

From the Editor: On “Better Angels”

It was ninety sweltering degrees when we landed in Cairns, Australia. Although our itinerary said we’d be met, there was no one waiting when we arrived. Having flown north from Sydney, at first we thought we were late, until a woman reminded us we’d passed another time zone. Here in the southern hemisphere, up seemed down and heading north felt hotter. Frankly, we were a bit disoriented. That’s just when a smiling Will ran up, shook our hands, and said to Stan, “Sorry, I’m late. Nice hat. Is that an Akubra?” Stan, having recently purchased his “felt fedora with leather band”, smiled, “Yep; made in Australia.” Will replied, “Banjo Paterson?” “Yep.” said Stan. I had no idea what they were talking about.

On the hour drive north, along a stunning coastal highway, Will answered my question, “Who is Banjo Paterson?” by reciting a famous Australian children’s poem, “The Man From Snowy River.” Interestingly, I later discovered it was written in 1890 by poet A B. (Banjo) Paterson, “at a time when there was a groundswell of sentiment towards Australia as a new and distinct nation apart from the British Empire. The bush settings and characters served to emphasize the

growing difference in national identity.” The epic rhyming poem begins, “There was movement at the station, for the word had passed around, that the colt from old Regret had got away. And had joined the wild bush horses—he was worth a thousand pound, so all the cracks had gathered to the fray.” We sat in the back seat, Stan’s hat between us, grinning. It was a wonderful beginning; we’d made a new friend.

Throughout our trip up and down the eastern coast, from the Great Barrier Reef to the southern-most tip of Tasmania, it was the people we met who charmed and inspired us. An older couple in Sydney shared their umbrellas, walking with us to a difficult-to-find destination. We bonded with Percy, a proud Aborigine, who taught us natural tribal remedies. (When he demonstrated squeezing juice from a berry into his eyes to keep them moist, I imagined rushing him to the ER. Luckily, he was fine.) Another driver, Simon, born and raised on Phillip Island, introduced us to parading fairy penguins and thanked us for not sleeping on the long drive back to Melbourne. It was close to midnight, but, as with almost every Aussie we met, we had a good chat, and yes, even discussed politics, ours and theirs. “What’s happening in America? How do you feel about it?” As we parted, Simon gave us both a hug and said, “No worries. We’ve always been friends; we always will be. It’ll be okay; we stick together; we are here for you, mates!”

The book I’d taken for traveling this time was “The Boy Who Was Raised As A Dog” by Bruce D. Perry and Maia Szalavitz. I’d highlighted passages. “Humans evolved in a situation in which cooperation was critical to survival.” “To build a better society, we must emphasize ‘the better angels’ of

our nature...” And lastly, “an evolutionist view that focuses on competition of the fittest for survival misses the important characteristic of humans; the propensity for altruism.” Bingo! I was reminded in Australia that the world is diverse and full of kind people. We are a global community, sharing the planet. Our responsibility lies in the care of, respect for, and loving of one another. Awareness of this helped me better appreciate our Aussie encounters. It also reminded me that MCDES has been doing this for 40 years; reaching out to the world with empathy, altruism, and love; the “better angels!”

So yes, Happy 40th Anniversary! Please check out the first in a series of anniversary reflections. Also, note the May 5th spring conference on moral injury. Rev. Dr. Nakashima Brock is highly regarded. Register early!

Thanks Ben, for insights regarding “new normals.” Thanks, Eunie, for your well-done reflections on journaling during grief. Thanks, Paula Johns for sharing important knowledge about advanced directives. And Chris Lewis, thanks for another excellent movie review. *Manchester By the Sea* will touch your heart. And remember, *Coalition News* welcomes submissions, reviews, and resources.

So yes, it’s good to be home. Thanks to one last “Aussie angel,” Belinda, who gently tucked us under her wing as we made our way through a maze of tight connections. “Follow me, mates!” she chirped. “No worries!” Yes, we are all in this together. It requires cooperation and global empathy in order to survive and prosper. Good on ya, MCDES mates, for fostering that effort. See you in May and as always, keep doing the good work you do so well.



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MCDES is a nonprofit 501(c)3 volunteer organization whose purpose is to promote and provide education, opportunities for networking, and support to individuals and groups involved with the care of persons confronting death and their families and friends, and those who are bereaved, regardless of the cause of death.