



COMING HOME

Servant-Leadership, Men, and the Road Back to One Another

—SHANN RAY FERCH

A primary reason for the general malaise and lack of leadership experienced by many in contemporary society coincides with a loss of the essence of what it means to live in and be developed by a real community, or to encounter what might be called a sense of home. In Greenleaf's terms, the true community is a result of servant-leaders working to meet the most ultimate needs of those with whom they come into contact. The result of meeting such needs is that others grow wiser, more free, more healthy, and more autonomous. In Greenleaf's conception, in a good community, a good home base from which to live and move, people are liberated toward the best sense of healthy humanity and therefore become better able to serve and the least privileged of society are benefited or at least not further deprived. The world seeks wholeness, even as self-embedded lifestyles and desperation strike at the core of our ability to create community and give to others a sense of home in which love and power remain in balance, and openness, self transcendence, and healing attend us. In looking closer at this conundrum, I find as a man that servant-leadership challenges my will to power with a coinciding and more profound will to love. Vulnerability is painful, but also required.

I grew up in Montana, in a home filled with basketball, hunting, and fishing. Having served as a panelist on the National Endowment for the Humanities Research Division, as well as for the National Endowment for the Arts as a literature fellow, I've come to admire both the great sense of inquiry found in social science as well as the depth of art and human potential found in works of true literary merit. The loss of home is a recurrent theme in the contemporary literature of America. Sometimes downplayed or ignored, most often revealed as fractured or fragmented or wrecked, the sense of loss is pervasive and painful and raises questions about human nature, my own



experience of manhood in the context of home, and the nature of servant-leadership. In this introductory essay I want to consider what it means to be a man, what it mean to be a man in America, and what servant-leadership might have to say about masculinity in contemporary times.

My father turned seventy this year. “I guess the Lord saw fit to bless me,” he said, and it wasn’t only about the seventy years, it was about the wilderness. In a given season, a Montana hunter might bring home a deer, perhaps an elk. Many people in Montana feed their families on the steak, hamburger, sausage, and jerky that arrives after an animal is rendered and processed. My family lived mainly on deer as I grew up. This season, yes his seventieth year, my father brought home two turkeys, an elk, two deer, two antelope, and a mountain goat. The mountain goat he found in the Crazies, a hunt he took alone in the high country, cresting ridges and plateaus, rock walls and escarpments at higher than ten thousand feet. He went farther than expected in order to approach the animal from above and shoot a billy behind the shoulder on a steep slant from three hundred feet.

The animal collapsed and slid a great distance down a narrow chute. It took time and great caution to reach the goat where it came to rest across a razor uplift of rock. There my father straddled the rock spine and stood over an expanse of sky and proceeded to bone out the animal. He knew he would need to work fast. In a treacherous pathless country, being caught coming down the mountain after dark is not pleasant. In his precarious position, field dressing a mountain goat, a job that normally takes my father forty-five minutes took more than two hours. With a hunting knife, a sharpening tool, and a small bone saw he worked to quarter the animal, remove the meat, and take the cape and horns. Finally, with the sun on a hard lean toward last light, the heavy pack was ready and he began the descent. The Crazy Mountains are a dramatic and isolated “island” range east of the Great Divide, north of Big Timber, Montana. They lie in Sweet Grass County between the Musselshell and Yellowstone rivers. Just after dusk my father emerged on the flat below the mountains, made his way to his truck, and returned home.

For years, my father and I could not express our weaknesses to one another. Nor could we easily express our tenderness. In those years, conflict was hot and full of wrath and mostly irresolvable, but in later life, love came to us and taught us the nature of forgiveness. The physical landscape of Montana, as well as the interior landscape of people, gives a small glimpse into the reality of how we give and how we ask forgiveness. The land can sometimes be an echo of how we change, and especially how we love. In America there is sometimes a pervasive lack of vision regarding



the masculine and the feminine. Many men do not have words for their relationship to women or to other men. Here, when combined with a wordless or muted interior, the Montana landscape evokes an even more isolate and rugged exterior, often resonant of the stylistic characteristics of each man's own physicality. A man's generational family line, his temperament, his response to abuse or violence or difficulties, all this is embedded in a Western landscape as bleak as it is beautiful, as fatal as it is enervated with life. The result, for a man who cannot find words to express feelings, is often a potent bend toward that which is harsh, desolate, violent, and deadly. As a result, some men live physically loud and largely defunct familial lives. Or in a counter shadow, men shun emotional engagement and carry an ultimate sense of apathy toward that which is lovely and true in the lives of others. Such men live empty and void, and are also experienced as meaningless. Such men become leaders who are blind to the possibilities of servant-leadership, and who unconsciously or consciously forward an anti-ethic of command and control. In violence or apathy, men cut off the feminine and succeed in harming their relationships with women and other men. Even if it can be said that all men benefit from a healthy and in fact exquisite balance of the feminine and the masculine, many men find it very difficult to reach toward the feminine within their own masculinity. As a clinical psychologist in work with marriages for more than twenty years, I've found a balance of courage and tenderness, and power and love, is necessary for both the feminine and the masculine to relate on an in-depth level. Servant-leadership, when engaged with sincerity, humility, and the will to change, provides just such a balance.

Broken marriages, fractured families, the border of despair, the fall from grace. Men who reject grace or fall short of grace tend to live in violence or ennui toward self and others. Truly, there is a hard fall for such men. At the same time, in my experience a deep desire to return and atone exists in the essence of the masculine in America. I've come to understand that almost all men yearn for grace and in fact love from the women and men in their lives. Most men yearn for an authentic sense of home, yet without grace and love a life of pain and unwieldy consequence tracks a man, often in predatory fashion.

The mystery of life and the hope for love is irrevocable and is felt even in men whose interiority can often appear more mountain-like than human. Cold, distant, massive in darkness or density, far removed from the intimacies of daily life, such men suffer. Still, in the heart of hearts, I've found men crave something higher. If you have encountered wilderness, you know



the great respect and awe and fear wilderness commands, and at the same time you know the intimacy wilderness imparts nearly without measure. In a similar way, I believe the men of the West, even those who appear to be the hardest or most emotionally void, desire a pathway toward grace, and if they somehow are given to set out on this path, they tend to traverse the landscape bravely and with endurance. I've found that path to lead firmly into the tremendous depths of servant-leadership. Certainly, some never open their eyes or soul enough to begin the journey back from a fractured sense of self and others, yet those who dare are the men we know who are beloved in their families and communities.

As men, I believe we need atonement.

In order to find such atonement, our will is required. Our will to be mentored by women and men who are exquisite servant-leaders, who balance legitimate love with legitimate power, and who generate in us and others greater health, wisdom, freedom, and autonomy, as well as a greater will to serve.

In atonement, we are restored to a true sense of home.

In my own home, because of my wife and the heart we share with our three daughters, there is a spirited love for poetry, story, music, and dance. When I met Jennifer, I began to experience life more fully. She is an elegant and powerful thinker, writer, and reader who meets the world with tenacity and belief in immanent possibility. A fully expressed person is a wonder to encounter—the woman or man capable of understanding and embracing and transcending their own weaknesses or their own shadow, while also attending to the light. Jennifer is such a person. I think of the capacity to live in balance as an everyday miracle: balance involves embodying not only darkness, as we are wont to do, but also light, as is our shared hope. From this encounter, with an articulated sense of the healing qualities of the feminine and the masculine, the essence of home becomes more present to us.

Home is a place of peace and reunion and reconciliation, where love and discernment and depth and gentleness and wisdom and power and beauty reside. Home, rather than dislocation or displacement, draws us to the affirmative reality of what it means to be human. That home could be the original sacredness of the Native American traditions in Montana such as those of the Northern Cheyenne or the Blackfeet or the Sioux, or the many other powerful sovereign nations of Montana, or it could be a sense of home that heralds from a far homeland such as my own heritage in Czechoslovakia. Or home can be found in America, in the heart of the America we hope in and for which we openly seek a healing that will reverse the descent of the



present and take us into the vitality of a more responsible future. Home can be found the world over. Home is acknowledged or embraced or challenged or divided or attacked or subdued as a result of the level of privilege we may have in our lives at a given time, or depending on the level of atrocity we may have suffered in our families, nationally, or culturally.

There is a displacement of people today.

And there is also the hope of returning home.

Emotional and spiritual wilderness is sometimes equally as treacherous as physical wilderness. In the mix of Native American and Euro-American culture in Montana and in the American West, imaginative and essential life comes of care and discipline, brokenness and surrender, and the honoring of one another's culture while also directly facing the atrocities of the present and the past. Servant-leaders take us toward the atonement we need to become more whole. Honoring place and people and history with a commitment to truth-telling aimed at restoring the sense of relationship one to one, between people, and between cultures heals the nation, and heals the world. Of ultimate value is an understanding of love and power, the atrocities and massacres and grave harms, the pervasive human rights abuses as well as the reconciliations that have transpired in Montana history, in American history as a whole, and throughout the world. In the unhealthy home, as in the lived experience and embodiment of personal, organizational, or global dysfunction, the nature of the masculine as it appears in society presently is often something that either steps forth in greed or remains apathetically dormant and is therefore unconsciously violently projected or silently subdued, rather than something that is contemplative, given in dignity and received with dignity. Listening is diminished or in fact destroyed. The healing of the masculine involves receiving the influence of the feminine, of home, and of the will to be honorable, integral, intimate and authentically life-giving in the center of culture and country.

In a home, an organization, or a nation where love and strength go hand in hand, safety and peace are the result, and here we are restored to mutual influence, personally and collectively. Ways of influence that have to do with healing, wholeness, and the return to oneness rather than fragmentation in family, culture, and nation, deepen humanity and generate grace, forgiveness, reparation, restoration, and mercy. A true sense of home is not only mutual influence toward greater success, but more centrally, a true sense of home generates a more whole vision of our shared humanity. From here, we build the bridge toward forgiveness-asking, toward making amends, toward atonement, and toward eventual reconciliation. In forgiveness, we



experience peace, in justice we experience the opportunity for reconciliation, and in atonement we experience the return to love.

In this special double issue of the *International Journal of Servant Leadership*, I hope you find others to walk with you deeper into the heart of true servanthood and true leadership. I hope you find peace in your travels, the strength to endure and overcome obstacles, and the grace and gratitude that comes of deep friendship, work well done, and the contentment we share at the end of our labor. May every poem, essay, and research article be a light to you on your way.

When my father came home from the mountains and gave to us from what he'd been given, my family received him with open arms. We ate well this year. We thought with gratitude of how he went at seventy into the heart of a rough and often relentless landscape. We celebrated how good it is to be alive and wild. We gazed with open eyes on the beauty of the wilderness in this world.

We embraced one another with joy.

We welcomed each other home.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Shann Ray Ferch, professor of leadership studies at Gonzaga University is a systems psychologist and a National Endowment for the Arts literature fellow. He has served as a research psychologist for the Centers for Disease Control, a panelist for the National Endowment for the Humanities, Research Division, and a visiting scholar in the Netherlands, the Philippines, Canada, South Africa, and Colombia. His collection of stories *American Masculine* (Graywolf), named by *Esquire* as one of Three Books Every Man Should Read and selected by Kirkus Reviews as a Best Book, won the Bakeless Prize, the High Plains Book Award, and the American Book Award. Dr. Ferch's creative nonfiction book of leadership and political theory, *Forgiveness and Power in the Age of Atrocity: Servant-Leadership as a Way of Life* (Rowman and Littlefield/Lexington), sheds light on the nature of categorical human transgressions and engages the question of ultimate forgiveness in the context of ultimate violence. His book of poems, *Balefire*, is forthcoming with Lost Horse Press. Shann grew up in Montana and spent part of his childhood on the Northern Cheyenne reservation. He lives with his wife, Jennifer, and three daughters, in Spokane, Washington, and teaches leadership and forgiveness studies in Gonzaga University's doctoral program in leadership.