IN MEMORIAM

We Remember: The Individuals and Their Families

Faculty: Christopher James Bishop, Jocelyne Couture-Nowak, Kevin P. Granata, Liviu Librescu, G.V. Loganathan

Graduate Students

Doctorate: Partahi Mamora Halomoan Lumbantoruan
Waleed Mohamed Shaalan

Master's: Brian Roy Bluhm, Matthew Gregory Gwaltney, Jeremy Michael Herbstritt, Daniel Patrick O'Neil, Juan Ramon Ortiz-Ortiz, MinaI Hiralal Panchal, Julia Kathleen Pryde

Undergraduate Students: Ross Abdallah Alameddine, Ryan Christopher Clark, Austin Michelle Cloyd, Caitlin MiUar Hammaren, Rachael Elizabeth Hill, Emily Jane Hilscher, Jarrett Lee Lane, Matthew Jospeh LaPorte, Henry J. Lee, Lauren Ashley McCain, Daniel Alejandro Perez, Erin Nicole Peterson, Michael Steven Pohle Jr., Mary Karen Read, Reema Jospeh Samaha, Leslie Geraldine Sherman, Maxine Shelly Turner, Nicole Regina White

... and we extend continuous healing to the injured.

On April 16, 2007, the eyes of the nation—and, indeed, the world—were fixed on a small town in southwest Virginia. As television crews descended, friends and
employees watched in horror as the death toll at Virginia Tech reached 32, plus one lone gunman. As the story unfolded I huddled with others at our northern Virginia campus, antennae tuned to the numbing news, while many of our graduate students and colleagues journeyed to Blacksburg to their children-undergraduate students there. The events of that day changed forever the lives of the Virginia Tech community, as well others around the world. As e-mails and telephone calls arrived from our university "brothers and sisters," as well as other colleagues and friends from far corners of the globe, it became apparent that planet earth was grieving with us. Repeatedly, I witnessed and experienced a sense of community and identity that transcended the confines of Virginia Tech and connected us as a family of humankind, albeit a very sad and horrified family.

In the days and weeks that followed as our balloon launches peppered the skies with maroon and orange (our school colors), I witnessed candlelight vigils across the state and country, an avalanche of e-mails from around the globe, round the clock coverage of shell-shocked students, images of memorial banners hanging in universities far removed geographically, but closely connected in spirit and compassion. As a parent myself, I ached; I mourned the shattering of so many young lives cut short—and the equally riveting loss of faculty.

I also witnessed, however, something else: the spontaneous emergence of a larger sense of Self—a movement from the rawness of the human experience to the rising of the human spirit: rivers of compassion flowing to and within the Virginia Tech community; the professor, a Holocaust survivor, who gave his life so that the students might escape and live; the father who lost his daughter but extended condolences to the gunman’s family as they too had lost a son.

Further, on April 17 the University community gathered in a convocation of remembrance and tribute, accompanied by families and friends of the fallen and officials such as the governor of Virginia (who rushed back from Japan), congressional representatives, and the President of the United States. The call for connection was heralded and heeded at many levels of consciousness. The day initiated an important healing process but the Closing Remarks by Virginia Tech professor and poet Dr. Nikki Giovanni also opened an aperture to a transpersonal embrace. Excerpts follow:

"We do not understand this tragedy. We know we did nothing to deserve it."

...but ... she continued:

Neither does a child in Africa dying of AIDS
Neither do the invisible children walking the night away to avoid being captured by the rogue army
Neither does the baby elephant watching his community being devastated for ivory
Neither does the Mexican child looking for fresh water
Neither does the Appalachian infant killed in the middle of the night in his crib in the home his father built with his own hands, being run over by a boulder because the land was destabilized.
No one deserves a tragedy.

We will continue to envision the future through our blood and tears and all our sadness.
We are the Hokies
We will prevail [Giovanni repeated this refrain three times]

Spontaneously erupting from the audience, and lifting them out of their individual encasements of pain, chants of "Let's Go, Hokies" (the school mascot) reverberated in resonance. An initial level of healing had begun in an identity that transcended the individual.

Moreover, a potential global compassion was created; an awakening that deeply painful tragedies are life-as-usual, everyday occurrences, in some areas of the world; an opportunity some time in the near or distant future to remember ... and thus better understand and appreciate the lived worlds of those in lands distant from home.

Now, however, may still be too soon as the rawness and pain are still palpable. The event took a while to register and even longer to process. The impact was crushing and for many everlasting: shock, horror, grief, accompanied, however, by fortitude, bravery, compassion, community, and transcendence. It may be possible, therefore, that together with the closely affected students and families, we might "invent a future" in which the memory of the pain, rather than debilitate, will spark a deeper understanding of humanity's suffering, with the divide between self and other becoming a bit more permeable. These still numb students and others might be fertilizing, nurturing, and incubating seeds of change for our world.

May these tragic events serve as a reminder to us in the transpersonal community of the importance of further pursuing our development and understanding of the transpersonal potential inherent in humanity (for better or worse).

In peace,

Marcie Boucouvalas
Editor, JTP

Professor Marcie Boucouvalas has for 27 years served on the faculty of Virginia Tech's Northern Virginia Graduate Center (National Capital Region), home to the office of the Journal of Trampersonal Psychology since 2002. From 1981-2002 she served as a field editor for the Journal.