



# Living in the Balance

## November and December 2022

In 1977 Queen Elizabeth II celebrated her silver Jubilee. I was 28 and had the remarkable opportunity to spend five weeks of that summer in the UK studying their education system. The experience was enriching and broadening for me as they were already experiencing an incredible influx of immigrant children that they were working to assimilate. With five years behind me as a school counselor in what was then the largest junior high school in South Carolina, I had more than 1200 students from many backgrounds and experiences as well. With that in mind, I eagerly explored all aspects of educational systems seeking ways to support my students.

At that time, our SC schools were funded by "average daily attendance" meaning that monies were distributed by the number of students in school in a classroom seat each day. I was already concerned about the number of out-of-school suspensions and its impact on learning. Out-of-school meant out of learning and falling farther and farther behind as classwork could not be made up. This approach perpetuated a vicious downward academic cycle especially for ninth graders earning their first units for graduation.

In early 1977, I began exploring alternative solutions to out-of-school suspensions and discovered a consultant who was developing the concept of "in-school" suspension. The basic premise is to provide a certified teacher to supervise students suspended from the usual classroom in an "in-school" area where they would "serve their time," complete their assigned classroom work, receive individual/group counseling, and then return to the classroom. This program could both reduce academic issues and keep suspended students from being unsupervised during their suspension.

I presented the in-school suspension idea to my principal, and he said, "Go for it." I had no idea how to "go for it," but discovered a possibility by applying for and receiving a grant from the Appalachian Regional Council of Governments. I was very excited for my students and our school. All the details were worked out for the program to begin in the fall of 1977. Teacher hired. Space provided. System set up. Faculty briefed and on board.

So, what does this have to do with Queen Elizabeth II? When I left for the work study in the UK the in-school suspension program was "go." Check. Check. When I returned from the UK, my principal, whom I'd worked with since the ink was dry on my diploma, had been promoted to the district level, leaving me with a new principal. He was skeptical of both me and the grant. I was concerned as I knew the unsettledness of being scrutinized and monitored. Sink or swim time. Fortunately, by mid-school year, the program was successful and was to be implemented throughout the district the following school year as a big step in dropout prevention. I was elated for the students and the district!

Several months into the implementation of the project, my best friend and colleague came in my office and laid a binder on my desk. "I have something to tell you. Mr. X asked me to type this paper for him for his Ed.S. graduate class." I looked at the "paper." It. Was. My. Grant. His only edits were crossing out the section titles and adding his name and the course number to the cover sheet. I was blind with fury when I entered his office. I laid the marked-up grant on his desk, looked him squarely in the eye and said, "What do you think you are doing taking my grant and submitting it as your work for your graduate course?" He rose from his chair, leaned across his desk, and sneered at me, "I will turn this in! Understand that I own you and everything you do while you work for me!" I told him that if he proceeded, I would report him to the university for plagiarism. My anger still surging, I did not wait for his response. I took my grant, turned on my heels, and walked out.

After several sleepless nights, I reported this incident to my former principal who now dealt directly with all the secondary school principals in the district. He didn't say it, but I knew after our meeting that he would do nothing. It was clear....protect your own and the deeply entrenched good-old-boy system. Any action would have to come directly from me, so I made an appointment with the university professor. I crossed the rainy campus, stepped into his office, and said, "I am taking a huge risk, but I must tell you that I believe someone in your class will turn in my grant as their final paper." I didn't say who. I just laid it out and left him a copy.

News about my confrontation with the principal traveled fast. I later discovered he had also terrorized first year teachers by forcing them write papers for him for his graduate degree. He had also made sexual advances to some of these same young teachers. When I asked them why they did not report him they said he controlled their future with his evaluations, and as first year teachers he had the ability to end their contracts.

The principal and I did not speak during those last weeks of school. He needed me and knew it, as the only way the school year would end satisfactorily for the students was for me to do scheduling and close the year. I asked him to submit all scheduling and closing information to me in writing so I could do my job. At some point our paths crossed and he arrogantly said to me, "And just so you know I never turned in that paper you objected to," like that would somehow exonerate him. As perpetrators do, he never admitted his guilt or any remorse. I continued to say nothing to him. I knew what I knew and so did he. That summer as I contemplated my "what next," the system kicked in as systems do. He was promoted to a school he had always coveted and that was that. He was never accountable for what he did to me or to those first-year teachers or to who knows how many others.

This story is more than 45 years old, but for me this tale never ends. I have watched this narrative unfold hundreds of times locally and nationally, but none more blatantly than with the Trump election and the trainwreck that has followed. And I continue to be triggered by "déjà vu all over again." I know what I know about my former principal. And I know what I know about the former President and his ilk. And I know what I know about people who continue to support these thieves, liars, and bullies by defending their blatant quests for power and control that will never be quenched. And even if the acts are criminal, so what? "Nothing will happen!" they crow.

Many years ago, my dad said to me, "Once you know what you know, you can't unknow it." And that truth continues to light the fire in me to act on that knowledge. And never has there been a more crucial time for action. We are at one crossroads after another every day in our relationships, in our own backyards, in our communities, and in our country. What do we tolerate? What goes unsaid in our relationships with others? What is overlooked? What....or who...do we make excuses for? Where are we complicit? Everything matters. Nothing is inconsequential. My 28-year-old self reminds me every day to walk tall and upright and to always remember....

*"Be brave to stand for what you believe in even if you stand alone."*

— Roy Bennett – Deceased, During part of his life, he was a member of the Senate of Zimbabwe. During a portion of his service, he was imprisoned under horrific conditions.

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- Offers a space and time for you to explore, reflect upon, and deepen your relationship with God.
- Provides a haven from the daily busyness of the outer world and opens a time to be still and to reflect on your inner journey.
- Is a companioning relationship grounded in dialogue and discernment.
- Explores ways you may integrate spirituality into your daily life.
- Is not limited to any one spiritual practice or tradition.
- May involve one or two meetings or multiple meetings over time.

## You may wish to consider spiritual companioning if you are —

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- Looking for a place to dialogue about spiritual questions
- Seeking ways to connect with the Spirit in a more intentional way
- Discerning ways to live in a more integrated and whole way
- Standing at a crossroads in your life
- Exploring new or fresh ways to be in relationship with God

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I am no longer offering spiritual direction but will be glad to talk with you about the process.

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*The cover photo is taken from the Monopoly game! This is borrowed from a website. The other photos are my work and were taken in Spain and Ireland.*

