



Dear friends and colleagues,

It's been many months since my last note. I wrote to you previously about my dear sister Nancy who developed a glioblastoma; after two years of remarkable courage and grace, she succumbed in late December. We all had incredible support from angels: two home care companions (Christina and Virginia) and an incredible home hospice team. I learned so much from all of them about love, generosity and service. But for all that, and for all the time I had to "prepare" (as if...) the loss has been devastating. I have loved Nancy so much for all her life and almost all of mine, and I have always loved being her big brother, as you can see in [this photo](#).

Nancy was an Outward Bound instructor before going to grad school, and wrote her master's thesis about women's identity formation in wilderness education programs. She went on to get her doctorate in counseling and ended up as a researcher in the acclaimed Child Study Center at Yale. There she pioneered a program for opiate-addicted mothers called Mothering from the Inside Out. MIO helps these moms learn to foster secure attachment for their children, overcoming the neurochemical handicap of addiction (which interferes directly with the neural pathways of maternal attunement and attachment), thus breaking the trans-generational self-replicating cycle of insecure attachment, self-medication, addiction and insecure attachment in the next generation. (Here's a link to a [Grand Rounds](#) that was held to honor Nancy's work that includes a fascinating 20-minute talk by Nancy's mentor and colleague Linda Mayes about the neurobiology of addiction, attachment and parenting; the talk begins 10 ½ minutes in.) Nancy also showed that drug counselors can conduct the MIO program, making the program more readily accessible. You can tell how proud I am of my "little" sister, and how much in awe...

It's only in the last month or two that I've been able to regather my energy and focus and start to turn back towards the world. I'm not sure what I'll be doing now. I had put all my consulting work aside to be with Nancy and it feels like that part of my work is now in the past, with something new wanting to come forward.

But the theme of relatedness is more alive for me than ever and is at heart of so many of the world's most important challenges. How do we find and maintain common purpose across differences in class, race, gender, religion or political affiliation? How do we address racial, gender and other microaggressions in a way that supports both accountability and learning and offers the best opportunity for improving ongoing relationships? How do we learn to talk about and eliminate structural inequities? How do we reverse a 50-year trend of radical individualism and social disconnection to recognize that our fates are inextricably tied to each other, we are all in it together, and we will do better personally if we help each other? And how do we learn to do better at respecting and protecting the intricately interdependent relationships of the natural environment that sustains us?

It seems to me that humankind has come to a make-or-break evolutionary crossroads. We'll make it as a species if we can lift ourselves out of our habits of thought involving separateness, individualism and a zero-sum mentality to incorporate a greater mindfulness of relatedness and interdependence; there is a **me** and **we** polarity to be managed here. Perhaps we need to usher in a new philosophical era. Modernism and Postmodernism provided for greater intellectual and personal freedom and pluralism, but that has come at a cost of considerable disconnection and fragmentation; many people are feeling lost. What I think we need now is an Age of Relation in which we learn how to be together with and value our differences and how to take a systems perspective – to explore and actively manage our interdependencies.



As grandiose as this may seem and as hopelessly gigantic as the necessary patterns shifts may appear to be, the path forward is really quite accessible – to strive to improve the quality of relatedness in our everyday moments – at home, at work, and in the community; to hone our mindfulness and communication skills. We know from the Butterfly Effect that small patterns can amplify and spread to become large transformative patterns. Indeed, that's the only way large patterns ever change.

So that's where I've been and what I'm thinking about now. I hope you and those dear to you have made it safely through the pandemic and are starting to enjoy a return towards more connectedness. I'd be delighted to hear from you.

With warm regards,
Tony

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