



**Barnaby B. Barratt
Gunilla Blomqvist
Ifat Eckstein
Erica Goodstone
Al Pessa
Inge Sengelmann
Jill van der Aa-Shand**

What Sustains Me

**Seven therapists write about
what sustains them as human beings**

Reviewed by Nancy Eichhorn, Ph.D.

Reviewer's note: The first essay in this collection is a conversation between Serge Prengle and Albert Pesso (1929-2016). I volunteered to edit it for use in this book. There are no financial connections in any shape or form.

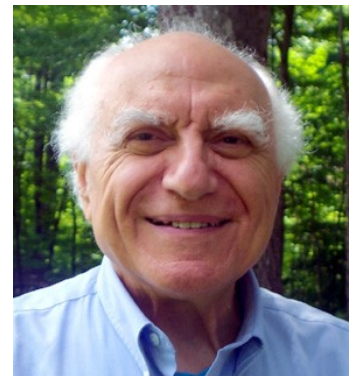
Seven therapists, different as can be but connected by their years as therapists, use their skills for observation and self-reflection to dive into their lives and explore the experiences that brought them to where they are, who they are, and why they are here today. Each shares a deeply personal reflection of self and others, their initial wounds in childhood, and the continual assaults that resulted from self and others. They are vulnerable and intimate. There's a sense of expansion as each writer breathes life into words landing on the page. The stories reached out, touched the essence of my being as experiences resonated with what's happened in my life. Some spoke directly to me; some challenged me to stay present and read through from start to finish to understand their perspectives. It wasn't about simply resonating, not about connecting with what was familiar. It was more about learning from these colleagues who took the time to share their personal essays about themselves and how they make sense of their experiences as unique human beings (Pregel, pg. 5).

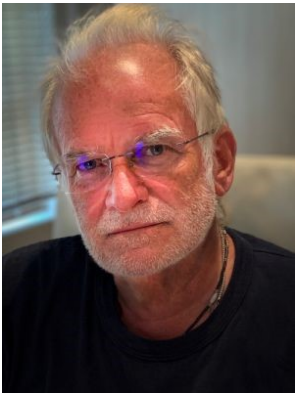


In the Foreword, Serge Prengle explains why the book exists. It's the outcome of conversations with therapists about the specifics that give them a sense of meaning and purpose and keeps them going through crises (pg. 5). He is clear that this is not a therapy book or a self-help book; it's simply a collection of personal essays by therapists writing about themselves to perhaps trigger readers to consider what sustains them.

The Contributors

Al Pesso writes about dance and movement, noting that he lived the dance. A sense of meaning and rightness came with motion. Movement is not simply about moving—it comes from our emotional states; it is tethered to our need to get a satisfying response from outside ourselves. He spent years as a professional dancer in New York, and when he left, he experienced seven years of anxiety and panic. Knowing that he could be that miserable for that long and not give up and have his world changed immeasurably sustained him (pg. 11-12). He learned something from the qualities of his misery that had his unborn self in it, which pushed him to create the Pesso Boyden System Psychomotor.

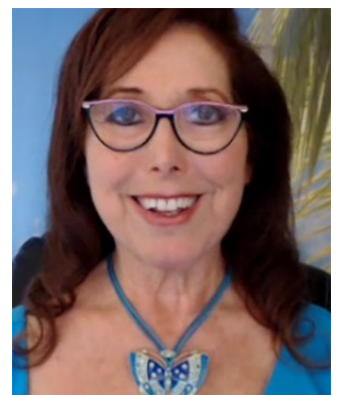




Barnaby B. Barratt poses questions and then muses answers. He looks at the meanings of words such as 'me' (which 'me' are you referring to as there are bundles of entwined versions of me) (pg.21) and what is meant by sustaining the current self as contrasted with the potentiality of who he might become. He writes about healing, his suspicions of one set of definitions, and those he adheres to. A discussion on sexuality comes in, along with his sense of being a 'radical psychoanalyst.' In the end, he concludes that meditation, listening, lovemaking, writing, and dancing sustain him because they help him balance *lieben* (love), *arbeiten* (work), and *spielen* (play).



A scene: A toddler is stuck in a crib with wooden slats. He isn't happy about being in the crib; he wants his freedom. So, he figures out that he can slip his legs through the slats until his feet touch the ground and then drag the crib to a nearby bed. From there, he can climb out of the crib and jump onto the bed. His mother, hearing the commotion, comes into the room, puts him back in the crib, moves it back across the room, and then leaves. The toddler is back at it. He didn't let this current circumstance cramp his style and prevent him from reaching and enjoying his goal, as Erica Goodstone writes. Instead, he took on the challenge and creatively solved the situation. Her essay on challenges and how they sustained her pulled me in. She was writing about writing, creating, and seeing what's there. She writes, "When the world gets to be too much, I sustain myself by taking on a challenge" (pg. 67). For her, taking on a challenge is "a leap of faith into the unknown." The outcome is more than just an accomplishment; it's about how "each challenge leads her to a continual expansion of the boundaries" of who she is (pg. 68). She invites readers to consider different definitions and impacts of challenges (i.e., roadblocks, difficulties, unwanted setbacks). She offers that having a vision and a shift in one's consciousness—a change in perspective—is required.





Inge Senglemann offers a present tense moment: she, her husband, and her parents sit at the kitchen table. The tension, the palpable feelings, and the bodily responses to the conversation rooted in reflection of past and present are riveting. The reader is in the room feeling what she's feeling with the insight of her ability to weave in observation and reflection. She writes about her experiences with drug and alcohol abuse, anorexia, and bulimia, wanting to live but trying to kill herself. The push and pull created by a depressed mother

and absent father. The loss of innocence early in life and then finding her way to self and body. For her, knowing that the pain of living won't kill her is part of what sustains her. She writes, "instead it will crack open the shell that impedes my connection to the fullness of life, love, compassion, joy and wholeness" . . . and "the double-helix of duality joining into non-duality," this is what sustains her.



The remaining three contributors, Gunilla Blomqvist, Ifat Eckstein, and Jill van der As-Shand (pictured above in order), offer reflections on their lives, the transitions, awakenings, and survival experiences to support their assertion that all of their experiences sustain them.

I read this book long after I received it. I was going through a challenging transition with my mom and death. When I recently picked it up, I thought, why hadn't I read it sooner? Many of the stories struck my childhood chords with a resounding OMG, and YES, that's it! Learning how they traversed less than adequate parenting, the absence of love, the presence of abuse, the wanting, the loneliness, the putting up with, modifying self to mold to other. So many tangents in their stories wove into mine. At times, I felt a release as tension disappeared, as self-acceptance crept back in and chased out self-hatred and disgust. Their willingness to be so real on the page humbled me—my sense of sustaining myself in healthy ways was far from where they were when writing these essays. They faced their adversity and found strength in themselves to grow forward. I think Serge's intention for the book—for readers to consider what sustains them—will come to pass. The essays offer readers much to consider about the authors' lives and, in response, their own.