those is my kid beat up your honor roll student, which is really saying I'm adequate too. But you don't see bumper stickers like this.

“Proud parents regardless of their grades, my kids have an “A” in my book.” The reason we don’t see bumper stickers like this is people aren’t paying attention to affirming their child regardless of whether or not they clean their room. Regardless of whether or not they mow their lawn. Regardless of whether or not they show the world how great a job they’re doing because their kid got on the honor roll. I think we need to affirm, affirm, affirm the child.

Michael, have I told you today what a treasure you are in my life. Brenda, if I could have chosen one, I’d have chosen you, I thank God every day you’re my daughter. Affirm, totally unrelated to them doing something right or doing something well. It’s not catching them good, it’s affirming them. Affirm, affirm, affirm, that’s why I had the tee-shirts made up with the bumper sticker, “Proud parent, regardless of their grades, my kids have an “A” in my book,” and I put it on the front and the front and on the back so people could walk around not simply drive around in their cars, but walk around, planting a little seed. We get to choose what we do with our energy and attention.

What message do we want the children to have? Well I think we want them to feel safe. How do they feel safe with us? Affirm, affirm, affirm. They’ll feel safe, safe to risk. Revealing themselves to us and safe to risk. Telling us about their dreams, knowing that we won’t squash them because we want them to do something else.

So I, if there’s some way that you can utilize that to support the work that you’re doing, I’m interested in that message getting out any way, shape or form.

M: Play is the thing, and as soon as you get into a sporting structure, more than if you watch the structure of, you won’t be able to get the ball, ... That whole sense of exploration ... so much of what the love which becomes the catalyst for people to ... Right? That’s the thing that ... the only right way to do it mentality does, the culture does. They pay billions of dollars to the guys that mostly hit the ball ... The opportunity to criticize ...

W: It’s a wonderful way to compensate for my feelings of inadequacy is to point out your shortcomings when you don’t do it right. They did, you know this probably, **they did this with the art students. In class they teach art and they took kids in a classroom, divided them in half, and one-half of the kids got to participate in a contest, in an art contest, and the kids were all given the same materials. One half of the kids they were in a contest, and the other half of the kids no contest. They were given the materials, they were told, create whatever you want to create and have a lot of fun with it and see what you come up with.**

Then what they did is they brought in artists and had them evaluate the work that the kids did and they didn’t tell them which group the pieces

Touch the Future

Bowen White MD

and Michael Mendizza

came from and it was very clear that the people that were competing in the contest to do the best art did the worst art. And the kids with the same materials that were just creating to have fun, did the best art because they were playfully at work, playfully at work doing art.

And what they created was much more wonderful.

end