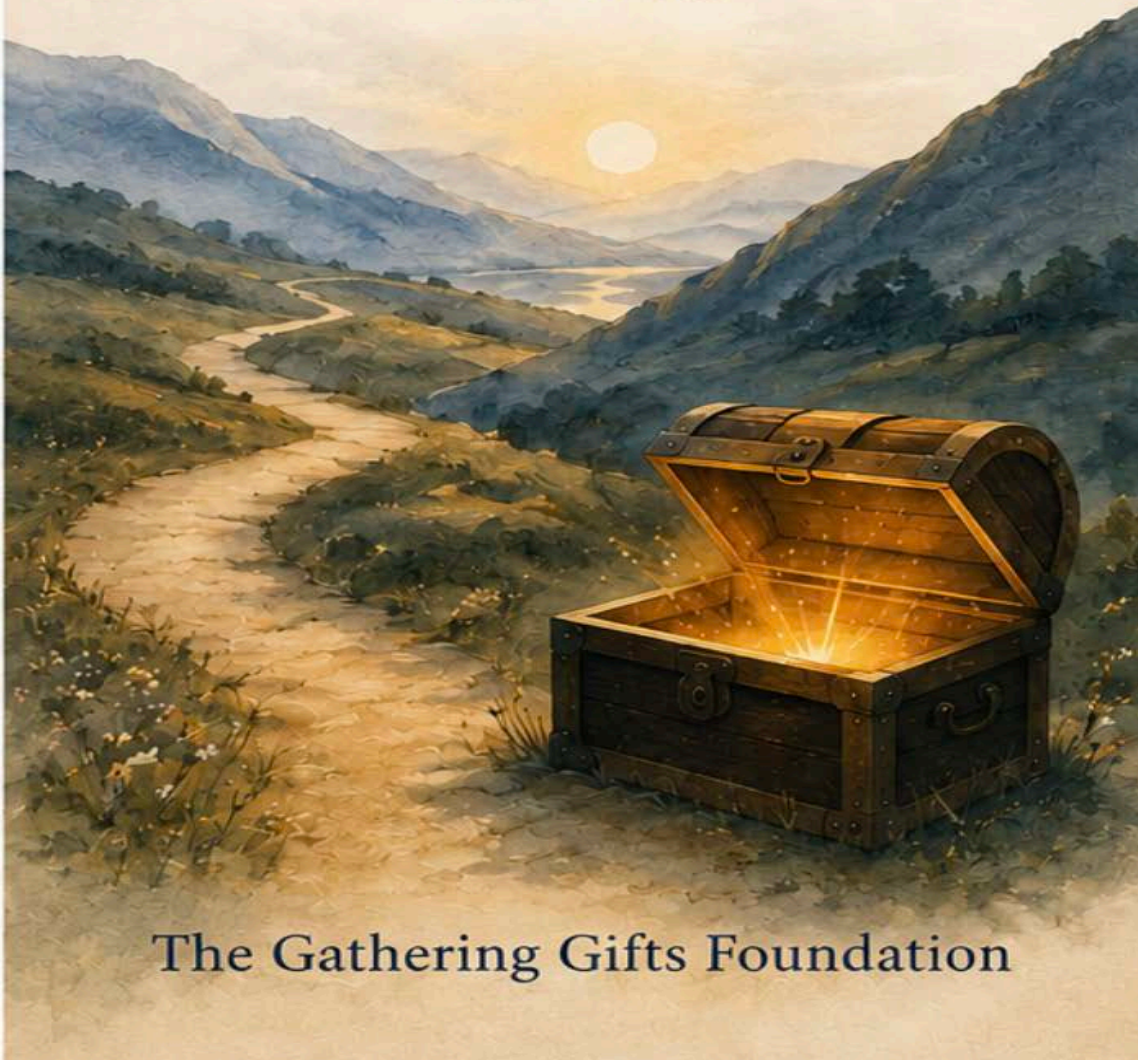


# Hidden Treasures Found in Challenging Times



A simple process and set of practices to  
discover and appreciate the Gifts around us  
and within us.



The Gathering Gifts Foundation

*Dedication*

**This book is dedicated to my mother Gladys,  
whose Gift inspired me to believe in my own  
and to  
my father Carl,  
whose life was a demonstration of forging new frontiers  
such that others might prosper**

**May they both rest in peace and find solace  
that they left a worthwhile legacy**

**And to  
all the other children in the world  
who are like Scott**

## **The Power of Focusing on the Gift Within**

Each of us is a Gift, although often we may not realize it. People we meet can touch our lives in very simple, yet profound ways. Their unique Gifts can touch our souls and guide our paths. Scott, a ten-year-old boy I met in the summer of 1972, touched my life in such a way.

Shortly after graduating from San Jose State College, I headed out on a hitchhiking adventure and arrived in Calgary, Alberta where I met a lady named Ruth Barry. Ruth worked at a residential treatment facility just outside town. Since I had worked part-time for the previous two years at a residential treatment center near San Jose, we connected immediately and had a fascinating conversation about emotionally disturbed children.

Two days later, I drove with Ruth to visit the William Roper Hull Home for Children. It was a beautiful facility with an administration building, gymnasium, football field, hockey rink, seven two-story cottages, and 300 acres of land looking out toward the Rocky Mountains. Ruth led me into a large conference room where we met Brian Sharpe, the Director. He shared the philosophy of the center and described its relationship to Reality Therapy, a perspective developed by William Glasser, whose work I had studied in college and loved. For two hours we discussed issues related to working with troubled children.

As we were ending our meeting, Brian turned to me and, much to my surprise offered me a job as a counselor. I was even more surprised as I heard myself say, "Yes!" Each cottage at Hull Home was staffed by twelve counselors, a social worker, and a supervisor. I was assigned to a cottage of boys aged six to twelve. Each counselor was assigned a "key child," someone with whom they would develop a close therapeutic relationship. Ten-year-old Scott was my "key child."

Scott had first arrived at the treatment facility when he was five years old. He had been severely abused, physically, emotionally, and spiritually. He had been locked in the attic with the family pets. When Scott was found, he was malnourished mentally, emotionally, and socially. Scott had been in the facility for five years when I met him, and he had already gone through fifteen "key counselors." Since no previous counselor had ever maintained a commitment to Scott, his sense of self-worth, trust, and hope for a better future did not exist.

I was introduced to Scott on a Monday. On Tuesday, the supervisor of our cottage asked me to take Scott camping for the coming weekend. When I told him that I did not "do" camping, he stood up and said firmly, "You are taking that kid camping!" He went on to explain that every other child in the cottage had a "key counselor" who had taken their "key child" on a mini camping trip. I was only too familiar with the experience of being left, so out I quickly vacated my anxiety surrounding the notion of going camping.

Scott and I were driven 100 miles from the cottage and dropped off with our camping gear and instructions to “hike in.”

As Scott and I hiked, we noticed dark clouds forming. We set up our campsite right next to a river. It was beautiful, but the temperature was rapidly dropping. Scott and I were not prepared for what was about to happen.

After dinner it started to snow. While I was using the axe to chop wood, Scott suddenly darted off into the darkness up toward a meadow. I ran after him and when I found him, he was hiding behind a bush, trembling, and begging me please not to hit him with the axe. I reassured him that I was not going to hit him and with tears in his eyes he told me of the times his father had threatened to hurt him severely.

The temperature continued to drop. Scott and I literally had to hold each other to stay warm. When we awoke in the morning the recreation director, concerned about our well-being and knowing that we were not properly equipped to deal with the unexpected storm, had tracked us down.

Scott and I had bonded. We had endured a difficult experience and pulled through it together. I had come to appreciate a specialness in Scott - a combination of sensitivity, courage, and perseverance. Although I could not quite articulate it, there was something unique beyond Scott’s puppy-dog affect. I was able to see beyond the scared, mistrusting little boy with bizarre and withdrawn behavior to a young person who was kind, thoughtful and resilient.

I heavily campaigned until I could help other staff members to see what I had seen. As they saw the authentic Scott (his Gift) their behavior towards him changed accordingly. They charted different kinds of entries in his logbook and noticed breakthroughs in his day-to-day progress.

Scott made rapid improvements in his self-esteem, behavior, and performance in school. He even took on the self-appointed role of welcoming new kids to the treatment center. Within six months of beginning to focus on the Gift within Scott, the treatment team determined that Scott was eligible for foster home placement.

One night Scott told me his vision of being placed with a family who lived on a farm in the country. He wanted to care for animals and treat them in a way that he had missed. Finding a good foster home was rare, a farm even rarer. No one had believed, except the two of us, that he would make such beneficial changes, so between us we held the vision (focus) of such a possibility. Within three months we got the miraculous news that a foster home had been found for Scott. It was a country farm with animals, just as Scott had envisioned.

The night before Scott moved to his new home, he made a heart-wrenching request. He thanked me dearly for my loving support and friendship but said that he did not want me to ever contact him again. Once he left the walls of Hull Home he wanted to focus on his new life. He wanted no reminders of his first ten years, only the opportunity to start over.

The relationship with Scott changed my life. I helped him learn to appreciate his Gift; he helped me to clarify mine. This was the single most important influence in my career. When I think about Scott, I am reminded of the tenacity and glory of the human spirit. I am further reminded that:

*“Each of us is a unique and precious gift. It injures our spirit to forget that even for a moment”*

If our spirits have been injured, having people in our lives who hold a clear and consistent focus on the goodness we have within enables our spirits to rise again, guiding us to fully blossom into the Gifts we were born to be.

## **How the Gift Process Was Born**

In 1982 while preparing to conduct an in-service training program on the topic of Purpose and Goals, I realized that I did not know the purpose of my own business.

While exploring the purpose of my business, I realized that I had yet to articulate the purpose of my life. I proceeded to ask myself a series of questions looking for a common denominator of fulfilling moments, contributions, and meaningful experiences. As the answers to the questions emerged, I asked new questions. Soon a common thread emerged.

I was sitting on the beach at the time of this life-affirming discovery. Even though I was sitting in the exact same place I had visited daily, everything felt different. My life felt intact. There was a place for me. Suddenly all my past experiences made sense. Life was no longer a series of jumbled, unrelated, discontinuous moments. There was a pathway with genuine continuity.

As I ran back to my house I stopped suddenly, caught by a startling realization. The nature of my life's purpose - that which has been the source of challenges, life lessons, meaning, and fulfillment - pointed to the essence of what was unique, special, and valuable about me - my Gift to life.

I could not wait to share this process with my wife. I asked her the very same questions I had asked myself. We were so moved, delighted, and amazed by this simple yet profound process that we invited six friends to our home that same week to share this new discovery.

I conducted the Gift Process with each of them, one at a time, in a group setting. The idea caught like wildfire and soon each person who attended that special evening started setting up Gift Processes in their homes. It was like hosting spiritual Tupperware parties.

Over the next couple of years, I created a body of knowledge about the process of finding one's unique Gift. From 1986-1992 I created a collage of workshops, seminars, business applications, speaking engagements, and facilitator training programs to support this new body of work. My first company: Life Purpose Associates was born.

What started as a simple inquiry into the purpose of my business in 1982 has resulted in a significant cornerstone of my personal, professional, and spiritual work. I have worn many different hats; marriage and family therapist, leadership coach, teambuilding facilitator, teacher, Cub Scout leader, father, husband, and son. Each of these roles has provided me with a canvas on which to bring forth the artistry of my Gift.

The Gift within us transcends roles. It is more glorious than words can describe. We can touch and are touched in deep and nurturing ways when we open ourselves to share our Gifts with one another.

Our intention for writing this book is that it will serve as a guide to help you discover and articulate the unique Gift that you are and in turn help others to discover their Gift as well.

## **My Mother's Gift to Me**

November 1991. I was in the middle of conducting a stress management program for McDonnell Douglas when I received an emergency phone call. My mother had been rushed to U.C.L.A Medical Center and her physician was trying to reach me due to the seriousness of her condition.

When I arrived at the hospital, I was informed that my mother had suffered a serious heart attack and they did not expect her to live through the night. With all the personal growth work I had done I knew it was important for my mom and I to make peace with each other. We spent the next eight hours together talking, sharing, and forgiving each other. By the end of this visit, we both felt complete with one another and by some unexpected miracle my mother was still alive.

One might think this was a happy turn of events, however, my mother had prepared herself to die and now that she was alive, she was not so sure that she wanted to be. For days she woke up each morning expecting to die then being disappointed that she was still alive. The doctors told me that if she had the will to live, she should be able to recover if only she would also accept the medical intervention that they were offering. She staunchly refused.

My mother was always a glamorous woman. She grew up in the era that prevented her from going out of the house or seeing people until she had "put her face on." Lying in her hospital bed with her white straggly hair, no make-up, and tubes in her nose she asked me to promise that I would not to tell anybody that she was in the hospital. This was my dilemma. My dear mother was demanding that I promise a dying woman to not tell any of her friends of her physical condition, yet I knew in my heart it was important for both my mother and her friends to have closure.

I knew better than to cross my mother. Going against her wishes cost my uncle dearly a few years back. My mother refused to speak to him for several years. Now I risked being excommunicated from my mother's love during the final days of her life; but I also knew that to deny my own truth is to be excommunicated from my self.

Torn by my dilemma, I called my friend and mentor Marilyn Miller for her sage wisdom. Her advice to me was to trust my heart and be courageous. She also promised to hold me in her prayers. That I found particularly helpful.

In the end I decided to trust in my Gift and I phoned my mother's dear friend Jo Kierman. Jo and my mom were part of a group of women who belonged to the same temple and had met together once a month for 30 years. One by one each member of the Stephen S. Wise Women's Group came to visit my mother. After the first two visitors my mother, in anger, told me how disgusted she was with me and how I had betrayed her just like my uncle. My worst fears had been realized yet I stuck with my conviction that this was the best course of action for all concerned.

My wife and I continued to visit her in the hospital. The Wise Women continued to share time with my mom. My mom continued to turn her back to me each time I entered her hospital room. One day while she was moaning out loud: "why won't God take me? I have prayed my entire life; I have always believed in God. Why won't He take me? I want to die."

***"The Gift that we are rises like a vapor and fills the room touching people we are often not aware of in ways we may not conceive. Our Gifts are called to the surface when we have a strong desire to give of ourselves to a cause greater than our own self-protection."***

I turned to my mother and said, "Maybe the reason you have not died yet is because there is still a lesson for you to learn."

My dear Jewish mother wailed in her old-world dialect, "What from lesson? Do not preach to me I am not one of your students or clients. Just leave me alone."

A few days later after one member of her group had made repeated visits, my mother turned to me and said, "You know son, I believe I know what you meant by that lesson. I have come to discover that all these years, ever since I was a small child (the youngest by several years in a family of twelve) right through when your father died, I always thought that I was alone in life. I have come to realize that I was never really alone. I have always said to you, 'have no fear, God is near' but I did not realize that people have always been supportive to me and that I have been truly blessed in having wonderful friends and family."

My mother died four hours later at peace having learned the lesson that she needed to learn. I learned a valuable lesson as well, the courage to trust and share our Gifts with another guides us to treasures and miracles that may otherwise be hidden from view. At any given moment we are faced with choices. Do we choose the path of safety and self-protection or do we commit to being the fullest expression of our Gifts in the service of people and challenging situations that we face?

# The Gift

***"An ideal society would be one in which each member brought his own particular and perhaps unique gift into the common pool." – Anonymous***

Each of us is a unique expression of life. Your Gift refers to a unique blend of special qualities, attributes and inclinations that are interwoven throughout your activities. These qualities are expressed when you are simply being natural and true to yourself. Whereas self-esteem can be built, the Gift that you are is already complete, whole, and intact. Your purpose in life is to unveil and continually express your inner Gift as you live your life in the world day-to-day. We each bring a unique signature to situations faced. When we share our Gifts with others both parties benefit simultaneously.

The flip side of one's Gift constitutes the major source of emotional pain in their life. As we learn to embrace this pain, our Gift strengthens in depth and expression. Consider your unique Gift to be like a sparkling diamond. A diamond has many different facets each reflecting light in a bright and beautiful manner. No two diamonds are exactly alike and while each facet of the diamond is slightly different, they are all parts of a lovely whole. Each of our unique Gifts has many lovely facets that, woven together, make a coherent whole.

Kristen Hawkins, a former Life Purpose Facilitator offered a lovely analogy to her clients. Consider that each of us is born whole and complete. That is, each has contained in his or her spirit all the attributes and qualities that the Creator possesses. Imagine that you have a beautiful guitar inside of you and all the strings are in perfect tune. All the qualities, all the notes that make us whole, exist on this guitar. There is one string - one note however that is especially clear and strong on your guitar. When played, it is especially magnificent. This note is your Gift.

Each person has their own special note – their unique Gift. When you are in their presence, their note is playing so loudly, that your own corresponding string will begin to vibrate and play naturally. This is the impact that our Gifts have on the people that we meet. When you are in the presence of another, the Gift that they are will amplify that same quality that is already in you. The strings are already there, just waiting to come alive. When others are in your presence, they have a similar experience. When you fully express the Gift that you are, your special note causes that same quality to sing loudly in others.

***"Each of us has been invited to a grand party by a very gracious host. We have not been asked to bring anything to the party other than our willingness to fully share of ourselves with the other guests. The host knows that if each of the specially invited guests were to share fully his or her unique gift with the others on the guest list, the party would be blessed with love, peace, joy, and fulfillment."***  
***--Darlene Goth-Newman***

The Gift that you are is the common thread that you contribute through all your activities. When you change your job or your relationships, the Gift that you are remains the same though the form in which you express your Gift may change.

In 1997 I was invited to deliver our Core Model to hundreds of therapists and personal growth coaches in Australia. During my initial visit we selected a small group of therapists who would be certified in our process so that the work we introduced would have legs well beyond the initial infusion.

Guido Voges is one of three Certified Core Quest Trainers in Sydney Australia who conduct regular weekend workshops based upon the Gift Process, the Core Profile and other Starquest programs.

A graduate of one of Guido's weekend workshops wrote:

*"My grandmother was my best friend and made me feel loved and secure. Finding her dead, when I was seventeen was traumatizing and robbed me of a security that I had become accustomed to. I realized at Guido's workshop that I was remembering my grandmother for being dead, and not remembering her for being alive and how her gifts enhanced my life. So I discussed the things that she used to do, the little things that made me feel safe. Things like leaving the veranda light on until I was safely on my bike or leaving the light on until I was safely inside. Those are small things I remember but very significant. I talked about her in depth and left the weekend with a more satisfied outlook."*

*"When I walked to my car, I found the interior light on and I immediately saw it as a sign from my grandmother that she was with me and I was safe. The reason I thought that is, the interior light in my car has never worked. I began to cry and just sat there looking at the light, feeling her warmth. I switched the light off and tried to turn it back on but once again it failed to work. It was like my grandmother had one brief moment given to her to show me a sign that she was with me always. Due to my experience and self-healing throughout the weekend, I was able to see that sign and make the connection. If I hadn't done the Core Profile, and Gift Process, I would be still internally mixed up and would have missed the signals through lack of focus.*

*I believe we all have signs shown to us at different stages for different reasons, and if we aren't focused then we miss the beauty of the moment. A sign might be an inner voice or a subconscious thought. Whatever form these signs travel in, they're yours and yours alone. The greatest sign we can give to ourselves and to our loved ones is our Gift. When you are connected to your Gift the light will always be on."*

*Hamish Mitchell, May, 1998*

## **TREASURES IN THE CLASSROOM**

### **Working with At-risk Teens**

Jazmine Kazarian is a talented, dedicated, and compassionate woman. At the time this book was first written, she had been teaching at-risk high school students at Vail Continuation High School. She invited our staff to come to her class and facilitate the Gift Process with her students.

Following the Gift Process several students wrote articles about their experiences. Following is what one student wrote:

## **Leon**

*“Monday morning I came in and sat down. Already sitting at the table were three adults. I knew they were here to talk about something but I did not know about what. I sat down and listened. It turned out that one of the students had a bad incident happen the night before and now that Nikki was here, it seemed like a good time to talk. This person was a friend of mine. I felt bad and was willing to listen.”*

*“Nikki and the two other ladies were very supportive and from what I saw, my friend was feeling better. Next thing that happened was we were to write down three people that we have shared our special Gift with, so everyone listened as we read them out loud. Later we all shared each others’ stories. It was time to write what Nikki called, a Gift statement.”*

*“The first person we started with was Betzy, who to most people, is the crazy one, and will tell you how she feels with no hesitation. So the purpose was for all of us to come up with all these nice things about Betzy and put them into words. Some really nice things were said to her that morning, and I am sure they made her day. One of the most heart-warming parts of that morning was when I turned around to take a look at Betzy. She had this really big smile on her face. One of the most important things I think was that she realized people she thought didn’t care, really thought she was a good person. That morning made a whole lot of difference for those who got their Gift Statements done. I did not have mine done but to see the magic being done was wonderful.”*

*“This seems like an excellent method to help people feel better because there are times in our lives when we just feel hopeless and don’t have anyone to turn to. That is when our Gift Statements are there to remind us of who we really are and how special each one of us is to the world.”*

Here, in her own words, is the essay that Betzy wrote following the experience of having her classmates give input on her unique Gift,

## **Betzy**

*“When I returned to class everyone was sitting in a circle ready to start the session. We first began with a rough situation that one of my classmates was going through. As we made him feel better and showed them that there was a light at the end of the tunnel, we began with this Gift Statement.”*

*“As we began the Gift Process I felt embarrassed and nervous. As everyone went around expressing their feelings towards me, I wanted to cry, but in a good way. I never realized how these people really felt for me. It was weird to hear them compare me to G.I. Jane and other strong women that stand up for themselves and make a difference. That made me feel real good that my classmates saw me as a strong woman who has no limit to life. I believe that everyone should have a Gift Statement made for them. It will change their point of view about themselves.”*

*“Several weeks later we returned to Jazmine’s class. There was a young man who seemed proud and defiant. He sat back and observed what we were doing. He seemed to want no part of it, saying defiantly, “This stuff is bull.” When asked to give input to his fellow students’ gifts he refused to participate. Jazmine whispered in my ear, “His name is Santiago, he is a Native American with an extraordinary talent to draw.” I came over to Santiago and asked him for some help.”*

*“He looked at me, arms folded and replied, ‘What do you want?’”*

*“I said, ‘I have the feeling that you are very intuitive and that you have a clear sense of each of your fellow student’s gifts. Putting these impressions in words may be difficult for you but I have the idea that you would be able to express your feelings through your art. As we do the Gift process for the next student would you draw a picture of the Gift that she is?’”*

*“Santiago proudly got up from his chair and pulled another chair directly behind mine at the table. The next person we conducted the Gift process for was a young lady about 15 years old. It was her first week in this class. No one really knew her that well and she seemed quite shy. As we went around the room people gave input to her that surprised her. She said it seems like you have known me for a long time yet we just met. Then Santiago revealed the penciled drawing that reflected what everyone had been struggling to put into words.”*

*“When the girl saw the picture she began to cry. Everyone in the class sat in awe and reverence. It was truly a lovely and precious moment. The class then convinced us to stay long enough to do the Gift process for Santiago.”*

Here is the Gift Statement the class helped to create for Santiago:

**Balanced like the medicine wheel he brings his heart and creativity,  
giving his total self to each task he undertakes.**

**He walks with good medicine not afraid to be true to his unique path.  
His expressions are truly as he sees them.  
He leads people to their own self-discoveries.**

**A spiritual healer who offers gifts with great meaning.  
Like the crow he observes the subtleties others often miss.**

**Committed to supporting others to walk with an ancient integrity and completion.  
A true corn boy who stands in defiance of the wind.**

### **Santiago**

There was a student named Danny who appeared especially shy and withdrawn. When it was his turn to hear the input from his classmates, he was obviously overcome with emotion. In the middle of the process, he quietly got up from his seat and went outside. The rest of his classmates continued to work on helping to compile his Gift statement by sharing their impressions about the special qualities they appreciated in this young man. A few moments later he returned to his seat. When a classmate read Danny’s Gift Statement aloud, the boy replied, “No one has ever said such nice things about me.”

Here is what Danny’s classmates wrote about him:

**A giving presence who truly cares  
Sensitive, friendly, and incredibly respectful.**

**Full of life, he reaches out and  
brings the day back into focus.**

**Brings dignity, compassion, and a full heart to others. He is the first one to jump up and help those in need.**

**A great support and trusting companion to young people.**

**Never to[sic] busy to recognize others and instill a sense of pride.**

**Danny**

Polly Labarge, a first -grade teacher at a private Christian school in St. Louis related a situation in which she was having a very difficult time with a particular student in her classroom. His deviant behavior was constantly a source of disruption in the class. Once she clarified this student's unique Gift, she began looking at the child differently. By looking at this child differently her tone of voice and behavior toward him began to change. By the end of the year his parents thanked her for her contribution to their child for they had never seen such a dramatic change in the child's behavior prior to his experience with Polly.

## **An Experiment at a School in Montebello**

In the fall of 1999, we conducted the Gift Process for a group of 250 teachers in the Montebello School District, Montebello, California. After the program we invited a few teachers to participate in a pilot project designed to explore whether increasing a teacher's awareness of their student's Gifts would have any measurable impact on the classroom. As one of the participants in our pilot project began sharing her impressions of a particular student's Gift, she mentioned how challenged she was to see her student's Gift through the child's angry and defiant behavior. "This student pushes my buttons constantly," exclaimed the teacher! "I really want to get past my reactions to this student. I owe it to her to give her the quality of education that she deserves. I realize that when I am constantly in a reactive state while dealing with her, I have a difficult time seeing her as a Gift and being an effective teacher for her."

When the teacher acknowledged that the student "pushed her buttons", she had unknowingly identified one of her *triggers*. A trigger is any stimulus that takes us out of a loving, joyous, or creative state. You can learn more about triggers by reading *Hidden Treasures Book II: From Triggered States to Treasured Moments*.

I asked the teacher to identify all the things people do that trigger her. She identified two primary triggers:

1. Angry people
2. Overtly defiant children

I then asked what it was about angry children that triggered her. She replied, “They are being disrespectful”. Next, I asked what happened to her as a child when she was overtly disrespectful. She immediately replied, “I would be beaten. You just did not do that”.

The teacher realized several things:

- The student who triggered her constantly was engaged in behavior that she would have never thought about engaging in as a child and that when on occasion came that she did, she was severely punished.
- The student’s behavior was unconsciously reminding her of what was scary and painful to her as a child.

While I was working with the teacher, another participant Maureen was busily compiling her list of triggers when she realized, “All of my triggers have to do with not being heard. What triggers me most in the classroom is when I am trying to talk and everyone else is talking at the same time or when a student wants to talk and he or she is being interrupted. Being the middle child with two other siblings I had the general impression while growing up that I was not being heard.” I revisited both teachers two weeks after our initial meeting and both reported that the students who they previously had issues with had appeared to change right before their very eyes.

When teachers take accountability for their triggered states, they bring an entirely different perspective and spirit to interactions with their students. Students are then able to respond to their teacher’s input rather than overreact to the teacher’s triggered states. A trigger may give you a reason to hide your Gift and protect yourself, or it can be an excellent opportunity to experience a deeper connection to your Gift. If you learn to use your triggers to transform the situation, you will find it easier to look beyond coping behavior and respond effectively to their pain.

## **Gift Processes for Children**

John Falcon, one of the other Core Profile Trainers that we trained in Australia, has since delivered our work to thousands of people including training other trainers to continue delivering the tools and concepts. Of the many Gift Processes that he has facilitated for children over the years, he wrote the following about one especially inspiring session.

*“Last year I conducted a Gift Process for a group of children ages 8-15 years of age. These kids had never met one another prior to the program. After a day of intensive personal growth work we started the Gift Process. I asked each child to draw a picture of the good part of themselves [sic]. Once they had completed the picture we asked them to put a name to the qualities depicted. Then they were asked to share what they had written about themselves with others in the group.*

*One at a time each child gave input to each other’s Gifts. Kids were enthusiastically coming up with ways of identifying each other’s special qualities.*

*The oldest participant in the group was a fifteen-year-old boy who had declared earlier in the day his refusal to participate in any of these psychological processes. One year prior this young man’s mother had attended a similar workshop conducted by Nikki Nemerouf.*

*For the past year, his mother's over anxiousness to involve this boy in this new perspective had the opposite effect and served to push him further away. During the Gift Process he actually became vulnerable and allowed others to see his tears. One week later his mother reported that the experience of the Gift Ritual had a profound impact on this young man. He was more openly and consistently loving toward himself, his family, and his friends. In that same group there was a 10-year-old boy who had recently experienced a family crisis. During the workshop this boy had difficulty focusing and participating. He acted out with giggles, disruptive noises and verbally devalued the experience. During the Gift Ritual he became visibly uncomfortable with the level of sharing from the other children. When it was his turn he was unable to share one positive quality about himself. I then proceeded to list a variety of positive qualities I had experienced in observing him during the day. I then invited the other children to do the same. I noticed that his face began to change. He became soft and present. For the first time that whole day he became a member of the group. One week later we had discovered from one of the parents in the group that this child demonstrated a shift in his affect and behavior. The mother asked us, "What did you do to my son he is so different? Whatever it was could you come back periodically and do it again?"*

## **Creating a Gift Statement for a Child**

You may want to interview various people in your child's circle of influence including grandparents, teachers, church or temple leaders, or other family members and friends. Keep a file of positive comments from others. Begin weaving the comments and the answers to the questions above into a Gift Statement.

A Gift Statement can be a wonderful present to mark special occasions in your child's life such as milestone birthdays, graduations, and other events. You do not have to wait for a special occasion though. The timely presentation of a Gift Statement can lift the spirits of a child who is facing life challenges and give them just the encouragement they need to make it through the tough times. Your child will learn how it feels to be appreciated and loved and how to demonstrate love and appreciation for others.

Several years ago, Burton happened to be visiting a dear friend. He walked upstairs and was introduced to three young children ages seven through nine. As he began talking with the children, he noticed that they were playing the game Paper, Scissors, Rock. Two of the children kept complaining that the third child was cheating. Burton, while interacting and observing the kids, suggested that they do the Gift Process. One child responded, "What's that"? Burton began explaining what a Gift was and the children agreed to try it. Burton asked:

1. What accomplishment are you most proud of?

One child responded that when her dad had suffered a severe loss in business, she woke up early the next morning and made his favorite pancakes, served them to him in bed, and kissed him on the forehead.

2. Recall a time you helped someone.

One child thought for a long time but could not think of anything. Then she suddenly remembered that when her parents get mad at her sister, she comforts her sister by helping the sister make her bed.

Finally, Burton asked the children to consider what they think is special about each other.

Here is one of the Gift Statements Burton created based upon his own impressions and the input that he gathered from the children.

**A caring and supportive presence  
Whose smile lights up the room  
Sensitive to her sister and friends  
Lending her helping hand when she brings a spirit of kindness and support  
To everyone she cares about.**

**Myra**

The kids focus shifted from being critical to being loving toward one another. As Burton left the room, he noticed that they were hugging each other.

## **Treasures at Work**

The Gift Process can be used quite effectively for a variety of purposes in the workplace:

1. On boarding process.
2. Teambuilding exercise
3. Prep work for strategic planning
4. Retirement celebration

## **Onboarding**

When introducing a new member to the team, the Gift Process enables people to let their guard down and become vulnerable to one another. Since the Gift Process is affirming it enables everyone to gain a deeper appreciation for one another.

*As one member who was new to the organization reported: "I have moved quite a bit in my career to multiple organizations. When I came to the Phillips Group I arrived somewhat guarded. Within my first month the team leader facilitated the Gift process. As people around the table started giving input to my Gift Statement, it occurred to me that they, somehow, had seen the real me. In fact, even though I had only been there less than a month it felt like they knew me better than my fellow team members at my other organization after being there for several years. After our Gift Process it seemed like we were all more open with one another. I still keep a copy of my statement framed on my desk as many of my peers do with their statement".*

## Teambuilding

We have been effective at introducing the Gift Process both at the beginning of team retreats and at the conclusion of a teambuilding program.

When the process is facilitated at the beginning of a retreat it can set a tone of warmth and openness serving to generate a more open and collaborate dialog throughout the program. We have done corporate retreats in the past where we print out everyone's gift statement and post them on the walls of the meeting room. We encourage everyone to review their statement before starting the meeting the next day so that they can be reminded of what is possible for them to bring to the meeting.

When facilitated at the conclusion of a retreat, it can bring wonderful closure to the event. People walk away having been acknowledged by their peers in a lovely and authentic manner. Often, people lament that it can be hard to bring the "good vibes" of a teambuilding experience back to the workplace. The Gift Process, and the written Gift Statements produced, can become an anchor for the team and those "good vibes". People go back to work and three months later they can reread their Gift Statement and be immediately reminded of the retreat, the lessons learned, and the good will that they have toward fellow team members.

We once received a letter from the CFO of an organization in which we had conducted teambuilding programs during the previous year. He wrote:

*Dear Nikki and Burton,*

*There is a member of my team that I have been concerned about. She is a wonderful person, who recently has had to face far too many serious trials. I have been frustrated by my inability to be of much help.*

*Over the past few weeks things got worse for her. Recently a dear friend was killed in an auto accident. I have never seen anyone so depressed. It was more than she could bear and quite frankly seeing her in so much pain was more than I could bear. That evening as I was driving home, it occurred to me that she could not see the Gift that she was to all of us. She blamed herself for everything that was happening to her even though most of it was outside her control.*

*I decided to call her immediate supervisor into my office. Jim had been through two of your teambuilding sessions so he had a little understanding of what I was proposing to do. I took a pad of paper to lunch and started writing down her gifts. When I got back to the office I sat down and composed a Gift statement. I was actually aware that I did not really know how to do this, but I have watched you and your facilitators several times so I just plowed ahead and did my best.*

*When I was finished, I took the statement to Jim and incorporated his ideas. He had worked with her longer than I so once he saw what I was doing he was able to add several qualities that I had missed. I included his input, printed the final statement on a piece of nice paper and put it in a sealed envelope.*

*That afternoon, just as she was about to go home, I called Harriet into my office and handed her the envelope. I told her that this was her gift, not an outfit for her, but the gifts from her that she has given to Jim and me. She was still in a highly emotional state, so I told her to take it home and open it when she was alone.*

*She came into my office first thing the next morning and kiddingly complained that I made her cry. She then took out the Gift statement which she had placed in a lovely frame, smiled and gave me a hug. For the first time in months I saw the real Harriet begin to peek through the darkness. She was cheerful all day, the way she used to be.*

*I know that it's too much to expect that this one piece of paper can buoy her through all the trials she still faces but for several days since, Harriet continues to bring an uplifting and playful spirit to work.*

*Thank you both for the gifts that keep on giving that you have brought to me, Harriet, and our organization.*

## **Prep work for Strategic Planning**

A few years ago, I had a coaching contract with a woman-owned law firm on the East Coast. The coaching had only been delivered via telephone. When they scheduled their yearly Strategic Planning Summit, we decided to kick it off with the Gift Process that I facilitated. Following the Gift Process, people would clarify their intentions for the summit.

The owners of the firm contacted me a couple weeks after the call to let me know that the Gift Process set the tone for the entire weekend experience and beyond. They were poised to tackle some difficult issues during the summit yet the normal adversarial banter that categorized most of their retreats was replaced with vulnerability and transparency. The “good vibes” and bonding that stemmed from our Friday evening call leading into the retreat has continued through the return to work.

## **A Gift for Retirement**

It used to be tradition for companies to give a tenured employee a gold watch with some sort of engraving upon retirement. An executive secretary of a major utility company, that Burton and I had been coaching, had decided to retire. Burton, who was the vendor of choice for this organization (prior to meeting me) had multiple contacts within the organization so we interviewed all of them about that which they appreciated in this co-worker who was preparing for retirement. The outpouring of love and appreciation was overwhelming for the two of us. It was clear that this person had positively impacted thousands of people either directly or indirectly.

We presented a framed Gift Statement with hundreds of signatures below the statement. A copy of the Gift Statement also hangs on the walls of a hallway in the corporate office alongside of other framed letters of commendation from the US Government, the Governor's office, and additional prestigious awards.

## Clarifying the Gift of a Business

Years before it became popular among companies to attempt to identify and articulate their “branding”, we worked with CEOs and senior leadership teams to identify the unique Gift of a respective business. The questions we ask are similar to those asked during an individual Gift Process with some small modifications. We asked each member:

- Recall a time when the organization generated compliments from customers. What unique qualities and/or attributes did they bring to the process of serving their customers?  
What three qualities do you appreciate about the organization?

One of our staff would then interview a selection of key customers and during a telephone interview would ask:

- What stands out as a distinction in doing business with this company?

Next, we interviewed employees and asked them:

- Identify what it is about the organization that they especially appreciated.

We would bring all the information that we gathered, including common phrases expressed by the many different people, to a follow up session with the leadership team.

In the following example, the staff members reached out to a collection of their most loyal clients and asked them to weigh in on the unique Gift of their treatment center. Here is what we created together:

**A safe and empowering environment in which children and their families are treated  
with respect and dignity  
The center’s staff is devoted to unmasking hidden potential,  
finding the child’s unique gift and developing it  
Children are empowered and gain self-confidence  
Families restore hope**

## Discovering Your Own Unique Gift

### Gift Clarification Questionnaire

The questions listed below are the very questions that I asked myself that spring day in 1982. They are the same questions that I have since asked several thousand people. They are not designed to elicit a complicated response. The process is a simple one. You may ask yourself this series of questions several times during the coming months and answer each time as if it were the first time. Suspend your preconceived notions of what you feel that your Gift is or should be. Be open, spontaneous, and introspective as you reflect upon and answer these questions.

I have included my own response for each question in *italics* as an example.

**3. What do you love to do?**

*I love to explore and discover my own personal, professional, and spiritual growth and help others do the same, play golf and tennis, spend time with my wife, introduce my children to meaningful experiences and play the piano.*

**4. What about each of these activities is especially enjoyable to you?**

*Growth - sense of renewal, shared learning, depth of connection.*

*Playing golf and tennis - challenge, learning how to get out of my own way*

*Experience of flowing, playing piano - the harmony, creativity, alignment I experience when I let myself go and trust that the fingers will find the right notes.*

*Introduce my children to new experiences - the sparkle in their eyes as they explore new territory.*

**5. What brings joy?**

*Family religious rituals, listening to my children sing in the choir, sharing deep and tender moments with my wife, children, and clients; Watching my children share their "Gifts" with other children and adults. Inspiring others to grow; challenging myself to do things I did not think I could do.*

**6. Share three fulfilling experiences.**

*Going to Europe with my family*

*Facilitating a weekend seminar for three hundred people*

*Watching as a young lady I once worked with blossomed into a wonderful actress and human being*

**7. What about each experience stated above was especially rewarding?**

*Europe - sharing the exploration, learning, and new experiences together.*

*Client blossom - the process of tapping into potential*

*Seminar - being vulnerable and sharing treasured moments, discovery, and laughter with a community of people.*

**8. Recall a time you contributed to someone or something.**

*Supported Scott to feel good about himself*

**9. What was unique about the way you gave to the person, group or project?**

*I did not see a deviant child, instead I saw a special person who I cared about.*

**10. When people spend special time with you, how are they positively affected by your presence?**

*More clarity, inspired to make changes, feel better about themselves*

**11. What attribute(s) do you possess that you are especially grateful for?**

*My intuition, quest for self-awareness, sense of humor, creativity.*

- 12. Recall a time when you gave lovingly of yourself to another person or project. What were you doing? What special quality or qualities did you convey through your activity?**

*Helping our Cub Scout pack raise money and increase its membership.  
Facilitating open communication, a sense of team, inspiring new possibilities,  
creating new ideas, taking a leadership role.*

- 13. After spending time with people being natural and expressing yourself, how did you feel that people were impacted by being with you? How had their lives been touched?**

*After playing music with Gary, he felt special and good about his talents and creations.*

- 14. Imagine for a moment that you are at your funeral and are listening to the kind words that people are saying about you. What will they miss most of all?**

*"I could always count on Nikki to help me make sense of the pain or confusion I was in. He was a spark of light in a dark hallway. I will miss his words of encouragement and enlightenment. He was always interested in something new. I will miss the way he made complex and abstract things simple."*

- 15. Imagine that you have invited three people into your living room and Nikki or one of his trained facilitators is there asking each of them:**

**"What do you appreciate about \_\_\_\_\_ (fill in your name)?"**

**What would each person say about you?**

*Person #1: Annie - A seeker of truth. Willing to look at himself openly and honestly. A devoted father.*

*Person #2: Larry - Creative, willing to take risks, an ability to bring people and ideas together.*

*Person #3: Susan - a trusted guide, an inspiration.*

## **Composing Your Gift Statement**

The words, phrases, and ideas revealed in the answers above that were especially meaningful to me included: a sense of renewal, shared learning, depth of connection; The sparkle in their eyes as they explore new territory. Intuitive, inspiration, and clarity. Tapping into potential, a spark of light in a dark hallway. He made complex and abstract ideas seem simple.

Using the words, phrases, and ideas mentioned above I constructed my Gift Statement:

**An intuitive presence of  
Creativity, Clarity, and Inspiration**

**Supports others to be self-aware and to pursue their own potential**

**People gain a depth of connection and  
sense of renewal in his presence**

**A spark of light in a dark hallway  
who helps translate abstraction and complexity  
into simple truths**

**An encouraging guide who leads others to  
new inner territory  
unleashing growth potential**

**Nikki**

Now it is your turn. Remember to circle the key words, phrases, and ideas that are especially meaningful to you as you review your answers to the Gift clarification questions. Use your own poetic or literary style. The most important step is to include the key words and phrases that resonate most strongly for you. This will personalize your statement and make it unique and especially meaningful to you.

Once you have organized your thoughts and phrases in a way that is special to you, turn to a clean page and write your Gift Statement.

For a short cut version of the Gift Process refer to the bottom of Page 23 and follow the directions.

## **Composing Gift Statement for Others**

### **A Final Tribute**

Kathel Harris, a former client, was inspired to send out a letter containing several of the Gift clarification questions to twenty+ family members of a dear friend who was 88 years old. Everyone who received the Gift Questionnaire was to fill it out and return it to Kathel.

Kathel took the collected responses and composed a lovely Gift Statement for her dear friend, and she flew back east to be with her as she was dying. Kathel read the Gift Statement to her friend and could see that she was deeply touched by the experience. As a final act of love for her friend, she sent the participating family members a copy of the Gift Statement to which they had lovingly contributed.

In loving tribute, Dr. Norma Reidman, another client, coordinated the composition of a Gift Statement for a friend who was dying of AIDS. She gathered input from his closest friends and family. At his funeral she read the Gift Statement aloud. Friends suggested that she place a copy of the Gift Statement inside the coffin. All who attended the service begged Norma for a copy of their beloved friend's Gift Statement so they could keep it as a special reminder of the unique Gift they had experienced in his presence.

## **A Celebration of Life Ceremony**

A few years ago, I fielded a phone call from my G-d son Devin letting me know that my best friend, mentor, and co collaborator on the Core Paradigm had died suddenly. In honor of my dear friend Larry, I collected the phone numbers of family members and friends and started reaching out to people so that I could compose a Gift Statement that would eventually be read at Larry's celebration of life. As it turns out, many people went beyond the input on the phone and crafted letters that described Larry's impact inside of their lives. I had a graphic designer take the letters, including the Gift Statement that I composed for Larry that was placed in front of the book, and made a beautiful coffee table book that was presented to Nancy (Larry's wife) and his kids.

At the celebration of life, we all stood in a circle. Each person shared about the Gift that Larry was to them and to others that they observed. I read, out loud, the final compilation of Larry's Gift statement.

**A huge and enduring presence of  
Warmth, Strength, Kindness, and Authenticity  
A relentless pioneer always searching for why  
and guiding all of us to look behind the curtain  
and uncover our truth**

**Larry**

## **A Healing Gift**

Several years ago, my client Robin revealed during a support group session that she had not had communication with her father in several years. He was a retired judge and because of childhood difficulties, Robin did not want to be in contact with him. The group and I encouraged Robin to compose a Gift Statement for her father. After much resistance, Robin finally agreed. During the process of composing her father's Gift Statement she got back in touch with emotions that she had not felt in a long time. She realized just how much she had missed her father.

When she finished compiling her Gift Statement, she read it to the group. Everyone had tears in their eyes. Encouraged by her experience, Robin sent the Gift Statement to her father. A week later Robin received a phone call from him. Soon after he sent her plane tickets to come visit him in Texas and the two of them began to heal their relationship.

## **A Living Eulogy**

Several years ago, my mother-in-law Lucille, whom you may remember from an earlier story, was about to celebrate her 80<sup>th</sup> birthday. Family members were planning to attend her birthday party in Logan Utah. About two months in advance of her birthday I sent out a request to all the family members asking them to submit letters describing what they most appreciated about Lucille. I asked the grandchildren and great grandchildren to

remember special moments that they had with grandma and to draw pictures if they wanted to do so. I also asked people to identify any key attributes and qualities that they especially appreciated about Lucille.

My sister-in-law put all the stories into a special booklet, and we presented it to Lucille at her birthday party. I also took the input and crafted the following Gift Statement for her, and my business partner laser cut it into marble.

**A warm and welcoming presence  
Considerate, Patient, Caring, and Forgiving**

**The glue for our family reunions**

**A truly neat lady who is loved and adored by all  
People are standing in line to become one of Gramma's grandkids**

**Her kindness is an inspiration to others  
Her humor lightens the load  
The funniest, coolest, and spunkiest Gramma of all time**

**She brings a loving spirit that makes us All want to gather around her  
To be warmed by her love, grace, generosity, and her heart**

**The living demonstration that "Hawaii is a feeling not a place"  
One "L" of a gal**

**Lucille**

## **Facilitating the Gift Process**

When the Gift Process is conducted for a group of people, the facilitator will work with each group member in turn. Beginning with the first person, the facilitator will ask three or four of the questions listed on the Gift Questionnaire while the rest of the group members listen attentively to the answers. The facilitator takes notes, jotting down the key words, themes, and phrases. Group members may also take notes as they listen.

The most important questions include:

1. Recall a time you were involved in something fulfilling. Share what made this time especially rewarding.
2. Recall a time you contributed something of yourself to another person. What special qualities or attributes did you bring to the situation?
3. List the first names of three people, present company excluded, who know you very well. What would each one of these people say is unique and special about you?

Once the participant has answered each of the questions, the most important part of the Gift Process begins.

Starting clockwise from the first participant, each person in the group shares their impressions about participant #1's unique Gift. The facilitator writes down the key phrases or words that describe the participant's qualities and attributes. After all members of the group have had the opportunity to share their impressions and what they appreciate about participant #1, the facilitator takes a few minutes to organize the collection of impressions from the group members.

The facilitator then reads the Gift Statement and gives the participant a few moments to receive it. Once complete, the facilitator turns to the second participant and repeats the entire process using the same key questions. The process continues until each participant has had the experience of receiving their Gift Statement.

Following the Gift Process the facilitator may elect to re-write the participants Gift Statements on a lovely stationary and give them to the participants to serve as a special reminder of their unique Gift. Here is an example of how one of our corporate clients facilitated the Gift process for the leader of their team:

*“After Eric shared his answers with the team, each team member wrote a statement which summarizes their personal experience with him. Next, we had Eric mute his Zoom so that he could not hear any of the team members speak. I then facilitated a Gift Statement for Eric by looking at the key words that came up most frequently to describe him and asked each team member to expand on those key words. We then paraphrased statements which described Eric's personal attributes and qualities that he brings to the table.*

The facilitator guided people to work together, in collaboration, to develop an aligned statement of Erik (the team leader's) Gift.

## **Gift Processes for Families**

The Family Gift Process is an opportunity to participate in a special and mutually nourishing ceremony that brings greater reverence and appreciation to each of your family members.

When you facilitate the Gift Process with your family, sit in a circle facing each other. You may wish to light a candle. Be sure to turn off phones and eliminate other distractions. Next, give each participant a pad of paper and a pen. Begin with the person sitting to your left and start sharing some of the impressions of that person you have gathered through your experience with the person. Next, ask that member of your family to recall a time they gave of themselves to another person or project. Then ask them to imagine three people coming into the room, one at a time, to share impressions about their Gift. What would each person say?

Once the first participant has responded to the questions, ask the rest of the family members in turn to comment on what they see as unique and special about this individual. As facilitator your job is to weave together the various comments made by each family member together with the information gathered using the Gift Clarification questions.

After everyone has given their input, you may choose to reread the various things that people have said about this family member. Once this process is complete, you will have the opportunity to compose a Gift Statement for the first person. Once person #1 has receive their statement, move on to person #2 and repeat the entire process until each family member has had a turn. The Family Gift Process may be conducted several times during the year. It is a lovely bonding experience and reminds each member of the family to hold themselves and each other as precious Gifts.

## Family Gift Statements

The Family Gift Statement can be an affirming process for each member of the family as well as a bonding experience. The process begins by facilitating the Gift Process for each member of the family. Next, print a copy of each individual Gift Statement and tape it to a wall or space them around on the floor for all to see. Collect key phrases from each individual Gift Statement and then weave them together into a Gift Statement for the entire family. The following example comes from a Gift Process which was facilitated by a member of our Starquest team many years ago:

**Beth:** People feel safe to reveal their true nature in her presence.

**Jeannie:** Listens with her heart and offers her truth when she senses that the time is right

**Annie:** A warrior of strength, courage, and pride

**Kathie:** Brings the extraordinary to the ordinary with a depth of sincerity from her warm heart

**Susan:** Warm and nurturing presence generating safety which facilitates self-awareness, growth, and spiritual evolution.

The Kaefer Family Gift statement then read:

*A family of Strength, Courage, and Understanding  
Wise beyond their years  
Their presence generates safety that  
Supports personal and spiritual growth for  
One another and those they meet  
They are committed to seeing beyond the surface  
To what is Real, True, and Good*

Another example of how one family incorporated each members individual Gift Statement into a Family Gift Statement:

**A family in which each member and the whole brings  
Warmth, openness, awareness, and humor to those whose lives they touch  
A safe space to be open and honest. A caring and vitalizing presence  
In which people feel special and understood**

**Sue:** A sensitive and effervescent presence of sunshine and strength who cares, supports, and uplifts

**Tracy:** A focused and genuine spirit who brings warmth and humor

**Rob:** A sensitive and unwavering dedication to true values of respect and integrity

The Family Gift Process is a lovely family bonding activity that can spread the idea of Gifts to your extended family. Each time you conduct a Family Gift Process, every family member has an opportunity to both give and receive new input regarding their own Gifts. Our Gifts are continually unfolding into new expressions, so the words that reflect these new expressions will change as well.

When my mother and father-in-law came to visit one summer about twenty years ago, we decided to hold a Family Gift Process. Grandma Fergie started us off as the recipient. My wife Annie was the first to share what she experienced as her mother's unique Gift. My oldest son Michael, age twelve at the time, went next and brought tears to his grandma's eyes as he candidly shared what he especially appreciated about her. Ten-year-old Nicholas went next. His sharing was not as lengthy as his brother's but nonetheless precious. He got right to the point and his comment touched his grandmother deeply. Next, Grandpa Ted put into words his love and respect for his wife. The process ended with my comments followed by a Gift Statement that read:

**A presence of support and compassion**

**A calming, respectful and reassuring soul**

**She brings a spirit of genuine concern for the feelings of others**

**Open, outgoing, easy to be with and accommodating**

**An open heart with a warm welcome**

**Loyal to her family, friends, and her work**

**She will go the extra mile with an unconditionally loving heart**

**A peacemaker**

**A comfortable companion**

**Fergie**

John Falcon, the psychologist in Australia whom I referenced earlier writes:

*“Two years ago, in a small beach community in Northern New South Wales in Australia I facilitated a family session for a minister, his wife and their four kids. At the beginning of our session the family set an intention of wanting to experience a loving Christmas unlike any they had experienced before. Toward the end of the session, I conducted the Gift Process. I asked each of them to reflect on the quality that would most represent their family's gift to others. They collectively agreed that their family's gift to the world was Support. The energy in the room began to shift. Each noticed that the room was filled with a loving spirit. What was interesting is that they each realized their intention, as stated earlier for a loving Christmas, was being fulfilled as the evening progressed.*”

*After the Christmas holiday the mother reported that the family had one of the best holidays they had ever experienced as a family. They were fully in support of one another and expressed much greater affection and appreciation with each other. Prior to the Gift Process experience, the father, had shared with me that he had somehow lost touch with his contribution to his ministry. He had been depressed and somewhat shut down. Sunday morning sermons were lifeless. He was having trouble staying present with his parishioners as they experienced life's crises. Following the Gift Process this man had a reawakening. He was able to bring forth his Gift through his sermons and counseling. His parishioners noticed a difference in his spirit and vitality. He clearly was connected to his Gift."*

Miriam Stein, former Director of the Newport Center for Educational Therapy writes:

*"One of my most rewarding experiences with the Gift process was with a family of four. I thought that the children might be a little young to have the verbal skills that make the process meaningful, but I was pleasantly surprised. We ended the evening with a big family hug and lots of smiles. Although Ashlyn was only 8 and Kenton 10, they easily and meaningfully contributed. An excerpt from the Levin Family Gift statement reads:*

**A family of Warmth, Humor, and Love  
Finely tuned to supporting and cherishing one another  
While deeply committed to the bonds  
That make them each part of a whole**

*It was a truly lovely way to spend an evening together. The process bridged some gaps between my in-laws and me, as I was able to experience each of their unique Gifts in a new and profound way."*

## **Practice Makes Permanent**

There are times in which we lose touch with our inner Gifts. As demonstrated in our pilot study, there are also times that it is difficult to see the Gifts in others. Therefore, it is very important to develop the mental discipline to focus on our Gift and then look for and treat others as the Gift that they are.

During our work with peak performers in the sports and business industries, we have learned that practice does not make *perfect* but it does make *permanent*. Whatever you practice consistently over time becomes integrated into your ways of being. If you practice complaining, you will become an expert at it. In the face of any situation, you will be able to focus on the problems and complain about it. If you practice blaming, you will become an expert at feeling powerless. The following processes, exercises and tools will strengthen your ability to express your unique Gift and to appreciate the Gifts that others bring to you. These exercises are also designed to help strengthen your muscles of appreciation such that you can discover the "hidden treasures" that every day has to offer - regardless of ever-changing circumstances.

## **A Pandemic is a Terrible Thing to Waste**

When the COVID-19 pandemic became a very real for me in the middle of March 2020, I knew that I could make a difference. What is more, I knew that it would be necessary to not only contribute to the mental and emotional well-being of the people that I cared about but to also strengthen my own well-being. I turned my Tuesday evening support group into a “Mindset Training” program. I invited people that I knew and a few people I did not previously know. I did not ask for any payment, instead, I asked for a one-year commitment to show up on time every week and to report back to the group the results of the practices that would be introduced.

This would be a platform for me to pull together 40 years of Mental Fitness training, Leadership Development, Performance Coaching, and the Core Model to practice right alongside each participant in the program. During the program we built a set of customized self-care practices (some of which are listed in the exercise section of this book). We practiced recognizing the impact of our personal narratives on our emotional state and shifting from a disempowering narrative to a more empowering one. We paid attention to our triggers and practiced the trigger recovery process. Everyone read the late Larry Gneiting’s book: “Life After Survival” and developed a working application of the concepts and tools - most importantly the distinction between the Authentic and Auto protective selves. We also discovered and identified that the root to everyone’s trigger could be found in an underlying core theme called: The Core Issue or Key word and this awareness would be pivotal in everyone’s transformation. We learned how to use intentions and practiced setting them and living into them regularly. And finally, we helped to clarify one another’s unique Gifts. Everyone agreed that when we held the Gift Process after 8 months of work together, that it was a deeply touching and bonding experience. It was that experience that encouraged me to rewrite this book and to make it available to all of you.

# **Strengthening the Muscles of Appreciation and Deepening the Connection to Your Gift**

## **The 60-Day Program**

- Will I focus on the pandemic or my sense of purpose?
- Will I focus on adverse weather conditions or my emotional temperature within?
- Is my life one curse after another or is my life filled with Gifts?

There are choices like these to be made in every moment. It is the micro practices that we engage in daily that produce the macro results.

### **Practice Makes Permanent**

The purpose of this set of practices is to:

1. Guide you to discover, articulate, and develop a deeper connection to your own unique Gift.
2. Guide you to appreciate the Gift of others more fully.
3. Guide you to strengthen your “appreciation” muscles so that in the face of daily challenges you can capture nuggets of treasures hidden in plain sight.

## **WEEK 1: Discover Your Gifts**

1. Identify 3 qualities that you appreciate about yourself.
2. Recall a time you gave of yourself to another person or situation. What attributes did you bring to that situation?
3. If we were to interview three different people from various aspects of your life what would each one say is your unique gift?
4. Send an email to three different people from various aspects of your life that know you well. Let each person know that you are engaged in a self-discovery process and that your coach has requested that you ask people to share with you what they believe your unique Gift is.

### **Compose Your Gift Statement**

Work in collaboration with your facilitator (the individual who shared this book with you). They will ask you to share the information that you have compiled and will write a Gift Statement on your behalf, much like the person who introduced them to the book wrote a gift statement on their behalf.

Using some of the sample Gift Statements from the Hidden Treasures book, begin playing with composing your own personal Gift Statement. By this time you should have gathered the input from the three people in #4 above which you can now add to your statement.

Share your Gift Statement with your facilitator. They will, in turn, offer you some additional input to include based on their assessment. Print out your Gift Statement and have it easily available for the remainder of the program

## **Week #2: Discovering the Unique Gifts in Others**

As you did for yourself, write down the qualities and attributes that you appreciate about a person that you care about at work or at home. Recall a time they gave of themselves to you or that you witnessed of them giving to other people or projects. What was it they gave? What qualities or attributes did they bring to that process?

Compose a Gift Statement for that person.

Using the description from this book, teach them what a Gift is. Let them know that you would like to take them through a discovery process to identify their own unique Gift. Using the same questions that you have used for constructing your own Gift Statement, ask this individual to provide their answers and send them to you.

Also ask them to reach out to a couple of people that they know and to have them comment on their unique Gift.

Compile this information, in combination with your own impressions of this individual, and construct a Gift Statement that you can share with them.

This is a muscle worth strengthening and it is advised that you continue to look for opportunities to create Gift Statements for friends, family members, and co workers.

## **WEEK #3: Discovering the Gifts within the Situations that you Face**

Many years ago, when I used to deliver keynote addresses to large audiences, I would ask everyone to take out a dollar bill. I would then direct the audience to find something about the dollar bill they had never noticed before. Once they were able to do so I told them to raise their hands. I then challenged them to put their hands down and look for something else in the dollar bill that they never noticed before.

Imagine as you go through your daily lives having the intention to discover the Gifts available to you inside of any situation that you face.

Gifts can come in many different forms and have several different appearances. Someone can share something with you in a conversation and the nature of what they said to you can impact you in a beneficial way. This is a Gift. When you witness something that your child does, and it gives you a sense of delight, this is also a Gift.

Starting with today (and everyday beyond today for the rest of your life) I encourage you to look for and acknowledge “nuggets” of treasure. Maybe you have become present to an aspect of your health that is valuable to you; maybe you pick up on a moment inside of a conversation that you are thankful for.

Building upon the practice you started during the previous week gather as many “nuggets of treasure” that you can and write about what you have discovered as part of an “Appreciation Audit”. Many people fall victim to being consumed with what they do not have or what another may not have. Then it becomes very difficult to appreciate that which is right in front of you, or within you. This is an opportunity to blend some of our previous practices together.

For example: As I am driving to the pickleball court I notice a red light. With my practice, I find the Gift inside of this red light of giving me a reminder to stay present and slow down. When I arrive at the court, I spend a few moments in the car and reflect upon the Gifts of the pickle ball community that I have experienced. I write out a little Gift Statement for the pickleball community. As I walk onto the courts and appreciate the Gifts of the people around me, I notice that I hear warm welcomes being shouted out in my direction. The intent of this daily practice is to reawaken the “Appreciation Muscle”.

When you visit the past, just spend enough time to capture a nugget of wisdom because dwelling in the past prevents us from appreciating the goodness in this moment right now. The trained mind in the face of what is, perceives opportunity and is grateful.

Every morning, write down 12 nuggets of treasured moments (Gifts) that you have captured from the day before. This helps to rewire our brains from a pre-disposition of focusing on what does not work about ourselves and our lives toward appreciating what does.

## **WEEK #4: Bring your Gift.**

**Enter conversations with the Gift that you are and with a desire to contribute, support, love, encourage and/or connect in a meaningful way**

Every day this week, glance at your Gift Statement prior to entering conversations with other people. It is a good idea to print out your Gift Statement and have it readily available on your desk or save it to your desktop. Some have even made their Gift Statement a screen saver or wallpaper on their computer. Others have printed out their Gift Statement on 5x7 index cards and have copies in their car, at home, and on their desk at work.

## **WEEK #5: Build a Menu of Intentions**

We believe that entering conversations with clear intentions is the most powerful and empowering focus tool that we are familiar with. An intention is focused thought, spirit, and action toward a specific and desired outcome.

Entering a conversation intentionally means that prior to having the conversation with someone, you consider your desired outcome for the time together and what mindset and spirit you can bring to the conversation that would set the stage to invite that outcome to occur.

This week, look for opportunities to bring a combination of the key qualities found in your Gift Statement inside of the conversations that you have with other people. As you started to do during week 5's practices, take your Gift Statement and circle key words and phrases that could comprise a collection of meaningful intentions.

For instance, let us say that your Gift Statement reads:

**A vibrant presence of  
Clarity, awareness and understanding.**

**Highly intuitive with the ability to make the  
Unseen visible and put into words.**

**He invites people to play the transformational games he invents and wholeheartedly partners with others in these practices.**

**He continually gathers new information and insights to grow within himself so that he can more effectively guide others.**

**He brings actionable insights to others and then patiently supports people to gain traction inside of their lives.**

The Menu of Intentions for this Statement might include:

- Look for opportunities to gather information, insights, or observations that could fuel my growth.
- Bring clarity inside of my interactions with others.
- Patiently support people to strengthen or refine their practices.
- Share what I sense to be the unseen dynamic and surface in such a way that invites others to see as well.
- Invite people to play a game with me with an inspiring and playful spirit.

## **WEEK #6: Clarify Situation Specific Intentions**

This week prior to entering various conversations glance at your Menu of Intentions and choose a particular intention(s) that you believe will serve to optimize the nature of the conversation you are about to have. Below us an example of a Gift Statement and the accompanying Menu of Intentions. Notice how her intentions are cultivated from words and/or phrases from her Gift statement:

**A kind, compassionate, and thoughtful presence  
Enthusiastic, dedicated, and patient  
Considerate to the end**

**Loving and strong  
A loyal and dedicated friend  
Listens with her whole being  
Uses her intuition and insight to write from the heart  
Her words inspire, motivate, encourage, lead, and touch others.**

**She brings a loving and encouraging spirit to the  
process of guiding others to explore new dimensions of  
growth and learning.**

**Quiet pillar of support**

**Respectful and organized  
Determined to embrace integrity  
Sees the gift in everyone  
Beautiful spirit**

**The ultimate student who integrates the lessons learned  
so that they become a part of her way of being. She continually  
demonstrates the willingness to navigate whole heartedly into  
uncharted waters.**

**She brings a unique blend of a quest to learn,  
a sensitivity to other peoples' perspectives, and an  
inner strength and fortitude that is tempered with kindness.**

**Patti**

**{Contributors: Nikki, Joe, Tracy, Brian, Marian L., Debbi - 3/2021}**

Here is the list of Patti's Intentions:

- Be a kind, compassionate, and thoughtful presence
- Be loving and strong
- Truly listen
- Use insight and intuition to connect with others
- See the gift in \_\_\_\_\_ (person/people, relationship, situation/experience)
- Bring an open mind, a quest to learn, and a sensitivity to the perspectives of others
- Be open, calm, and grounded
- Bring a loving and encouraging spirit to the process of guiding others
- Inspire, motivate, encourage, and lead
- Be a considerate presence

Let us say that Patti is about to enter a conversation with someone who tends to challenge her quite a bit. Maybe her intention would be: "To be loving and strong". In this way, without reading her entire gift statement (which she most certainly could do) she is selecting a specific intention from her Menu of Intentions that is rooted in a very specific aspect of her Gift.

This week, experiment with using a variety of your identified intentions in various situations. Notice which intentions tend to be the most impactful. You may end up with a slightly smaller collection to place in your personal rotation.

## **WEEK #7: Harvesting Gifts**

### **Experiencing the Gift in others**

*“When you change how you look at someone, the someone you are looking at changes right before your very eyes”*

Recall a time that you received a special present from someone. As you unwrapped the paper, you were eager to find out what was inside. Your full attention was engaged in the moment at hand. You brought a spirit of delight, curiosity, and positive anticipation to the experience. You were fully engaged in the present moment with no thought for the past or the future.

When was the last time that you interacted with your husband, wife, children, parents, friends, or business associates in this way? Shift your thinking and consider that each person is a Gift from a loving source to you. Allow this thought to make a difference in your ability to relish the precious experience of being fully present with the person right in front of you?

When you catch your mind drifting to future tasks such as your child’s dentist appointment, or when you notice yourself distracted by another lovely person walking by, simply remind yourself that the person you are with is a Gift from a loving source to you.

What do you imagine that Gift to be?

This exercise is designed to help you practice treating those you meet with reverence and gratitude, knowing that they represent a unique and precious Gift intended especially for you. During the next few days, as you interact with people, ask yourself, “What is this person’s unique Gift?”

As you interact with people take a few moments either before the conversation, during the conversation, or after the conversation and imagine that you were going to write a Gift Statement on behalf of this person. What would it say?

Continue to build upon the practices from the previous weeks. Prior to entering the conversation, start with either reading and connecting to your Gift Statement and/or choosing an intention from your Menu of Intentions.

Since most transactions these days occur over a telephone, it should be easy to take out a note pad and write a couple of sentences about what is unique and special about the individual with whom you are interacting with.

Prior to conversations say to yourself, “this person has been sent as a Gift from the universe to me in this moment. What is it I appreciate about who they are? What is their unique Gift”.

During the conversation identify something about this individual that you appreciate.

When you were able to identify what it is that you appreciate about the other person, what is it you notice about the conversation as a whole? What do you especially

appreciate about the person you are interacting with? How have they positively impacted you and your life? As you look back upon your history, what have you learned from them that you have incorporated into your way of being?

Once, prior to entering a potentially challenging conversation, Burton chose to make up a poem as a Gift Statement that he had constructed on behalf of a beloved mentor of his:

*She holds a sacred place  
With her kindness and grace  
You feel her sincerity  
And unwavering integrity  
Like an ancient and honored scroll  
She nurtures your soul.*

This is what Patti wrote:

*“Today, I looked at my husband, my son, and all of my students through the lens that they are a precious gift to me from a loving source. Sometimes, I take these very same people for granted as I buzz through my busyness each day. Today, I slowed myself down and practiced looking at and interacting with each amazing human being as the precious gift they are. The rewards were wonderful. Not only did I slow down, stay present, and engage more lovingly (which felt great!), but others mirrored that loving engagement right back to me! It was a beautiful experience. I will continue to practice this daily. This is a habit very worth building!”*

*“Focusing on the gift within those you meet is a blessing to both of you” Nikki*

## **Week #8: Enter Conversations with Reverence and Leave with Gratitude**

Today prior to having conversations, take a few moments in contemplation prior to each conversation. Glance at your Gift statement so that you can be reminded of the Gift that you are and what it is that you intend to bring to the upcoming conversation.

Then imagine you were to write a Gift Statement for each of the individuals that you are about to interact with.

Here is an example of what Tracy did prior to her interactions at work:

*“I created a contact card with my gift statement this morning so it is easily retrievable for me to read when I get to work. I read my gift statement this morning and I set an intention to think about the spirit I bring to the conversation before I enter into it drawing on the qualities in my gift statement. That worked beautifully! I found myself being upbeat, appreciative, and complementary. When I had conversations I thought about the gift in that person and even shared with that person my thoughts about their gift. I did it with both my co-workers and later my staff were joining in with gift speak of each*

*other. It was infectious! I had a meeting today and gave the doctor who chaired the meeting kudos for a well-run meeting and he gave me kudos in return. It's like you get what you give. I realized today that I had a prior judgement of someone, but today I saw him in a different way and the judgement was no longer there. My co-worker had a judgement today and I asked her what the gift was and she was able to see it differently. I really think these exercises will create a more positive working environment and reduce the stress.”*

Here is what Terrie shared from using this practice at work:

*“I received an unexpected call from a coworker with whom I usually have difficult conversations. After a few seconds of debating whether or not I should answer, I did. As I answered the phone, I began imagining what his gift may be. Throughout the call, I imagined his gift and reflected on my gift, and to my surprise, our conversation was not difficult or defensive like it usually is. After we hung up, I realized past judgments I had made about him were not so, and I looked at him in a different light. About a half-hour after the call, I received a second call from the coworker and answered the call without hesitation. He had just called to thank me for the help I provided to him during our first call. “*

As you are getting ready to bring closure to the conversation identify something that you are thankful for that occurred during the dialog. You may, as many of us are practicing, even choose to express your appreciation to the other person for an aspect of their Gift that you experienced during your time together.

What you focus on expands.  
Practice makes permanent.

As you practice experiencing your own Gift, that experience shall expand.  
As you practice looking for and harvesting the Gifts within others, that too shall expand.

As you reflect upon your experience of the past 90 days, which of the various practices sparked the most joy for you? Take those practices and weave them into your day-to-day life. Remember, what was a good idea once can become a way of life through consistent practice.

## Concluding Gems

Each of us was masterfully designed with instructions imprinted in the deepest part of our souls. As our lives unfold, we reveal to ourselves and to others, more and more of the unique contributions that we are here on this earth to make.

No two people who read this book are designed to be exactly alike. Each of us is born from a oneness, yet the way we live our lives demonstrates our uniqueness.

Each person is a miracle unfolding. When we express the Gift that we are, each challenging situation becomes a canvas on which to paint our unique and splendid expressions. Remember, you are the Gift to life. There is no need to wait for circumstances or events to reward you.

Be the Gift!

We each have the power to transform any ordinary circumstance into a special one through the spirit in which we participate.

We are each here on Earth to be true to our uniqueness while, at the same time, honoring our oneness.

Each person is a unique expression of life. Each one of us is here to weave a tapestry of experience and expression in his or her own way. We are all on the same journey, yet we each pursue our own path.

Life's Gift to you is the Gift that you are: your Gift to Life is to live as a grateful recipient.

As we grow in appreciation of our own Gifts, we grow in appreciation of the Gifts within those we meet. Part of the adventure of life is to unveil our Gifts through daily living experiences.

We cannot force our Gifts into expression. Yet when we show up to the party of life, open to sharing our Gifts and contributing to others, miracles and surprises happen.

As we commit to our own personal development, we will gradually dissolve the illusion of who we thought we were or even who we were afraid we were. In this process, we will grow into the fullest expression of the Gift we were designed to be.

Perhaps you have heard the expression:  
*"I am looking for the light at the end of the tunnel"*

What if the light at the end of the tunnel is simply a mirror reflecting the light that you are? - Nikki

