Parker Palmer
LBJ Lecture April 28, 2003

UNEDITED

LBJ Distinguished Lecture
Remarks for **President Denise Trauth**
Evans Auditorium
Monday, April 28, 2003
7:30 p.m.

Good evening, and welcome to our 2003 Lyndon B. Johnson Distinguished Lecture.

President Johnson would be proud to see that his alma mater is returning to its roots with tonight's speaker.

Southwest Texas was founded as a teacher preparation institution in 1899…and one hundred years ago opened its doors to its first class of 303 students preparing to go into the public school classrooms of Texas.

Southwest Texas has a well-earned reputation as a university with good teaching, and Johnson himself was a teacher before he was a politician. So for several reasons, it is fitting that we ask a teacher to speak to us tonight.

I have been involved in education in one form or another my whole life, and during that time I have observed lots of good teachers and students' reactions to those teachers. It seems to me that what all those good teachers have in common is that they love their subject and love teaching it. Even students who don't particularly like the subject will be drawn into it because of the teacher.

I think Parker Palmer would agree. He writes that good teaching comes from the heart.

Dr. Palmer is a senior associate of the American Association for Higher Education and senior advisor to the Fetzer Institute, for whom he designed the Teacher Formation Program for K-through-12 teachers.

He is a highly respected lecturer on education, spirituality and social change and is author of several best-selling books including: *The Company of Strangers, The Courage To Teach, To Know As We Are Known,*
and *The Promise of Paradox*.

It is with a great deal of pleasure that I introduce to you our 2003 L.B.J. Distinguished Lecturer, Parker Palmer.

Parker J. Palmer

Thank you so much President Trauth and thanks to all of you for coming out tonight.

I want to thank all the folks who have had a hand in putting together the day and a half I have spent here—it's been a wonderful thirty-six hours and I've enjoyed it ever so much. I'm grateful to have this opportunity to deliver the Lyndon Baines Johnson Distinguished Lecture; he was a great education president. I've always been grateful to him for that. I'm grateful; too for the kind introduction I got just now.

I have to tell you that when I hear a lovely introduction like that, I sometimes hear voices from my own family background in my other ear, and last night I was thinking about my father, I've shared with the audience tonight I'm thinking more about my mother. My mother actually died last month at age ninety-three, so she's on my mind a lot right now. When she was in her late eighties, I was up in Chicago visiting her, which I did as often as I could, and she asked me one more time, "Now, how is it Parker that you make your living?" I haven't worked for and institution for twenty years, I don't have a title, I just have a PO box, and I think that she was actually worried that someday I was going to move back in her basement, so far as I could tell. And she said, "I really need to know, because I have a lot of friends in the community here who ask me all the time, and I don't know how to answer them—they're worried too." So I said, "well, mom let me just boil it down for you. I work independently. I spend half my time writing books and articles. I spend the other half my time traveling around the country giving talks and workshops. So, I guess, really the way I make my living is trying to communicate with people about the things I believe in and care about." And she thought for a moment, she was, I think 88, 89 at the time, and she said, "Well Parker, I don't mind communicating with you, but I certainly wouldn't pay you for it." So it's nice to hear your mother's voice in that other ear when you get a lovely introduction.

I'm going to talk tonight about the inner life of the teacher. I want to talk about the inner life of the teacher as a neglected key to good teaching, as a neglected key to the renewal of the vocation among teachers and as a neglected key to educational reform. The inner life of the teacher or the inner life of any professional, for that matter is a kind of an esoteric language, or so it would seem on the surface, it's not a phrase we use comfortably or easily in our professional discourse. So in order to give you a little idea about what I am going to talk about, I want to put some flesh on the bones of those words, by sharing with you an exchange that happened between a couple of teachers on a website that I am related to. It is the website of the Courage to Teach Project—now going on in some thirty cities across the country involving thousands of teachers in the United States in a journey, and exploration that takes two years into the teacher's inner life.

On this website, we have a bulletin board, or a chatroom where teachers can chime in and share things that are on their hearts and minds that maybe they don't have a chance to share in ordinary conversation. A while back, a teacher named Don Rothman wrote in to this website the following, "For years, I have suspected that one of the things that enables good teachers to sustain long careers is . . . ." I invite you, in your

imagination, to fill in the blank, better pay, longer vacations, better students, better colleagues, what might it be? He said, "one of the things that enables good teachers to sustain long careers is their ability to forgive the inevitable disappointments and failures that accompany creative teaching, or any work for that matter, provide energy, challenge, and stuff to gnaw on only if we aren't gnawed away by them. I want to understand better than I do know how teachers forgive themselves and continue their work. Since forgiveness interacts with spiritual and inner life issues for me, I am seeking to deepen my understanding of the spiritual dimensions of teaching."

When I got to the bottom of that little entry, which struck me in and of itself, I was struck once more when I find this man identified himself as a professor at the University of California at Santa Cruz. As someone who did his Ph. D. in the University of California system, I can guarantee that ten years ago, fifteen years ago, twenty years ago, no professor in that system would have wanted to be publicly identified with a question about forgiveness, or something as inward and seemingly mushy as that. And it suggested to me that maybe a sea of change is starting to happen where we can talk about the work of the mind in a way that also involves the imperatives of the heart. So that entry in itself struck me as a good example of the inner life of the teacher.

But a couple of weeks later there was a response to Don Rothman from a public school teacher who identifies herself simply as Bev. And I want to quote to you what Bev wrote in, she says, "I have only just this week realized that my difficulty in a new placement is my lack of forgiveness. I have taught special needs kids for over twenty years, and have just been switched to regular education. I have worked so long with kids who found tasks very difficult, but who worked their hearts out with my encouragement. I now sit looking at able children who barely bother to show up. I've been furious at them without knowing it, and furious with myself for not being able to make a change." And then she says in parentheses, "we've been in school all of eighteen days." "Your entry, Don Rothman, reminds me that expectations become definitions, and I have defined their roles in my head and been angry that they have not fulfilled them. I need to forgive, and that has made a difference, but I have room to grow and I welcome suggestions." Well, that's an example of what seems to me to be a real life moment in the inner life of the teacher. But let me suggest to you that in our culture there are at least two ways of hearing, of listening to the exchange that I just shared with you.

Let me describe, first, what I think is the most common way among us of hearing what I just read. And that would be to say somewhere inside ourselves, "Well, that's sweet. That's touching. But it's also sentimental and romantic. Yes, we think about things like forgiveness. But this is extraneous to the real issues in educations. The real issues are structural, technical, curricular, fiscal and political. And even if these inner life issues like forgiveness are important, they are personal issues, they are not suited to teacher education or professional development. Bev needs to learn to forgive, but what you really need is better techniques of classroom management. And that's something that we can teach her." I suggest to you that that is the dominate way of hearing what I just read in our culture—the dominant way in which we dismiss and marginalize these issues of the inner life.

But there's a second way of hearing that exchange. And I think it's a way that is being employed by more and more people in our culture. In this way of hearing, we would say, "Forgiveness and inner life issues like it are as real and powerful as the structural, political, technical, curricular, fiscal, etc. As real and powerful as those external factors and in fact these inner life issues are those on which those externals depend. We can and must educate for the inner life for the sake of all concerned, just as we educate people in knowledge and in skills." By this way of hearing, we would say, "Bev can learn all of the classroom management techniques we can teach her. But if she can't use them from a forgiving heart, her students will perceive the techniques as fraudulent and they won't work. If the methodology doesn't have integrity, for the person using it, then the methodology falls apart. Students are always looking at teachers and saying, 'do they really mean what they're doing on the outside? Or are they operating from a different kind of heart on the inside?'"

Professional training in our society reflects our cultural bias that reality and power are found only in the external world. So, our professional training focuses on gathering knowledge of what's out there and gaining the skills to manipulate what's out there. Of course, we want people with knowledge and skill. When I go into surgery, I want a surgeon who knows exactly where the organ in question is located, and how to get there while doing the least damage to me. But, I think in our culture, we have forgotten, rather profoundly, that we ought to be concerned not only with the skillful hand, but with the heart behind that hand—the heart that drives the use of that skill. It's possible to use the same knife with the same degree of skill to kill somebody as it is to use that knife with a high degree of skill to heal somebody. People are actually taught to do both. Much depends on the heart that moves the hand.

We have to at some point start addressing in our professional training this profound problem that we have in higher education of graduating many, many people who have the knowledge and skill to manipulate the external world very effectively, but who live completely unexamined inner lives because we give them very little help in conducting that examination. We have to, at some point, take the education of heart and soul as seriously as we take the education of the skillful hand. Socrates, one of the heart-at-the-root-of-any-higher-education-system-worthy-of-its-name said, "The unexamined life is not worth living." I would add to Socrates' counsel, "If you choose to live an unexamined life, please do not take a job that allows you to impose this on other people."

In professional training, we should take that very, very seriously. I confess that I get distressed these days when I read the headlines about the leadership debacles in the church, in business, in high finance, in government, and I read that the right analysis of these leadership debacles is ethical failure among the leaders in question. I don't believe that. I believe that all of those people who brought down great corporations, on whom retired folks were dependant and now find they have to go back to work because their retirement funds are worth nothing, the leaders who overlooked or protected pedophiles in certain churches, these people all have taken courses in ethics, at seminary, and at business school. They probably got very good grades in those course. They knew the

rules. But they had been allowed in their professional education to focus so thoroughly on the manipulation of the external world—running an institution, preserving an institution's self interest—and had been so little challenged to examine their inner lives that they simply tucked their ethical knowledge away behind a wall of separation. And the disasters that resulted are well known, to all of us.

Before I take the next step, I just want to say a final word about where I learned that the power and reality of the inner life is at least as great as the power and reality of any factor in the external world. I spent most of the sixties in Berkley, but I *did not learn* about the inner life sitting in a hot tub in northern California. I learned about the power of the inner life by drawing as close as someone like myself can to the lives of oppressed people, to the experience of people in Latin America, in South Africa, in the African-American community in our own country, to people who have participated in great movements of social change, that have clearly changed the shape of history and the shape of the planet that we live on. These oppressed people are by definition, people from who all forms of external power have been taken away. They don't have access to wealth, status, influence, [and] the armies of the nations they [live in]. How then, have the managed to foment and generate great waves of social change? They have done so by gaining access to the only power that no one can take from a human being—the power of the human heart. They have done so in disciplined and focused ways, in ways that consolidated the power of the heart in community, and we can look around in history and see the resultant change. So I think the evidence is rather indisputable that the power and reality of the inner life is at least equal to the factors in the external world. And I think we in education ignore the inner life at our peril and at the peril of the entire world.

I want to turn a corner here and talk about some fields of work where what I have just said is being taken seriously. Because, it's not only teaching, but in other professions as well, where folks are starting to realize that if we don't educate professionals in the inner life—in the powers of heart and soul—we're missing a very important component of professional education. And before I turn more squarely to teaching I think it's important to look at what's going on in several other fields, partly because it helps us to think outside of our own educational box, and we may find it even encouraging and stimulating about ways of thinking in our own work as educators. So let me tell three quick stories in which I have some personal involvement, one from medicine, one from business, and one from the world of government.

There's a great revolution going on in medical education. This revolution is perhaps symbolized by the name of an organization that I've had the privilege to work with in recent years, this organization is called: The Center for Spirituality and Healing. And when you hear that name, it would be natural to think that this might be located at a church-related college or it might be a free-standing organization of some sort. But the Center for Spirituality and Healing is, in fact, located at the heart of the medical school at the University of Minnesota—a large, class "A," public, tax-supported, research oriented institution. How does it happen that the medical school at an institution of that sort has at its core a Center for Spirituality and Healing, a place to which doctors in training and

those who train them are invited to come to get disciplined access to their own inner lives, to do focused disciplined work on their own hearts and souls?

Well the reason I think is very simple. The field of medicine now has lots, and lots of clinical evidence that a physician who cannot enter a healing relationship with the patient is less of a healer than one who can. And the only way to enter a healing relationship with a patient is to have access to your own heart. This becomes no longer something sweet, sentimental, and touching. This now becomes part of the *modus operandi* of a physician who wishes to heal. And in this medical school, along with others, it is now regarded as part of the responsibility to help train doctors who no longer treat patients like objects, because doctors who treat patients like objects don't get the healing results that are the ultimate aim of medicine and the whole point, eventually, of the Hippocratic Oath.

We came into the twentieth century with a model of the human body as something like a machine that broke down from time to time. And the training of a doctor, early in the twentieth century, became something like that of a mechanic. If you could replace the right fan belts or add the right lubricants, or put in a new carburetor, maybe you could fix this broken machine called the sick human being. But as the twentieth century went on, the research evidence mounted that this was not the case. That healing was not only about the administration of medicine and surgeries, but it was about a relationship, a trusting relationship, with someone whose intent was to heal. I had a little personal experience of this about two years ago, when, quite by surprise for someone who had never been in the hospital ever in his life, I ended up in the cardiac unit of the University of Wisconsin Hospital. It turned out not to be, in the fuzzy language of medicine, a "cardiac event," but something else, and I won't trouble you with what it was. I had the misfortune to draw a cardiologist who was from Iceland. Now, I don't want to impugn all Icelandic people with what I am about to say, just this particular Icelandic person. My theory about him was that he had been freeze-dried at birth and nothing in his medical education had served to thaw him out. I was, for this doctor, the "aorta in 109." I was not Parker Palmer, I was not a human being. In the five days that I was in there, subject to his sort of experimental administrations, always trailed by his ducklings in white coats who were trying to learn, I guess, on me I found myself on a daily basis having to crawl over him or work my way around him to try to achieve some semblance of healing and wholeness. To try to remember that I was a human being with internal clues about what was wrong with me. To try not to give it all over to his objectified science, spoken in a language that he refused to interpret for me. So I have some deep appreciation for the fact that medical schools are trying to change this dance and on the basis of solid empirical evidence are trying to help doctors make not objects out of patients, but remember that patients are people who need to be invited into their own healing, in relationship. That's story number one.

Here's story number two, from the world of business, because we find this new understanding of inner and outer going on in so many spheres of work. Several years ago, I'm pausing because I'm actually at the age where several years ago could mean anything from three to about fifteen and I'm just trying to remember where on that

continuum it is. Several years ago, I got a call from a director of personnel at a Fortune 500 company. "Would you," he said, "come to our corporation several times over a period of a few years and help some of us in the front office and some of us from the shop floor do some inner work?" Well, I'm aware that this language gets used rather glibly and rather faddishly, and life is too short to waste time on such as that. So I asked him, "What do you mean? Why are you using this language? And to what does it refer?" And he told me a story that I found very compelling. He said, "Our company, for about a decade has been ahead of the curve in flattening the organization. We've taken those pyramidical, hierarchical charts out of the personnel handbook and down off the walls in the office. We now, throughout our company's 6,000 employees across a number of countries, everywhere you'll find us sitting in circles. And those circles include people from the front office and people from the shop floor. And in those circles, we're trying to share information and solve common problems and do it in a way that brings everybody onboard. Not because we want to make nice on each other, but because we want to do our business better. And we live in a fast changing environment where everybody needs to be onboard and we think that this is a way to do it."

"But," he said, "in that decade of experiment we have learned time and time again that people come to those flat circles with hierarchically organized inner lives." I said, "What do you mean by that?" He said, "Well, we've flattened our decision making externally but if you understand what's going on in that circle, over here is sitting someone from the front office who's saying to himself, or herself, 'Okay, I'll play this game for a while. I know which side my bread is buttered on. But when push comes to shove I'm the one with the knowledge and the training and I get paid the big bucks to get this decision made right. So, whatever we come up with in here I'll find some back alley way, when I get back to the office to get it made my way.' Meanwhile, over here is sitting someone from the shop floor who's saying, 'Okay, I'll play this game for a while, but when push comes to shove, I know those people are going to take it and run. Plus, they don't pay me enough to worry about stuff like this. I just want to go home and have a life after work, and not have to think about vexing issues of this sort all the time.'" And, so this man said, "We have started to understand that unless we can somehow honestly address this inner hierarchy that everyone brings to the flat circle, we should put those pyramid charts back in the handbook and back on the wall, because they are a more honest reflection of what's going on here than our current mythology that we're doing everything in community. Without truthfulness, without honesty, we can't get anywhere."

I found it very compelling, I went and worked with that company for several years, and as you all know these are not the kinds of problems that one "solves." You don't fix peoples inner lives in the sense that you fix a broken machine. But what you can do, and what I think we helped to do with that company over a period of several years, is to create settings where people can put their cards on the table and tell the truth about this dynamic that the personnel director described. And in truth telling you can sort of move incrementally, slowly towards more authentic ways of being together in the work. Ways that really work rather than ways in which everybody is just faking it. We did that and I feel good about the incremental results that we achieved. That company

continues to use some of the models of truth telling that we experimented with during that time as a way to find their direction in a very complex business environment.

A third and final story, from the world of government, before I turn back to education. A few years ago, I sat with a circle of about twenty to twenty-five people from Washington DC. It's also moving to meet people from the Federal government who are there because they have a very high ethic of public service. They're there not to get rich or famous, but because they truly want to be citizens of a democracy in the fullest sense of that term. And these people in the circle I was with for four days fit that description. One of them, like all the others, was feeling this ethic of his to be in profound conflict with the political pressures surrounding his life. He was a man about 55 years old, highly placed in the Department of Agriculture. He'd been in Washington for ten years. But for twenty-five years before that, he had been a farmer in northeastern Iowa—in the same county in fact as my great-grandparents farm. And so I felt a kind of kinship with him and a type of soul connection. I thought I knew something of who he was. Throughout his time with us, that four day period, he kept agonizing about a policy that was on his desk at that moment regarding the rapidly thinning topsoil of Midwestern farmland, which as you know is being depleted at a tragic and self-destructive rate by agribusiness practices. He kept saying, "My farmer's heart knows how this policy should be settled. But the political pressures around me are all moving in the other direction." On the final morning of our time together, he came to the closing circle looking a little bleary eyed, and he said, "I had a sleepless night last night, but in the middle of the night I realized what I must do, I must go back to Washington and decide this issue in favor of my farmer's heart." After a period of respectful silence, somebody said to him, "How will you deal with the pressures that your boss will put on you to reverse that decision; with indeed his anger, as you've predicted it, at the decision you're about to make?" And this man got very quiet and very thoughtful, and said, "Well I guess the most important thing I've learned this weekend is that I don't report to my boss, I report to the land."

That turns me towards teachers, who at this very moment across our country are trying to remember that they don't report to the people who make the tests or who administer the tests, or who insist on the tests, they report to the children. That's what every good teacher is trying to remember in our day and time. Now I cannot tell you that that man from Washington DC went back to his office and did exactly what he said he was going to do. This is not a fairy tale, it's a true story. So I can't give you the perfectly happy ending. I know from personal experience that there's often moral slippage on long airplane rides, after you've left the workshop, after you've had the epiphany. If he did go back to Washington and do exactly what he said he would do, I cannot tell you that the topsoil of Midwestern farmlands has been saved. The policy process is too complex to be redirected by one person's moral resolve. So I'm not trying to sell you a fairy tale here. This I can tell you with great assurance: every time a human being has a moment of remembering who it is that he or she really reports to, there is moral gain for all concerned. Every time a human being understands the foundation stone of his or her integrity in the work he or she does, there is a nudging for that person towards doing the right thing a little more deeply, a little more fully, a little more often. And most important of all, every time a person has a moment of the sort I just described,

that person can never again forget that there's a voice inside that wants to tell him or her the truth, that wants to cut through the kurplupple, the confusion of all those external voices and pressures. That I can tell you for certain, and that adds up to net moral gain for all concerned.

Let me tell you one more story about teaching. We're talking about inner life things like struggling the ego, which wants to please the boss, versus the heart, which knows it reports to the land. We're talking about inner life issues like forgiveness of ourselves and others in order to sustain our commitment to our personal vocation and mission. We're certainly talking about things that add to human integrity and a sense of human wholeness in those who do them. But are we talking about things that make a difference in the real life of institutions, in the real world?

I want to share with you a very recent piece of research from the world of education. It was reported in the October 16, issue of *Education Week* for those of you who'd like to follow up on it. Done by two scholars at the University of Chicago, who, during the course of the nineties, the whole decade, did a very careful longitudinal study of Chicago public schools. And they were trying to answer a very simple question: why is it that over the course of the nineties some of the schools who were deeply engaged in efforts at education reform managed to improve student learning outcomes ten years later in language and mathematics while other schools engaged in those same efforts at reform failed miserably to improve outcomes for students? Why is that? And this study done, as I say, by two scholars at the University of Chicago, a very careful research model looked at all of the usual suspects in terms of independent variables. They looked at how much money got thrown at these schools. Could it be that more money would create better outcomes for students, and less money would create poorer outcomes? They looked at curricula. Was this about better curricula being introduced? They looked at teaching technique, in-service, professional development opportunities. They looked at governance models which were a big thing being experimented with in Chicago in the nineties. And they found that none of those variables had any power at all in explaining the difference between those schools that improved student learning and those schools that failed to improve student learning. But fortunately they had studied another factor—the "X" factor. And it was the variable that explained virtually everything.

The name of that variable, the name they give that variable is "relational trust." They looked at relational trust between teachers and administrators, between teachers and teachers, and between teachers and parents. And they define it very carefully. They found that if, in the early nineties, your school had high levels of relational trust, or leaders that were devoted to working on relational trust, your chances of improving student learning by the end of the nineties were one out of two. One out of two. But, they found that if your school had low levels of relational trust and leaders who were not devoted to working on that factor, your chances of improving student learning over the course of that decade were one out of seven. I was trained as a sociologist and that's a huge statistical difference—one out of two versus one out of seven. And that relationship held true no matter how much money you threw at a school, no matter how slick the curricula you introduced, no matter how clever the teaching techniques, no matter how

sophisticated the models of governance. If relational trust wasn't there, none of that would have positive outcomes for student learning.

I call this "well, duh science." I mean really, who doesn't know that? But I'm very grateful to these researchers for lifting up a factor that we all know to have immense power in the conduct of human life, but a factor of the sort that has to do with the inner life that social science hardly ever looks at. I'm very grateful to these scientists for casting a light on the power of relationship. What does it take to have relational trust? Well, it takes people who have their egos under control, who know they don't report to the head of the department they report to the children and to each other. It takes people who know how to forgive. It takes folks who have mastered the inner terrain of their lives to enter in to these creative relations with each other, which not only contribute to our sense of wholeness and integrity and make our lives more satisfying. There is empirical evidence that these factors also serve better the students, or whoever, that it is we intend to serve.

Now I want to turn a corner towards the final part of my remarks. I want to say a few thing about what I think these stories have in common. How it is that my colleagues who have heard each program around the country are putting wheels on these ideals—embodying them, manifesting themselves in action now in thirty cities, working with thousands of public school teachers who, in my mind, are the culture heroes of our time these public school teachers on whom we so deeply depend. What I think these stories have in common is two things. The people in all of the stories I have told were struggling to rejoin soul and role. That was true of the farmer turned bureaucrat in the Federal government. It's true of the doctors at the University of Minnesota medical school. It's true of the people that worked in that Fortune 500 company. To rejoin soul and role. But secondly, they were doing that not as a sort of individual meditative act; they were doing it in community with other people.

The inner journey is a challenging journey. I get a little amused when people say to me, "The world is so confusing out there I have to meditate to find clarity." I don't know about you but when I go inward I find it more confusing than New York City. In New York City at least, you can get a map or find a taxi driver who knows where you're going. I have yet to find anyone who knows how to take me to the destination I want to go to inside myself. There's a lot of voices in there. There's shadow and light. There's complexity and confusion. And I have found in my lifetime very consistently that I need to have a community with whom to sort and sift these things in order to even begin to discern the wheat from the chaff, the false from the true, the right lead from the wrong clue.

And so what we are doing in our Courage to Teach work around the country is creating communities of teachers, twenty-five teachers in each location, who take a two year journey together through a series of eight retreats. They journey in a community that has a very special dedication or devotion, and that is a community that exists to support and sustain the inner journey of each person in that group. It's a form of community that I don't think we know a whole lot about in our society. I think of

community, let me change the image a little, I think of community as a group of people who are creating between them a certain type of space—a social space if you will. And I think a lot of the different kind of spaces that we know how to create between us in this society.

Let me give some examples. We know how to create social spaces that invite the intellect to show up, the university has majored in that over the years and I'm glad, as I value the function of the intellect very much. We know how to create social spaces that invite the emotions to show up—that's what a therapy group does for example. We know how to create social spaces that invite human will to show up—that's called a committee, where we organize our efforts on behalf of some goal. And we certainly know how to create social spaces that invite the ego to show up—that's called all of the above. Wherever we are, the ego is eager to put in an appearance. But what I think we know very little about, is how to create a social space that allows the human soul to show up, the spirit, the heart, my self, my sense of identity and integrity.

It's much harder to create a space to invite that kind of vulnerable inwardness to put in an appearance than it is to invite my intellect, my will, my ego. What does it take to create a community that knows how to welcome the soul? Because I don't think we're going to get very far at reconnecting soul and role unless we have some answers to that question. Let me start out with just a very personal image of what I believe the soul to be like, because if we don't understand its nature, we won't understand what makes it feel welcome. I think the human soul is very much like a wild animal, and by that I mean two things. On the one hand, the soul is tough, resilient, and resourceful; it knows how to survive in hard places where no other part of us knows how to survive. One of the things I've spoken and written about over the years, I've written about it in my new book *Let Your Life Speak*, is the personal journey I made during my forties, twice, with clinical depression. And it was in those devastating times of depression when my intellect, which I have depended on for many years, was utterly worthless, and my ego was shattered, and my emotions were dead and my will was non-existent. It was in that darkness that I, like many other people, was able to sense occasionally, way back there in the woods, something that was still alive in me, something that knew how to survive in a place where there was hardly any nourishment or any light. That wild thing, call it if you will, the soul, that's where I first started learning about that capacity of the soul. When I walk in the world today among the people that I meet, I constantly meet people who wouldn't be with us if it weren't for the tenacity of that wild thing called the soul.

But, exactly like a wild animal, this tough resilient, resourceful soul is also essentially shy. And we know that if we want to see a wild animal the last thing we should do is go crashing into the woods screaming for it to come out. We know that under those conditions we will simply scare away the thing we seek, this shy thing we seek. We do know, however, that if we walk into the woods quietly and if we will sit at the base of a tree and breathe with each other, breathe with the Earth for an hour or two, we may eventually catch a glimpse of that wild creature that we seek. We may catch it only out of the corner of our eye, but we will never forget the sight and the sight will be an end in itself. We won't try to get it to move over here so that we can get a better

picture. We just want to see it, we want to appreciate it, and we want to revel in its presence.

So being in a community that knows how to support the inner journey, being in a community that knows how to welcome the soul, is a lot like walking into the woods quietly and breathing with the Earth for a few hours until that soul feels safe enough to show up and to start to makes its claim on our lives. You see, that's what happened with that man from the Department of Agriculture, because he found himself in a community that weekend that was following certain rules that were meant to honor the shyness of the soul.

Let me tell you what some of those rules are, that we use in our teacher formation groups. The most fundamental rule we use is: no fixing, no saving, no advising and no setting straight. Think about that, it leaves you with no tools. When we sit our teachers down at the beginning of the two-year journey and we say, "You know what? For the next two years through eight retreats of about four days each, the facilitator is going to enforce a very important ground rule: no fixing, no saving, no advising and no setting straight." Somebody almost always exclaims, "Well what in heaven's name *are* we going to do with each other for the next two years? You've just taken away the only things we know how to do." But the last thing the soul wants is to be fixed or saved or set straight, it wants to be witnessed, it wants to be heard. And it doesn't matter if I hear your soul or you hear my soul, all that matters is that we are present to each other in a way that allows me to hear my soul and you to hear your soul.

It was amazing to watch that group from Washington DC follow these ground rules because every one of them was a fixer, a saver, an advisor, a setter straighter. And every one of them had an opinion of what that man from Agriculture should do, in fact there were probably more opinions than there were people in the room. But for almost four days they disciplined themselves not to advise this fellow, but simply to let him listen to himself explore the issue out loud. When we try to advise, fix, set each other straight, we know how to defend ourselves against that. But it's very hard to defend yourself against the voice in your own soul when you are held in a communal space when it's telling you the truth about your life and is allowed to make its claim. I sometimes invite people, when they are struggling to understand what this kind of community is like, to think about a couple of interpersonal moments that many of us have had that I think are very much like the quality that this community possesses.

Two examples. Think for a moment of a person who has helped you grow into some part of your own truth, who has helped you at some point of your life to become an important truthful part of who you are. I've asked a lot of people to tell me stories about that person, the parent, that grandparent, that spouse, that friend, that neighbor, that uncle or aunt and almost always those stories have two strong characteristics. One is this person gave me unconditional love unconditional regard. In this person's presence I did not have to do anything different or be anything different to gain their affirmation. And so I had this grace-kind of space in which I could really explore my own truth and try to understand more deeply what it was. And at the same time, this person somehow

surrounded me with a charged force field of expectancy that made me want to grow from the inside out. Not specific expectations about what I would or would not become, but a force of expectancy that gave me the opportunity to grow precisely because my approval or the love I received from this person was not dependent on what I did. I could now take the risks that growth involves. That's what its like to sit in a Courage to Teach group or a circle of trust, a community that knows how to welcome the soul.

One more relationship that some of us know something about that maybe takes it closer to the bone; it certainly does for me given recent experience. Sitting in this kind of community, supporting each other's inner life is, in some ways, like sitting with a dying person. A lot of us have had that experience and I've talked to lots of other folks who have. Again I hear two things—that in this final moment of life, the person sitting at the bedside realizes two very powerful things. One is this is not a problem for which I have a solution or a fix. And maybe for the first time in my life I have to penetrate the illusion that I'm here as the fixer of this person's problem. I have to find a different way to be there because this defies the problem/solution category that we so often work with. And secondly in this moment, I also have to give up the squeamishness that makes me want to turn away from something I don't know how to handle, that's too problematic or too fearful or too ugly to look at because I don't know how to fix it. And so in this moment of sitting with a dying person I finally learned to be neither invasive nor evasive of a human being living those last moments of life. That's what its like to sit in a community that knows how to support the inner journey. That's what its like for our teachers who sit side-by-side for two years. I sometimes say to myself, and occasionally to others, "You know what? We're all dying all the time anyway. Wouldn't it be good to learn to sit that way with each other before the last few hours?" And when people do that, they find relationships being transformed.

Now I'm going to close with one more story. I told my wife a few months ago that the older I get I just hope I'll tell more stories and make fewer points. She was very glad to hear that actually. She encouraged that further development. I wish I was enough of an actor to act this one out, but I think I can give you the picture. I once facilitated a two-year Courage to Teach group where we were sitting with each other this way from the get go. The only problem was that one of the people in this group, a very tall man named Mark Fond, a shop teacher from central Michigan, where we had this Courage to Teach group gathering, was my student from hell. He was the fellow that came in on opening night while everyone else was on the edge of their chairs leaning into the circle and— if I could act it out—he was almost parallel to the floor in his chair, feet stretched out, hand over his eye staring at the ceiling, looking out the window, rolling his eyes, sighing. Giving a lot of non-verbal language indicating that he didn't want to be there is the kind of bottom line way to put this. And so, we went on with the retreat, and I told people about no fixing, no saving, no advising, no setting straight how we were going to learn, as you do at the bedside of a dying person, simply to be present to each other rather than trying to straighten each other out.

Half way through this retreat, Mark, who is several inches taller and a little broader than I am, came over to me and said, "Can we talk?" I said, "Sure Mark, that'd

be fine." He says, "We got to go outside, I don't want anybody to hear this." *Now* you know it's really important. So we went outside and he looked down at me and he said, "What the hell is going on in there?" Now one of the things we do in this group is learn to ask honest, open questions, right? Like I always say, "Have you thought of seeing a therapist?" is not an honest, open question. So I said, "Is this an honest, open question? Because if it is, I can't answer it for you, only you can answer it for yourself." "Well thanks a lot. That's a big help." And I said, "Well, I can't tell you what the hell is going on in there for you, Mark. I can tell you what the hell is going on in there for me, but not for you." And he said, "Well, I just don't know whether to stay or to go." And I said, "Well, all I can tell you is that in a community like this if you want to go, you're free to go with our blessing, if you want to stay, you're free to stay with our blessing, if you want to go and then come back later, you're free to do that with our blessing." "Well that's a big help." So we carried on with the retreat.

I'll make a long story short by telling you that for six of the eight retreat, that's a year and a half of this two year process, this same scenario repeated itself every time. He'd sigh, put his hand over his eyes, look out the window. Somewhere near the end of the second day, he took me aside, "Can we talk?" We went outside. "What the hell was going on in there?" You know I started to get the routine down pretty pat. But I noticed something, because I'm really kind of an intuitive guy, he kept coming back. Right? That was hard to miss. Well, the seventh retreat arrives, it's the spring now of that second year, we've got the spring and the summer to go and that's the end of the road. We sat down opening night in the circle, and Mark is right on the edge of his chair. And his eyes are just alight. And so, being an intuitive facilitator, I said, "Yes, Mark, do you have something you'd like to say?" He said, "I got it." And I said, "Well that's keen. What'd you get?" You know I was little worried, SARS wasn't around yet, but you never know. He said, "Well let me tell you a story."

He said, "For the last two years, my principal has been on my case about going to the high-tech workshop on the teaching of shop this coming summer. He's insisted that I go to this place a hundred miles away where I'm going to learn how to apply the keen stuff they do in the new technology in teaching high school students shop. And for two years I've been telling my principal to go jump in the lake. I've explained to him that this high technology is a passing fad; it's going to go away. And even if it turns out not to be a passing fad, it isn't what my high school students need right now, they need hands on experience, they can get the technology later. It'll be a waste of time and money, and by God I'm not going. And for two years," he said, "my principal has been on my case about going the coming summer. The tension between us has been growing deeper and deeper, and since I'm kind of a leader on the faculty this tension has been spreading through the building and things have gotten a little ugly from time to time." He said, "A few weeks ago my principal called me in again," here we are on the spring of our second year of the group, Mark's third year in this dance of death with his principal. "And he said, 'Mark, this time I mean it. You're going to the workshop and I'm not going to take no for an answer.'" And Mark said, "Well, I'm going to tell you no again, I'm not going. But at least this time I can tell you the truth about why. For two years, I now know that I've just been blowing smoke. I've been giving you false excuses." He said, "I've been

sitting with this group of teachers who have been exploring their inner lives and I guess I have one too. I've started to figure that out. I can now tell you that the real reason I don't want to go to this thing is that I'm afraid." I don't know that Mark had ever used the word afraid about himself in his life. He said, "I'm afraid that I won't understand what they're saying—not a word of it. I'm afraid that going to the workshop will make me feel like I've been doing it all wrong for the last twenty years. I'm afraid that I'll come back from that workshop feeling like I'm over the hill and I don't have the vocation any longer as a teacher in shop. So I'm still not going, but at least now I can be honest with you about why. The real reason is I'm afraid, and this group has helped me understand that." "So there was a silence," he says, "with his principal, and after a couple of minutes he said my principal looked up and said, 'You know what, Mark? There's a lot of stuff I'm afraid of too. Let's go together.'"

Now I make a very simple point. If we could repeat that story twenty, thirty, forty times a week, around public schools or any other institution, we could create some real reform. It's a story about the power of truth telling in our professional lives. It's a story about taking off the mask and letting the soul speak what's real for us, and it's a story about the power of that to create working relationships towards new possibilities in our institutional life. It's a story about relational trust, which helps students learn in the long run, according to two scholars at the University of Chicago. But let me tell you one more thing. It's a story about a group of people, and I honor them for this more than I can begin to express, who knew how to hold Mark in a very difficult space for a year and a half without ever turning to him and saying, "Come on man. Get with the program or let a real person take your seat." They respected the shy soul that was in Mark, they give him the space and time to do that deep learning at his own level and at his own pace. And the results were powerfully transformational. I think there's some clues there about what we need in good professional educators.

Thank you very much.

Lecture transcribed by Benjamin Hicklin, graduate research assistant 2007-08