



Interviewee Jonah Whitely
Age 49
Occupation Journalist
Interviewed January 25, 2001
Location Mid-Atlantic State
Email Jonahtime@hotmail.com

This personal account of a true life story is offered as support and inspiration for your own healing journey. It is not presented as a definitive method of healing, or seen as encouragement to pursue a particular path

JH: When did you first become aware of being engaged in a process of inner healing?

JW: It was probably when I was in my 30's. But years before, in college, I had been forced to seek a psychologist. I took LSD in my 20s and all this psychic material spilled into my nervous system. I had trouble concentrating and I felt distracted, like I was driven by something I didn't understand. I was so scattered I was afraid I would never earn a living.

JH: And then you sought help, professional help?

JW: I did. From the time I was a baby, I had been brought up with a rigid world view. I was a fundamentalist Christian going off to college just as the counterculture, with its drugs and anti-war rhetoric, swirled about. I was carrying around a view that said: There's good and evil. You're on one side or the other.

Inside I clutched a knot of fear that whispered I was evil. Yet I was also doing my best to hide from that. But with LSD you can hide from little. I was conflicted about my upbringing, but I didn't have people I could thrash this out with. I knew little of psychology. And I didn't know how to articulate my dilemma, unpracticed, as I was, in the art of introspection. Mostly I was defensive and self-deprecating, because I had been subjected to enormous criticism in childhood. I had grown into a wounded introvert. At that time, someone handed me a copy of a book called *The Primal Scream* and as an Old Southern Baptist, I recognized that I needed a second Baptism - to be dunked in a river of feeling. Intuitively, I thought that lying on a mat and wailing would release fury and sadness the church had told me to bury inside. Though the release of repression was a new idea, openness was in the air and plunging into feeling promised to mend the fear I had of doing something wrong.

I managed to get through college, confessing to compassionate professors that I needed extra time to wrap up papers. Once college was complete, I moved from Baltimore to the outskirts of New York City, where I found therapists experimenting with deep feeling therapy. Within a couple of years, I learned to express a whole spectrum of emotions-and my anxiety diminished. But I don't know that I thought of this as healing. The word was thrown around much less often in the '70s than in the '90s.

JH: So that work in your 20's helped with the psychedelic experiences?

JW: There were only two. The first was profoundly spiritual. I experienced a deep connection with the earth, the trees and the sky. The other was a trip down the dark side of Alice's rabbit hole. It was so unpleasant I wanted to squirm out of my skin. I had to resist ending my life.

JH: You sought help, but you weren't really thinking about being within a process of healing. It was more about sorting through the confusion and all the contrast that came up for you? And then, it became much more conscious in the 80's. You would have been in your 30's then?

JW: Yes, I was reporter by then. And I had been asked to interview a therapist who was working with a child. She had been molested by a minister and I was asked to write about how one heals from such an experience. At that time, I also was befriended by a woman who was alienated from her family. As an adult, she remembered that her father had sexually abused her. She was in recovery and, with all this going on, I noticed I was resonating with these stories. I wondered: Is this my issue too? I had a dependence on alcohol, cynicism about sex, unexplained depressions and impulses to seduce. Yet I told myself this sort of crazy acting out was not really me. At a deeper level, I wanted to love and be loved. But I didn't know how. I thought, "Something here needs to be healed." And with a therapist I started to remember incidents with my grandfather and mother-awful times that were sick and scarring.

JH: At that point, you had some sense of healing?

JW: Yes and giving myself permission to remember was an important step. But the memories took years to uncover. I lived with confusion, terror, anger, grief and from my family. I was also discouraged because my honest attempts to love were like the wobbly steps of a baby. I fell down and broke my heart a lot. I grew infinitely tired of feeling depressed. Fortunately, my therapist had designed an incubator for an intense inner journey. He called it The Ark - a 40-day retreat held in the foothills of the Poconos. Three times during a ten-year period I set sail with the 20 or so loving people who made up the crew.

Through their compassion and acceptance, I was encouraged to explore the energies darkly dancing inside. We used psychodrama, sand play, gestalt role play, mess painting, journaling, dream telling, movement and emotional release to bring forth the unconscious. In the process, I discovered how tightly my psyche had been glued shut. Gradually I also grew to believe everything I held to so very tightly was loveable - if I could simply find a way to show it to those who were offering to accept whatever I carried inside. And, as my hidden demons emerged, I there was a reason for my terror. It was because I had been brought up to believe in the devil. And I thought that I was a child of the devil because of all the "evil" things that I had done with my mother and grandfather when I was a boy.

I had experienced all sorts of violations and to remember these, was to risk crossing into hell where I had lived as a child. But this was a risk I needed to take over and over. As I did, I found that I'm not the devil-that the grown ups who were supposed to care for me had taken advantage of my innocence and manipulated my body. These adults were also excellent at blaming me when I tried to talk about these things. So I grew ashamed and confused. As a child, I felt responsible for the unspeakable acts I was told to engage in.

As you might imagine, even after being on the Ark I had baggage with my family and the Christian church. So when I came back from the first 40-day Ark in 1990 I signed up to be in a Bible study

group. A wonderful group of Episcopalians accepted me and taught me a version of Christianity that had more to do with understanding than judgment. I'm grateful to them.

I also realized that my dreams were an avenue for approaching my hidden parts. When I began my Ark adventure, I was already in a dream group, but afterwards I started to pay more attention to the uncensored images that appear in the night to be integrated during the day.

And I had a fortunate encounter with a woman in a dream group who was passionate about bringing out the feminine side of Christianity in her Presbyterian Church. She noticed I had loving feminine figures in my dreams and that I had come to see women as my friends. She asked me to speak at her church about the feminine nature of God. Her invitation was a surprise and honor. As a result, I got involved in Christian adult education—what I thought of as a "do-it-yourself Sunday school program" where a group of us would decide what we wanted to study and needed to learn. I presented on topics such as the hero's journey and the nature of good and evil, concluding that the divine is never absent, regardless of what we experience. So, that was another positive opening. I found that, if I could let my mind lead the way on these topics, my emotions would follow. I came to believe that life is an enormous gift of God. And that belief helped me feel my way into a reality where this goodness became more real.

JH: So, your intellect was a door-opener for you—it was a threshold? And the rest of you could walk through that doorway?

JW: Yes, but I don't want to make it sound easy. I had to continue to work with my emotions to create a spaciousness inside. With that, I could engage my mind with new ideas. My childhood was a bit like growing up in a concentration camp, though I don't want to compare myself to the six million Jews who suffered torture and death. But the camps were a real metaphor. And when your childhood has that tone, it's difficult to feel settled. Shame lurks in every corner. Feelings are denied. Trust of others is eroded.

Even now, I work at feeling okay in my body because I could never relax in my home growing up. Each morning I allow myself to feel the places in my body where I hold tension. I breathe and make sounds that want to come out. This is my way of giving my distress to God—to pray on the bad junk. It's my daily dose of redemption. Today sound therapists might call this toning. But I come out of the primal therapy school. So I'm doing a modified version of deep feeling work which keeps me whole and sane.

Sacred stories have helped too. I guess that's the influence of mythologist [Joseph Campbell](#) and psychologist [Carl Jung](#). One of the most important stories has been the Old Testament tale about Jonah. Using active imagination, I've let myself enter the story, rewriting Jonah to highlight my stages of death and rebirth. When church members learned I was doing this, they invited me to perform my "midrash" in our Christian education class. To me, Jonah has a traditional sort of hero's journey. He is called by God to preach to his enemy. Yet he resists by running away. Of course, with God there is no escape from the call to claim your powers, and Jonah confronts that truth when he is swallowed in the darkness of the monster, much as I was swallowed by my dark memories. Jonah is released through prayer and surrender to a higher will. I was released in a similar way.

In the myth, Jonah continues to struggle, even with his new consciousness, even when he accepts that he must preach. For him, the act of ministry is a challenge. Over and over, he must confront his hatred. And that's how I experience transformation. Epiphanies are useful, but I must continue

to do my best to be conscious—to reclaim my relationship with something beyond the glittering maya of life. So each day I struggle to love myself and the people around me. Out of that struggle comes a devotion to mercy, rather than judgment. And I can only be humble, knowing how flawed I am.

JH: Back when you began working with this story, you speak about wholeness. What was healing for you?

JW: I initially thought that I would get to a point where I wouldn't have to experience any more pain. I guess I thought I would dwell in Nirvana. That was one of the promises of [The Primal Scream](#). [Arthur Janov](#) theorized there was a pool of pain that could be drained and turned into a flower garden. But that was never my complete experience. Pain has diminished but not ended. That's where the Eastern perspective has been useful: Happiness and pain are two sides of the same coin. Both are infused with divinity, not just happiness.

So healing has meant that I must confront concepts that keep me from breathing in peace and breathing out love. Healing has meant many shifts away from old corrupting attitudes. In the world I grew up in, sex was equated with love. I needed to let go of that and find something more mystical—to know love is the energy that pulses through the universe. In time, I no longer dreaded the evil from my childhood. Instead, I felt that when as a child I was having sexual relationships with my mother, there was a wounding. But that didn't mean God was absent. If anything, the divine was saying - make something of this wound. I suppose you could say I found a beauty in sorrow—in the yearning to view evil in a new way. The urge to make sense of suffering propelled me through heaven's gate.

I think that the big "aha" occurred when I realized how a fundamentalist rigidity, like mine, can block an awareness of holiness. Over the years, I have come to appreciate a schema offered by writer and mystic [Andrew Harvey](#). Harvey says that we come whole into the world. We're awash in a unified field, when we're in touch with our bodies and feelings. Then there's childhood's socialization and we develop a false self. We use that self to negotiate our way in the world. But Harvey says, if we're lucky, we get broken open and the false self is questioned. And that's what happened with me.

In one sense I was fortunate. I broke open at a young age and so I was never able to walk la-de-da into the world. There was always anxiety. There was always fear. There was always a questioning of how the hell I could get out of bed and face the day. And so, I could not take anything for granted. I felt a lot of depression. But, as I studied mythology, I realized it's not such a bad thing to have these struggles. Heroes are wounded. The crucible of pain forges the soul.

JH: Jonah, there was a wholeness that you experienced even though you were in pain?

JW: Yes, the marvel of something like Primal Therapy is that you can be immersed in the most gut-wrenching experience and be in awe that you don't disappear or go insane. There is a center that holds. You may feel like you're dying, but that's the false self dissolving. No matter how much pain I experienced, God would not destroy me. He might crucify me, but that's different from murdering the soul. I believe, whatever the curse, the soul can be reclaimed.

JH: You broke open but you didn't shatter.

JW: That's why I say breaking open can be a form of grace. It sends you on the road towards a higher integration. It creates a longing to reconcile with all that's been buried through the years. In my brokenness, I turned to storytelling, dream work and the world religions. In all my gnashing of teeth, I would come upon moments of integration. Like Jung, I can say I don't have to believe in God. It's a presence I know.

JH: And that presence is trustworthy?

JW: And trustworthy. But I would not have known that so powerfully in my body if I had not confronted my rigid concepts of good and evil. Having decided that I'm not essentially evil, it's easier for me to be a **Big Brother**, to lead a dream group or to teach Sunday School. I've been able to do these things because I confronted the notion that I had to be evil because I took part in strange things when I was a child. I could never heal if I thought I was the devil's child.

JH: Could you say that the split between good and evil was healed for you? Do you consider that healing-realizing that you weren't a conduit for the most horrible things?

JW: There has been a great deal of healing, though I still have work to do. I still have an immense amount to learn about love and compassion, especially in everyday life with others. It's the age-old problem: How do I chop wood and carry water with an awareness of the goodness in my village? I also wonder about residues from other lifetimes. Sometimes I feel as if I need to be forgiven for mistakes I can't fully fathom. This is something I don't claim to understand. But I believe I've mended much of the corruption and confusion from childhood. Knock on Krishna.

JH: So, we're talking about, in terms of your consciousness around healing, a process of healing in the early 80's?

JW: Let me create a timeline. I graduate from college in 73. I go and I live outside New York. I do some initial therapy for a couple of years. And while I'm looking at the false self, I'm also trying to put together an American persona that will allow me to go out and live. I get a job in journalism, and all that time I continue to work on myself, but mostly I'm learning a craft. Then in the mid-80's I look deeper into what's troubling me.

JH: And then the breaking open.

JW: The breaking open in a more profound way. Because I did break open in college. But it was in the '90s, when I unearthed my early sexual history and saw how weeping can lead to spiritual depths. Somehow the emotions that move through us purify the body and spirit, showing the many faces of God. Then we wonder: Are we weeping because of all this pain or because life is radiant? The personal pain is suddenly a chorus of Amazing Grace. Who would have thought God could save a wretch like me? I'm told many Christian mystics were often in tears.

JH: Would you say that as your process unfolded from the 80's on, and there were more breaking open periods for you, was there a time that was especially difficult for you?

JW: I hated when I was drinking because I felt so depressed, a factor in the early decades. I turned to alcohol because I was in pain. Later, recovering my sexual abuse memories evoked a thick gloom. And not knowing what to do with my family was hard. I talked with my mother about what her father had done. But I found so little acknowledgement that I never openly talked with her

about what she and I did together. It was also a challenge to find people who were positive and not in trouble with their drinking. For me, learning new social behavior was as difficult as learning to feel.

My relationships with women have proved a gauge of how well I'm doing. As a young adult, these relationships were sexual. As I've gotten older, I've found comfort in friendship. It's been healing to find that women cherish my caring for them in non-sexual ways. These friendships are very special.

JH: Are there places in your story that are still mysterious to you?

JW: Yes. When I was a child, I felt assaulted by sex and criticism. But one day, when I was 12, I got out my mother's typewriter and wrote a letter to the editor of our local newspaper. What was that? Was it some sort of rebellious act? Was there a quiet voice saying, "This family will only let you be smart on paper. Follow this route to freedom."? By writing that letter, I found a career that provided me with a voice on paper. Then as the years went by, I was able to claim a speaking voice and have a presence in a room of strangers.

Noticing this, I've come to believe that our defenses are an important part of who we are. When we're wounded as children, cynicism and bravado are necessary at times. As a very young boy, I was probably an extrovert. Early on, I talked and talked in school. But under a barrage of criticism and hostility I withdrew. Quietness was my mask. As an adult, I discovered I didn't have to keep this mask when I wanted to speak my truth. I learned to open my mouth and sing. I guess you could say therapy for me was emotional education as well as catharsis.

I would say if anybody gets anything from my story, it's never give up on yourself. I remember when I was a kid that I wanted to kill myself when my grandfather was abusing me. I remember wanting to jump out a window when I was about four years old. But I didn't do it. Something stopped me. Instead I found a way to tell my mother that I didn't want to go back and have my grandfather as a babysitter. For some reason my mother listened. I didn't have to go back. If I'd jumped out the window I wouldn't be here in this body.

JH: You were awake at four years old. You could see that. You could know that. And you could speak about it.

JW: Yes. I also believe a good therapist reflects back the qualities our parents never helped us see. I love that my therapist noticed talents and depths that I could not name. But it's an act of faith to hang in as a client when you're not in touch with your strengths. I had that faith.

JH: Jonah, during the times that were most trying for you, most challenging or difficult, what was it inside of you that kept you going?

JW: Sometimes, probably, it was having a job. That provided a structure where I had to get up and be present to the world. I have also had some very good friends who've helped me along the way. And I'm grateful for having a mind that functions. A bigger issue was always : How do get myself to feel like I'm not just dragging my body around?

JH: Were there times during your process that you experienced epiphanies?

JW: Yes. One Christmas I went with my girlfriend to get a Christmas tree in the woods. It was a snowy day and we brought the tree home and decorated it, talking about what Christmas meant to us. I had this book of readings from the world's spiritual traditions. I read from that and spoke about how for me Christmas was about the baby Jesus and how that baby is like our spirituality, how we have to treat it tenderly. I said our understanding of the inner God has to be born anew each day. The evening was filled with kindness and love.

But all good things end and we eventually unplugged the tree and went to bed. That's when we heard a noise in the living room which sounded like a burglar. I was frightened. But I crept along the hall and poked my head into the living room. And do you know what I saw? The Christmas tree aglow. If somebody broke into the house, they came to plug in the tree. That was an unexplained event that reinforced my understanding of what it meant to live from a spiritual point of view. It was as if the tree insisted on relighting itself in remembrance of our love.

JH: And there's been more?

JW: Dreams have been a source of emotional and spiritual guidance. I believe dreams often remind of us emotional and spiritual states we forget to take into account in our waking lives. At different moments, when I've been struggling in daily life, I've had dreams about the feminine-my symbol of being in touch with my feelings and blessed by acceptance. It's almost as if, in my attempts to make my peace with my mother, there has been a reciprocal love calling from the spiritual world. I'll give you an example.

Last fall, a friend shared one of his favorite poems by Denise Levertov. It's called "The Avowal."

*As swimmers dare
To lie face to the sky
And water bears them,
As hawks rest upon air
And air sustains them,
So would I learn to attain
Freefall, and float
Into Creator Spirit's deep embrace,
Knowing no effort earns
That all-surrounding grace.*

I wasn't aware the poem made a deep impression, until one evening, during a dream, I saw myself as a feminine presence floating from a high place. It was a glorious free fall-an affirmation that there is a presence that supports everything in my life.

JH: Thank you - such fullness of support. Would there be any part of your healing process that, if you had your way, you would change?

JW: I would have preferred to have been in less pain. I would have preferred not to have been as confused about my relationships with women. But I don't know how I could have achieved that..

JH: Do you feel that there's a particular healing challenge that stands before you now?

JW: Well, I still live with body pain. I have to be mindful of it. I have to find ways to not let that infect my consciousness and cause me to be angry and bitter. So, I continue the process of releasing pain-so I won't close off my awareness of the beauty in the moment. To quote meditation teacher [Jack Kornfield](#), one must learn to surf the waves of consciousness.

JH: In what ways do you respond to having to carry around the pain?

JW: If I get up and feel a lot of pain, I just lie down and breathe into it and let myself feel what's there. If that doesn't work, I'm fortunate in living with a friend trained in peer counseling. I can ask for a therapy session just as she can ask me for a session when she's in distress. We allow each other to feel our feelings of distress, knowing that we can plunge into crummy states and emerge with a greater peace. [Yoga](#) has also helped calm the body's tensions.

JH: Jonah, do you see stages within your process, now that you've spoken about it?

JW: When we seek therapy we start to receive love for speaking about how we're broken. That's an important part of the process in American psychology. But I'm glad I did not stay in that space. It seems important, at some time, to move beyond raw pain. For me, that was a subtle shift. It had something to do with working on mythological themes—imaging myself as Jonah and as Joseph, Jesus' father. I worked with that story too. Mythology taught me to see pain as part of the hero's journey and to think about having a gift to bring back from the wilderness. With time, I began to think of myself as courageous, not just broken. At that point, the wounds became blessings, not just an excuse to complain about love never gained.

JH: Having heard your responses to these questions, and reflecting on your healing journey, how would you now define what healing is?

JW: No matter how much we try to understand healing, I believe it will always have a different meaning for every person. Somewhere inside we carry an image of what it would be like if we could feel more whole. When we yearn to become that image we set our life on a new path. That's the hero and heroine's journey. We wander into dark places and meet magical beings who become our teachers. We are like Odysseus and, if we are lucky, we arrive home, in this life or some other—surprised that we're closer to wholeness than we've ever been. I think that's when we're able to say in wonder: I've been healed.

It doesn't mean that pain and struggle end. To me it means we're living more from our very best selves. And that's our gift to the earth. What's been healed in me? I no longer wonder about the existence of the Divine. That's because I have been borne up in my own free fall. And I can say that in addition to all this pain there is joy in knowing the depths of life. There is wonder in recognizing that there are mysteries calling me on to new adventures.

JH: In what way, do you incorporate your experiences of healing into your work?

JW: In a culture that can be very shallow, I seek to write about experiences that illumine the depths. Sometimes I achieve that and sometimes I don't. When I'm with people I attempt to be aware that there's always a possibility of going deeper. There's always a possibility of being kinder. There's always the possibility of my seeing something in the other person that they don't recognize. And when I see it, I try to reflect it back. I want to be a mirror of love.

JH: For someone going through an especially challenging part of their healing process, what would you share with them?

JW: I remember when I was in college and I was extremely unhappy. There were days when I would wait until the sun went down and go outside and just stand and look at this building that was at the far end of the quad. It was all lit with a white light and I had no idea what I was doing. That building was the only solace that I could find because I had no words to speak my pain. I came from a family where nobody spoke about important things, and I had no idea what psychology could do.

But I took solace from an inanimate object and I think that there are times when that's all we can do. So it's important to honor wherever we are. A friend suggested I call this radical compassion. Many of us have been so wounded by criticism that we have a vicious inner critic. But when we start to have compassion for ourselves we are on the way to making peace with our critic and feeling God's love. That's the kingdom of heaven-in the here and now.

In retrospect, my taking drugs, my being an alcoholic, my being quiet, my being seductive were all ways that I learned to survive. Ultimately, they were not the best ways for me to be. But there was a time when that's all I could do and I feel compassion for that young man. I hope we can all learn that kind of compassion and forgive the silly things we have done. We needed those mistakes. So why not call them allies? Why not bow to our mistakes, thank God for preserving us and commit to living in a more conscious way?

That's how we make amends -- and purchase a ticket to the caravan of love.

The following websites are provided as sources of information about resources mentioned.

Joseph Campbell	http://www.jcf.org/about_jc.php
Andrew Harvey	http://www.andrewharvey.net/
Carl Jung	http://www.cgjungpage.org/
Big Brothers	http://www.bbbsa.org/
Jack Kornfield	http://www.spiritwalk.org/kornfield.htm
Yoga	http://www.yogasite.com/

To order the book referred to, click on it in the story or go to www.Amazon.com

Arthur Janov, *The New Primal Scream*

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