

This article appeared in the November 14th issue of the North Port Sun Herald

LET ME INTRODUCE YOU TO THE FLORIDA CENTER

This is my first article in a series of weekly articles that will be dealing with many different kinds of issues that have to do with the human spirit and our need to live life to the fullest. It will deal with peoples' emotions and how they can use their minds to their best advantage. I am asking readers to send feedback as well as requests for me to deal with particular issues in future articles. Some of the topics that I will be addressing are dealing with anger and guilt, building self-confidence, ways to limit worrying, stress management, understanding depression living in an unsafe world, learning how to relax and, believe it or not, how to deal with the mental side of the game of golf.

For today's article I have chosen to write about the future opening of a new Agency in the North Port Community called The Florida Center for Child and Family Development. This Agency has its main office in Sarasota with a satellite in Venice and in the wisdom of our Community Leaders, they will now have another satellite in North Port. The building is in the process of being built and is located on Pan American Boulevard. I have been privileged to become involved with The Florida Center since 2005 when I interviewed the Marketing Director, Lucy Nicandri on my radio show at WSLR in Bradenton and later met Peter Howard who is the Agency's President and CEO. My purpose in this writing is to support their entrance into our Community of North Port in any way that I can. Future articles on The Florida Center will focus on the human elements of helping children and their families.

The Florida Center is nationally accredited and provides quality services and programs dedicated to the development of young children, their families and our community. These programs include speech, occupational and physical therapy as well as mental health services. More than 400 children have participated in their Early Childhood Education Program and over 9,000 developmental therapy services are provided for children aged from birth through eight years. Over 550 families were served in a year through the Healthy Families Program and over 400 parents and professionals on a statewide basis were trained on Fetal Alcohol Syndrome Disorder. In addition over 19,000 mental health counseling sessions were provided to children and families in the period of a year.

Although statistics may tell a great deal about their programs and services, what meant more to me was being able to tour the Venice facility with my wife under the guidance of Jennifer Horton-Clark who heads up that satellite and who will be serving in the North Port facility as well. We met many of the children, their teachers, therapists and volunteers and came away with a tremendously warm feeling and a sense of gratitude for everything that was being done for them. The children were developmentally limited but their hearts were full of love. I can't remember receiving that many hugs ever before and enjoying every minute of the experiences. The progress that was noted by those working with these children was very positive, imaginative, constructive and enlightening. All of the programs had some therapeutic value associated with them and the progress was

carefully gauged so that children could be moved into different groups as their progress continues.

But there is always a catch. The Agency is dependent upon contributors such as yours to help fund and support it in order to provide the vital and ongoing programs and services for the community-at-large especially during these changing economic times. Welcoming

The Florida Center into our Community would best be served by your considering a donation. With Christmas nearly upon us, this would be an excellent time to extend our hearts to the children and families served by this Agency with a generous contribution.

You can donate online and learn about the many programs that the Agency offers by going to the following internet address:

http://www.thefloridacenter.org/donation_new.cfm.

You can also donate by phone by calling 941-371-8820 or toll free at 800-587-1385 with Extension 1069 serving both numbers. Finally, you can donate by mail at the following address: The Florida Center for Child and Family Development, Accounting Dept., 4620 17th Street, Sarasota, FL 34235.

I look forward to writing future articles for the Sun and, again, would appreciate your feedback. I want to make this your column and address your issues and interests. Until we meet again, STAY WELL AND LIVE YOUR LIFE TO THE FULLEST.

Charles Bonasera, LCSW was a practicing psychotherapist for over 40 years and is now a Consultant, Author and Motivational Speaker. He also chairs the Speaker's Bureau of The Florida Center for children and families. He welcomes your comments and requests for future articles. You can e-mail him at charles@charlesmbonasera.com or view his website at www.charlesmbonasera.com where all of these articles appear on the Media Page in the North Port Sun section.

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THE VALUE OF CELEBRATING A TRADITION

Every year around this time Americans will reach into their box of traditions and come up with the same formula that has kept our country believing that it can still hope for a sense of unity and harmony. We use this time of year to give thanks or to share ourselves with others in the form of giving and receiving gifts or sharing a meal. No matter what our belief system, culture or background, there is a common thread in which we all share allowing us to pause in this not-so-perfect world and celebrate for at least one day.

Tomorrow families, neighbors and even strangers will come together to give thanks for the blessings that have been bestowed upon them in the form of sharing in a meal that has long become a tradition centered around a common food...turkey. But apart from partaking of the food that represents the celebration, what value does tradition have for

us? Is there an importance that is derived other than the obvious value that the tradition holds? I believe that there is and that importance has to do with a need to keep the human spirit alive and well. It is our sense of “spirit” that allows us to continue to have hope for the future by practicing the traditions of the past.

No matter how powerful or rich as we might be, there is a common thread in which we all share and that is the fear that we could lose what we have by chance, circumstance or choice. In that respect, we are all frail despite a tendency to deny weakness. Whether the stock market, a hurricane or drought, we cannot take the prosperity of having the riches we enjoy for granted for they can all be wiped out in an instant. Holidays remind us of both the blessings and the fear that what we have is not permanent. Most of us will pause to remember those who are no longer a part of daily living except for the memories they still hold in our lives. And so the fear of loss and the ever-constant reality of change might be considered as being the basis for having and celebrating the hope that we all need for the future.

Somehow, dwelling on the past...on tradition...helps keep our spirits alive and striving for a better life...a better world. Essentially, celebrating tradition brings us back to the reality of how precious life really is and, perhaps, how much we have taken it for granted. Whether we focus on the value of our own life and what we have for which we need to be thankful or on the lives of those whom we love and cherish as being essential to our well-being makes no difference. The point of celebrating tradition helps us to maintain focus on what is really important and vital to us and affords us the opportunity to make sure that what we need to value is not lost in the daily routines that preoccupy our minds and our purpose in life.

There is no value in achieving or possessing anything unless we can enjoy the benefits that it may bring. As a life management consultant, I have worked with many very successful people who have gained prosperity and power but whose only goal is to achieve more of the same. The one track in which they run their lives allows very little or no time or thought to being able to appreciate or enjoy their achievements. They might rationalize their philosophy of living their lives in this fashion under the guise of “doing business” but the lesson that Scrooge teaches may come too little, too late or not come at all. I have talked with the relatives of these successful people who, despite their living a luxurious lifestyle tend to resent the fact that the person providing these benefits is more of a fixture than someone with whom they can share that lifestyle.

And so, celebrating tradition is a way to remind us that how we live life and what is really important need to be reconciled. Celebrating tradition gives us the opportunity to regain that perspective allowing us to enjoy what we have and the people we love. However, the real trick is to be able to hold onto that appreciation long after the celebration and until the next opportunity to celebrate arrives. Stay well, live life to the fullest and Happy Thanksgiving everyone.

Charles Bonasera, LCSW was a practicing psychotherapist for over 40 years and is now a Consultant, Author and Motivational Speaker. He also chairs the Speaker's

Bureau of The Florida Center for children and families. He welcomes your comments and requests for future articles. You can e-mail him at charles@charlesmbonasera.com or view his website at www.charlesmbonasera.com where all of these articles appear on the Media Page in the North Port Sun section.

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THE DISADVANTAGES OF BEING POLITICALLY CORRECT

I really have to chuckle every time I hear the phrase “politically correct” because most of the time politics are better known as being “politically corrupt”...but that’s another story. I guess that being politically correct means that we can no longer use the word “Christmas” or “Ho, Ho, Ho” in order to satisfy everyone and not upset anyone. Well, I’m not going to go into the origins of this concept or what it specifically entails. Instead, I would like to go behind the concept and try to help you understand its purpose.

For me, being politically correct is an attempt to be perfect and safe. That suggests that it’s wrong to be unsafe...to be able to speak out with what it is that you believe. Instead, the norm this concept holds to is that of having everything uniformly fit into a neat little package that is acceptable across the board. I believe that there are dangers involved in this kind of lifestyle. The danger is that we tend to lose our individuality for the sake of conformity. Now, don’t get me wrong. There’s nothing wrong with conformity in and of itself but if our individuality is at stake, then there’s a problem because that is what people tend to protest about...namely their need to be their own person. The same hairstyles, jeans, jewelry, shoes, tacky-tacky-houses and even the same bodies are touted as being the only way to dress and look. I find that to be very sad. What happened to the person...the individual?

What many people do not realize is that perfection is unachievable. And so is a person’s ability not to make any mistakes going through life. Life is about learning and conformity or a need to be “perfect” do not allow any effective learning to take place. The greatest learning is when we don’t know that we are learning and are having fun. Learning is different for everyone. There are no two children who learn the alphabet or their times tables in the same manner. For that matter, there are no two adults that learn in the same, exact manner either. Some of you may remember that dreaded disease called polio. Dr. Jonas Salk was a researcher who was attempting to find a cure for cancer and made a mistake only to find the cure for polio through the use of a vaccine. He made a mistake and we profited from it.

While practicing as a psychotherapist and now as a consultant, I find that one of the main contributing factors that create stress in people’s lives is their need to be perfect. It’s a hard job and the reason that it’s so hard is that there is never an end result that allows us to enjoy the fruits of our labor. Usually, the main outcome for those who spend their lives trying to be perfect is a great deal of frustration and anger. Most of us have perfectionistic

tendencies to one degree or another. The most common base for those tendencies can commonly be traced to misinterpretations that we made as children that we needed to be perfect in order to be loved. For some of us, that message from parents or parent-figure was driven home with a vengeance and the pattern of trying to achieve that state of perfection lasted well into our adult years despite the fact that there is no need anymore.

Realizing that it is no longer necessary to be perfect is hard to achieve but once we make that determination, it feels like a burden has been lifted from our lives. Most of us who have a need to be perfect don't really know what it's like just to be who we are. The key to changing that pattern is to be able to learn to relax....something that perfectionists aren't "allowed to do". Once we are able to experience that feeling of relaxation, though, it might serve up an incentive to continue to work at developing that state as a regular part of our daily routine. Just try this for a moment. Push back from your desk or table and place your hands on your lap and close your eyes. Now, just allow any tension that you might be experiencing to drain from your body. A good way of doing this is by starting at your toes and working your way up your body to relax those parts. Remain relaxed once you've achieved this scan for a few minutes and try to capture the feeling. Once the feeling is captured, your recalling it can allow you to experience it repeatedly and there will no longer be a need to be politically correct.

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This article appeared in the December 5th edition of the North Port Sun Herald

SOME INTERESTING POINTS ABOUT DEPRESSION

Many of those who sought help from me for depression came as a "point of last resort" either because previous therapies were not effective or they were against being medicated in order to treat their symptoms. Many people wanted to take control of their symptoms and their lives while their reliance on medication became just another problem to deal with. Meds may often mask symptoms leaving their sources untouched.

Indeed there are some depressive reactions with a chemical imbalance for which medication is necessary. And there are cases that can only respond to medication intervention and not to a psychotherapeutic approach. I treated one woman for suicidal tendencies and severe depression who was placed on medication upon my request but would not work on her personal or marital issues. She admitted that if she became healthy, her husband would probably leave her and she would rather have remained in a

depressed state. I also found a number of cases in which medication alone was not the answer but either psychotherapy or a combination of psychotherapy and medication were the preferred courses of treatment.

I could not have imagined the hype that has been occurring over recent years over pharmaceutical companies vying for sales of various psychotropic drugs such as anti-anxiety and depression medications on TV. This kind of approach adds to the fantasy that a pill can fix everything. Indeed, it cannot! There still is and always will be the need for individuals to change the patterns which led to the conditions and/or symptoms being experienced. My primary purpose as a consultant is to instruct people as to the nature of particular patterns and how to change them. However it should be noted here that not everyone is motivated, capable or chooses to work on their patterns.

Depression, in particular, has some “hidden agenda” associated with the disease. Stephen Ilardi, Ph.D., Associate Professor of psychology at the University of Kansas associates depression with the way we live our lives. He cites our “sedentary, socially isolated, indoor, sleep-deprived, poorly nourished lifestyle” as major sources of depression and points out that in the course of human evolution. if people were as vulnerable to depressive illness as 21st century Americans, we would be extinct by now.

The most interesting part of his thesis is this: we think more than we do. I have always stressed the need for clients to distinguish between their ***thinking and their doing*** as being an essential part of their becoming healthy both in dealing with depression as well as in its prevention. Our minds and bodies were meant to be ACTIVE and FUNCTIONAL. Instead, we have become lazy, highly stressed and relatively non-functional in our day-to day routine. Case in point: the obesity crisis. Many people will talk the talk but not walk the walk.

People need people, stimulation, conversation, activity, movement and to feed their bodies the nutrients that it needs to be healthy. Being unable to afford a gym membership or trainer doesn't preclude that we can't walk twenty minutes once a day at a brisk pace. Our bellies would be just as full if we ate healthy foods as it does eating fatty foods. Watching TV with the people we love would be better served with shutting off the TV and communicating and sharing our lives with them. In simple words, if you're not in control of your life, you'll become depressed. Changing those patterns can be as important as taking antidepressants...perhaps even more so.

So the solution to the problem of depression may be a patient's need to take medication but it must also be stressed that the factors I've pointed out need to be realized as well. I understand that lethargy and a tendency to remain sedentary both physically and emotionally are natural consequences of depression. Allowing those consequences to continue, however, will only curtail successful treatment. Changing them tends to insure that the process of treatment will be successful both in emerging from the depressive pattern as well as preventing its return. Another major factor that I have found to be prevalent in the treatment of depression is repressed anger or anger that we may tend to internalize and not express. This topic will earn its own column in future writings.

Charles Bonasera, LCSW was a practicing psychotherapist for over 40 years and presently serves as a constant, author and motivational speaker. He is also a member of the Communication Committee at The Florida Center for Child and Family Development and chairs their Speaker's Bureau. He welcomes your comments and requests for future articles and you can e-mail him at charles@charlesmbonasera.com or view his website at www.charlesmbonasera.com.

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HANDICAPS AND THE HUMAN MIND

It wasn't that long ago that my beloved sister, Jo, died. When she was eight years of age, she was stricken with the dreaded polio virus for which, at that time, there was no cure. The first third of her life was spent walking with the aid of braces, then for a short period was able to walk without them and finally was relegated to a wheelchair until she died. This article is not about her or her handicap. However it is about how her mind dealt with her handicap. I use her as an example for the countless numbers of people who have handicaps and/or who are developmentally challenged and who have used their minds to help them adapt to their life's circumstances.

If you watch a child watching other children at play there is an unmistakable sense about them in their need to mimic those to whom they look up. Their attitude is one of "I can do that!" And with the will of the ages and several failed attempts, they usually are able to accomplish whatever it is that they choose to experience. If you could consider that child's inability to do something previous to this process a "handicap" as being that of achieving success, that is the very same mind set of those who may experience a physical or mental handicap. There is a thrust of energy and willpower that allows them to go beyond their limitations and focus on the accomplishment.

To the untrained observer, their attempts at accomplishing their goal appears excruciating but to that person, there is a "rush" that allows them to withstand whatever difficulties they might experience in their efforts. An observer might be prone to step in and help or accomplish whatever the goal is for the individual. In effect, that robs them of the satisfaction of being able to say that they did it themselves. There is nothing more satisfying to someone with a handicap than the sense of independence that they experience upon completion of their task.

A handicapped person's mind has a remarkable ability to break tasks down into small steps in order to accomplish them with the least amount of energy or steps possible. My sister would watch me intensely while I was performing a task and then make very simple and amazingly practical suggestions as to how I might be able to save time and energy following her short cuts. So too was her ability to teach children how to play a game. She had a remarkable ability to relate to children who flocked to her because of the

fun they would have with her and despite her inability to perform any of the tasks necessary to play a game, her sense of sequencing and her ability to instruct them allowed them to gain a great deal of satisfaction and a sense of accomplishment. It would not be her instruction that would be emphasized but rather the child's ability to accomplish the goals themselves while having fun.

While touring The Florida Center a while ago, I closely watched developmentally challenged children performing certain play tasks repeatedly with glee until they had mastered them. Their sense of patience and will to accomplish was noteworthy. Once mastered, they moved onto the next phase of whatever the sequence called for in order to move up on the plane of accomplishment. The look on their faces was one of intensity and a sense of purpose. Essentially, they were oblivious to those around them in their total preoccupation with performing their tasks and the fun they were experiencing. The applause that their teachers gave them served as an incentive to go onto other, more complicated tasks and so the learning took place. It was a marvelous experience that I would invite everyone to experience for themselves by touring that facility either in Sarasota or Venice.

The human mind knows how to compensate and go beyond the limitations that an individual might be experiencing. It transcends those limitations with an eye for DOING...for accomplishment...for a sense of purpose that fuels the emotional soul and disallows it from become stagnant and useless. Our purpose on this planet is to learn and grow as people. That is not limited to those of us who may be fortunate enough not to have a handicap. If we want to look at the source of mental health and how the human mind promotes it, these examples exemplify what true mental health is all about.

I define mental health as our need to find alternative methods to gain happiness. I believe this to be true universally. Probably the most inspiring, yet drastic example of this is the return of the war veterans whose need to function despite the loss of limbs pushes them into excruciatingly painful rehabilitation. Their sense of enduring the pain in order to accomplish their goal may not be comprehensive to those of us who have not experienced their plight. Watch the look in their eyes and on their faces. There is nothing that is going to stand in the way of their success.

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This article appeared in the December 19th edition of the North Port Sun Herald

THE PROBLEM WITH MARRIAGE

The title of this article is taken from my yet unpublished book “How in the Hell Did This Happen to Me?” The book will deal with patterns adults bring from childhood that are no longer useful or harmful to their life management. I am sharing some of the points on this topic because of their importance in hopes they might help people struggling with relationship issues.

The title does not signify that marriage is the problem. Marriage constitutes a vow or obligation taken by two partners to remain committed to one another. A recent article dealt with the issue of divorces taking its toll both socially and financially. This article explores some basic marital issues contained in this phrase: “A marriage does not a relationship make”. Hundreds of thousands of people are married but only relatively small percentages have healthy, functional and happy relationships. The basic reason is that most couples don’t really KNOW each other prior to marriage. In order to have a healthy marriage, you must first have a healthy relationship.

When people move into a relationship and subsequently toward commitment, more emphasis is placed on the relationship than on each letting the other know WHO THEY really are. Rather, the fun and excitement of the new relationship tends to overlook that first step in order to maintain the relationship. People are usually on their best behavior in order to impress each other. That’s part of the excitement and enjoyment of starting a relationship. This could lead to their putting off their individuality in order to create and maintain the relationship. Although not uncommon in early stages, that same pattern can exist in long standing relationships as well. When this happens, people have difficulty being honest and sharing feelings with one another in order to have a close, intimate relationship. As people may find out over time, it is not sexuality alone that provides closeness and intimacy since the need for true sharing is vital.

Another issue is that often, people tend to either tell too much or too little about themselves at the inception of a relationship which can cause problems later on. This pattern can lead to erroneous first impressions which can become lasting or might sabotage the relationship from its inception. It is very important for people to come to know one another but that process should take place over time and not be like a bomb that partners drop on one another in an untimely fashion. Relationships need to take time for maturing and closeness.

The last point I want to make is the tendency for people in committed relationships falling into playing roles as being the reason that the relationship continues. Although roles are important, the trick of a committed relationship is to be able to be one in the relationship while still enjoying the benefits of each other’s individuality. This may be difficult to achieve but when accomplished, a new and vital sense of the relationship begins to emerge.

Here are some points to consider:

- Carefully listen to your partner in order to learn more about the person and not just being your partner;
- Make sure that both of you can depend on each other while not being dependent;
- Make conscious choices to change some set routines and introduce some new ones such as going dancing or bringing flowers.

These suggestions might lend a different perspective in order to help your relationship move in a more vital and positive direction.

And now, I want to apologize to any readers who may have tried e-mailing me while using the wrong address. The address has been corrected in this article and I would like to invite you to let me know if there has been any benefit from practicing any of these suggestions or any other comments you might choose to share.

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This article appeared in the December 26th edition of the North Port Sun Herald

TO RESOLVE OR NOT TO RESOLVE

It's the day after Christmas and now our thoughts turn to the New Year and making some resolutions as well as trying to figure out how to pay our Christmas bills. In this article I want to explore some of the social, psychological and emotional importance of New Year's resolutions. The hoopla surrounding this day transcends any other celebration in our year. The revelry that accompanies New Year's Eve parties is the most resounding practice but then, there's the day after and the dreaded thoughts of making a New Year Resolution.

I say "dreaded" because resolutions have to do with practices that people engaged in previously that needed changing. And so, we use this opportunity to get a fresh start with a new year to resolve to "fix" them in order to get back onto the right path of our lives. Some are sincere in making resolutions while others are rather "half hearted" because they really don't want to change but feel the need to conform and so resolutions have become a traditional or even an essential practice.

So what's the difference? It seems that the only way a resolution can be effective is when certain conditions prevail. One of them is *proper motivation*. By proper motivation I

mean having the motivation to change a problematic routine or pattern vs. just giving “lip service” to doing so. The motivation must require *doing something* to change. Making too many resolutions usually overwhelms people who may give up.

Another element is *proper perspective*. Perspective is important because we need to view the pattern in a manner so that it can be changed. For instance, if we’re going to change a complex pattern, viewing it as a “whole” rather than a number of parts becomes overwhelming and defeats us even before we start. Patterns or behaviors need to be broken down into their essential components in order to achieve success. In this way, each successful step we make toward changing a pattern becomes an incentive to go onto the next and its completion until the changes have been accomplished.

A third element is *reasonable expectations*. If our expectations are unreasonable or unrealistic, no matter how hard we try making desired changes, they are bound to fail. Expectations are the *key element* that will usually determine the final outcome. If our expectations are beyond our abilities, despite an intense desire, a sense of discouragement will set in resulting in abandoning our efforts and considering our efforts a failure.

Now, why *don’t resolutions work*? I have found the most common reason to be a person’s *feeling guilty* as the motivation for change. Guilt suggests a sense of negativity rather than a positive outlook to the future. It also signifies that past failures are the basic incentive for change resulting in a defeatist sense even before the first step is taken. Another reason is that people expect immediate gratification from their efforts. Starting a change plan requires patience because if a pattern has existed for some period of time, it is probably going to take a period of time in order for that pattern to be changed. For instance, quitting smoking after years of practicing that habit may not be able to be accomplished within the first week and may take several tries before success is experienced.

In summary, here are some points that you can consider to insure success with your New Year’s resolutions. 1) Develop a positive motivation to change; 2) Don’t make too many resolutions all at once; 3) Develop a clear perspective of both the pattern and changing it; 4) Create steps for changing that provide a positive incentive to move toward success; 5) Make sure your expectations are reasonable and realistic; 6) Change feelings of guilt from past failures into a healthy outlook to the future; 7) Develop patience vs. expecting immediate gratification. In these ways, your attempts at making necessary changes will become a labor of success instead of a sense of futility that might result in failure.

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This article appeared in the January 2nd edition of the North Port Sun Herald

THE BEAUTIFUL BODY SYNDROME

You haven't heard of the "beautiful body syndrome"? Well that's probably because there is no such formal diagnosis. But I'm sure you've heard of bulimia and anorexia nervosa haven't you? Those are bona fide diagnoses that all too many young and not so young women ... and even some young men ...are suffering from. The late, great singer Karen Carpenter was probably the first celebrity that brought those diagnoses to the attention of the American public several years ago and the battle for thinness still goes on. What's it all about? We know that the need to be thin is something that most people desire but what might lie behind that need? Even though death may not be the final outcome, the damage done to the brain, body, mind and emotions can be irreparable. It is truly a scourge and there is clearly an addictive quality to these diagnoses. In this article, I am going to take a closer look in order to understand them better.

I suppose that most professionals would first attack this problem by talking about "body image" and "self concept". Indeed, those are real components that make up these problems but might there be something behind those that needs exploration as well? I believe so. I believe that an underlying cause behind these very dangerous practices is the need for control ... control that people desperately need since they do not feel that there is any other real controls in their lives that they can call upon. From the time that we are born, seeking ways to control becomes an issue. Some examples of needing control are an infant's cry to be fed or changed, a child's manipulating his or her parents or a five year old desperately trying to maintain balance in learning how to ride a bike. Exercising control over our environments and destinies have always been essential to our survival.

Emotionally and psychologically, people need to feel safe, worthy, comfortable, accepted, loved, admired, desirable, needed, appreciated and valued. If we were to stand back and perceive what might be going on in our society, rejection in the form of criticism, anger and rage are rampant in all too many areas of our lives. In my practice as a psychotherapist, I found that rejection is probably one of the most devastating experiences that someone can have. Why? Because as humans, feeling unloved is intolerable. There is no greater need that we have than to love and feel loved. And so in order to gain a foothold, people will go to extreme forms of control in order to experience that sense of loving and being loved.

People going to extremes to fix or prevent rejection from reoccurring usually create a worse problem in the process and is based on feeling that they have no control over their lives and the sense of rejection that they actually or potentially might experience. Many people have an irrational fear that they might be rejected based on fears stemming from the experiences of others and will go to extremes to prevent happening to them. The attempts to control rejection from reoccurring could otherwise be focused on changing behavior or attitude but instead, the body becomes the focal point of the remedy. Fad diets, fasting, over-the-counter diet pills, hundreds of internet websites that tout losing weight quickly as well as the push to prevent obesity are all aimed at becoming thin. I

also believe that a basic reason, why people overeat to the point of obesity contains the same element of control. Eating brings comfort and comfort brings control.

The more desperate people become, the more they lose control. These points may help.

- First, learn relaxation methods to control anxiety and extreme thought processes so as not to panic;
- Second, be aware of your uniqueness as a human being to emphasize your independence instead of a need to conform;
- Finally, become aware of those who truly love you for who you are. They will provide the basis of loving and being loved by another quality human being.

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A PORTRAIT OF LOVE, STRENGTH, COURAGE AND COMPASSION

She was only nine years old when the bombs fell in her small rural town of Kent, just outside of London, England, but unaware of her maturity beyond her years. She and others like her were responsible for the care of the younger children as they ran to their brick, windowless bomb shelters when the sirens sounded for protection against a cruel enemy. They were undaunted, however, with respect to the potential devastation that the bombs could bring as they sang, chattering, told stories and recited their times tables in order to drown out the noisy din of the bomb loaded planes overhead. This was WWII and this story was told by a close friend who, when asked about the war commented "It was something that was there...that you lived with". As their mothers exemplified whether looking after their homes and children or working in the munitions factories, they didn't show their fear in order not to induce fear in the young..

I've known her for about three years and have always enjoyed her company and her crisp British accent. While at dinner one evening, she began talking about her experiences during the war leading to our making a date for an interview. She explained that while the men were away fighting the war or doing civil duty (her father was a fireman), it was the women who held the families together with the universally structured discipline that wartime brings. Her school lunch hall had been bombed out and mobile units took its place. A treat would be having milk to drink since all foods, clothes and petrol were rationed and subject to the use of coupons. Upon returning from school, they reported home otherwise someone would come checking on them to insure their safety. After

doing chores they went to play in the woods and fields. Christmas allowed one toy and fruit in their stockings.

Her description of life during those times suggested that everyone went about their business of “living in the moment”. I had the sense that the sirens sounding provided an inconvenient break in their day or night when most of the bombing occurred, necessitating everyone’s taking shelter. Everyone old enough to know how to use a gas mask was issued one and the very young were placed in incubator-like units to protect them from potential gas attacks. Sometimes, they could see the “Spitfires” (planes) taking off to intercept the German bombers which meant that an attack was imminent. They were especially aware of the “doodlebugs” which were flying bombs. When the noise they made stopped, that meant they would drop and destroy what lay below.

If someone’s home was bombed out, they went to live with relatives or strangers with the government finding places for those needing shelter. Without telephones, the only warning they could depend upon was their radio to determine where bombings were taking place placing them in proximate danger. There was little time for depression, anxiety or fear as community bonded to help one another providing security and allowing everyone to take things in stride.

I asked how her experiences affected her adult life in a negative fashion. She could think of none. Instead she spoke of having developed a sense of consideration and compassion for the needs of others as well as a strength that has allowed her to deal with adversity in her life as well as an awareness that all misfortune could be overcome and would pass with time. It also provided her with a strong sense of appreciation for whatever she has had in her life. My friend is truly a remarkable woman and person.

And now, here are some questions for you:

- What in your life has helped you to develop a sense of character?
- Do you require immediate gratification or can you postpone it?
- Do your family and community experience closeness and support?
- Do you have a true appreciation for what you have vs. focusing on getting more?
- What traumatic event in your life left you stronger and more confident?

Charles Bonasera, LCSW was a practicing psychotherapist for over 40 years and is now a Consultant, Author and Motivational Speaker. He chairs the Speaker’s Bureau of The Florida Center for children and families and welcomes your comments and requests for future articles. You can e-mail him at charles@charlesmbonasera.com or view his website at www.charlesmbonasera.com where all of these articles appear on the Media Page in the North Port Sun section.

This article appeared in the January 16th edition of the North Port Sun Herald

THE PROBLEM WITH ANGER

Pick up the front page of your newspaper. Watch the evening news on TV. Listen to your neighbors express feelings about the unfairness of taxation. Listen to the frustration of a mother of a child looking for immediate gratification. Watch the reddened face of customers who believe that they have been cheated. Listen to the accusations of politicians attempting to justify their positions. What do all of these experiences have in common? **ANGER!**

It seems that everywhere you turn; anger tends to be a part of our emotional environment. Without realizing it, we hear, think, feel and “even breathe” anger a great deal during the course of each day. Let me shed some light on the issue of anger and why it is perhaps the most difficult emotion to deal with whether within ourselves or from others.

As children, many people were taught that anger was “wrong” to experience or express and should be withheld. That same sense may have stayed with us throughout our development and into our adult years so that we tend to harbor our anger internally. But then, you might have heard sayings like “I’m so angry I feel that I could explode” or “Don’t get angry... get even”. This process of internalizing anger is likened to a volcano once gases build to a certain proportion necessitating a need to “blow” spewing destruction in its path. Internalizing anger is very dangerous and potentially harmful and could easily be cited as the reason for the violence in our society. It also tends to create depression in people.

Anger is a normal, healthy feeling. I define it as a feeling experienced when someone says or does something we wish they hadn’t said or done. There is nothing wrong with that. So the problem is not with feeling anger but rather how we handle and choose to express it. However, then there is guilt which I define as a feeling experienced when WE say or do something that we wish we hadn’t said or done. People tend to mislabel and mishandle each of these feelings resulting in reacting inappropriately upon experiencing them. Anger comes from others and guilt comes from within. Many times women believe they are experiencing guilt when they are really angry and men tend to think that they are feeling angry when they actually feel guilty.

Much of this confusion comes from early childhood training both of the manner that our anger and guilt was treated by parents as well as how parental figures handled those feeling themselves that we copied from them. A person’s ability to distinguish between the two handle and express those feelings in meaningful and appropriate ways is often the key to their resolving issues in their lives that have plagued them. I recommend that people learn to take stock of these feelings and begin to sort out the patterns that they use to deal with them. Here are some guidelines that might help:

- What do you remember about how you dealt with anger feelings as a child?
- What do you remember about how your parents handled their feelings of anger?

- Do you tend to withhold feelings inside rather than express them?
- Do you have a “hair trigger” reaction when you become angry?
- When you say or do something for which you feel guilty, how do you handle and express that?
- Are people afraid of your anger or are they able to change whatever they have said or done once you express it to them?

When people experience problems with any of these guidelines, they might try changing the manner in which they deal with them. If help is needed, it would be a good idea to seek it. If misplaced anger continues to dominate our society, the outcome can only be one that we will ultimately regret.

Since beginning to write this column, I have not received very little feedback from readers and so I want to once again encourage you to jot an e-mail to the address noted below. That will help me determine whether my articles are helpful as well as giving me ideas for other requested topics.

Charles Bonasera, LCSW was a practicing psychotherapist for over 40 years and is now a Consultant, Author and Motivational Speaker. He chairs the Speaker's Bureau of The Florida Center for children and families and welcomes your comments and requests for future articles. You can e-mail him at charles@charlesmbonasera.com or view his website at www.charlesmbonasera.com where all of these articles appear on the Media Page in the North Port Sun section.

This article appeared in the January 23rd edition of the North Port Sun Herald

GROWING UP IS NOT AN OPTION

The era in which I grew up had one simple rule: “Just do as I say, not as I do, and everything will be fine”. Since that time, parenting and children have gone through a major metamorphosis. Instead of a dogmatic approach, parenting tended to become an “art form” in which there was much more liberality introduced into the methods that previously would allow little room for change. The former was the manner in which a sense of responsibility was taught. It was a relatively universal method that most parents employed in raising their children and in that sense there was a more commonly acceptable approach. However, this column is not about the merits of either approach nor will it weigh the effectiveness of each. Actually, today’s column is about choices, consequences, responsibility and obligation.

We did not have choices as children because of the expected conformity. By-and-large, teaching children about choices was unheard of. There was no sense of having a choice when you acted responsibly and heaven help you if you didn’t. As children from that era grew into adulthood, many of them either did not realize that they had choices or they did not believe that they could make them. They continued to act very similarly to how they were expected to act as children. I am not sure that the lack of training in making choices is only reserved for those of my generation since my work with today’s parents would suggest that similar patterns are being practiced as well.

My perception of this process is simply this; responsibility involves choices whereas obligation does not. The sense of “responsibility” that was practiced in my judgment was really more of a sense of “obligation” driven by guilt. As those children grew into adulthood without being taught about choices, many made the wrong ones which would be understandable since someone cannot do something they weren’t taught to do. That sense of what I now term to be obligatory behavior and the guilt which drove it really didn’t work very well. Everything was perceived in a “forever” context and, of course, there is no “forever” in this life. Life is about constant change and so without knowing how to make choices real dilemma results creating some real problems. Let me be clear. You can practice making choices, and still be accountable for the consequences of those choices without practicing rigid, dogmatic patterns.

Since life is also about making responsible choices, having a healthy and happy lifestyle involves making good choices that will benefit us. If you realize that life presents many turns in the road requiring making a choice as to which direction we go, making right choices is a very important and necessary part of being an adult. And because much of the learning that children experience is derived from watching parents deal with their lives, the process is handed down from generation to generation. Not to say that making mistakes and learning from them is not a part of living life but I am referring to a consistent pattern of making wrong choices that creates a great deal of turmoil and misery from those caught up in that pattern. However, it is never too late to learn to make good,

solid, healthy choices in life but the first step is to realize that there are choices that can be made.

Let me leave you with some questions whose answers might prove helpful to your life and the lives of your children.

- How much guilt do you experience instead of feeling free to make choices in your life?
- Do you teach your children how to make choices based on their own experiences or do you criticize them when they make mistakes?
- Do you recognize that your pattern of making choices is probably going to become your children's pattern as well?
- How accountable are you for your choices and what are you teaching your children about accountability?

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This article appeared in the January 30th edition of the North Port Sun Herald

THE TERROR FROM WITHIN

Our newspapers and magazines are filled with stories of terror. Suicide bombings killing massive numbers of people, injuring hundreds and reigning terror throughout those regions in which these patterns predominate. Thusfar those types of terrorist episodes are occurring outside of our Country but Homeland Security anticipates that it may not be long before we might see such attempts and is preparing to prevent them from happening. The very word “terror” strikes fear into our hearts and rightly so. Unfortunately, our future will be resplendent with such threats requiring ultra vigilance.

This article, though, is not about the threat of terror running rampant throughout the world. It is about another type of terror which has already invaded our own United States and, I believe, is deserving of some attention. Some call it “moral decadence” while others term it an undermining of our basic principles that founded this Country. I want to examine this phenomenon in the light of what seems to be its roots.

I wrote a self-help book on managing stress in our lives entitled Guide to a Life Management Process. In it I refer to the terms “guiding principles” as those values, priorities and beliefs that guide us through life. As our society has developed over time our belief systems and priorities have changed. Whereas a sense of self-discipline and the rule of law were common features previously embedded in the fabric of our society, those elements gradually were substituted by sayings like “you can have it all”, “go for it” and “go now, pay later”. The “common good” has been replaced by the rights of individuals. I believe that at some point you could order a hamburger in a fast food chain and if it didn’t appear within a certain amount of time, you received one free. The element of postponing pleasure resulting in maturity seems to have disappeared and people are looking for ways of looking good and staying young as obesity and suicide are on the upswing.

Now, don’t get me wrong. There have been many benefits derived from some of the changes that have occurred over time. Technology has certainly improved and we are doing marvelous things that were unheard of previously. We have made significant advances at controlling disease and exploring the void of space. I’m not sure that any of the changes that have happened are intrinsically bad or harmful. What I have found is that people have a tendency to carry a good thing to extremes which may end in a bad result. Those extremes are what might be determined as being the “terror from within”. Going to extremes brings a sense of imbalance and frustration that can bring on anger and even violence as we seek our answers in those states of mind. Going to extremes can oftentimes mean that we carry our right to self-determination to a point where we might forget that there are responsibilities associated with that right.

Should we return to the “good ‘ol days”? I’m not sure about that if it means regressing. But we can begin to reign in our attempts at having it all and begin to realize the value of what we do have with an appreciation that will help us to take note of our progress. There

is certainly nothing wrong with always having something to look forward to but that perception can be accompanied by an appreciation of what has come beforehand. That sense of balance might help set us straight and begin to minimize the terror from within. I often tell my clients that too much of a good thing is not good for us. What are your views on this topic? This newspaper and I are looking for and would welcome your feedback.

Some points to consider:

- How well have your guiding principles served you?
- Are you able to “live in the moment”?
- What can you do to bring more balance into your life?
- What changes that you resolved to make this new year will help you to achieve greater balance?

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This article appeared in the February 6th edition of the North Port Sun Herald
WHEN SUFFERING FROM JOB STRESS, LOOK IN THE MIRROR FIRST

Life can be difficult at times. Problems may arise in our personal lives in our marriages, with raising our children, having un-neighborly neighbors, financial problems, personal issues such as dealing with weight or anger. Those are all problems that are very stressful and occur within the personal and everyday routine that many of us encounter. And then, of course, there's what may be occurring outside of our personal lives within the workplace.

After all, most of us spend at least one third of our twenty-four hour day outside of the home in a place that can have many different faces associated with it ... namely the workplace. Like it or not, there are situations and people there that can be very stressful and have an extraordinary effect on us personally as well as on the relationships we have outside of the workplace as well. Without getting into the kinds of stressors that the workplace might hold that leave us exhausted at the end of the day, the focus of this article is on how much of that stress might be associated with what we might be bringing with us into our jobs.

In my book, ***Guide to a Life Management Process*** I coined the phrase "carryover effect". This is to indicate that we always tend to carry issues or problems from one area of our lives into others. When this happens, and usually we are not aware of its happening, problems that might appear to be associated with the area we may be in are really what we've carried over from another part of our lives. For instance, we may think that we're having a problem with our boss but what might really be the case is that we are having problems in our marriage or with our children that make it appear that our boss is the problem.

The basis for the carryover effect has to do with our feelings and our not being aware of them or not dealing with them in a forthright manner. In other words, the feelings that we might experience with the marital problems have not been resolved so as to "wipe the slate clean" as we move into the work environment. Of course, the same thing can happen in reverse. If we're experiencing a problem at work and bring home the residue of those effects, it might appear and feel that we have a marital or other family-type problem. It isn't unusual for people who experience the carryover effect to experience problems in many if not all relationships. They might also end up feeling overwhelmed, argumentative, fearful or a myriad of other feelings that aren't very productive or comfortable to experience.

As I mentioned, the key to preventing this effect from occurring has to do with our feelings and how we handle them. There are three major steps in dealing with feelings successfully and they are as follows:

- Be aware that you are feeling something that needs attention
- Be sure to label that feeling or feelings accurately
- Express those feelings in an appropriate and meaningful manner

As we are able to accomplish these three steps successfully, what will happen is that instead of storing those feelings or carrying them around with us having them interfere with other parts of our lives, we can get on with our lives with a much more free emotional state. Doing so will increase our productivity in whatever we might be doing and our focus will be much more attuned to whatever task it is that we are engaging.

And so, let me pose the following questions for you to consider:

- Do you oftentimes feel confused, angry, guilty or overwhelmed without being able to identify the source or why?
- Are you aware of your feelings when you experience them and what do you tend to do with them?
- Can you practice the three points listed above, keep a journal as to how you end up feeling and what effect it has on your life?

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This article appeared in the February 13th edition of the North Port Sun Herald

A REMARKABLE DISCOVERY AND A MAN FOR THE AGES

I became interested in and did some internet research on this topic as a result of an e-mail sent by a friend. The information below was extracted from a number of articles describing the topic.

This article is about an accidental discovery that is a possible cure for cancer as well as a solution for our energy crisis. It is also about a 63 year old man who, while battling leukemia, had the ingenuity and passion to build a machine that emits radio frequency waves. His name is John Kanzius who originates from Erie, Pa. and who now lives on Sanibel Island, Florida. The idea for the invention came to him while involved in one of the courses of chemotherapy. In the middle of the night the idea came to him and he began to construct his machine. The formal name of the machine is the External RF Generator but he calls it “a kick ass cancer cell generator”. He has been in and out of remission and presently is battling the cancer once again.

Previous to his find, he had determined that the time allotted him to live was an ending that he reluctantly accepted. But from the age of 22 he had always tinkered with radios and his idea resulted in his using his loving wife’s pie pans, wire and in sundry other materials to begin his adventure. What prompted him were not only the cruel effects of his therapy but seeing the faces of children who were suffering with the same disease while undergoing treatment. He described that their smiling faces were transformed as a result of their treatment leading him to believe that there had to be a more humane way of treating the disease.

The machine basically makes cells act like antennae to pick up a signal and self-destruct. Theoretically, the patient is injected with gold or carbon nanoparticles of metal which are attracted to the abnormal cancer cells while ignoring the healthy cells. When patients are exposed to the radio waves only the bad cells heat up and are destroyed. He is quick to point out that there is still a long process of tests being conducted by the medical community on the machine and the theory behind his find. He was bolstered by the fact that his study appeared in an oncology publication which is a necessary step in the process. Another obstacle is the need for funding monies in order to support further research study.

But that wasn’t all to the story. He filled a test tube with salt water from a canal in back of his home and placed the tube and a paper towel in the machine. Upon turning on the machine, the paper towel suddenly ignited lighting the tube as if it were a wax candle. When he performed the experiment without the paper towel, the saltwater began to burn. What he determined was that the machine released the oxygen and hydrogen from the water and created an incredibly intense flame of around 3,000 degrees Fahrenheit. The potential uses are limitless in that it could provide fuel for cars, create electricity, heat homes, etc. all from a renewable source: saltwater.

Readers can view videos of Kanzius by going to the following internet URL (<http://www.youtube.com/login>) and, after logging in, placing the words “John Kanzius” in the video search engine.

Apart from his amazing invention, I was attracted to this story because of the qualities that John Kanzius possesses. I want to pose some questions of my readers to determine whether they too have some of these qualities.

- When you believe in something, how able are you to dedicate yourself and persevere in reaching your goal?
- Although a realist, how much of a “dreamer” do you allow yourself to be in order to pursue your goals?
- You have received a good deal in your life but how much do you believe in “giving back”?

Mr. Kanzius taught me a great lesson and I trust that this small tribute to him and what he stands for will touch your hearts and minds as well.

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This article appeared in the February 20th edition of the North Port Sun Herald

UNDERSTANDING SOME PATTERNS OF ANGER

I've already had a column on anger as it is defined and how it can be confused with guilt. However, since there is so much anger in the world today, I've chosen to add to that article in order to facilitate a better understanding of this feeling with special emphasis on the patterns that it might take in people's lives.

Anger is simply a feeling that we experience when someone says or does something that we wish they hadn't said or done. Although I say "simply" the pattern of anger can become very complicated and ... in some respects ...very dangerous for some people. The first pattern I will describe is the "volatile outburst". Usually, this manner of dealing with anger stems from early experiences in our families learned from parents who themselves may have resorted to similar methods of dealing with anger. It could also be the result of being told that anger is wrong or "sinful" to experience thus resulting in our withholding it. And then, like a volcanic eruption, because the pressure needed to be released, we learned to "blow up".

Another pattern of anger is people becoming very upset upon making a mistake and berating themselves to the point of becoming negative, accusatory and determining that they are worthless. This pattern is based in perfectionism wherein people do not believe that they are allowed to make any mistakes. Perfectionism is also usually a learned attitudinal and behavioral pattern that can stem from early childhood learning. It could also be based in a misinterpretation that children make upon being corrected by parents coming to believe that mistakes are forbidden. Remember that the basic control that children have at their disposal is being able to manipulate others so if they are criticized and unable to succeed, they may resort to extreme thinking patterns which feed into this pattern.

Another harmful pattern is the anger that is viewed like a plague by some who believe that they are disallowed to express. In this pattern, people tend to deny or avoid dealing with their angry feelings to the point that they are very easy targets for others who may want to take advantage of that fact. The result is that oftentimes those people become victims in abusive and potentially dangerous relationships. Although avoiding and denying some things can be a necessary, positive defensive approach to dealing with certain problems in life, when we use those defenses to an extreme, problems will usually follow. One of my favorite sayings is "***moderation in all things including moderation***".

A vital key to dealing with anger is to 1) recognize that we are angry; 2) determining that we are going to handle it in a certain manner and 3) expressing anger in an appropriate manner that will result in a resolution of whatever the problem might be. In effect, the smart way is to put less emphasis on confrontation and more emphasis on resolution so that it can become a win-win instead of a win-lose situation.

And so, perhaps something could be learned from these patterns by asking ourselves and answering the following questions:

- How did one or both of my parents deal with their anger and what was the result of their doing so?
- What do I remember about how I dealt with anger as a child and how did it feel when I did so?
- How well or poorly does my dealing with my anger now, as an adult, serve me in my life in personal (intimate) relationships, in my workplace and with friends?
- What do I notice about others' dealing with anger in ways that seem more positive and with outcomes that tend to place them in control of their lives instead of trying to control others?

Hopefully, answering some of these questions will help in determining how you can begin to deal with anger in ways that will provide you with a positive and effective outcome.

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This article appeared in the February 27th edition of the North Port Sun Herald

MY SWAN SONG AND WINGING IT

This is my last article for the North Port Sun Herald. First of all, I want to extend my sincere thanks to my Editor, Nicole Noles, for the opportunity of expressing my views on mental health issues. Upon finishing my professional education, I was determined to write and talk about mental health in a manner which would not threaten people. I wanted to help them understand that mental health is akin to seeking alternative ways to gain happiness. I trust that, in part, I have been able to accomplish that in the series of weekly articles that began last November.

Secondly, I want to thank the readers of my columns. I hope that they have brought some enjoyment as well as cast some light on issues that we deal with on a daily basis. I trust that the articles have been instructional to the extent that readers have been able to incorporate some of the principles and suggestions into their daily routines.

Now, I want to talk about “winging it” or “going by the seat of your pants” ... phrases commonly associated with being able to function without a plan. For some people who tend to make intricate plans to live their daily routine, winging it is quite a foreign concept. I know of some people who live with every portion of their day being rigidly planned. Should anything interrupt that plan, they suffer a great deal of anxiety and some go into a panic state.

For these people, spontaneity is not something that they can look to. They may enjoy an activity which they have planned but should something else arise, problems arise as well. To someone who is used to more spontaneity, their lives appear boring and lacking in excitement. Their rigid pattern of living life could become so well planned that they might move into a very compulsive behavioral pattern from which they cannot vary. This pattern involves certain “rituals” that they need to go through in order to accomplish something. I would consider this pattern as being a final stage of compulsive behavior. They seem incapable of “thinking out of the box”.

Now, something needs to be said about making and having a plan in dealing with life. Doing so brings a sense of order and reliability into life’s routine. However, as with everything else, too much of a good thing is not good for us. Balance is the key to living a healthy, productive lifestyle. And so, a mixture of reasonable planning and spontaneity is the more viable alternative for living life to the fullest. Life is also about taking risks in order to grow.

When people live their lives in a safe, predictable manner they may find comfort but there is no sense of growth or experiencing life as it comes. This method usually has a good deal of fear associated with it which predisposes any growth. By “growth” I am referring to a need to learn more about ourselves and our physical and emotional environments. We can only accomplish that by experiencing new things. Yes, there is some anxiety and stress associated with doing so but the payoff is being able to move

from one level of growth to another, etc. Instead of being afraid of the unknown, people who want to grow look at taking risks as an adventure instead of fearing them.

Let me pose some questions that you might ponder for yourself in your life to help you decide how you might want to live.

- How much do you need to be “safe” vs. needing to grow in your life?
- Would you be willing to introduce a sense of spontaneity in combination with your planned life pattern?
- How does it feel to experience a balanced lifestyle?

Answer these questions for yourself and then decide to bring some greater balance into your life by your choice. Those decisions do not need to be excessive or threatening but little parts of your life that can be entered into a greater sense of balance will bring great satisfaction, a sense of growth and control.

Charles Bonasera, LCSW was a practicing psychotherapist for over 40 years and is now a Consultant, Author and Motivational Speaker. His newest book “How in the Hell Did This Happen to Me?” is scheduled to be published later this year. You can e-mail him at charles@charlesmbonasera.com or view his website at www.charlesmbonasera.com where all of his articles appear on the Media Page in the North Port Sun section.