ELECTRIC MEMORIES

e·lec·tric | **ə'lektrik** | **adjective**
having or producing a thrilling sense of excitement

mem·o·ry | **'mem(ə)rē** | **noun (plural memories)**
the mind as a store of things remembered

Warren Buttery

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Interviewed by
Brian Gruber

Koh Phangan, Thailand

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audio, video, and text remembrances,
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Who I Am

How would you describe yourself?

I start with, I'm a yoga teacher. It's my foundation of life and holds me to the island. I appreciate the island because it brought me to yoga.

I'm a chi nei tsang practitioner. I have a new skill, aquatic bodywork, which is kind of cool, a deeply healing practice, beneficial for me in the past, guiding people in and underneath the water.

A lot of what I do is about breath. With my yoga practice, I have a Kundalini bent as well as Hatha, I'm always teaching people how to breathe pranayama. The water stuff is all about breathing. When you hold someone underwater or are being held underwater, you no longer have control of your breath. Amazing things can happen. Trust.

When did your interest in yoga start?

I was in Burma, one of the last contracts of my humanitarian career, and my third spinal injury inspired me to do something about it. I have three, one in my neck that was pretty scary, two in my lower back. It was my body telling me that I needed to change. For my third spinal injury, I was lying flat on my back in my apartment in Yangon. I recognized I needed to do something about it. So I went to a yoga class and I thought, oh, this is kind of interesting.

When was that?

I started in 2015. Just a little here and there. I knew I needed to change so someone said, why don't you come to Koh Phangan? I thought, well, that's ridiculous. I can't take drugs and drink tequila for breakfast and party all night. He said, no, no, no, there's another side, there's a healing side, go there. So I did. And practiced a little bit. I didn't really know what I was doing, but I understood that the change needed to happen, so I went to Nepal in 2016, 2017. I found my teacher; I was going for one month but I stayed for one year. Sort of did an apprenticeship where I committed myself to the practice, learned

a lot about my physical body but also my energetic body and a way to better connect with myself. It's a beautiful place up in the forest, on the lip of the Kathmandu valley, and I spent a lot of time walking through the forest as well as practicing.

Before that, what were you doing?

I spent 22 years in the humanitarian world.

What does that mean?

It is going into complex places, as a professional, to talk to communities, understand what they're going through, and how organizationally we can help them. In Afghanistan, as an example, I spent 10 years there over a period of 20. Problems have been going on for generations. Whatever actions we were going to take, we had to deal with the immediate, but with the idea of looking towards their future, developing the program around their needs, with their input, and within the limitations of the organization or sometimes, dare I say, the politics of the situation. Create a team, create the program, and, typically, then hand it on to somebody else. And then go off to another emergency. I was most of

the time going from one place to another, short-term contracts, sometimes back-to-back contracts in one place. Places that I enjoyed and found interesting. Emergency work is very rewarding in getting to understand what the world really is, and what creates that world. Yeah.

What did you bring to that job? Why did people hire you to do that work?

Initially, naivety (*laughs*). I really jumped in and said, I'll go anywhere, here's my email address, wherever it was really challenging. What I really brought, because I had a military career 12 years before that, I understood my physical, mental, disciplinary limitations and boundaries. And so I could go into it. I went to Afghanistan, quite bold, but naively at the time.

Nothing in Afghanistan related to Australian forces?

No, no, no, I'd left the army one year before I went to Afghanistan. So I had an understanding about the military stuff.

Where did you serve?

The Australian Army, almost 12 years, the Corps of Signals.

What about you as a professional was showing up in a similar way in the Australian Army, in humanitarian work, in your yoga work?

This is my ego speaking, but it was very similar work. My role was to listen to people and create safe space for professionals to do their job in supporting communities with healing. We're talking large communities at times; some of the organizations I was working with were dealing with a million beneficiaries in the early days of the Afghanistan invasion. Generally smaller than that, maybe 100,000, 10,000, maybe a smaller community, almost always in conflict. Instead of working on that industrial scale, I've whittled it down to much more personal small groups, individuals. It's always been on a path of supporting people, a path of service. And that's what I feel as a yoga teacher and practitioner of other modalities, to be in service.

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I've always been on a path of supporting people, a path of service.

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I learned a lot about what's happening in other people's minds. I can

never feel someone else's pain. But I can understand where it comes from. I used to think I was good at empathy, but I'm not. I'm good at compassion. Empathy is where you feel someone else's pain, put yourself in their shoes. I cannot. And did not professionally because I couldn't serve people if I got caught up in the emotions of what was going on. And the army really taught me that, to separate. The army in a way teaches you how to be a sociopath (*laughs*). You've really got to separate what is life and what is the intention of the intervention. And so I can be compassionate but I can't get lost in the emotions of what someone else experiences.

One of my skills was to teach people how to put landmines into the ground. I went to the most landmine-infested country in the world. And what I saw was different from what we were taught. We were taught the landmines are a legitimate weapon of war. And it's to stop, to create problems for militaries. But in Afghanistan, in countries in Asia that I have worked, that's not necessarily true. The greatest victims are women and children who go foraging for water and food and firewood.

Warren Anywhere

Where and when were you born?

When people ask me where I'm from, I like to have a little mystery. And so I say I'm from everywhere, because for me…

That's your Facebook name.

Warren Anywhere. A small part of me is where I'm from. What brought me here is a much more interesting question. Because I'm very, very different than that person there. I was born in Adelaide 1966, August 21. Working class family, nuclear family, but I left home when I was 16. It wasn't necessarily my choice but, later in life, I appreciated that decision. I joined the army two months after my 19th

birthday. In my 12-year military career, I got to travel around a lot in Australia, most of it living in a capital city. I've seen a lot of that big, dry dusty country.

How much is being an Australian part of your identity, of who you are today?

I just started watching cricket for the first time in 15 years (*laughs*). Not very much. I feel it's a compliment when people say they don't know where I'm from, from my accent. Of course, it's in me, but I really left behind a lot of Australia. What I determined over the years, a lot of the reasons why I left still exist for me, probably more so. The politics of the country, the immigration issues, the treatment of the indigenous populations. But yeah, cricket has been sparked in this last ashes test series.

What do you think are the most precious gifts that your parents passed on to you?

Nonattachment. Yeah, definitely.

Explain.

When I reunited with my mother, 32 years later, I thanked her, I truly deeply thanked her, because she made some

decisions back then which precipitated my father asking me to leave home. It could have been traumatic but I was able to just accept it and move on. I thanked her deeply. If she hadn't taught me that I can be self-sufficient, that I can make my own decisions, I probably wouldn't. It's given me this opportunity to live an extraordinary life without regret. I listen to a lot of people and their stories and their trauma. And so much of it is the father and mother wound. I felt that I dealt with that pretty well, fairly young, because there was a huge healing experience that took place on Koh Phangan via Skype when I reconnected with my mother.

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Why didn't you talk for 32 years?

I'm stubborn. I decided that they had made a decision. And there were a couple of follow up events where I thought, I'll hold them to that decision. And the independence that you give me, I'm going to hold on to also. So I stuck to it. Regrettably, I didn't get a chance to reconnect with my father before he passed but did so with

my mother. And we had conversations for a year and a half before she passed.

And your brothers and sisters?

I have a sister. Who I don't really know. We're connected on Facebook. We're very, very different personalities. She lives somewhere in central Australia, probably around Alice Springs, I have a half-sister, who I've met maybe three times. We're second family. My father married twice. My sister is three years older. But my half-sister is 20 years older than me, if she's still around.

The Nepal Apprenticeship

Let's go back to Nepal. How does one find one's teacher? Destiny, a mystical connection? Or is it stumbling across someone you just decide to study with?

Yeah, it's very mystical. Um…Google (*laughs*). I was looking to leave the island to really get embedded into yoga. I was looking for a one-month teacher training. And I was looking at India not really knowing what to do. But the visa process didn't fit my timeline. And I just switched to Nepal. And I googled and on top of the list came my teacher. He has a Ph.D. in yogic science and a Ph.D. in Sanskrit. I thought, wow, I'm going to somebody real. One month became one year and he gave me this incredible apprenticeship,

to practice, to learn the philosophy, the wisdom, what it's like to live a life committed to practice, how he was raising his family. I had a connection to his little daughter, the first time I ever dealt with a little girl. That was interesting learning for me as well. Yeah, so committing to a karmic yogic path, a path of service, which I recognized then, oh, I've always been in service anyway, in the military, in my humanitarian career, and on my yoga path.

Was there a moment during that year where it went from, this is really a cool yoga class, I'm enjoying this experience in Nepal, to something transformative, either in terms of your intention to take teaching more seriously or some movement in your own identity?

I always knew I'd be a teacher. Because I've always trained people, no matter where I've gone, could be in the middle of Sudan. I've taken upon myself to train staff around me, national staff, international staff on all types of things. I've always had that in me. I'm always open to learn. A lot of people with even 20 years practice will come to his TTC's (yoga teacher trainings). And they were generous enough to be able to share their

learning which I took on board. So it was a rate of growth that I really appreciated.

Was there a point in doing that training that you had a deep sense that you were going to make this big commitment for the next phase of your life? Devote yourself to teaching yoga?

A part of it was, I have been coming to Koh Phangan for so long but I've always been a consumer. I've wanted to set roots here. And so what can I offer? How can I be useful as well as preparing myself physically and psychologically? So that was always my deepest intention. How can I ground here onto this magical island of healing and transformation? And of course a skill that potentially I can take traveling around the world. This is a very transferable skill.

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I always knew I'd be a teacher.

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Yoga for a lot of people is exercise, stretching with Sanskrit names. What's yoga to you?

Yoga is the basis of everything that I do. It's the philosophy. Asana, the daily practice that we have, is the hook that

gets you into the door for advanced training. For me, because I love teaching the philosophy, these are incredible tools of how to understand self and the practice is actually a very small part of yogic philosophy. I like to ground myself in the philosophy first and to make my decisions based on that. I appreciate that everyone comes to yoga for a different reason. Except men, generally men come for two reasons (*laughs*). One is injury, physical or psychological. And the other is because of a woman. A woman led them there or they worked out in the gym and saw unique women doing their thing and thought, okay, I want to be part of that. For me it was both. There's a woman who really led me back here. My first yoga teacher was a woman. And it was to understand my injuries.

Bucking the System

Talk about your education.

Very limited.

You left home at an early age, presumably that affected your academic career?

Yes, yes, yes, I repeated year 11. And the second year around, it was three of my dear friends, we all repeated together. So 11 second time was quite a blast. But that was the time I had separation between my parents and I, so I couldn't do my HSC (High School Certificate) because I had to work, I had to earn a living. It wasn't until I joined the army. I was a soldier for five, six years, then applied to be an army officer. To do that, I needed an education

course to get my HSC. And then from there, I went to Duntroon, Royal Military College, to graduate as a lieutenant. So that was my structured education. But I've always been inquisitive or curious. I truly have learned from others, and particularly from mistakes of my own. The next time I did any schoolwork was to do my yoga teacher training.

You talked in a kind and gentle way about your relationship with your mother, the notion of learning non-attachment, but there was some moment or incident at which you, either by your own volition or with a nudge, left your family of origin.

They made the decision. And I just stuck to it.

They made the decision. To what?

To ask me to leave home. Actually… what… it is a bit personal, but I'm open to it.

It was troublesome times with my parents, and particularly my mother. it got to a point where my mother thought it was untenable for me to live there. And she said to my father, it's either I go or she goes, and my father said, "Well, son, I can live without you." And I said,

"Okay, you will," and I was out the next day. To recover from that, straight away, I thought, okay, I'm on my own, no problem. I'll deal with this as grown up as I could at 16. I was really blessed. I fell in with some really good people with jobs, older than I, sharing an apartment.

I got to this point when 32 years later I recognized okay, it makes sense to reconnect. And I'm strong enough and understanding enough within myself. We're at the Sanctuary and I had a Skype call with my mother, surrounded by good people. I got her number through my sister, thanks to Facebook.

And I called her up. And I thought I was being really grown up. But my first questions to her were the questions of a 16-year-old boy, like, what did I do wrong? How bad could I have been? What did I do to ignite this in you? And she made a list. And (*laughs*) actually, the first statement was, well, you bucked the system. And I got zoomed back to 16. Like, what does that mean? I didn't know what that meant when I was 16, bucking a horse? I still don't understand what that means now. And she said, well, you didn't follow the rules. You didn't like making your bed. You didn't like doing the dishes. You noticed girls, you earned more money than we did. You caught taxis and we

couldn't afford them. Oh, I guess you're right. Because all these are still true. So if these are the reasons, you made the right decision. Bad decision but right decision. What I understood was, her little boy was growing up. And she no longer had control or connection to that little boy.

The next time we had a call, a few weeks later, she was very defensive, attacking. I told her a little bit about my humanitarian work on the first call, and I was living and working in Burma, of course, the Rohingya genocide issue had come up. And she said, *you're not working to bring them here, are you?* Whoa, hmm. I tried to go on, to try to express myself about immigration and conflict, and blah, blah, blah, which of course wasn't relevant to her. She was just acting out because I'd made her feel defensive about things. The beautiful thing about that second call was she started to explain a little bit about her life. And she got to the topic of my father who'd passed. And she was… he was terrible. "He was so awful to me, he treated me like a house slave." And I said, whoa, hold on, hold on. I don't know what went on with your relationship. And that really, that's not my business. From my perspective, I don't want to hear, sorry, I can't hear this because he made the greatest sacrifice.

He chose the woman he loves over his only son. That's a pretty big deal. That was a bad decision. But it's the decision he made so I will not listen to your criticism of him, that's your stuff. For me, he made the ultimate sacrifice of love to you. Yeah, yeah. And I forgave both of them a long time before, that was part of my journey, to forgive. It's not their fault. I must have been terrible, but not according to her list (*laughs*).

Did that affect your choice not to have children?

I have looked at that. Neither my sister nor I have had children. Not intentionally. The work that I chose after the military had me moving around a lot. Short term contracts, three months, six months, even one year, some back-to-back contracts. And so it didn't come up as an opportunity. I got married for a little bit in Sri Lanka with an incredible woman, but it was a lot of fire. At one point, we had discussed children. But there was too much anger in our relationship. There were also too many drugs and too many parties. I said, well, once we can clear that, then we can consider, but not right now.

Do you find ways to mentor or parent younger people?

Not deliberately, but it happens. I'm almost always—except when I'm in the room with you—the oldest man in the room (*laughs*).

And it's been that way, for a very long time. I found it difficult to find mentors, male role models. In the military, there were people above me. But once I got to somewhere near them, I recognized that these are not the kind of men that I want to be. It's one of the big reasons why I left the military. Abuse of power, overinflated ego. Not in connection with who they were. In connection with the facade of, I am an army officer, I am Lieutenant Colonel, and I didn't want to be that. One of my ways is to sit with younger men, I've always done that; in Afghanistan, with my work, employ younger women and men. With sitting in communities, with younger men and women to listen to them, not just the old men, because that's typically what happens, but also to listen to the younger ones. Even if I'm sitting at the back of a party rolling a spliff. And some young guys would come and sit around and listen.

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mentors, male role models.

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Think back to the decision-making process to join the army. What brought you to that?

I joined the army because of a woman. But it's not what you think (*laughs*). Because I…

Because you look good in uniform?

That came up later (*laughs*). And I did. I was kind of family-less. I'd been dating a woman for a year or so, on and off at high school, and when I left school, her mother, Joy, got to a point and said, Warren, you're just not doing enough for yourself. Yes, you have a job, but really, you're just pissing your money up against the wall, like literally Friday night, drinking, getting drunk. And I want better for my daughter. I thought, ooh, okay. So I joined the army. And it's not the girlfriend. She's not the reason, it's Joy. The mother. She's the reason because she instilled a sense there's more potential in me. As I graduated as an army officer, there's a tradition of having your loved ones putting your insignia, the pips, on the shoulders. I had a partner, she was on one side, and I asked Joy to come and put them on the

other side. She traveled from Adelaide to Canberra to do that and, a couple of years later, I went to the girl's wedding as a guest, which I thought was a nice rounding off.

How important was that moment for you when they put the insignia on?

Oh, a lot of pride, a great deal of relief. A sense of wonderment, going into such an incredible sheltered workshop, what the military is. My father was in the Navy, he fought in World War Two. So perhaps something in there. My mother also, she was in the Australian Army Reserve for a few years. I'm not sure if it played a great deal on me having that background, but perhaps it did because I ended up in uniform. I've always had a sense of adventure. And if you look at army kids, many of them come from broken homes or they come from a lineage or they come from poverty. Empires need poor people, so they can have armies. And they offer opportunity.

And family?

Yes. Exactly. That's the sheltered workshop. Yeah. Family. A sense of belonging, camaraderie, support, never had to question what I was going to wear that day. It gave me my education. It gave me status, I guess.

All Due Respect

What's the most intense memory you have from your army years?

There was a gentleman, an army major, I really looked up to him. He was a runner and I was a runner. He was specialist service regiment. That's where I wanted to go. I really looked up to him. After I graduated from Royal Military College, I went into his unit, he became my commanding officer.

After some time, my parents decided they wanted to try and reconnect with me. They decided to do that through my commanding officer. He said to me, Lieutenant Buttery, you should connect with your parents. I order you to contact your family. I said, with all due respect, sir, you can fuck off. Now (*laughs*), he didn't really appreciate that comment. It was

an illegal order. He couldn't charge me. He committed quite some time on getting back at me. I was the mess officer. We created games around a function and he challenged me to the obstacle course that I'd created. We're in dress uniform, and he said, okay, we run up this cargo net on the steps of this beautiful old Queenslander house. He went to grab my feet because I was ahead of him to pull me back, to cheat. But the army shoes I was wearing had steel taps on the toes and heels. He cut his hand, sliced it right open and went to hospital. I carried on the evening, we decided as young subalterns we'd go out and get drunk. He came back with stitches in his hands and said, where's Buttery? He wanted to challenge me again. I was already out on the town. I think I got 21 extras that time. I had to serve at the front gate, no life for 21 days. He later became my careers officer. That's when my career really started to go down (*laughs*). That was instrumental in me understanding the man that I wanted to be. Looking at role models and recognizing these are not the kind of models that I wanted to be. It brought me to the end of my Army career, saying I don't want to be part of this any longer.

You didn't serve overseas?

I didn't serve overseas. For the most part Australia was in peacetime. The Australians went to Cambodia. But my careers officer, he wouldn't allow me to go, a lot of my colleagues, my peers, they went, not all but many. But I was put into positions that were seen too important.

Serving in Danger Zones

You've likely had more intense experiences in your humanitarian work than you did in the army.

Oh, absolutely.

Did you ever feel personally at risk? Ten years in Afghanistan, I can imagine there were one or two moments.

There were a couple of moments. I've only been shot at twice. Both, they weren't really trying to kill me, just trying to send a warning. But there was a moment in southern Sudan before it was southern Sudan. We were doing an emergency intervention. I was working for an international organization, relatively

small. There was nothing there. There were no buildings with glass. The war had been so significant, particularly in places that we we're working. I had to travel from one location to another location speaking to Dinka communities. I don't know if you know the Dinka, really tall, like seven-foot tall, six-footers are short fellows. And they have really long legs, a lot of them were cattle people, driving the cattle right around the country into Ethiopia. Walking meant nothing to them. I had to get from town A to town B to help resupply, help support logistically, a small team out there; a small team means one nurse, an Irish nurse. I was talking to my colleagues, military Sudanese civil authorities, about how do I get from one place to another? They said, it'll only take you half a day. No, I think they said a couple of hours. And we'll give you a bicycle. At the time, this is around late '98, there was a lot of flooding. So there was the conflict, there was the absolute poverty. There was…

Can you briefly describe why were you sent to southern Sudan and by whom?

I won't name the organization, but it was a small international agency. My role was to support their feeding program.

Part of their feeding program was food as medicine. So capturing people right on death's door, not just babies, also adults. It's some incredible work. The intervention that we had was a little town called Ajeep, it was written about because it was so extraordinary. It was a kind of work that not been done since World War Two, dealing with totally malnourished adults, because a lot of the children had already passed. The war was pretty messy, north and south and the inter-ethnic group war, which is always really the undercurrent if anyone knows about Sudan. It's not about politics so much, it's about what's happening locally, cattle-rustling and people-rustling and kidnapping women for wives and all that kind of stuff was going on. It was horrific.

They gave me this old bicycle. The old Chinese model, what do they call it? Pegasus? Which doesn't have handles this way, it has handles that way. It's a weird sort of thing. And big wheels. They gave me a guide and he was only a little fella, so he would have been about my height. Beautiful, joyful man. He took off on a bicycle and I was trying to follow him in the heat of the Sudan desert. We came across quite early a boggy place because flooding had gone on previously. We couldn't ride the bikes, we had to carry

them, with a backpack of maybe 10 kilos. By that time we'd been traveling for about seven hours. It was so hot. We started five o'clock in the morning. I was exhausted, I sat down in this swamp, this guy had gone off ahead, I didn't know where he was, I sat down in the swamp crying, bawling my eyes out. I don't know where I am. There was elephant grass around me so I couldn't stick my head up and see anything, and it smelt putrid and I said, well, what am I going to do now? You're going to die here unless you get off your ass. So after 20 minutes or so of reorienting myself, letting loose some energy, I got off my ass and carried the bike, started plonking along in a direction. I didn't have a map, had a compass. Probably an hour had gone and he found me. It took us another four hours and I finally got there, exhausted, and so appreciative. The Irish nurse who was there, she had been on her own for about a week, because we were flying in light aircraft, little Cessna things with alcoholic Russian and Ukrainian pilots. The airfield had flooded, we couldn't fly in. She really needed help. So here I am. The hero train, right, I'm gonna go off there, and let's do it. That was when I really looked at death.

Through all those humanitarian assignments, was there an enduring sense that you were doing something important, were proud of it, this was a way that you were consciously choosing to make an impact on the world? Or was it a job?

It was a lifestyle. At times over at the bar, we'd sit down and say, ah yeah, we're off to save the world tomorrow. Knowing full well that whatever communities I dealt with, working in places which had perpetual conflict and perpetual disaster, I could help this one year, but next year, they're screwed. Because bad guys have come in or the so-called good guys would come in or because neither of them are good guys to their populations or a greater famine or whatever. That was the cynic coming up in us.

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I could help this one year,
but next year, they're screwed.

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I have gone back to places a few years later and connected with people that I'd worked with. On fewer occasions, beneficiaries, but people that I worked with, that's always been my focus. I learned detachment very early. I can't get lost in

the poverty, the emotions of the religious fundamentalism or the politics, the conflict or whatever it was, I can't get lost in those emotions. I focused all my attention on my national staff because many of them I employed right from scratch and gave them the opportunity to work for their own people and sometimes for their enemy. My focus was them, developing them, creating a safe space for them to flourish, and providing the structure and the benefits, the salary to allow them to deal with the people.

Working with the Taliban

Some of the people that I met in Afghanistan not long after the Taliban had taken over Kabul, my role was, as a semi-indigenous organization, to connect with the United Nations, connect with the Taliban presumptive authority, connect with communities on providing some unity of purpose. My national team was far more experienced than I. Afghans from different ethnic groups. And they became my dear, dear friends. When I went back to Afghanistan, the last time I met with all of them, who still stay very connected, they had become leaders in civil society, ministers, deputy ministers in government, not the crooked ones, the technocrats, the people who really cared

and stayed all through the Taliban period and had their families kidnapped and tortured because of the work they did.

What was your experience with the Taliban?

As a foreigner, I was careful, I was protected. There was a particular security organization, office number two, and their job was to keep foreigners safe, and to spy on us, because they always thought there was something we're seeing here. My role was to meet what they call deputy ministers, because the so-called spiritual leaders, they were all in Kandahar. The guys who were really wielding power at a Kabul level, they were acting or deputy ministers. I would meet with a couple of them quite regularly, including the acting minister of religious police. We would try to talk to them about different issues, it could be security about international workers and their national staff, it could be access to women's health, because there was none. It could be children's education. My role was to, with others, represent the humanitarian community to the presumptive authority on all these issues. They held me in fairly high respect. At least that's the way it felt. We always felt safe. When I arrived in Kabul, there were 100 foreigners in Kabul and in

Herat. Now up there in the Panjshir, they were different. It was a different country, because that was all Northern Alliance, we had no communication to them. The only communication we had anyway was to Peshawar in Pakistan via HF radio. A little bit of text like a tweet, that's as much space as we ever had. Unless we drove out through Jalalabad or the Khyber Pass, which was always a big event. I've driven up and down half a dozen times over a year but also from Kabul into Kandahar. I've driven from Kabul into Quetta in Pakistan, all through that Taliban time. That was one of the times we got shot at, kind of our mistake. We were a bit slow. We didn't reach the town before dusk. And there was a Taliban checkpoint up on a hill and so one fighter 50-cal just to say, hey, we're here.

Did you have much contact with Islam or an opportunity to learn or be impressed by Afghans' practice of Islam?

I had many Islamic scholars encourage me to come to Islam, they'd say you'd make a great Muslim. And I would say thank you. I really appreciate that. But those Christians were trying to convert me for a long time and they haven't worked their magic yet. So maybe not

now, but I love the ideas. The Taliban are mainly one ethnic group, the Pashtun. And I appreciate the Pashtunwali, the culture, not all of it, but some of it, their honor. The Americans would say, these people can't be trusted. I'd never found that. There's an old saying that you can never buy an Afghan. But you can always rent one for a length of time. They're pious, they're really stuck to it, and their commitment, the love underneath that facade of warrior is really deep. My friends from back at that time are still dear brothers to me today. Because when you connect, you stay, and you don't have falling outs. You have a way of getting around things, of talking, of forgiving. I like that sense of honor. Afghans, particularly Pashtun, are warriors and poets. The poet Rumi, he's Afghan. Afghans were ruling most of India. I respect and learned about many religions.

When I started my yoga practice, and started learning the philosophy, it gave me the opportunity to go back to all the books that are written by men. They all say the same thing. They all talk about love. It's wrapped around these stories of genocide and stories of misogyny and stories of retribution. But they all talk about love.

I break it down into two main areas. Religion is about God. If you obey, you're

okay, you're in. If you don't, you're punished. And it's supposedly guidelines for living a better life. Well, philosophy is also guidelines for living a better life. But the biggest difference is, there's no God, and there's no punishment. That's what yoga brings to me. I don't like this idea of being punished. If I don't agree with you, I'm going to hell, the greatest of all punishments. With yoga, it's try, and if it works for you, great. If it doesn't work for you, try this instead. It doesn't say hey, you must, it's trial and error. And I appreciate that. That had always been my life, like from my parents. You must do. I'm not good at that. I'm not good at being told what to do, that commanding officer when he said (*laughs*), you're not officer material. Thank you, sir. I don't like being told what to do. And I don't like telling what to do. I do encourage thought. I do encourage questioning. There's a reason I was kicked out of Sunday school, I asked too many questions. Who's that Jesus fellow? Really? What did he do? Can that be real?

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They all say the same thing.
They all talk about love.

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Can you describe how you were kicked out of Sunday school? Sounds like fun.

I asked too many questions. United Church, Protestant, but kind of lackadaisical. I think parents use it to send the kids off so they can have a free Sunday morning. When I was a baby, we'd come into church and I'd be squealing as soon as I got in there. There was a little silent booth which overlooked the pulpit and there were toys up there. As soon as I got up there, I'd be quiet and start playing with toys.

There is no truth. It's perception. The only truth that we have is ourselves. This is my truth if I can say it without impeding upon yours. That's a big deal for me, being told what is, what is not.

Sierra Leone

Relationships are the best way to learn, the best opportunity to have a reflection of oneself. There's a story I want to tell, it still has a massive effect upon me. I was living and working in Sierra Leone during the conflict, 1999, for MSF (Medicines Sans Frontières, Doctors Without Borders). It came as a charity mission. When I was in Sudan, I was with a wonderful partner. Her name was Jane. I went to Sudan. She went to Honduras. And in Honduras, she died in a helicopter accident. She was an Australian doctor. We went to Afghanistan. It was an incredible relationship. The idea was, I was going to do a short mission in Sudan and meet her in Honduras. She was also working for MSF.

In Sudan, I met a guy in the middle of the bush, this American fellow. We were sitting around at the end of the evening

swatting mosquitoes and probably drinking a whiskey. He told me how he had a former partner died in a helicopter accident. I said, whoa, what are the odds of that happening? Wow. They had been partners for some time and they'd split up and then this helicopter accident happened. When I was in the Australian Army, there was this very famous accident, two special air service helicopters collided and 19 men died, half of them were my friends. That was a big event in Australian military history. Two days later, I got asked to come back to Lokichogio, a town in northern Kenya, where the big aid effort was C130 aircraft dropping pallets of food for the Sudan People's Liberation Army. The army would take it and use it and the communities would get some. At the airport, this Irish guy, the logistics chief, pulled me aside at the back of the airfield and said, Warren, we've got some news about Jane. And, whoa, whoa, what? Well, there's been a helicopter accident four or five days before, because of the big hurricane in Honduras, Hurricane Mitch. And—are you ready to deal with this?

My bottom dropped out of my life, didn't know how to behave. The agency she was working with were generous enough. I was working not with MSF. I was working for somebody else. They

said, we'll fly you to Honduras, but they're still looking, the French Navy's out there and local authorities and I said no need if the reports are a helicopter explosion over the ocean. They found bits of the helicopter and bits of the pilot.

I went to Melbourne to meet her parents. And for the first time in 15 years, I put their estranged relationship into the same room. That was for me the most appropriate thing to do. I had to go through six months of grieving. I didn't know what to do. I said to MSF, maybe I want a job. Get me out. And they said, okay, we'll send you to Sierra Leone. Cool. Go to Sierra Leone for MSF.

We were some of the first people to go back after the invasion of Freetown, horrific. If you know the Sierra Leone war, it's about diamonds, and the hallmarks of that conflict were the use of machetes. Started with cutting off thumbs so they couldn't vote. Lips, ears, carving Revolutionary United Front in people's chests. And MSF had set up a camp, the MSF amputee and war wounded camp. And everyone went there, Kofi Annan and his wife, Mary Robinson, the former Irish president, they'd come visit. We were basically capturing these people to come in off the jungle with these horrific wounds, gangrene and stuff. They'd been in the

bush for a long, long time. MSF volunteer doctors would patch them up, maybe a bit of re-amputation here or there because they had to cut up the dead flesh. I was supporting the hospital and the camp. And yeah, you can imagine there were some stories around that camp.

There was this man, 50-ish. I was sitting in the medical clinic in the little camp. I just sat down next to him. And he started to tell me a story. He had no arms, they'd cut his lips off. And he started to tell me the story about how he was really lucky. The RUF had taken him out into the bush and he'd witnessed his wife being raped and then murdered. They'd already cut his arms. And then at that moment, the ECOWAS, the Nigerian soldiers came rushing through and cleared the camp and he went running into the bush with his stump. He had his niece, a little three-year-old, pushed against his own hip to stop bleeding. And his other little boy holding what was left of his arm. They'd cut it, but not through at this stage. He eventually got out of the jungle, they operated on him, German surgeons, incredible people, using ketamine to knock them out as an anesthetic.

I was dealing with the trauma of my dead partner. And I started bawling. I just wept like a child and literally ran out of

the clinic and ran home and I took maybe four or five days before I could muster the courage to go back into the camp. I went back into the camp and found him. I sat down with him and I said, thank you, thank you so much for your story but, I asked, why did you tell me this? He said, I felt you needed to cry. He felt my trauma and wanted to share his experience to be able to allow me to let it go. That was a huge catharsis for me. I continued working at the camp and I really appreciated him. That was a big event. Yeah, me trying to tell that at Burning Man one year to a young, scantily dressed woman while we were on LSD was a really bad mistake (*laughs*).

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He said, I felt you needed to cry.

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The camp occupants, residents is a better word, amputees and war wounded, they decided to have a football game. There was enough space in the front of the camp, it was on the main road. And they called it the amputees versus the war wounded. Some dignitaries came. It was amazing. The amputees won. There were no handballs! Some press and humanitarian workers thought this was disgusting. "How could

you do this?" I didn't do anything, man. All we did was supply some food. They set it up all themselves. But it was a beautiful day where they got their humanity back because they wanted to play football with each other. We just provided some football gear. That was wonderful.

How did the experience of those humanitarian missions inform how you choose to live your life now?

With awareness that I will never know everyone's story. And every story that I have the privilege to hear is something I can learn from. The stories that I had experienced, my stories and stories that others had told me, of generations of suffering, you think you and I might have a bad day. And you did. But it's nothing in comparison, you know that after these exploits.

And I recognize that every story has its message. And every time it's shared is a connection from one human being to another human being of great privilege. And great respect. Great honor.

How do you view service now, having had those prior experiences before?

Such extremes gives me an essence of credibility, what we, as teachers,

practitioners can go through and experience and live healthy and happy lives. We don't need to be trapped in our trauma, there are ways out and this is a big part of what yoga had been to help me change my life. I'm not saying it's pure medicine, but it's certainly been very, very helpful for me, the philosophy as well as the physical practices, and they can be used to release trauma. Yoga gives a connectivity to people the same as how religion was formed to bring people and communities together so they understand each other. So when I meet another Muslim, and I know who they are, if they can feel safe, we have a story that connects us. And I see yoga as part of that, stoicism would be another part of that, a different but similar understanding of how we see the world. In my humanitarian career, I used to rely upon cannabis and alcohol to de-stress. The last mission that I had done, it was with a British NGO who I'd worked for a few times back in the day, in Afghanistan and elsewhere, Oxfam, a credible organization.

You picked some good ones.

Yeah, I try. I spent three years in Burma up until my injury, up until 2016. And I'd come here (Koh Phangan), I'd been in Nepal. I'd lived in the States for a little

while, growing cannabis and living with a wonderful but severely depressed woman. I learned a lot there too. The Rohingya refugee crisis sparked up again, where nearly a million Rohingya Muslims were pushed out of Burma by the army, fastest exodus of humanity since the Rwandan genocide. So I went there because I was connected already to the environment and to the issue. Oxfam accepted me and I did a six-month mission but I no longer had alcohol, no longer had cannabis in my life. I had yoga and that helped me find balance. I went back and I saw these humanitarian teams, very committed individuals, mainly of Western origin, but also some amazing Bangladeshis, professionals, who had gone from emergency to emergency to emergency from the Sierra Leone to the Ebola crisis to this one to this one. And I saw myself in them at different stages of my 22-year career, I saw the martyr, I saw the savior, I saw the PTSD, I saw the ambition, and I saw the exhaustion, deep, deep exhaustion, and how that affected not only themselves as individuals but the team and how they were with their nationals.

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We don't need to be trapped in our trauma, there are ways out.

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Starting a Yoga Community

What I did was, I started yoga. We're all set up as several teams from different organizations. One massive hotel at Cox Harbor, a holiday destination for Bangladeshis, big white sandy beaches with women in burqas walking in the water, it's quite a juxtaposition from this place. I started off in the mezzanine floor of this big ugly hotel at six o'clock in the morning and then people started to join me and we had 7, 10 people every morning practicing. I moved out of that hotel, I found a lovely hotel with a spare room on the beachfront. So I started a yoga community there. And we would practice three times, four times a week, with humanitarian workers from every nationality, including Bangladeshis and surf lifesavers on the beach. And from that, we had

four people go off and do their teacher trainings. Some of them came back and yeah, we had 120 people who would be practicing at different days of the week, helping them let go of stuff they were carrying for years or from that emergency, which had its own challenges. That was beneficial to me and it proved how the practice can help me, and it proved to me I no longer fit in that world.

The scope and the drama of the humanitarian work in the stories that you shared is extraordinary. Your daily life here is different. Do you ever long to go back to that life because of that higher profile?

No way (*laughs*). I don't fit there any longer. I have enough drama here on Koh Phangan (*laughs*) helping people going through their shit. The yoga teacher training as an example. I always start with the question, what's your intention for being here. Some might say, to be a yoga teacher; it's quite rare that comes up, less than 10 percent. The others, they're looking for transformation. Yoga has provided me the basis, the tools for my own transformation and that's what I share with them. I know it works because it worked for me. Now I'm not saying it's going to work for everybody, because

there are always going to be different modalities, whether it's a good start point to get out of the head, which is where the stories collect. The trauma is in the body. And that's what yoga offers, to release the trauma from the body.

The military and humanitarian organizations refer to their assignments as missions. What's your mission now?

I am creating a yoga education platform with a colleague to bring this practice and philosophy at a deeper level to others. What has been really rewarding is an old army mate of mine, who I've not seen since we graduated in June 1991 as young army officers, he's coming to train with us in February. For me, that's full circle. So I guess my mission is to do the same thing as I did in my humanitarian career, create a safe platform with some tools for people to do good work on themselves. That's what Moksha is. Liberation.

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For me, that's full circle.

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The Healing Path

An injury in Sri Lanka led you down your current path.

I was living in Sri Lanka, working overseas doing humanitarian work. It happened to be the time of the invasion of Iraq. I went there with an organization. And I found myself up in the Sunni triangle, which was seen as quite a hotspot at that time. My role was to conduct assessment of what was happening there and develop ways of helping people develop programs to help people. I found myself in a pickup truck in the passenger seat quite a bit with an Iraqi national driver. And as we're driving around in what is quite a tense environment, the warplanes were still dropping bombs at that stage, a lot of people were running around the battlefield, I found myself falling asleep.

The structure of my neck is affected by this kind of bobbing movement. But I didn't recognize that until I got home to my then partner. It was quite a tumultuous relationship, a lot of fire, a lot of heat, a lot of extremes from incredible highs to incredible lows. Lots of drugs, which also helped this undulating high frequency life, going from conflict zones into another extreme. We were making love, which was rare because normally there would be arguments before I left. And then there would be arguments or silent treatment for a few days before we reintegrated. It was powerful and very beautiful but then suddenly something popped, quite literally. I didn't know it at the time, but I had a prolapsed disc in my neck. Everything below my neck was pain. I couldn't scratch, couldn't think, face turned blue. And my very powerful woman, I saw fear in her face for the first time. That was quite shocking for me. I was very blessed because I'd already become acquainted with a Chinese medicine practitioner who was also Western trained, a story on its own, spoke no English, but I trusted him implicitly. And over a four-month period, I went through lots of acupuncture, putting my neck up in a harness, and gentle manipulation to be able to get the disc back into place.

The injury for me I later realized was twofold. One, it was the expression of our relationship in a very physical manifestation. Too much. Something had to break and, in the end, it was me. And I also had this first opportunity to start to listen to my body, what was happening in my life preceding the injury, what was happening in my time at the moment of injury, and how I was able to deal with the injury, how I was able to heal. I wasn't listening to my body, I just got to this position where I could work again. And I did since that time, this was 2006, 2007.

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Something had to break
and, in the end, it was me.

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Since that time I have been afflicted by two other spinal injuries in my lower back. The first one, sciatic pain, a prolapsed disc with sciatic pain down both legs, extraordinarily painful. Again I fell back on the Chinese medicine practitioner, who was wonderful. He really saved my life. And then a few years later, my third injury, when I was living in Burma. This time I was surrounded by people who allowed me to be vulnerable and to talk about what was going on. It

was that point in time that I was looking for different types of therapies. And I discovered yoga. And I came to this island, Koh Phangan, which I'd been coming to for a couple of decades to party, and in this case, an angel, wonderful sister said to me, why don't you come to heal, there's a different side to this island. And when she first mentioned it, I thought I can't dance for days, drink tequila for breakfast. I can't do that, take drugs, but she said no, no, no, there's another way.

I stumbled across a wonderful healer here. Her name is May. And I'm very grateful for her. And she gave me a version of chi nei tsang, which is also now one of my practices and offerings to the community. It's an abdominal massage from the Taoist tradition. It was very powerful. It happened to be at a blood moon. My healer's little space for healing was above the water at Why Nam under this massive red moon. At one point, she pressed deep into my heart space. And I let out a breath. It was an ancient breath, a 100-year-old breath (*groans loudly*) this kind of thing, it had dust on it. And I stopped breathing. I'm not sure for how long. I just lay there in this state of nothingness. Then, suddenly, the breath came back. Such a reawakening, I felt energy leave my body and come forcefully back

in. There was a big shift in me from that day forward. After that wonderful healing session, I went back to Burma and I quit my job, which wasn't serving me, quit a relationship that wasn't serving either of us. Quit a beautiful apartment and I came back here to have my second chi nei tsang experience, which led me to reconnect with my mother for the first time in 32 years in a safe space with wonderful, powerful feminine energy around me, to give me the support to be able to do that. And that really kick-started my whole healing journey. From that moment on, I wanted to explore every type of modality that I could here.

Pha-Ngan

What does this island mean to you? And what about these myriad life experiences bring you to this place?

I came here 20-plus years ago, but I came here to party. I would be between humanitarian jobs. Being in a complex environment, thinking I'm going to bring myself into a joyful, relaxing atmosphere. What I was doing was going to different extremes because I'd be dancing for days and not really being on my own until the hangover came. So I was always looking for healing. And that's really what this island is about. It's about healing and transformation. Certainly that's been my experience. This time when I came to heal, I was open to different experience. And I sought out healers of reputations that could be helpful for me.

What I recognize with a little more education is that the trauma that I've been holding in my body, but also the stories that I've shared of survival and courage and loss, are stored in me. Apart from the Chi Nei Tsang experiences, I came across a young man, his name is Patrick, who practiced something he calls Zen Thai Shiatsu. He's a beautiful young guy, a surfer, curly golden locks, surfer beads and the kind of guy that as a mature man I would push away as being not so relevant. What do you know, my ego! And somebody had said to me, Warren you're really connected to your feminine, but maybe not to your masculine. I was affected by that, a bit triggered. And I sought out this guy Patrick, thinking I'm just going for a massage. And he used his hands, his feet, his elbows, his knees to pull and stretch my body into positions that doctors would have said, don't do. And the whole time he's asking me questions about oh, so where's that injury? What occurred there? Oh that. That's my mother. What's this injury here? Oh, that's my lover. What's this injury and this, this very powerful practice, I'm going between tears and screams and releasing of energy and emotions. And I truly experienced that connection between the injury and what I'd been

holding in my body. The injuries physically had healed. But the emotions around the injuries had not. And he shined the light and was able to let those go as an experience. I was bullied as a child and I broke this elbow. And I spent three weeks in a hospital with my arm extended and weights held to get things back in order. I was about 12 or 13. So I was isolated from my parents. And for all my grown life, whenever I had a massage, I couldn't allow anyone to touch me here. And during that experience, I went through and told that story. And now there's no problem. The injury had healed, but my emotional attachment to that injury had not until this sharing, through releasing of the pain and the stories around it.

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That's what this island is about, healing and transformation.

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You also had an experience with Reiki.

These are the three powerful healing experiences that I had, the Chi Nei Tsang, the Zen Thai Shiatsu, and Reiki. It wasn't here on the island, but its connected, a wonderful woman friend, who's a Reiki Master Trainer. She'd set up a massage

table in her apartment in Bangkok. I'd experienced Reiki before but never really understood what it was. I was laying on the bed and she sort of waved her hands over the top of me. I thought that's nice but didn't really feel anything. At the end she said to me, well, you need to come back to your mother. What a coincidence. She just died four days before. So that's not possible that I can connect to my mother. She said no, this is the best time. I asked, so what do I do? Well, okay, just lay there and begin to feel into your heart and bring up representations, images, memories of your mother. She had to leave the room, she gave me a session interrupting a training that she was doing in the next apartment. And I thought, what is this? I'm on my own. I'll give it a try.

As I lay there on this massage bed, I felt this huge weight upon my chest. It was like Encyclopedia Britannica books piled up on my chest, pressing down so much so that I found it difficult to breath. And suddenly, bang, like the Alien movie, where my chest blew open and there was water pouring up, this energy, but it felt like water, this powerful waterfall going up from my chest heading up into the sky, into the ceiling. And I'm here like this aaahhhhhhhh (*groans loudly*) and then

that went on for 5, 10 minutes. When it finished, the water had subsided, or the energy had subsided, and I came back into this very relaxed state. Feeling unsure what to do with that. And it came to me, why don't I try this again with my father who had already passed. I didn't have the opportunity to reconnect with him, unlike the opportunity with my mother. And so I did the same thing and I focused on my heart and focused on memories of him and I felt this huge weight come down on my chest. Same reaction, this bursting open of my chest, me flailing back, and this energy rushing up into the ceiling, into the sky. And that went on for a number of minutes. I just fell in this heap on this massage table. And I thought okay, should I try this again with my former wife, and I thought, no, I don't have the energy for that (*laughs*). I curled up in a bundle and fell asleep.

The Mother and Father Wound

Describe your men's work on the island.

I've witnessed the worst in men. The absolute worst. I've literally sat down and drank beers with psychopaths, leaders of bloodthirsty revolutions such as Foday Sankoh in Sierra Leone in 1999. Spent a lot of time in war zones with very violent people, people who committed war crimes and atrocities, both from the aspect of an invading country and an invaded country.

Around five years ago, a good man came to me and said, have you ever sat in a men's circle? I said, no, what's that? There was a small group of men from different backgrounds, different cultures, different experiences, different age groups and we

sat down and had a very loose structure about building a safe space. That was my first opportunity to really sit with men without alcohol, without an agenda, without a purpose, except to be seen, to be heard, to be supported, and to be called upon our bullshit.

Since that time, I have a similar format. Once a week, a group of men meet with this in mind. The transient nature of this island is that some men, they'll be here for a few months, and then they'll go away, but then might come back, and I feel very rewarded that a lot of men do come back. I've seen men come from states of depression, states of suicidal thoughts, even actions. Within a period of a few months, three, four, six months, have picked themselves up and moved on. How do we feel ourselves? How do we get out of mind and into the body, which relates my yoga and breathing practices, discussions and commitments around accountability and integrity. We have a physical piece, how do we embody this energy? How do we embody these emotions? And how do we get to release them in a safe space? And the men's circle always ends in gratitude. What are we grateful for? This work has been important for me, I show up almost every week.

Last night is an example, I was with my group and there was a group of five men who we've known over the last couple of months. I went through a process of understanding some of the needs of my relationship that I'm not fulfilling and I've been putting aside. I felt out of balance with my own integrity and my commitments to myself and my relationship. By being supported by these men in this process, I was able to come back and make some healthier commitments to be able to support my relationship. Tomorrow, there's another embodiment workshop that I'm doing as part of the festival here, to help to bring men in to recognize that they can be vulnerable and still be in their masculine power.

You said that you listen to people's their stories and their trauma and so much of it is the father and mother wound. Are you able to articulate what the father or mother wound is for you?

The first step is to recognize that's where it is. We are a product of our environment and our relationships, particularly our fathers, particularly our mothers, because we hold them on high pedestals without recognizing they're human too. And they are also dealing with the wounds that were presented by

their fathers and their mothers and they didn't have the skills, they didn't have the tools, they didn't have the opportunity to look into themselves. That's my experience anyway. It is incredible how I meet, in particular, Europeans, how they've been affected by conflict, by war. If we look back at some of the injuries that my father carried, emotional injuries, they go back to his time in World War Two, when he was a young sailor. He used to have dreams, he'd be screaming at night, as if drowning. Those wounds that are carried down, suppressing of his fears, not having the opportunity to speak about them, not being able to be in a safe space to share them. What effect does that have upon me as his son, the pressures that were put on to him. With men's work, it's helped me to be feeling safe and, in a non-competitive environment, to be able to speak vulnerably. I continue in that work for myself and to support other men.

We talked briefly about possible interest in having children at this point in your life. Is that still an aspiration for you (Warren laughs)? Is that your answer?

I don't have any desire to have children (*laughs*). My injuries certainly put on an aspect of my emotional injuries

around sex. Because once I hurt my spine, there's a lot of fear in there. Instability, physical instability, emotional instability, the feeling of helplessness. With my second lower back injury, I was in Sri Lanka, I had two lovers at the same time, all very open and truthful and honest, which taught me a great deal. But I was prolonging my recovery, because I was fucking, and lower back injuries and hip thrusting movements.

I am aware of this phenomenon.

Not good to lay on my back, and to receive, also not good. So it's been helpful to understand these injuries and what I can strengthen so I can be a lover again, and not be in fear. That's played a role. It's also some of the stuff we do in men's group, to be able to talk about sexuality, and where we're at. Not about, you know, I banged this woman, a horrible way of looking at things, but what is our vulnerability? What's been our emotional experience in being so present, both physically and sexually, with a woman and with ourselves? That's an ongoing process. And there's been some amazing work done out there. Which I'm now incorporating in discussions with the men around me.

Liberation

I was asked to leave home when I was 16. Asked is a very polite way of saying it. From 16 until now, all my decisions have been mine. But I've not felt supported. I don't understand what a healthy dynamic between father, mother, and son is. I don't comprehend that. Establishing reconnection was vital to me in understanding the pain that I was holding.

I remember the first call. I was there in front of a big Ganesha. I asked a lot of the questions that I'd been carrying since I was 16. Was I so bad? What did I really do? What was my responsibility in this separation of mother and father and son? "I can live without you" were the last words that my father ever spoke to me. And I had to accept that. That was empowering. I didn't have a choice but I was able early on to understand what attachment was and how I can dis-attach. Some might

say I put down my emotions. I don't know if that's true. Certainly in some respect. Then that popped up again, how bad could I be? Why would you reject me? Your only son. An interesting dynamic because that put her on the defensive. She was still struggling with an injury which took place at that time, which was partly my fault. Because we got physical. I turned my back on her as a 16-year-old when she was yelling at me. She pushed me in my back and I turned around, "Don't!" It was just about the time I'd got a bit bigger than her. Don't. And she fell. That's when my father came in. That was the first time he was truly violent towards me, kicking me around the room. I had a wooden doweling rod and held it up to protect myself. He grabbed it and smacked me across the face at the same time my mother was calling the police. When the police came, my face was blue. My eye was closed. They asked, what's happening here. I said, I don't need to talk to you anymore. You can see who's injured. You can see who's the victim here. I'm not going to press any charges and I don't want to speak to you and I don't want to speak to them. I'm happy to accept their ultimatum, I'll leave.

So I had to deal very early how to be, how to have… to dis-attach from whatever was going on. That was helpful to me

throughout my life. Doing humanitarian work, if I had bias, or if I came into this sensation of empathy, I might not be able to do my job. Even though people would tell me their stories and I could feel compassion. I don't have so much empathy. I can't feel that. I can't feel what they're experiencing. I later learned the difference between empathy and compassion. My way of being able to dis-attach from other people's suffering put me in a better position to be able to do my job.

You started a project called Moksha. The instruction of yoga is a core element of who you are and what you do. How did that opportunity or focus emerge from those experiences?

Right. Thank you. Yeah, yoga for me underpins everything. Once I'd had these very deep healing experiences, I recognized that I wanted to do something more sustainable, how to fix this physical self. I went to Nepal and found my teacher. I had the opportunity to delve into a lot of the practices while strengthening and gaining flexibility in my body. That's the physical side. But what I experienced is, the philosophy of yoga underpins everything. It has given me tools to help diagnose what's happening inside of me,

emotionally and physically and spiritually, and to give me the tools to be able to move out of whatever wounds there are around that.

I traveled around the world, teaching yoga in the Republic of Georgia and Bangladesh and in other places that I worked in my life, trying to extricate myself from my humanitarian career. I am truly a product of yoga: this stronger, more flexible, more empathetic individual comes from yoga. From that, I've been training people for eight years on how to be yoga teachers but working for other organizations. A dear friend and sister who I've been teaching with for a couple of years—we really understand each other—said, why don't we create something a little bit different, something with a greater depth than we've been experiencing with other schools. So we created Moksha.

Moksha is about being passionate about the philosophy and practice of yoga as a tool of transformation. Not necessarily training people to be yoga teachers, though that is there if that's what people's intention is, but to give them a foundation of yoga, to understand themselves better, as it helped both of us. Yoga for me underpins the way I approach life. It gives me incredible tools that I like to share.

What's the vision for the organization over the next year or two?

We've just completed our second training course. We're in the fledgling stages. Our idea is to take it from a training every few months into something with which we connect with students for a longer period. To be able to support people for years, to create a community of healing through practice.

Does Nepal still hold a special place in your heart?

It certainly does, in several ways. My first journey out of Australia was 1991. I came to Thailand very briefly, then went to Nepal, hated it. I turned around and came back to Thailand. I didn't go back to Nepal again until I was on my yogic path. I found my teacher. It was fateful that I did, because I found somebody who gave me a great deal of structure, who's no-nonsense, who's very Nepalese, and lives quite a humble life with his family with a huge work ethos. It gave me a great grounding. Dr. Chintamani Gautam. I call myself a yoga teacher, but he has so much more information, so much more practice and so much more knowledge. I feel grateful and humbled that he's been there for me and with me.

We All Want Love

Final thoughts?

There are so many different modalities to healing. There's lots of different pathways, and I've selected a few, yoga being a key, whether you're going find it in practice, whether you're going to find it with a counselor. Some tools will work for one but may not work for another, but I really implore people, and particularly men, to reach out to find something. It all starts with understanding self. What am I feeling? How can I check in with myself? Can I slow down and stop and listen to my body which I was ignoring for so long. That's the first step. Recognizing there's a problem here and how do I change it. They talk about midlife crisis.

Mine happened at 48. But instead of going out and buying a Porsche, I came to yoga. I needed to heal. There was a physical imperative that I needed to resolve, through which I found yoga and all the healing modalities from there.

I like to draw men into yoga. I believe that the more men that practice yoga, the better the world will be. Because you're more in tune with your body, more in tune with the emotions and the traumas that you might be carrying. If we as men have healthy role models to find that balance between masculine and feminine, that's *ha-tha*. Hatha Yoga is the sun, the masculine, and the moon, the feminine. Bring it into center. Mother and father, daughter, and son.

What are the stories that have defined you, that have animated and activated you?

There are so many moments. I guess it's this accumulation of experience. Just like complex PTSD, it's never one thing that brings you here. It's the accumulation of experience and my willingness, commitment to discover myself and the openness to find the tools to be able to do that. And to find the right teachers. When I broke free of the military structure, I recognized more equality in men, and to

bring in the feminine; the humanitarian world is full of very powerful women. And that helped me find balance. Recognizing that conflict, the wars that are being fought, who are they really hurting? Yes, men, but it's the women and children, the ultimate victims. And then their women and children. That generational pain like Afghanistan, which I'd lived in for 10 years over 20 years, generations of pain inflicted upon whole communities, the whole country, through religion, through dogma, through poverty, through conflict, through very disruptive political change, and recognizing how resilient humans are. Afghans, Sierra Leoneans, Ethiopians, Sudanese going through generations of conflict and to recognize that we all want the same thing.

We all want love. We all want to be heard. We all want to feel supported, in family, in community. We all want that. We all want to be held, in our wounds. And it wasn't until I was able to stop and feel that I recognized that. And that's why I'm here today in service to support men it's men who create the trauma. Generally, it's men who make decisions and acts of violence. Generally, it's men whose brittle egos make decisions that react negatively, destructively on whole communities, whole nations,

generations. That unhealthy masculine, the toxic masculinity, the misogyny, the ability to see difference, this necessity, that you are lesser than me, you are different than me. And yoga explained to me that that's just not true. We're all the same. My humanitarian career helped me to understand that it didn't matter what environment I was in, people who have survived, they want the same thing. They want to be safe. They just want to be safe. And maybe I can support some people in being safe. The same way I try to support my partner in being safe. Different connotations of the term safety, but it's the same thing. It's how can I be loved and vulnerable and held in a world that's often dangerous and unsafe?