

# The **SOLUTION** *source*

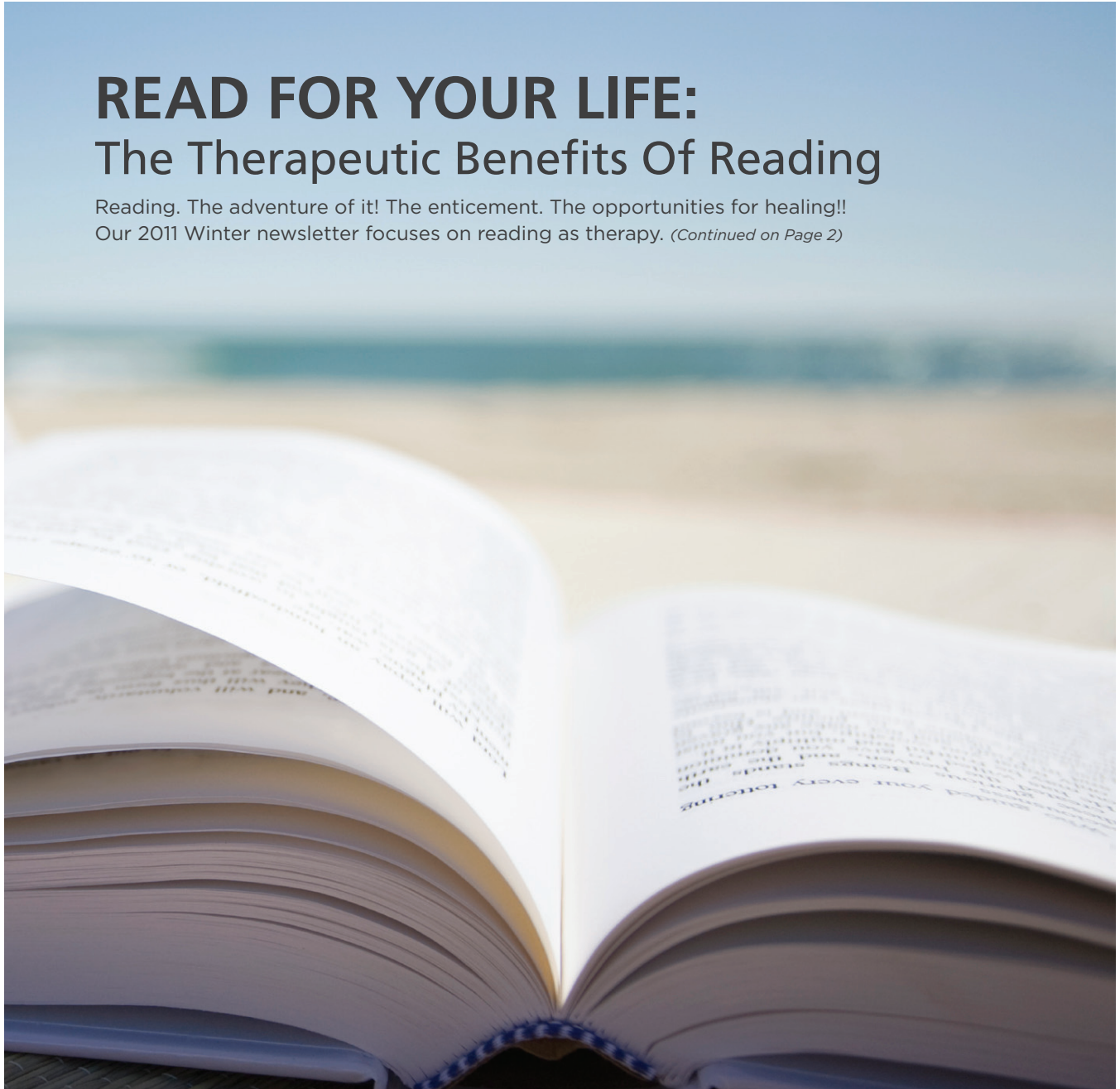
Counselling Centre of East Algoma Newsletter  
By Colleen Ginter, Clinical Counsellor at Thunder Bay Counselling Centre

*For You & Your Family*

Winter 2011

## **READ FOR YOUR LIFE: The Therapeutic Benefits Of Reading**

Reading. The adventure of it! The enticement. The opportunities for healing!!  
Our 2011 Winter newsletter focuses on reading as therapy. *(Continued on Page 2)*



### **IN THIS ISSUE:**

The Therapeutic Benefits Of Reading	02
Stories That Have Changed Lives	03
Reading Helps To Restory Yourself	04



## READ FOR YOUR LIFE: The Therapeutic Benefits Of Reading

Reading. The adventure of it! The enticement. The opportunities for healing!! Our 2011 Winter newsletter focuses on reading as therapy.

Reading as therapy or otherwise known as Bibliotherapy, according to Wikipedia, is an expressive therapy that uses an individual's relationship to the content of books, poetry and other written words as therapy. According to writer and therapist, Nancy Mellon, "reading and ... story-making and storytelling can be a creative and transformative process".

At its most basic, bibliotherapy consists of a selection of reading material for a person that has relevance to that person's life situation. The idea of bibliotherapy seems to have grown naturally from the human inclination to identify with others through their expressions in literature and art. For instance, a grieving child who reads (or is read to) a story about another child who has lost a parent will naturally feel less alone in the world.

How many times have you read a book, or any story about someone else's experience and related to it? Did it normalize and validate your own thoughts, feelings and experiences? Did you find out something new about yourself? Reading often helps readers identify the source of feelings that might be confusing or troubling to them. It can help identify the source of our anger or anxiety and other challenging experiences.

At the very least reading can transport us away, to escape our own landscapes and allow us an escape to exotic lands and exciting vistas.

Dr. Joseph Gold, professor of English at the University of Waterloo and a marriage and family therapist, states that, as readers, we "can make use of fiction and poetry in constructing, repairing and understanding our own lives." He further states that "when you read fiction or poetry you experience feelings, emotions, as well as thoughts and images. You see pictures in your mind and you have feelings associated with the pictures." He further states that "you can use your feelings about what you read to explore yourself, your relations, your attitudes to job, home, sex, children and parents, aging, death

and religion for example. There is a direct link between what you feel about stories and what you feel about everything else, especially about yourself.

Gold states, "Fiction can reflect for you, like a magic mirror, the veiled parts of yourself and your life. The other wonderful function of story in human cognition is its power to alter the reader's way of thinking and perceiving. Fiction can help you to reorganize thinking, resolve problems, remember the past when you need to review it and see it differently. In other works, fiction can be a powerful agent for creative and healthy change." ■

Pat Conroy, author of *Prince of Tides*, *The Great Santini* and other novels depicting the courage of the human spirit, states the following about how books became a life support for him.

Conroy relays that it was his mother, who had been born in extreme poverty, wanting her children to have a better life, who introduced them to the world of books in order for them to experience a different world. He states that "reading helped him define who he is". He read to learn. He read to learn how to be courageous and to learn how to be sensitive. Reading has been such an integral part of his emotional, spiritual and writing life that Conroy has written a book dedicated to his experiences of reading.

Conroy's website states that "starting as a childhood passion that bloomed into a life-long companion, reading has been Conroy's portal to the world, both to the furthest corners of the globe and to the deepest chambers of the human soul. His interests range widely, from Milton to Tolkien, Philip Roth to Thucydides, encompassing poetry, history, philosophy, and any mesmerizing tale of his native South. He has for years kept notebooks in which he records words and expressions, over time creating a vast reservoir of playful turns of phrase, dazzling flashes of description, and snippets of delightful sound, all just for his love of language. But reading for Conroy is not simply a pleasure to be enjoyed in off-hours or a source of inspiration for his own writing. It would hardly be an exaggeration to claim that reading has saved his life, and if not his life then surely his sanity." ■



# Stories That Have Changed Lives

(Submitted by clients and staff)

While an exhaustive list would be impossible, here is a sampling of books and their themes that have personally impacted some staff and clients of Thunder Bay Counselling Centre.

## Adults and all Ages

### The Alchemist

by Paulo Coelho

This is a book I read when I really needed it. It reminded me to trust myself and reassured me that we all have a personal destiny which we need to honour.

### Man's Search for Meaning

by Viktor Frankl

Experience of being in Auschwitz and the extent of human emotional suffering that he and the prisoners endured. It portrayed a stark difference between how suffering can suffocate the human condition or spur it to triumph to overcome adversity and indeed grow from the experience. While that book details the worst qualities of humanity, what was most impactful to me is the victorious capacity of the human spirit to survive and, more than that, flourish in a way that is jubilant... triumphant.

### In the Skin of the Lion

by Michael Ondaatje

Showed me the line between what is real and not real is very fine and if we choose to see it, there is magic in all of our lives.

### She's Come Undone

by Wally Lamb

Helped at a time of teenage/ young adult awkwardness and never feeling like you fit in. Finding your inner strength.

### Dark Tower Series

by Stephen King

An outstanding man's life, his choices, his decisions, his gains which are so few...his losses which are numerous. It is the most evocative fiction read I've ever experienced. Brings forth so many emotions - it is cathartic, purging and engaging. Due to the fact that it is a longer than average series, it gives the reader an opportunity to really identify/ bond and engage with the characters. In my opinion, very therapeutic.

### To Kill A Mockingbird

by Harper Lee

The themes of injustice, bravery, loyalty and standing up for what I believe in resonated with my young self.

### Angela's Ashes

by Frank McCourt

About a man who overcame hardship and disadvantage to become a world famous author and an award winning teacher. Truly inspirational. Truth is stranger than fiction.

### Tuesdays With Morrie

by Mitch Albom

A young man learns about acceptance, communication, love, values, openness, happiness and compassion.

### Read For Your Life

by Joseph Gold

As a life long reader, this book validated all my thoughts and feelings about the wonderful joy of words and the therapeutic gifts of reading.

### Merle's Door: Lessons from a Freethinking Dog

by Ted Kerasote

I recently read this book and I was touched by the deep bond the author had with his dog. The author mixes his observations of dog behaviour with research and raises/trains his dog.

### The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn

by Mark Twain

This book provides an escape filled with adventure, friendship and heroes. It provides a story of realism in understanding race, love and life lessons.

## For Children

### The Hurt

by Teddi Doleski

A little boy learns to verbalize his hurts and move beyond hurt and loneliness.

### What Jamie Saw

by Carolyn Coman

A young boy deals with family violence.

### Miss Rumphius

by Barbara Cooney

A stunningly illustrated story for young girls and women. I loved this book as a child. It taught me the importance of following your dreams and also the beauty of giving back to the world.

### Paper Bag Princess

by Robert Munsch

An empowering story for girls of all ages. ■

## Reading Helps to Re-Story Yourself

*"As humans, we are interpreting beings. We all have daily experiences of events that we seek to make meaningful. The stories we have about our lives are created through linking certain events together in a particular sequence across a time period and finding a way of explaining or making sense of them. This meaning forms the plot of the story. We give meanings to our experiences constantly as we live our lives. A narrative is like a thread that weaves the events together, forming a story.*

*We all have many stories about our lives and relationships, occurring simultaneously. For example, we have stories about ourselves, our abilities, our struggles, our competencies, our actions, our desires, our relationships, our work, our interests, our conquests, our achievements, our failures. The way we have developed these stories is determined by how we have linked certain events together in a sequence and by the meaning we have attributed to them.*

*Sometimes reading can serve to help the reader find an alternative story to the one they believe about themselves that is troublesome and hurtful. Alice Morgan would say, not just any alternative story, but stories that are identified by the person as stories by which they would like to live their lives, stories of identity that will assist people to break from the influence of the problems they are facing.*

*Just as various thin descriptions and conclusions can support and sustain problems, alternative stories can reduce the influence of problems and create new possibilities for living."*

Alice Morgan, narrative therapist and writer.

*What is Narrative Therapy:*

*An Easy-To-Read Introduction ■*

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P5A 2T1

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### Sexual Abuse/Assault Survivors Group

Counselling Centre of East Algoma is pleased to offer a 20 week group for female Sexual Assault / Abuse Survivors. For more information, please contact Cheryl Meawasige. **848-2585**

### Women for Change

This group provides support, education and counselling to women who live or have lived in a violent relationship. For more information contact Therese. **848-2585**

### Creating Connections

This group is for children who have been exposed to woman abuse. Their mothers will attend at the same time and have their own group after enjoying refreshments with their children and other group participants. For more information contact Therese. **848-2585**

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