

## **Journeys of Courage**

### *Remarkable Stories of the Healing Power of Community*

Joy Carol

Suffering. Despair. Hopelessness. Community can be a positive force in breaking this cycle, both for the individual who has experienced pain and for the community who has experienced pain as a group. Joy Carol presents here the inspirational stories of people who were a part of that transformative process of healing that can come about in community.

What has been your experience of community?

Storytelling has been an important part of the human experience from the early days. Stories illustrate truths, give examples for living, both positive and negative, and tie us to those around us in our community, whatever that community might be. Stories have the power to inform and transform, and the stories collected in *Journeys of Courage* show transformation on individual and group levels. Joy Carol researched communities that faced terrible challenges and suffering—New York City after Sept. 11, Northern Ireland and Ireland during the long years of “the Troubles”—to see how those communities responded to them and were changed in the process. The wide-ranging sufferings include the 9/11 aftermath, sexual abuse, addictions, life after prison, sectarian violence, and political imprisonment. The healing leads to hope.

Before we hear the voices of pain and courage, the author gives us an extensive list of factors she sees as integral parts of the healing process for communities. This comprehensive list was composed based on the numerous interviews conducted while researching this book. Among those factors we see such qualities as truth, courage, respect, sharing, perseverance, forgiveness, compassion.

The first story of the gift of compost from the Seattle community gardens to a community garden near the World Trade Center site shows rebirth, hope for the future, and solidarity through the gift from one community to another. Each story that follows presents a different type of community—church, neighborhood, workplace, etc.—often broadening traditional definitions of community. Other stories demonstrate the power of forgiveness that comes when we learn to accept our own faults. Look for the stories that speak to you and communicate some truth.

### ***Before Reading***

Think about your experience of community. What comprises a community? What does it take to heal a community that has suffered a significant tragedy? After reading, consider the questions anew and compare your final answers to your preliminary answers.

### **Questions for Reflection/Discussion**

- How does becoming a more authentic community, clear about and true to its values, contribute to healing?
- Are there any factors on pages 13–15 with which you disagree? Would you add any?
- As the author suggests, reflect on lessons learned from each section of stories, perhaps using them to journal.
- How are courage and healing related?
- What connections do you see between the communities presented here? What lessons can we teach each other through these connections?