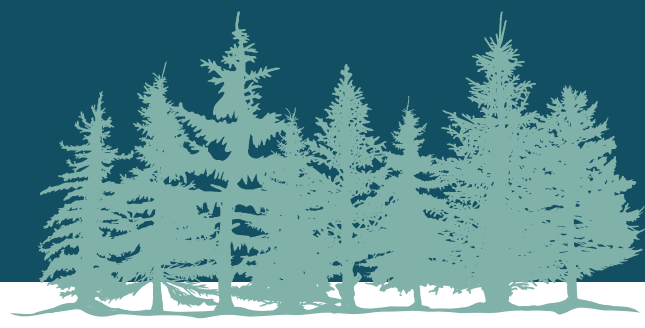


BRAVING THE WILDERNESS



BOOK DIGEST

PEOPLE ARE HARD TO HATE CLOSE UP. MOVE IN.

"I imagine one of the reasons people cling to their hates so stubbornly is because they sense, once hate is gone, they will be forced to deal with pain—ames A. Baldwin"

Hatred surrounds us and the 24/7 news cycle won't let us forget it. Even politicians act in ways that would cost us our sense of dignity, jobs and families... and vitriol reigns over social media. However that's a world view from afar, the picture changes when we zoom in: The nuance, complexity and depth of the human experience appears and reminds us that love, hope and beauty cohabit with pain, struggles and trauma.

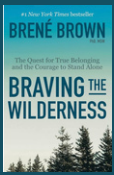
Her research shows that those who experience true belonging stay zoomed in—without abandoning their beliefs or ignoring what's going on beyond their little corner of the world. They base their opinions of people on actual in-person experiences only, they don't fall into the trap of hating an entire group of strangers because they dislike most of the members they have met. She reflects on the coworker who is also our closest friend despite having opposite political views. She talks about that incredible teacher who opened our heart and mind despite the fact that we stand on opposite sides of the debate on abortion law. She reminds us that people are hard to hate close up.

We tend to default to anger, because it's easier than experiencing our pain and fears. But we can all attest that this trade off doesn't work long term and is obviously not serving anyone.

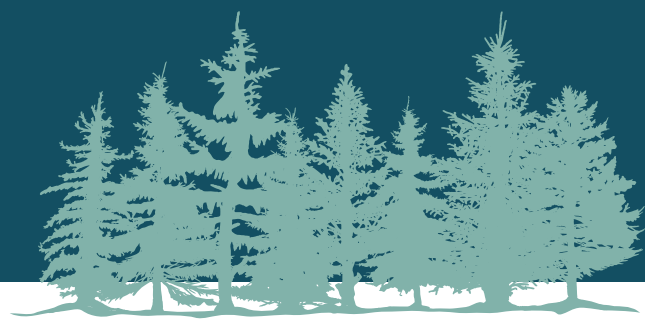
*"Pain is unrelenting. It will get our attention.
Despite our attempts to drown it in addiction, to physically beat it out of one another,
to suffocate it with success and material trappings, or to strangle it with our hate,
pain will find a way to make itself known"*

Pain only subsides once acknowledged. We can choose to give it love and compassion or spend 100 times more energy to fight it.

*"Our families and culture believed that the vulnerability that it takes
to acknowledge pain was weakness, so we were taught anger, rage and denial instead."*



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Which is not to say that we must fight our anger either! Sometimes anger is our way of experiencing our pain. Anger is meant to be a catalyst, not a cover up or a final destination. She writes:

“Internalizing anger will take away our joy and spirit; externalizing anger will make us less effective in our attempts to create change and forge connections. It’s an emotion that we need to transform into something life-giving: courage, love, change, compassion, justice. Or sometimes anger can mask a far more difficult emotion like grief, regret, or shame, and we need to use it to dig into what’s we’re really feeling. Either way, anger is a powerful catalyst but a life sucking companion.”

Pain denied turns into fear or hate. Pain felt turns into **courage**.

THERE ARE ALWAYS BOUNDARIES. EVEN IN THE WILDERNESS.

With the commitment of getting closer, comes the experience of face-to-face conflict at some point.

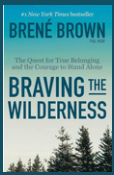
And conflict is hard and uncomfortable, especially when it involves family members.

In order to ground into decency and love, we need to know and protect our **boundaries**. Because there is a line between what must be accepted and what cannot be tolerated.

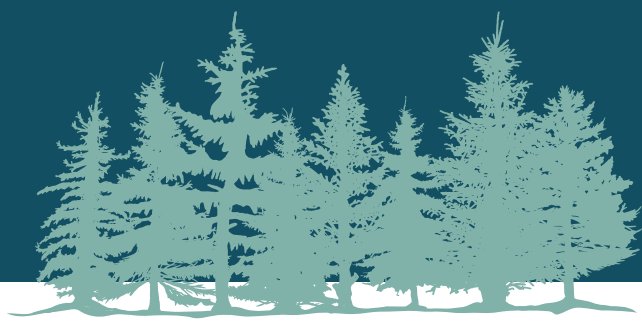
Based on her research, Brene Brown can attest that:

“The clearer and more respected the boundaries, the higher the level of empathy and compassion for others. Fewer clear boundaries, less openness. It’s hard to stay kind-hearted when you feel people are taking advantage of you or threatening you.”

To be vulnerable, we must ensure that we feel **physically** safe first and foremost. And then there is the topic of **emotional** safety. That part is tricky because the definition of it is ambiguous. Indeed, emotional safety does not require us to never get our feelings hurt, it demands for our humanity to be acknowledged and revered.



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She shares the findings of David Smith, author of *Less Than Human*, who explains that **dehumanization** is used in response to conflicting motives when one wants to harm a group of people despite our intrinsic wiring as human beings that prevent us to harm, kill, torture or degrade other members of our species. Dehumanization is a tool meant to override this deep natural inhibition. And it's not an event but a **process**.

She quotes Maiese's definition: "the psychological process of demonization of the enemy, making them seem less than human and hence not worthy of humane treatment."

It starts indeed by creating the image of an enemy, which destroys trust and sparks more and more anger, cutting us from our ability to listen and empathize. "Those people " are on the other side, the dangerous, evil one. And then all bets are off, there's no limit anymore to what can be done. The goal is to create what she calls **moral exclusion**: Hurting other human beings is bad, of course, but they're not really human beings anymore... There's a loophole.

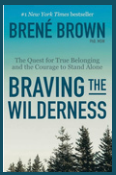
She explains that dehumanization always starts with language and that images usually follow. And this is primordial to remember that we're biologically driven to believe what we see and to attach meaning to what we hear! So we can hope that this would never work on us, but we're far more vulnerable than we hope.

She adds:

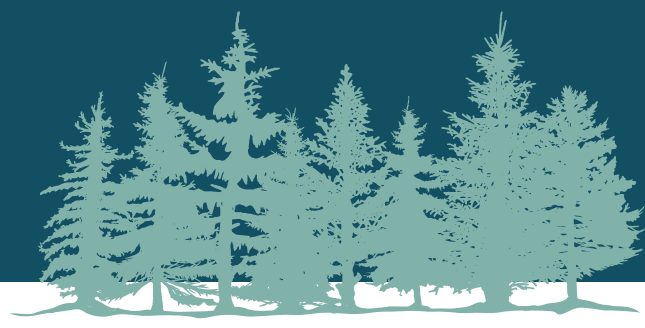
"The point is that we are all vulnerable to the slow and insidious practice of dehumanizing, therefore we are all responsible for recognizing it and stopping it."

THE COURAGE TO EMBRACE OUR HUMANITY

Our work now is mostly to rehumanize those who've been targeted by dehumanizing systems and tactics. We must stay aware of how political and ideological debates have set us up for failures and how tricky it is to stay grounded in our humanity in the era of social media where anonymity and lack of accountability prevail.



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A good exercise is to check, whenever we're appalled by something that is said about one group or another (for instance a political party), if we would be just as shocked to hear the same thing said about their opponent.

It's also important to ask ourselves whenever one is referring to someone else as an animal or an alien, if they're attempting to diminish their humanity in order to justify hurting them.

Dignity is the line we must protect.

*"We must never tolerate dehumanization—
the primary instrument of violence that has been used in every genocide recorded through history."*

Let's also remember that any dehumanizing dehumanizes the dehumanizer first. What we say about others say volume about who we are and in the end very little about them.

And because we're so saturated with dehumanizing words and images, we're often close to normalizing moral exceptions. We must stay diligent and self-aware in our will to hold ourselves up to higher standards.

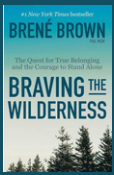
She reflects about the debate around Black Lives Matter and Blue Lives Matter or All Lives Matter. Can we realize that we do not have to care about one and not the other? Can we understand that of course all lives matter and that it's not the point here? Because, as she writes:

" (...) the humanity wasn't stripped from all lives the way it was stripped from the lives of black citizens."

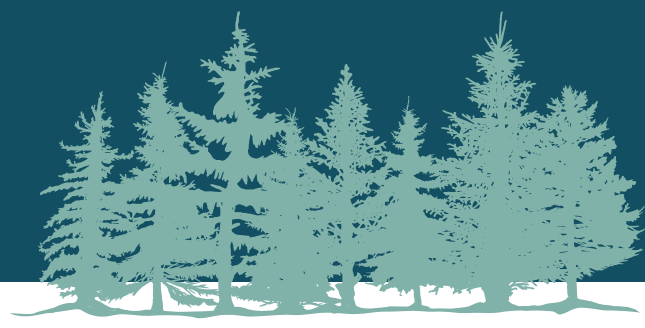
and because undoing that level of dehumanization takes a lot more than two generations...

"I believe Black Lives Matter is a movement to rehumanize black citizens in the hearts and minds of those of us who have consciously or unconsciously bought into the insidious, rampant, and ongoing devaluation of black lives. All lives matter, but not all lives need to be pulled back into moral inclusion."

True belonging lies in the wilderness when we can take nuanced stances. When we remember that what matters is loyalty and love, not denial and fear. When we remember that people matter more than systems. When we remember that everyone's physical safety (which being protected from emotionally abusive and dehumanizing language, because it actually threaten their very existence) is the only valid priority.



BRAVING THE WILDERNESS



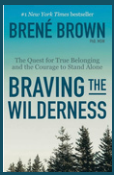
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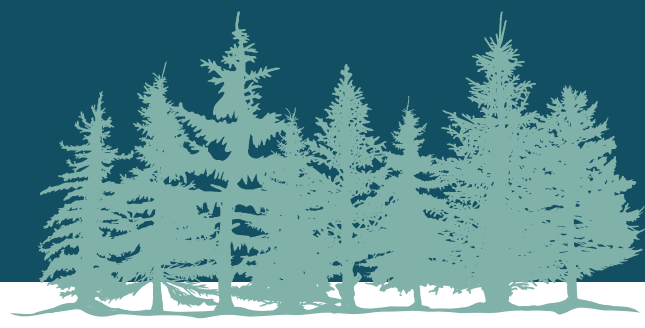
CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION

Brene interviewed her friend Dr Michelle Buck, a clinical professor of leadership at Kellogg School of Management at Northwestern University, who spent the last twenty years studying conflict transformation. Here are some major takeaways:

- When we agree to disagree, without fully exploring the nature of the disagreement, we don't protect our relationships; we perpetuate misunderstandings that will only deepen and that can be more detrimental to our relationships than any agreement would have been. We must use those occasions to increase our **mutual understandings** of each other. That's how we build respect and connection—and we don't even need to ultimately agree for those to happen.
- The key is to first express our **underlying intentions**, by highlighting why the topic means so much for us. This way we can remember why the conversation matters and that it's not just about being right, it's about sharing our truth.
- It is paramount to distinguish between **past, present and future** in those instances. Where are we right now and what are we trying to accomplish should be our guiding prompts. Once again it's not about agreeing, it's about remembering that we have the same goals.
- Calling it conflict transformation (instead of resolution) reminds us that **creatively navigating** conflict together can allow us to co-create something new.
- We must listen with the **intent to understand**, and not to reply. "Tell me more" should be our go to answer. And we must make it our mission to understand the other in the way we want to be understood by them.



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COURAGE AND POWER FROM PAIN: AN INTERVIEW WITH VIOLA DAVIS.

In a soul reaching interview, Viola Davis shares about her deeply challenging upbringing and how she first built a very thick skin... but that when she was 38 years old, she realized that her thick skin was not only keeping the pain out! It was keeping everything out—including love, intimacy and vulnerability.

She chose to be transparent and translucent instead, after that. She chose to experience her life fully and deeply. She decided to allow herself to be seen!

Viola Davis shared with Brene Brown:

“We are all worthy of telling our stories and having them heard.
We all need to be seen and honored in the same way that we all need to breathe.”

She also invites us to:

“Go further. Don’t be afraid. Put it all out there. Don’t leave anything on the floor”.

Finally, she promised herself to not be a mystery to her daughter and not let her believe that she’s alone in the wilderness, ever.