

Storm Breaker

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Day Break

By Dr. Andy Brown

Storms of Life

An eerie stillness fills the air. It is the undeniable “quiet before the storm.” Local news is broadcasting information about little other than the incipient hurricane, along with endless pathway projection maps. Outside there are no birds chirping, no wind whistling, and no other natural indicator that a cataclysmic storm is on the way. The humidity increases to a tangible, suffocating thickness that makes breathing a difficult chore.

Yellow streaks of sunshine barely cut through dense silver cloud clusters that eventually band together to block out the sun. The swaying treetops are the first indicators of the coming hurricane’s mighty winds. As the clouds darken to an inky midnight shade of black, the wind rushes from the treetops to the ground. The rain begins hard and only grows in strength as it pounds relentlessly from every angle. The unnatural mid-day darkness beckons street lights to blink and sputter on for a time. Soon they will succumb to the inevitable power outages which will engulf cities. Entire regions soon plummet into chaos and darkness.

Hurricanes are measured in strength and force using the Saffir-Simpson Hurricane Scale. The strongest storms producing the highest winds and rain are rated at the highest level as a Category 5 hurricane, indicating that catastrophic damage will occur throughout the path of the storm. Lesser storm levels indicate that damage will occur, but will be less disastrous. Whether a hurricane is rated as a Category 1 or a Category 5, it is synonymous with damage and devastation.

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Day Break (continued)

Evacuations for residents of the southeast are not typical for hurricanes that measure less than a Category 3 storm. Even at those lower levels, though, when a Category 1 upgrades into a Category 2 and a Storm Watch escalates to a Storm Warning, the mood of the remaining inhabitants radically changes. The once unfathomably long lines in grocery stores and at gas pumps dwindle as cautious residents seek shelter. The outbound evacuation traffic of anxious motorists which recently clogged highways has dispersed, leaving tar-covered deserts full of nothing but a post-apocalyptic emptiness.

Coastal towns and sunny beaches become dark. The pervasive gloom is only sporadically punctuated by hurricane candles, flashlights and gas-powered lanterns. When bedtime arrives and all the old-fashioned forms of lighting are extinguished, the darkness becomes a living creature. No longer masked by the usual sounds of cars, air conditioners and televisions, nature comes alive with the noise of harsh winds, snapping limbs and falling trees, of waves crashing and pounding the shores. Nighttime seems unending and uneasy. Houses sway as heavy rain batters the windows and siding.

The morning after a hurricane is a direct contrast to the terrifying night before. The differences are both gut-wrenching and oddly breathtaking. The splendor of a beautiful, brilliant azure sky is starkly juxtaposed with images resembling a warzone. Trees protrude from houses, while parts of houses rest in the branches of trees. Some homes merely look drenched, while others are completely gone. Powerlines have fallen, along with people's spirits. Shutters and shingles litter the landscape. Debris is everywhere the eye can see. Few things are left untouched by the storm; few people are unaffected. There are wide-spread losses: homes, businesses, pets, cars, and even lives. The people who remain are in shock.

Months, and oftentimes years, are needed to rebuild after a destructive hurricane passes. The people who make it through the initial storm are left to fight emotional storms as they plan burials for loved ones and pets that perished. Many have on-going battles with FEMA and insurance companies before any rebuilding can begin. The clean-up process is daunting and seems endless.

The casual observer may ask, "What good can come from a hurricane?" but science actually shows significant post-storm growth and regeneration in the environment. Trees grow taller and stronger, the soil is replenished, and the atmosphere and oceans are cleansed. Storms come in different shapes, forms and sizes. Both natural and man-made disasters are a few of the traumas that represent the storms of life. Death, cancer, divorce, failing health, chronic pain... just as in the scenario of the hurricane, these storms of life can leave a broad and tragic wake of destruction and chaos. Just as the affected landscape is renewed after a hurricane, a human life that experiences a storm also has the potential for renewal, rejuvenation and growth even after the darkest trauma.

In the coming months, this publication series will take a closer look at the parallels found between natural post-hurricane growth and the growth that occurs in the life of a person who has weathered a storm. As Edgar Allen Poe has said, "The world is a great ocean, upon which we encounter more tempestuous storms than calms."

I invite you to join me to explore how to navigate treacherous waters and create our own calm harbors in the midst of a storm.





Calming the Storm

By Barbara Lance

Do you accept the challenge?

Welcome to “Calming the Storm!” Over the next few months we’ll explore how conflict management skills can change your life. This first article will offer some suggestions for changing things in your sphere of influence right now, while subsequent articles will cover topics like the psychology of conflict, and specific steps a person can use to control their anger.

The increasing number of mass shootings has caused an intense public dialogue. An oft-repeated line is, “There should be a better way to stop potential shooters. Someone should do something.” But what? The debate on changing gun laws has been raging for years and shows little signs of progress. Changing people’s minds takes time, which we seem to be running out of. While others spend their time debating, is there anything that you or I can do right now to change things?

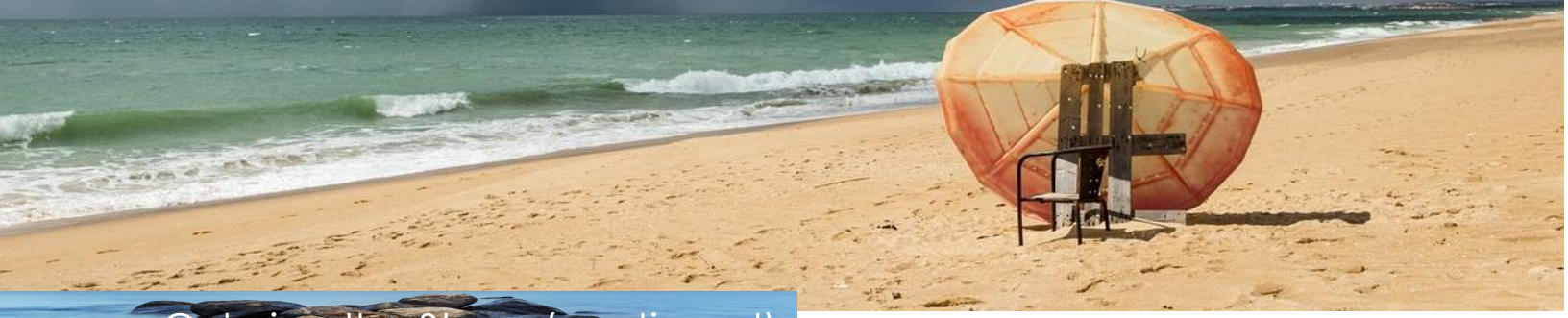
Newspaper reports of violence often report that the perpetrator’s neighbors are bewildered because “he seemed like such a nice man.” Accounts of abuse within families sometimes include stories of family members who thought something was wrong, but didn’t want to be nosy... and are then shocked to find out a child was being starved and beaten on a regular basis. Our society has trained us to ignore anything uncomfortable, to act like everything is ok when it patently is not, and to keep silent when speaking up would mean embarrassing someone.

Amy Herdy, a journalist who spent her career reporting on crime and had a lengthy correspondence with convicted multiple rapist Brent Brents, urges in her Tedx Talk [“Have You Met a Monster?”](#) that we should be willing to confront violence or predatory behavior. “Speak up if you witness predatory behavior... Don’t make excuses for it, don’t look away, don’t cover it up.” (12:26) But it’s uncomfortable to make someone else’s business your own. How do you even begin that conversation? One way is to be more involved with your fellow citizens. Getting to know your neighbors or the cashier at your local grocery store can have a profound effect.

A former neo-Nazi credits getting to know his diverse customer base for changing his prejudices. In his Tedx Talk [“My descent into America’s neo-Nazi movement & how I got out.”](#) Christian Picciolini talks about what caused him to first join a white supremacist group at the age of 14. “For 14 years, I’d felt marginalized and bullied. I had low self-esteem. And frankly, I didn’t know who I was, where I belonged, or what my purpose was. I was lost.” (2:49) Christian went on to become the leader of the group at age 16.

What made him finally renounce the white supremacy movement was a series of small events, starting with the birth of his son. He questioned whether the persona he had created for himself within the white supremacy movement was one he wanted to continue to perpetuate, to the possible detriment of his role as a loving father and husband. Soon after, he opened a record store that made its money primarily on white supremacist music, but also sold other types of music that brought in a wider variety of customers. One day, his conversation with a young black customer led to a feeling of connection due to the struggles that both their mothers had with cancer. Conversations with other customers, including a gay couple, caused him to increasingly question his prejudices. Those conversations led to his leaving the neo-Nazi movement.

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Calming the Storm (continued)

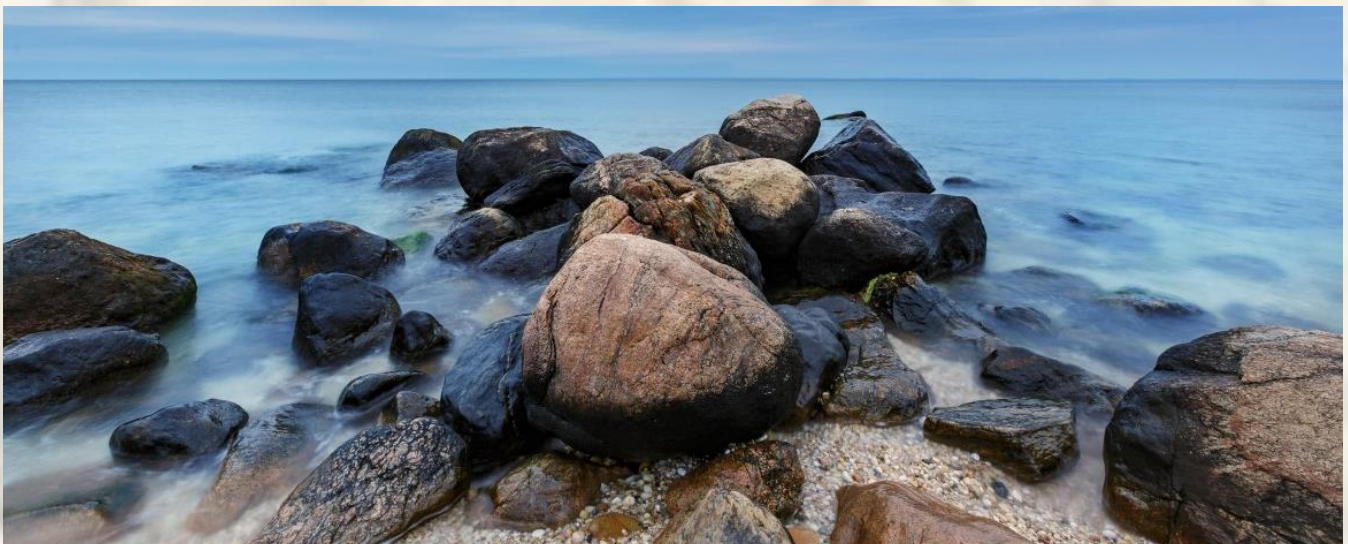
Another instance of the power of a simple conversation comes from someone who was planning a mass shooting. Aaron Stark's Ted Talk is entitled ["I Was Almost a School Shooter."](#) After detailing the abuse he suffered at home and his subsequent depression and anger, Aaron says, "I was going to attack either my school or a mall food court. It didn't matter to me; it wasn't about the people. It was about the largest amount of damage in the shortest amount of time with the least security." (4:03) Fortunately, Aaron still had one true friend, who was willing to look past his behavior and mistakes, and see someone worth knowing. That friend gave him a place to sleep and even more importantly, gave him compassion. Aaron says, "When someone treats you like you're a person when you don't even feel like you're human, it'll change your entire world." (5:30)

Aaron goes on to urge, "Love the ones you feel deserve it the least because they need it the most." (5:46) Our inclination when we meet someone who seems violent or odd is to ignore them or at best to report them to the authorities. Our inclination is to avoid direct involvement. What if our inclination were to look at that strange kid next door with eyes of compassion and a willingness to make a connection, rather than disgust at their behavior?

As a society, we have to make a decision. Is it more important to act polite and ignore anything out of the ordinary, or more important to lessen the likelihood of violence? If the latter, then we each have to be willing to do the uncomfortable thing of not looking away from things that make us uneasy. We have to be willing to confront uncomfortable things head on, and we must have a plan in place ahead of time if we are to do so effectively.

I challenge you to come up with a plan. A plan for connecting with your neighbors, a plan for speaking out against jokes that demean others rather than laughing uncomfortably. No one wants to be a killjoy... but no one wants to get killed, either. Now is not the time for ignoring. Now is the time for acting.

"There should be a better way to stop potential violence. Someone should do something." That's right. Someone should. And that someone is us.





Storm Front

By Brittany Williams and Ashley Curtis

Storms on the Home Front

In the darkest of times, individuals who are struggling tend to lean on those around them for support. Theorists argue over the origins of this humanistic process, but whether this skill is inborn or learned it seems to be a communal issue. Diversity and connection go hand and hand, but despite differences, connection is relayed and modeled from a very young age. Evidence of this phenomenon can be observed when a young child falls and scrapes his knee, which begs the empathetic attention of his peers. In adolescence, children find their own eccentric ways to achieve human connection in meaningful ways. Even the awkwardness of adolescence can be conveyed in supportive nonverbal body language. Within human growth and psychosocial development, supportive communication will look different across the lifespan (Corey, 2013). Moving toward adulthood, human connection continues to show up through the eternal exchange of vows, as each party recites that they are there to support the other person “for better or for worse.”

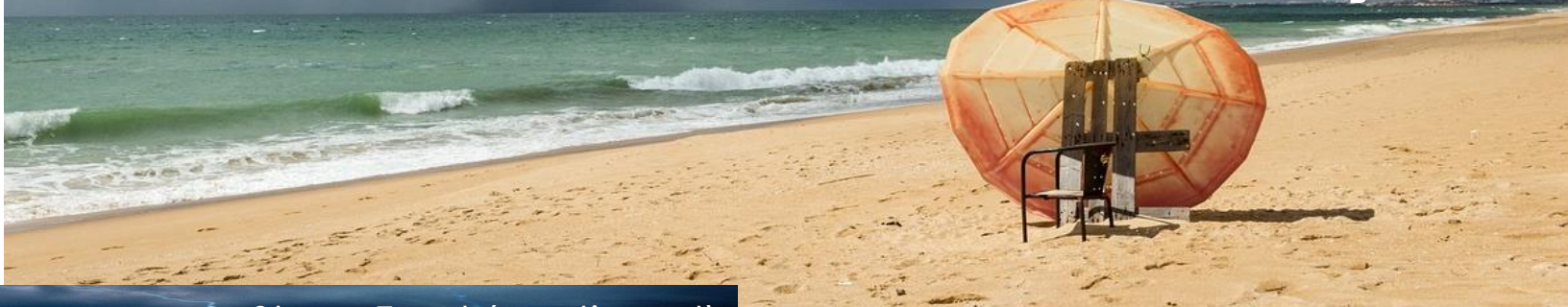
It is evident that this peculiar phenomenon is occurring across the lifespan in many different forms. A hypothesis can be made that human connection and supportive relationships are vital to survival and an inevitable struggle. Storms happen. Some storms are visible, some are obscure. Some storms erupt like betrayal trauma with abrupt contact of infidelity that isn't on the radar. Others are like the chronic use of disdainful words, killing a relationship with a thousand tiny cuts. Some individuals turn to those closest to them to cope with the treacherous waves of their life, and oftentimes those are handpicked supports. Laursen and Hafen discuss the positive and negative outcomes of conflict within closely intimate relationships in their 2010 study. One thing they uncovered is that although one can see relational growth from healthy conflict, the alternative coercive conflict that occurs in unsupportive relationships is highly correlated with detriment adversity to the relationship (Laursen & Hafen, 2010).

Having said all this, who does one turn to if the storm swells within the safety of their own personal relationships? Detrimental relationships are commonly seen with the comorbidity of mental illness such as adjustment disorders, depression, and even trauma-related stressor disorders, depending on the severity of adversity (Sangalang & Gee, 2012). How do therapists help their clients and even themselves navigate through the eye of the storm that occurs in close quarters with those that they count on to support them? And how do those professionals battle the raging storm when the client believes those to whom they look for support aren't able to understand their thoughts and feelings?

It is imperative for therapists and helping professionals to examine associations between symptoms and relationships to determine any residual or direct effect. For example, those struggling with depressive symptoms tend to perceive their partners or supports as having a lack of understanding of their thoughts and feelings (Gordon, Tuskeviciute, & Chen, 2013). This is important to consider due to perceived understanding within a relationship being found to correlate with greater relationship quality and longevity (Gordon et al. 2013). When navigating through the storm with a client, helping professionals and therapists may miss the associated factors within their closest relationships and instead focus on the presenting issue itself. The association between depression and relationship satisfaction is important for professionals to consider due to most clients presenting with both depression and relationship problems (Li & Johnson, 2018).

Another factor to consider is the use of social media in the realm of relationships. As most know, social media platforms allow individuals to connect with friends and family, share personal information, and integrate themselves into others' perceived lives. Social media has also been associated to depressive case. Those with depression may use social media more often due to a diminished self-worth, and seek out validation through social media platforms (Lin et al., 2016).

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Storm Front (continued)

When speaking on close relationships and supports however, social media could be a saving grace, and the only access point between an individual and their closest supports. In these cases, therapists and helping professionals need to consider the quality of the relationships made through social media and how they directly affect the client's symptoms.

After examining these, how do professionals manage the dueling effect of symptoms and relationship quality? Per Li and Johnson (2018), therapists can assist clients in identifying their negative thought patterns and behavioral cycles. This, in turn, will help lay the foundation for creating skills to reframe the negative thought patterns. However, identifying who are close supports for the client in the beginning stages of treatment, and determining what effect those relationships have on the client's symptoms, would be imperative for the therapist. Looking into the eye of the client's storm, it is important for the therapist to determine relationships as a catalyst for support in treatment. Once the depth of relationships is determined, the therapist can assist the client in working their way out of the storm.

Corey, G. (2013). *Theory and practice of counseling and psychotherapy* (9th ed.) [DVD included]. Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole.

Gordon, A. M., Tuskeviciute, R., & Chen, S. (2013). A multimethod investigation of depressive symptoms, perceived understanding, and relationship quality. *Personal Relationships, 20*, 635-654. DOI:10.1111/pere.12005.

Laursen, B., & Hafen, C. A. (2010). Future Directions in the Study of Close Relationships: Conflict Is Bad (Except When It's Not). *Social Development, 19*(4), 858-872. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9507.2009.00546.x>

Li, P., & Johnson, L. N. (2018). Couples' depression and relationship satisfaction: Examining the moderating effects of demand/ withdraw communication patterns. *Journal of Family Therapy, 40*, 563-585. doi: 10.1111/1467-6427.12124.

Lin, L., Sidani, J. E., Shensa, A., Radovic, A., Miller, E., Colditz, J. B., Hoffman, B. L. ... Primack, B. A. (2016). Association between social media use and depression among U.S. young adults. *Depression and Anxiety, 33*, 323-331. DOI: 10.1002/da.22466.

Sangalang, C. C., & Gee, G. C. (2012). Depression and anxiety among Asian Americans: The effects of social support and strain. *Social work, 57*(1), 49-60.





In Action

AWARDS

Drs. Andy Brown, Tiffany Rush-Wilson, and LoriAnn Stretch were named [Outstanding Counseling Faculty](#) by OnlineEducation.com, a definitive resource for college leaders, faculty, and students researching online education.

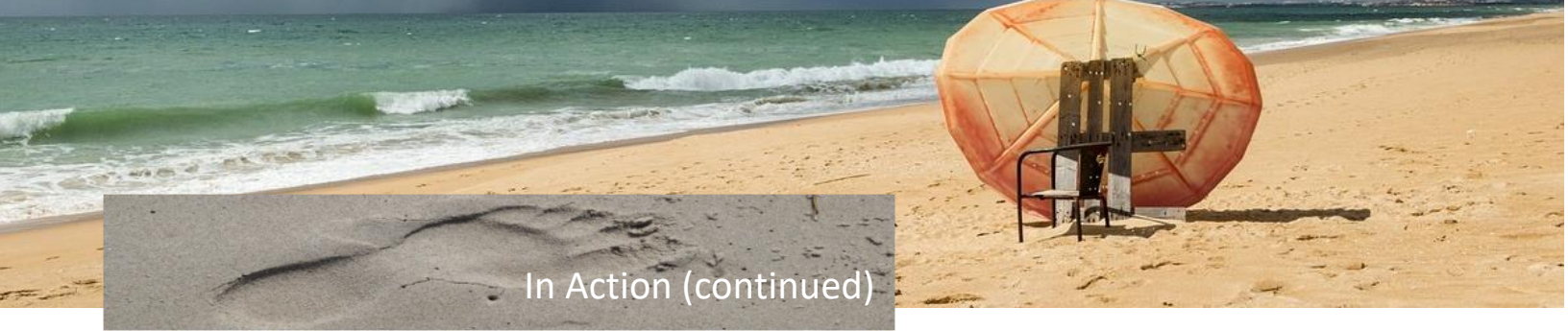
OnlineEducation used the following criteria in choosing professors to include in this list:

- **University Affiliation:** These professors are all actively teaching and associated with counseling programs at accredited universities in the United States.
- **Publication:** They have been widely published in peer-reviewed scholarly journals.
- **Institutional and Peer Recognition:** They have been recognized through research grants, teaching awards and honors, publishing and service.
- **Professional Commitment:** They have contributed to the field outside of their teaching obligations. They serve as program directors or deans, editors, board members, leaders and community volunteers.

PUBLICATIONS

Dr. Brown is spearheading a research project with Dr. Alyssa Weiss-Quittner and Brittany Williams entitled, “Scanning Our Environment for Something New: Treatment Interventions to Enhance Post Traumatic Growth.” The article is projected to be published in September of 2019.

Dr. Brown is working with Dr. Susan Foster to formulate the first ever Social Justice Crisis Intervention model.



In Action (continued)

PRESENTATIONS

The Association for Creativity in Counseling

The conference will take place at the Wyndham Grand Clearwater Hotel in late 2019.

How to Rewire the Anxious Brain

Co-presenting with Dr. Weiss-Quittner and Dr. Stewart-Spencer

Mesmerized: Integrating Solution-Focus Brief Therapy with Hypnosis

Co-presenting with Dr. Weiss-Quittner and Dr. Stewart-Spencer

All Aboard: Applying a New Critical Incident Social Justice Model to the Titanic and Beyond

Co-presenting with Dr. Susan Foster, Dr. Denita Hudson, Lala Elepano, and Jennifer Toof

Metaphors in Therapy

Co-presenting with Dr. Susan Foster, Dr. Denita Hudson and Dr. Rob Eubanks

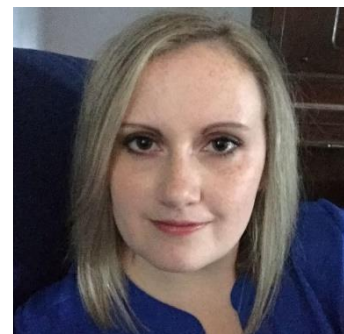


Contributors



Andy Brown, Ed. D, LPC has completed his doctorate in counseling psychology and is currently a professional counselor in the state of North Carolina. He has a background in the field of health and wellness, where he holds a master's degree in physiology, as well as a bachelor of science and a bachelor of arts degree in exercise science and religion. Dr. Brown uses a mixture of psychological therapies, as he is a theoretically integrative counselor. He also holds advanced certifications in program management, behavioral coaching, strength and conditioning, traumatology, and hypnotherapy, as well as level one and level two certifications in eye movement desensitization reprocessing (EMDR), and brain spotting. He enjoys live entertainment, travel, and spending time with family and friends. Andy can be reached at traumadoc101@gmail.com.

Ashley Curtis is a Licensed Professional Counseling Associate (LPCA) in the state of Kentucky, and is a Certified Clinical Trauma Professional (CCTP). She graduated from The Chicago School of Professional Psychology in 2019, and holds an MA in clinical mental health counseling. Ashley currently works in a private practice offering services to a wide range of clients. Ashley has also been named the Graduate Student Representative (2019-2020) for the Military and Government Counseling Association, is a standing board member for the Northern Kentucky Mental Health Counseling Association, and actively participates in multiple ACA divisions. She loves spending time with her three children, and enjoys attending live sporting events. Ashley can be reached at acurtis@mebsky.org.



Barbara Lance holds an MA in conflict management from Lipscomb University. Her work in conflict management has focused on giving clients the skills they need to lead large groups, work on interpersonal relationships, and develop stronger bonds within communities. Her current passion is working with an orphanage in Andrah Pradesh, India. Getting to know these children, whose entire worldly possessions fit into a small box, has been a humbling and joyful experience, and she hopes to help them create a brighter future. Barbara has also spent many years working as a proofreader and editor, with projects that include professional presentations, scholarly journals, corporate newsletters, and non-profit communications. She enjoys gardening, puzzles, reading, and watching superhero movies. Barbara can be reached at judyshelterindia@gmail.com.

Brittany M. Williams holds an MS degree in mental health counseling from Capella University and currently practices clinically in Central Florida. Her undergraduate degree in psychology is from the University of Central Florida. She is a member of the Florida Mental Health Counselor Association and is currently working toward licensure. Brittany developed published works in the counseling field while she was a graduate student and beyond, having since co-authored several articles that were published in newsletters, online forums, and a journal. Brittany enjoys spending leisure time on Florida's coastal beaches and traveling to new places. Brittany is passionate about counseling clients with trauma history, and is actively seeking training for an advanced traumatology certification. Brittany can be reached at bmw040707@knights.ucf.edu.

