

Social Work: A perpetual odyssey towards strengths based practice

Pam Trotman

This paper will retrace, from a reflective viewpoint, a forty year journey through professional and personal challenges as part of ongoing efforts to discover and utilise my strengths as an integral part of social work practice.

It will cover terrain in which forces such as internalised dominance threaten to undermine or disrupt my strengths and capacity to reach professional maturity. It will describe the journey inherent to exploring the implications of applying principles of social justice, self determination, uniqueness of the individual, and respect for difference. It will attempt to take readers through the dark, lonely, often terrifying realm of fears and prejudices – country we must travel if we are to break free of those forces to encounter our humanity – the cornerstone of good social work practice. It will chart the trials, challenges and triumphs resulting in confidence in myself as a social work professional, the future, and a sense of belonging to the global struggle to achieve just and equitable societies, as well as being part of the social work profession's contribution to that collective effort.

The paper will conclude by describing a vision for the future and the likely challenges facing those people who attempt to achieve that vision.

The reader will firstly be taken through the narrative of key influences shaping my thinking and hence responses to social work thought and practice leading to the identification and analysis of my emerging strengths based practice. By its nature, the narrative needs to be told in full before the nuances of its patterns and the main relationships between its characters reveal their full meaning and purpose. By tracing the threads of the narrative, and by exploring their meaning, one begins to gain a sense of the whole story, in therapeutic terms, the uniqueness of the individual. And in telling the story, and hearing it retold, the person gains a vantage point from which to explore and assess individual chapters of life and key events within them - the result being a growing sense of wholeness and connection both inwardly and to the greater world of his or her existence. To avoid disruption to the narrative whilst at the same time acknowledging sources of information I will cite references by use of the numbers thus: [1].

This narrative begins February 1965. I had passed my high school exams but not well enough to obtain a scholarship to attend university. An offer of a Government sponsored Teacher's College Scholarship was declined as I really wanted to study social work, despite having scant knowledge of the profession. The last two years of my life had been dedicated to matriculating – never again was I to demonstrate such commitment having, in my last year, spent two hours of each day on mathematics; the subject I needed to pass if I was to matriculate. I was a very poor mathematics student and in fact failed all the examinations in those final two years except the one that counted.

With my parent's blessing and financial support I was going to Sydney, some seven hundred kilometres away, to begin studying social work. Such was the extent of my family's conviction and commitment to my future that they dedicated three quarters of the fortnightly income to paying my way. Yet the journey really began a decade beforehand shortly after we had arrived in the rural community in which we were living.

My father, a soil conservationist, had returned to government employment after a failed business venture. We went to live in a prosperous country town. Accommodation was in short supply so initially we lived in a disused farmhouse. To get to the house we had to cross the bridge over the river, a slow meandering river that wended its way across a vast floodplain. As with such rivers there were numerous ox-bow lagoons along its course. One such lagoon, know as billabongs in Australian English, lay just on the other side of the river. It was 'home' to several local Aboriginal families. As a living place, nestled under the giant river gums (eucalypt trees) it was a picturesque setting. Even the humpies, crudely constructed dwellings made of waste materials, appeared to my seven year old eyes to have a certain charm. This 'community' was, in many ways, ideally located as it was close to the town centre and the river provided a nearby source of food, water and firewood.

That scene and the ensuing events marked the birth of my sense of social justice though it was not until I reached university that I found the language to describe what I had experienced. It was born of the question "why do those people have to live there and not in town like the white people"?

Shortly after our arrival there was a huge flood that swept across the country inundating everything for miles. The floodplain became a vast inland sea. The town's emergency services team, of which my father was a member, required all those people living along the river to evacuate. This included the Aboriginal people. I don't know where they went as they were simply told they had to move.

When the flood waters receded people moved back into their homes yet the Aboriginal people were not permitted to return to the billabong. They were allocated a parcel of council land beside the town's garbage dump. The site had no running water or sewerage though I recall some pit toilets were erected and a tanker delivered water. It was 2 miles from the shopping centre, and other facilities. The Aboriginal people soon rebuilt their dwellings, again from materials salvaged from the garbage dump.

By then my parents had obtained land through a post war scheme for soldiers who had fought in WWII. It gave them land on which to build houses. A second scheme which had its origins in post WWI Australia provided 'Soldier Settlers' [1] with farms created by the Federal Government from the purchase of huge pastoral properties which were then sub-divided into farming allotments. The pastoral properties had been established during the days of colonisation in which white settlers simply occupied vast tracts of land across eastern Australia.

As a primary school student I was learning about Australian History which told of the discovery and exploration of Australia, the conquering and taming of this 'Wide Brown Land' as Australia was affectionately known, and the birth of a nation. We also learnt, that one of the first pieces of legislation passed by our Federal Government was the White Australia Policy [2] which, as its name suggests, ensured that Australia would only be settled by white people. That policy was born of a xenophobic determination to prevent the Yellow Hordes (Chinese) from overrunning Australia - a fear arising from the influx of Chinese during the gold rushes some fifty years previously. Nowhere in our constitution were Indigenous people recognised as citizens. Their births and deaths were not formally recorded along with the registration of white citizens. We were told stories of how, in some parts of the country, records of Aboriginal births and deaths were kept as part of livestock records! This remained the case until the results of the 1967 Federal referendum [3] changed the Australian political landscape in two ways - by removing the White Australia Policy and by acknowledging Indigenous people as citizens. That election marked the first time I voted and has remained a seminal moment in my political and social consciousness.

The phrase '*Wide Brown Land*' comes from much quoted poem "*My Country*" by Dorothea MacKellar [4] an early Australian poet, who by coincidence had penned the verse whilst living on one of the pastoral properties just a few miles out of the town where I was growing up. As I sat on the same river bank she had sat on years before I too felt my heart swell with love of this wide brown land.

My Country

*The love of field and coppice,
Of green and shaded lanes,
Of ordered woods and gardens
Is running in your veins.
Strong love of grey-blue distance,
Brown streams and soft, dim skies –
I know but cannot share it,
My love is otherwise.*

*I love a sunburnt country,
A land of sweeping plains,
Of rugged mountain ranges,
Of droughts and flooding rains.
I love her far horizons,
I love her jewel-sea,
Her beauty and her terror –
The wide brown land for me!*

*The stark white ring-barked forests,
All tragic to the moon,
The sapphire-misted mountains,
The hot gold hush of noon,
Green tangle of the brushes
Where lithe lianas coil,
And orchids deck the tree-tops,
And ferns the warm dark soil.*

*Core of my heart, my country!
Her pitiless blue sky,
When, sick at heart, around us
We see the cattle die –
But then the grey clouds gather,*

*And we can bless again
The drumming of an army,
The steady soaking rain.*

*Core of my heart, my country!
Land of the rainbow gold,
For flood and fire and famine
She pays us back threefold.
Over the thirsty paddocks,
Watch, after many days,
The filmy veil of greenness
That thickens as we gaze.*

*An opal-hearted country,
A wilful, lavish land –
All you who have not loved her,
You will not understand –
Though earth holds many splendours,
Wherever I may die,
I know to what brown country
My homing thoughts will fly.*
Dorothea MacKellar (1885-1968)

The more I identified with the sentiments in the poem the greater my bewilderment. It was that inner tension, experienced, yet not understood as a child which had a significant role in shaping my perceptions and understanding of the world, and my growing sense of self. It is that tension, which even today, fuels my love of this land and passion for seeking justice within it and forms the basis of my strength based practice.

The tension of which I speak relates to two, for that time, very unusual aspects of my childhood and youth. The first was the reason we had gone to live in the town – my father had resumed his profession as a soil conservationist after a failed business venture. Born in the western districts of our state, he loved the land and had a passion for its preservation decades before the concept of conservation became popular and politicised.

Each school holidays I would travel with him into the countryside, visiting farming properties requiring soil conservation work to reclaim land scoured into deep gullies as a result of poor farming methods and the denuding of the hilltops. He would take me into those gullies and teach me about the soil, its different layers and how they were formed. Sometimes the gullies were so deep the sky above me became just a narrow strip of blue. I learnt that the '*flooding rains*' of which Dorothea MacKellar wrote and for which we longed, also meant that, because of poor farming practices the land would be further scoured and ravaged.

My father had introduced me to a spiritual view of soil as a dynamic 'living' part of our world which we needed to nurture and protect if we were to benefit from its riches. His mantra, when speaking to ministers of religion was '*you save souls – I save the soil*'. Few people took him seriously. I am often glad that he did not live to see the extent to which the Australian landscape and '*the core of its heart*' as a nation has been ravaged by development though in truth he prophesied what we are now experiencing – especially the increasing salinity of inland river systems.

Soon I learnt how to 'read the land' with an eye to how water would flow across it and the possible effects of that flow. I was beginning to understand, and internalise the concepts of connection and interconnection and the potentially destructive results when key relationships are disrupted.

The second tension of which I spoke earlier related to our living conditions and those of the Aboriginal people. Our newly build house was located on the route between the Black's Camp and the local schools and swimming pool. The term '*Black's Camp*' was the name given to it by the local white citizens. It is used now in its starkness to reinforce the extreme marginalisation and denigration of the people living in that camp. Its people had been made aliens in their own land, forced to squat on the periphery of prosperous white settlement. The mere existence of the camp exemplified the extent to which white people had assumed superiority over them and had forced them out of their country. Not for them was there an acknowledgement of their '*love a sunburnt country, a land of sweeping plains, of rugged mountain ranges, of droughts and flooding rains*'. Their world was the dry Black's camp - a no-go area for white people – intruders chased away by the dogs roaming its precincts. Desolate and marginalised as it was it was still 'home' for its inhabitants.

I can't recall exactly how it came about but we were the only white children allowed to visit the camp. Maybe it was because, unlike many others, we did not set our dogs on the Aboriginal people when they walked passed our house, or because we invited the children to come and play, or because we just said hello but soon we were frequent visitors to the camp and the children to our home. I was fascinated and enthralled to see what could be made of materials salvaged from the dump. To this day I remember marvelling at the shiny brown earth floor polished hard by diligent sweeping. To my young mind it was difficult to understand how earth could be made clean by sweeping yet the evidence was before my eyes.

Many of the humpies were ringed with sculptured figures made of disused tyres. Black swans tyres came to life as flower beds, and painted stones marked out the boundaries between each humpy. Even then I could discern who cared for their home and who didn't. We had the privilege of being welcomed into homes but we were also soon identified as being '*friendly with the blacks*'. Had it not been for my close friendship with a daughter of one of the town's prominent businessmen I too would have been ostracised.

My parent's reputation too as confidantes and people who welcomed outsiders from all walks of life into their home earned us some grudging respect but also meant we were never really seen as part of the local 'in group'. I looked forward to inter-school visits as we were guaranteed to have someone stay with us who was seen as being '*a bit weird*'. The teachers organising the billets always gave us the non Anglo children. I loved it as often it meant I got a geography or social studies lesson right inside my home. The hypocrisy of it though did not escape me or my older sister - we were valued as a billeting family because we took those children no-one else wanted in their homes.

Through my association with those Aboriginal families I had the privilege of learning first hand about a host of social justice issues. It also meant that I did not accept as truth the myths often circulated about how dirty, dishonest and unreliable Aboriginal people were. I KNEW differently.

The narrative now fast forwards to March 1996. A whole generation has been born since the 1967 Referendum which abolished the White Australia Policy and recognised Aboriginal people as Australian citizens. The High Court of Australia's June 1992 Decision [5] finally and formally acknowledged Indigenous ownership of the land. Under British sovereignty land had been granted on the basis of '*terra nullius*' (although the Australian land mass was inhabited no-one owned the land). Eddie Mabo [6], a Murray Islander, had begun the movement to have this myth legally overturned.

In 1989 I had moved to live in the Northern Territory of Australia. Initially our home was in a small mining community within the famed, world heritage listed, Kakadu National Park [7]. The world heritage listing, in part, resulted from the presence of Aboriginal cultural sites and the living culture of the Aboriginal Traditions Owners. Part of the '*living culture*' being that the Aboriginal people retained and used their languages, and for many, English was their fourth or fifth language.

The Traditional Owners were acknowledged as the true owners of the land which had been 'returned to them' when the Park was created from Crown Land (government owned land). Few people, other than the Aboriginal people saw the irony of having the land for which they could establish continuous occupation for 50,000 years being restored to them by a people whose occupancy of the wider Australian land mass had only occurred in the previous two hundred years. In Kakadu I discovered and came to love another part of our "*Wide Brown Land*".

Kakadu is vast, covering a geographical area of 20,000sq.kms. Within it borders are in excess of 5,000 recorded rock art sites, unique flora and fauna and an entire river system. I revelled in its vastness and sense of agelessness which seemed to permeate the air as a quiet subliminal hum – as if the earth and rocks themselves were alive. Much of the rock art told stories of Aboriginal spiritual beings like that of the Rainbow Serpent (creator of the land) and Namarrgon (Lightning Man) [8]. Lightning Man made thunder and lightning by clapping together the stone hammers on his head, elbows and knees. And what a magnificent show he provided when the monsoonal storms rolled towards us. The air vibrated with booming thunder and giant lightning flashes – energy so intense that often the earth literally shook as if to herald '*the drumming of an army, the steady soaking rain*".

After a short while I began to make connections with the local Aboriginal people, most of who lived in shanty communities outside the town boundary. Again I was witnessing an example of white dominance acting to exclude Aboriginal people despite their acknowledged ownership of the land. The dominance came about because the town had been built to house workers attached to the nearby Ranger Uranium mine. The area within the mining lease and town precincts had been legally excised from Kakadu National Park thereby giving ownership of the mine site and town to the mining company which also had legal responsibility for demolishing both sites and rehabilitating the area once the minerals are exhausted (2020). This legal arrangement made it impossible for anyone who was not employed, or partnered to an employed person, to live in the town as all housing was linked to employment.

Some of my connections with the local Aboriginal people began within Sunday church services attended by a group of devout Aboriginal worshippers and an amalgam of non-Catholics. A relaxed, participative service format included the sharing of 'The Peace' – what I irreverently called '*kissy kissy time*'. It took me a while to realise that many of the Aboriginal people, most of whom sat at the back of the church, rarely were included in the wider sharing. I noticed that they appeared shy of coming forward and, except for a few, the white people similarly seemed unable to take the steps towards them. I prefer to sit at the back as it gives me a chance to observe the wider context of my environment. In this particular church I noticed that it placed me and my husband amongst

the Aboriginal worshippers. It thus became natural for us to reach out during '*kissy kissy time*' to shake the hand or embrace those around us. One woman, Merrill (not her real name), was loathe to hold out her hand as it was misshapen from leprosy. One day, as I sat next to Merrill I noticed her hand looked swollen and sore. Without thinking I reached out to touch it gently asking quietly '*does it hurt*' to which she nodded. We had established a bond of caring and understanding which endured throughout my time in that community.

By March 1996 I felt at home in the Northern Territory and had developed a deeper respect for the land and a growing appreciation, albeit applied, of the connection Aboriginal people had with it. I had obtained work as a part time tutor in the School of Social Work in Darwin, some two hundred and fifty kilometres from my community. Each Monday I drove to Darwin to spend several days on my teaching commitments.

Darwin is a small tropical city perched on the edge of what is known as the Top End of Australia. It is a very multicultural community and its people pride themselves on their relaxed and tolerant attitudes. Subtle signs of white superiority and the marginalisation of Indigenous people were nevertheless still evident though few would acknowledge this as to do so would run contrary to the dominant ethos of an accepting community. One day I noticed a small article in the local newspaper which reported that '*long-grassers*', the name given to the homeless, were being imprisoned for failure to pay fines related to sleeping in public places. The fines were executed in accordance with a local government by-law which made it illegal to sleep in public places between sun down and sun up. Enacted in 1983 in response to the growing bands of hippies taking up residence along the foreshore during the balmy months of the northern Dry Season the legislation was now being used to clean up Darwin's streets and parks of its long-grass dwellers. The result of these policies and their enforcement meant that Aboriginal people were being incarcerated for non-payment of the \$50.00 fine. Their bedding was also being confiscated.

Incensed and appalled that this should be happening in our supposedly tolerant community I decided to take action. Drawing on Lady Godiva's tenth century example of direct protest by public action [9] I decided to sleep out in one of central Darwin's main parks as gesture of protest at the way the provisions of the by-law were being enforced. Perhaps it was the inner stirrings of my English aristocratic ancestry or a simple belief that if I was to retain a sense of congruency and integrity I had to do something to voice my objection to what was happening. A friend and I paid for a full page advertisement in the newspaper. The advertisement, in the form of a letter, called on churches and others, to speak out against this practice reminding them that their properties were built on land taken from the ancestors of those people who were now being targeted. It announced that on a certain date a month hence that I would publicly defy the Council's use of the by-law by sleeping out and that I would go to prison rather than pay the fine. I signed the letter, "*Pam Trotman, Social Worker*". All I wanted to achieve was a formal statement that someone did not endorse the Council's actions.

My actions unleashed a storm of outrage. It didn't help that the newspaper, sensing a good story, made me and my proposed actions front page news for that edition. A photograph of me covered almost half the front page. I was woken early that morning by a telephone call. The male caller screamed obscenities at me before hanging up abruptly. Such was my introduction to public protest! That I had stated my profession as social worker seemed to embarrass many of my colleagues. Although nothing explicit was said, I felt a barrier being erected between myself and other social workers, especially those who worked in government positions. Only a few actively supported me. No follow-up comment came from the Australian Association of Social Workers despite the pursuit of social justice being one of its core objectives. My visit to the Darwin Police Station to ensure our safety whilst we engaged in the protest was met with a long haranguing from a senior officer. I left feeling totally pummelled.

I had come full circle in my journey of recognising and confronting the forces by which prejudice, alienation and injustices are spawned. But the narrative was incomplete as I was only then beginning to synthesise the lessons of the last three decades of my professional practice. Core principles such as 'self determination', 'respect for difference' and the pursuit of social justice [10] were resurfacing as conscious pillars of that practice. Perhaps this was because I had returned to the formal teaching environment. For whatever reason, I found it increasingly difficult to ignore the myriad of examples where I assumed as rights what were in reality social privileges. Nor was I able to remain silent in the face of other people's expression of dominance simply because they too had been socialised into a dominant position within society.

The more I grappled with this the more it became evident that much of my social work practice had been focussed on pursuing social justice for clients in relation to the actions of a third party rather than on my own practice. I had become an effective advocate and taught many people assertiveness strategies in the pursuit of their equitable participation in the community and in obtaining a share of its resources. But the incongruencies experienced in my childhood remained as an inner nagging on my conscience. I was able to do all these things as a result of privilege – especially the privilege of having parents who encouraged me as a child and young woman to think beyond the social constraints of my gender. Not for me were the limited horizons of a small country town. I was helped to attain the abilities to '*make the world my oyster*' words passed down by my mother which she had learnt from her naval officer father. That was his only legacy to me as he had died when my mother was ten years of age.

The inner naggings soon caused me to explore the extent to which I maintained my social and professional position solely on the basis of that privilege. Slowly I began to reflect on those aspects of my practice which, unintentionally, served to maintain inequalities and injustices within the systems for which I worked and in which I

lived. The tensions heightened even further in 1999 when I began work as a counsellor with an Aboriginal medical service.

One of the most challenging aspects of my work with this client group was finding ways of breaking down the effects of their internalised oppression and my internalised dominance [11]. They had been socialised to give white people deference whilst I, coming from white upper middle class and minor English aristocratic stock, was accustomed to being respected. Often the deference was expressed in requests for me to tell clients what to do and the frequently explicit expectation that I, the powerful and competent one, "*would fix them up*". The notion of self determination was an anathema for many people, especially those who had learnt that survival within the dominant society meant demonstrating unquestioning deference to white thinking and expectations.

Yet they repeatedly turned up for counselling – often seething with outrage at their circumstances; outrage which threatened to overwhelm them and me as their counsellor. Negotiating the pitfalls of transference and counter-transference [12] became an ever present requirement as I struggled to ensure my own reactions to their internalised oppression and my internalised dominance, did not contribute to their existing confusion and maintenance of their oppression.

The one thing that saved me from succumbing to the quagmire of this destructive interaction being the deep conviction that I was no better than anyone else and that if it was good enough for me to expect to be given the opportunities to become self determining then, I needed to afford others the same opportunities otherwise I would be an arch hypocrite – an unthinkable prospect. Using the same principle, I also was loathe to accept responsibility for other people's lives often asserting that I had enough to do making sure I remained balanced and well functioning and that they had within them the ability to overcome their troubles. I repeated the assertion that our shared challenge was to discover and harness those abilities – often likening them to the Hindu notion of the 'Inner Charioteer' [13].

With some clients I felt as if I was engaged in an emotional and spiritual arm wrestle as I struggled to help them to control, then harness, powerful negative energies to avoid being destroyed by them and to channel them into creative forces for change and renewal. There was no time or place for pretences or posturing. This was in-your-face grappling with issues of deep human tragedy and pathos.

The more the counselling role took me through these realms the more I had to confront my own demons and fears. They took the shape of inner doubts about my skills and knowledge, of fears of being overwhelmed by the pathos and tragedy poured out in counselling sessions throughout the day. And too there were the demons of confusion over what was the best way to resolve my own interpersonal and inner conflicts along with recognising the need to resist the temptation to claim the client's achievements as mine own. The later demon was a constant companion as the more people found resolution to their problems the more they told others about me. Soon new clients were self-referring with the explicit expectation '*can you do to me what you did to him/her as he/she is a changed person and I want to be like that*'. I think the only thing that saved me from this particular demon was a deep distrust of guru's. I was not going to hand over control of my life to someone else by blindly following his or her teachings or directions, viewing it as being tantamount to placing oneself in spiritual servitude. For me salvation could only be found through my own journeying while allowing myself to be influenced and guided, but not controlled, by others. Achieving the balance had become an integral part of my own life's odyssey and I later came to recognise it as a mainstay of my strengths-based life and professional practice.

As I connected with clients in their journey towards wholeness I discovered that I need not fear being overwhelmed by their stories of trauma and suffering. Slowly I began to hear the voice of the survivor and to recognise that it was the survivor spirit prompting the person to seek wholeness. That shift in my listening focus meant that whilst I still acknowledged their pain and suffering I was often in awe of the beautiful spirit which had managed to preserve itself from the full onslaught of traumatic experiences. Soon my style of questioning and reflecting began to change. Questions such as: '*what was it that enabled you to survive that horrific experience*' helped the client to also focus on that inner strength and beauty. Just as I had responded to the pain in Merrill's hand that day in church I found myself reaching out to people in their woundedness. Gone was the fear that I would be overwhelmed by it. In its place was a sense of connection to our shared humanity. Together we would then chart the course forward towards a new sense of wholeness and renewal of spirit.

I shared my knowledge and skills with clients, explaining the purpose of key therapeutic approaches. They in turn invested their wisdom and knowledge to the process of deciding what was the best way for me to apply knowledge and skills to promote and facilitate their journey. Gone were the requests, and demands, for me to fix them up. Rarely did a counselling session finish with either of us feeling exhausted or spent. The ability to recognise and share in one's universal connectedness and interconnectedness served to enrich and sustain each of us.

Often I would find myself sitting on that river bank of my childhood drawing energy from the eternal patterns of renewal contained within its life force. I began to practice treading more gently among the relationships of my inner and outer spirit with the result that anxieties flowing from fear and doubts became less common. Slowly I was beginning to find my own flow of inner life which could find its course across the land without ravaging it or drowning people with its intensity.

The narrative has now reached the year 2006. My time with the Aboriginal Medical Service has come to a close – the decision to resign made after heeding the inner voice that said it was time to go. I have rejoined the Australia

Association of Social Workers and have become active in promoting its core objectives, especially those that relate to the pursuit of social justice, advancement of humanity and contribution to building the profession's knowledge base.

Around me are countless ugly examples of humanity's capacity for rapacious action, most of them born of fear and many justified by reference to religious dogma. Whole nations are tearing each other apart and others are being ravaged by the economic, political and social exploitation of the dominant few, my country among them. It's no longer the fear of the Yellow Hordes but of Muslim radicals. Australia, once the new home for many refugees fleeing injustices or ravaged lands is now the place where government policies excise whole tracts of land to avoid the prospect of boat people arriving on our shores in search of refuge [14]. The White Australia policy is again being reintroduced in the form of a test to ensure new settlers can demonstrate an understanding of and respect for 'Traditional Australian Values' one of which being the ability to speak English. Few people recognised that this policy, targeted at newcomers, serves to exclude many Indigenous people within their own land as their knowledge of written English is well below that of the level suggested as part of the policy [15].

It would be easy to despair at these developments, each one being an assault on our shared humanity but if we take the time to listen to the voices of reason, compassion and connectedness we can still hear the quiet hum of the energy within. The sound of clamouring, fearful politicians, and harsh cries of people outraged by years of oppression becoming less dominant, thereby enabling us to stay tuned to the collective hum of our shared humanity.

I believe that is our challenge for the future – to focus our energies on finding ways to retain, rebuild and restore connections across racial, religious, and political landscapes so that when the steady soaking rains of renewal pour upon us, we are not swamped or scoured as they gush across our inner and contextual terrains. By confronting our own inner demons we will be better prepared to stand firm in the face of external threats – using our individual and collective strengths to shape a craft that will sustain us should the floods come, and provide a vehicle through which we, in diversity, can build new homes and where we can dwell in peace. A pipe dream? I think not. Is it not at the heart of political struggles and the objective of every quest for justice?

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