



THE BEAUTY OF EMBRACING THE SHADOW

—SHANN RAY FERCH AND JIYING SONG

The International Journal of Servant-Leadership exists as an echo of prophetic descant. A treble harmony playing in the ear quietly above the melody which progresses in beauty below. How does one reconcile the polarities that divide us in our daily lives, our families, organizations, and nations? The articles in this volume speak to reconciliation, and the healing power associated with greater wisdom, justice, and love. They involve a necessary embrace of duality, a return to oneness in which harmony and melody are more readily heard and embodied. The great American poet and thought leader, James Baldwin, illumined our oneness precisely at the juncture of black and white America: “Each of us, helplessly and forever, contains the other—male in female, female in male, white in black, and black in white. We are a part of each other” (as cited in Styron, 1966/1992, p. 455).

As co-editors of this journal, Jiyong Song and I have experienced vastly different lives, and yet a unity remains in our common humanity, across time, space, and global understanding, through the profound call life places on people not only to be responsible to life, but to find beauty in embracing our individual and collective shadow, the place Carl Jung referred to as the seat of all creativity.

For Jiying, a story still with fresh pain.

I received a video call from my mom one day. She demanded me to send her \$30,000 immediately. I was frozen at the spot and didn’t



know what to say. I grew up in a culture of absolute fidelity to my parents. I obeyed and called my husband across the Pacific Ocean. Of course he asked some questions, which I forwarded to my mom. My mom gave me a story with my dad's backup. After I told my husband the story I received, he collected, borrowed, scrambled enough money within a week to send to my parents. Crisis passed, I thought. Several days later, my mom called me and told me a different story of why they needed the money. She knew I would not have helped them if she had told me the true story. She justified her action by saying that she knew she would get the money if she lied to me and her goal was to get the money to help my brother. I questioned how she could have done this to me and my husband. The next day, I received a video call from my dad. He almost never criticizes me. He did that day because I questioned my mom. I broke into pieces, for that moment, for that lie, for that justification, and for my childhood.

I had never gone to a counselor before. This time I knew I could not do it by myself. I revisited my life with my counselor and asked her at the end of our sessions: "Do you think I should forgive them?" It was more a question to myself than to her. I had been at the forefront of supporting forgiveness among the people around me. I truly believed what I said, but at that time, I was not sure whether I could forgive.

The heart takes time to heal. When I picked up pieces of myself along my journey, I became more whole, even though not 100% whole. It took me a long time to gather the courage to talk to my parents again, even longer to talk to my brother, but I did it. I am seeking to forgive them even though they still don't think they have done anything wrong. Among the many elegant and profound religious traditions that exist worldwide, I am a Christian. There is no pain, no unfairness, my Good Lord Jesus doesn't know.



One year later, I finally saw my husband face-to-face and told him the true story. He paused and then said, “I don’t care (about the stories). I did it for YOU.” Falling into his arms, I wept.

For Shann, a story from his upbringing in the American West.

In present-day Montana, with its cold winters and far distant towns, the love of high school basketball is a time-honored tradition. Native American teams have most often dominated the basketball landscape, winning multiple state titles on the shoulders of modern-day warriors who are both highly skilled and intrepid.

Tribal basketball comes like a fresh wind to change the climate of the reservation from downtrodden to celebrational. Plenty Coups with Luke Spotted Bear won two state championships in the early eighties. After that, Lodge Grass, under Elvis Old Bull won three straight. Jonathan Takes Enemy remains perhaps the most revered. Deep finger rolls with either hand, his jumpshot a thing of beauty, with his quick vertical leap he threw down 360s, and with power. We played against each other numerous times in high school, his teams still spoken of by the old guard, a competition fiery and glorious, and then we went our separate ways.

For a few months he attended Sheridan Community College in Wyoming then dropped out.

He played city league, his name appearing in the Billings papers with him scoring over 60 on occasion, and once 73.

Later I heard he’d done some drinking, gained weight, and become mostly immobile.

But soon after that he cleaned up, lost weight, earned a scholarship at Rocky Mountain College and formed a nice career averaging a bundle of assists and over 20 points a game.

A few years ago, Jonathan and I sat down again at a tournament called the Big Sky Games. We didn’t talk much about the past. He’d



been off the Crow reservation for a while, living on the Yakima reservation in Washington now. He said he felt he had to leave to stay sober. He'd found a good job. His vision was on his family. The way his eyes lit up when he spoke of his daughter was a clear reflection of his life, a man willing to sacrifice to enrich others. His face was full of promise and thinking of her he smiled. "She'll graduate from high school this year," he said, and it became apparent to me that the happiness he felt was greater than all the fame that came of the personal honors he had attained.

Jonathan Takes Enemy navigated the personal terrain necessary to be present for his daughter. I hope to follow him and be present for my daughters. By walking into and through the night he eventually left the dark behind and found light rising to greet him.

My own family history differed from Jonathan's, and yet we shared a common bond of seeking, and in an act of unforeseen grace, finding greater life.

When I was young, I spent much of my life lost in loneliness and fear. My father, as I grew to know and love him, may have been lonelier still.

I saw my father's father only a handful of times.

He lived in little more than a one room shack in Circle, Montana. In the shack next door was my grandfather's brother, a trapper who dried animal hides on boards and leaned them against walls and tables. I remember rattlesnake rattles in a small pile on the surface of a wooden three-legged stool. A hunting knife with a horn handle. On the floor, small and medium-sized closed steel traps. An old rifle in the corner near the door.

My father and I drive the two-lane highway as we enter town. We pick up my grandfather stumbling drunk down the middle of the road and take him home.



Years later my grandpa sits in the same worn linoleum kitchen in an old metal chair with vinyl backing. Dim light from the window. His legs crossed, a rolled cigarette lit in his left hand, he runs his right hand through a shock of silver hair atop his head, bangs yellowed by nicotine. Bent or upright or sideways, empty beer cans litter the floor.

“Who is it?” he says, squinting into the dark.

“Tommy,” my dad says, “your son.”

“Who?” the old man says.

When we leave, my grandpa still doesn’t recognize him.

On the way home through the dark, I watch my father’s eyes.

My grandfather was largely isolated late in life. No family members were near him when he died. He once loved to walk the hills after the spring runoff in search of arrowheads with his family. But in my grandpa’s condition before death his desire for life was eclipsed. He became morose and very depressed. In the end, alcohol killed him.

Once, I asked my father, “What do you think happened to your father?”

We were driving a backcountry road.

He turned to me, dusk aslant on his face, his facial bones subdued in the half-light.

“He stopped dreaming his dreams,” my father said.

The unities of both Jiying’s experience and Shann’s experience of finding beauty in shadow are reflected in the articles of this year’s *International Journal of Servant-Leadership*. There is a gravity not unlike the gravity that holds each of us fast through storms, a buoyancy that offers radically different sightlines of race, class, gender, and social history to illuminate universal human impulses of longing and belonging. There exists in the essence of servant-



leadership a quiet, flexible, and lithe force countering the social upheavals threatening individual and collective life today—the up-cycling of genocidal rage, gaslighting with dominant narratives, the violence of othering, legacies of generational trauma—we believe the articles in this volume of the *IJSL* affirm the power of empathy, the wisdom of wilderness, and the transcendent presence of divine mystery—a form of uncommon grace moving across the landscapes of human life.

Reference

Styron, W. (1992). *The confessions of Nat Turner*. Vintage Books. (Original work published 1966)

Shann Ray Ferch, PhD, is Professor of Leadership Studies with the internationally-recognized Doctoral Program in Leadership Studies at Gonzaga University, and the Editor of *The International Journal of Servant-Leadership*. Dr. Ferch's work regarding leadership, organizational culture, and the human will to forgive and reconcile has appeared in scientific journals and other scholarly venues internationally, and he has served as a visiting scholar in Africa, Asia, Europe, and the Americas. His story collection *American Masculine* (Graywolf Press), selected for Esquire Magazine's list of "Three Books Every Man Should Read," won the the American Book Award. He is also the author of *Forgiveness and Power in the Age of Atrocity: Servant Leadership as a Way of Life* (Rowman & Littlefield/Lexington), an Amazon Top Ten Hot New Release in War and Peace in Current Events, *The Spirit of Servant Leadership* (Paulist Press), edited with Larry Spears, *Conversations on Servant Leadership: Insights on Human Courage in Life and Work* (SUNY



Press), edited with Larry Spears, Mary McFarland, and Michael Carey, *Servant-Leadership and Forgiveness: How Leaders Help Heal the Heart of the World* (SUNY Press), edited with Jiying Song, Dung Q. Tran, and Larry Spears, *Global Servant-Leadership: Wisdom, Love and Legitimate Power in the Age of Chaos* (Lexington), edited with Philip Mathew, Jiying Song, and Larry Spears, and *Servant-Leadership, Feminism, and Gender Well-Being: How Leaders Transcend Global Inequities Through Hope, Unity, and Love* (SUNY, in press), edited with Jiying Song, Joe Walsh, Kae Reynolds, Jennifer Tilghman-Havens, and Larry C. Spears. His novel *American Copper* (Unbridled Books) won the Western Writers of America Spur award and considers colonization, racism, and cultural dignity in the American West. His collection of poems, *Balefire*, won the High Plains Book Award and appears with Lost Horse Press. As a poet and prose writer, his work has appeared in some of America's leading literary venues including *Esquire*, *Poetry*, *McSweeney's*, *Narrative Magazine*, *The Journal of American Poetry*, *Poetry International*, and *Salon*. He has served as a National Endowment for the Arts Literature Fellow and as a panelist for the National Endowment for the Humanities, Research Division.

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