

# Scenes of the Human Spirit

by Peter Mullally, MA, MSW, RSW,  
Therapist, NSTU Counselling Services

Serving as counsellors at NSTU Counselling Services, we are privileged to share in the resilient spirits of so many members and their family members. The scenes of the human spirit depicted here are gleaned from numerous counselling conversations over the years.

**All persons and their specific circumstances are not identified as the scenes are composites from a wide variety of situations.**

**Scene 1:** Some time after one of the greatest disasters in the Western Hemisphere, the earthquake in Haiti, a Nova Scotian teacher and new Canadian came to counselling. Immediately she got talking about the spirit of survival of the Haitian people, about the spirit of her family, and her own spirit. She observed that in Canadian society spirit talk is absent. “Until I saw people’s outpouring of compassion for and donations to Haiti, I was not aware of people’s spirit here. It seems people in Nova Scotia don’t talk freely about spirit like they do back home. In my home country, spirit is part of every person, every community, everyday.”

“Living in Nova Scotia for five years, I haven’t once heard anyone talk about their spirit,” she continued. “Here, it’s like a very private thing; spirit is hidden. Are people afraid of their spirit, embarrassed or ashamed of their spirit.”

This question has many answers. Could it be that we grew up equating religion and spirituality? Many of our communities were split along religious lines. We were warned against speaking of religion outside the church. It was unsafe and considered impolite. As we became very private about religion, we became private about our own spirit and spirituality in general. Religion was made private so spirit became private.

“But signs of spirit appear everyday in everything,” she continued. “These signs come through in friendship, music, and poetry, in the wonders of science and the natural world, like a sunset or sunrise. There are signs of spirit in a street person’s smile, in shared intimate moments, in a grandchild’s hug, in the grief of loss, and really in every experience of life.”

**Scene 2:** “That’s it, I can’t stand you always on my back about something—school, job, my room, friends, smoking, drinking, weed. I’m outta here,” shouts the teen while bursting out the front door dragging an old suitcase ballooning with stuff. No news of him came for months. Then a letter with a

Yukon address arrived but no phone number. A second letter brought hope. Mom and Dad waited in fear. As time passed, fear turned to dread. In the vacuum created by the child’s absence, the parents’ love grew stronger. Eventually, telephone contact, shared tears, a fresh start on both sides and then after 18 months the teen returned.

“How did you stand it?” a neighbour asked the parents. “I don’t really know,” mom replied. “Somehow we believed in the inner goodness of our son and in our inner goodness, spirit within, some call it. And our family and friends were



with us all the way with their spirit too.”

**Scene 3:** “These days there’s more talk of the spirit but it’s not easy to get a handle on it,” says the 47 year old teacher who has been searching for something to hold on to. “Some say spirit is our essence, the core of who we are. Some say soul, some say it’s connection to self, others, and the whole universe. Some even say spirit is energy, the energy of life.”

His friend thought for a while then said, “I think spirit is about love. There’s nothing so profound as true love; I mean self-giving care of others, of ourselves and of our world. And there’s nothing more practical than creating and falling in love in an absolute, final way. What you are in love with, what seizes your imagination, will affect everything. It will decide what will get you out of bed in the morning, what you will do with your day, how you spend your weekends, what you read, which friends you choose, what breaks your heart, and what amazes you with joy

and gratitude. Fall in love, stay in love, and it will decide everything.”

“You know, Gandhi called love the prerogative of the brave. It really does take courage to be open to the possibility of being vulnerable, being wounded, and being afraid for ourselves and those we care about. The spirit of love can sometimes be complicated and confusing. It’s not always warm and secure. It’s not always pretty. Yet, it is always kind and primary—the very fabric of our lives.”

**Scene 4:** “Emotions, feelings, body tension, weird thoughts race around the track of my mind, like those racing dogs chasing a mechanical

the events that come our way each day. Is this something you’d like to explore in counselling—the basic way you view your self, your work, your life? This can have very practical application to how we do our day.”

**Scene 5:** A worried administrator came to talk about his 16 year old daughter, Sarah. With a sparkle in his eye, he told about how she had been a student, an avid basketball player, a volunteer with the local food bank, and a fun older sister to her younger brother and sister. Then his face tensed as he described that lately Sarah was staying out late, quitting basketball, skipping school, and being mean at home. “What are you most worried about?” the counsellor asked. “I think my greatest worry is—what if she is mentally ill the way my uncle got at her age. He couldn’t live a regular life: he dropped out of school, he couldn’t keep a girlfriend, so he never married, and he got fired from the few lousy jobs he ever had.” He paused, took a few deep breaths, teared up and whispered, “If she is ill, will I love her any less?” Another pause then he answered his own question, “Definitely, I will love her even more and do all I can to support her. I can start right away by listening more and lecturing less.” Minutes passed in silence before he reflected, “I’ll admit it was scary coming here to talk to a total stranger about this great worry. Yet, just hearing myself saying all this out loud makes me so much more aware of my heart’s desire: I do not want to fear for Sarah, I want to love her, no matter what.”

**Final Scene:** Counselling with teachers teaches a great deal about becoming a decent human being, a very high spiritual calling. One particular lesson shines above the rest: teachers desire the very best for their students, for their own families, and for the world. Teachers’ desires and our desires as counsellors is beautifully captured in the words of the great Persian Poet Hafiz:

*I wish I could show you  
When you are lonely or in darkness,  
The Astonishing Light  
Of Your own Being.*

**Author’s note:** To maintain strict confidentiality the conversations in this article are not the actual words of any persons in counseling. The conversations are intended to show situations and ways of thinking many of us may share. The quotes are used to portray people’s experiences in a life-giving manner.

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ekeefe@nstu.ca to provide her with your NSTU email address. The **Be\_Well@nstu.ca** list will provide information about the EIP and other wellness topics.

The Early Intervention Program (EIP) invites NSTU members to sign up for our Wellness email list at **Be\_Well@nstu.ca**.

Please contact Erin at ekeefe@nstu.ca to provide her with your NSTU email address. The **Be\_Well@nstu.ca** list will provide information about the EIP and other wellness topics.

