



## Fred Craigie on living a meaningful, joyful, and peaceful life

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**Fred:** in this conversation we've talked about polarization and incivility and so forth. And how are we going to find our way out from that? And I think this idea of curiosity about people's life experience is part of that. As I think about people who are at polar ends of the spectrum from where I am it's probably not so important that I get engaged in a heated argument about why I'm right and why they're wrong. That there may not be much of a future in that, but maybe the conversation more is how did you come to where you are? What are the life experiences that you've had that have brought you to that place? And in that, there's a possibility that you can see the humanity in somebody else and maybe you can understand what it's like to be them and to be on their journey.

**Diane:** Welcome to the *Catching Health* podcast. I'm Diane Atwood and my guest today is Dr. Fred Craigie. Dr. Craigie is a clinical psychologist and he is passionate about the role that spirituality plays in everyone's life, but especially in healthcare. He was a full-time faculty member at the Maine Dartmouth Family Medicine Residency in Augusta for 37 years until his retirement in 2015. Currently, he is a visiting associate professor at the Andrew Weil Center for Integrative Medicine at the University of Arizona College of Medicine. He and his wife usually split their time between Maine and Arizona. But COVID has changed things a bit.

Dr. Craigie and I met a few years ago at a symposium on spirituality and health at Colby College, which he coordinated. We stayed connected because I signed up for his weekly email reflections. He's been sharing them for years, and now he's publishing many of those reflections and a lot more in a book *Weekly Soul: Fifty-two Meditations on Meaningful, Joyful, Peaceful Living*.

Oh, my goodness, Fred, we need your book now more than ever. So, thank you for the book and thank you for being here today.

**Fred:** Thank you very much. It's a pleasure. I've appreciated your *Catching Health* blog and it's nice to be a part of that.

**Diane:** You have contributed before, because at the beginning of this pandemic, you wrote an essay about how you were coping out in Tucson. And now you're back in Maine and you made a safe journey back here. You drove all the way back with your dog.

**Fred:** We made a safe journey. We do drive because we have the dog and in better times, we like traveling and seeing the country. And, this time as the pandemic was just developing, we decided that we didn't want to linger in any particular place for very long. So, we made a straight shot, across the country successfully. And we've been here since about the beginning of June.

**Diane:** Now usually people who split their time between Maine and a warmer climate would be long gone, but you're staying put here in Maine?

**Fred:** We are. Yeah. We see that there's been a little spike in the COVID activity here in Maine, just in the last couple of weeks, but still it pales in comparison to what it's like in Arizona and our part of Arizona in Tucson. We love Maine. We've lived here for 45 years or something like that. And we've done our time splitting wood and shoveling snow and we feel like we can do it again. So, we're just keeping an eye on what things look like and we'll decide as we go along.

**Diane:** So, the wood is all stacked.

**Fred:** We're ready.

**Diane:** Okay. It's certainly a time of great upheaval here in the United States and around the world. We've got the pandemic, we've got politics. How are you coping in general? I suspect that you've got a lot of ways to be able to cope with things.

**Fred:** Yeah. Well, I want to mention for starters that I think that I am challenged no less than anyone else by these hard times. You know, I look at 225,000 people or whatever it is that have died in the United States, not even counting people elsewhere in the world., and I think what tragedy for those people and for, people who loved them many times who not been able to be with their parents and siblings and friends and neighbors in this terrible illness. So, I grieve about that. You know, I'm no less challenged by the political situation and the terrible, polarization and the terrible, stress and feelings that so many people have at both ends of the political spectrum. So, it's a hard time and I'm not immune from that. I do the best I can. There are indeed a number of things I try to keep in mind as I make my way through this. I was asked at the integrative medicine program to do a video on coping with COVID in the very early stages of the pandemic in May, I think. And, I was listening to that the other day and the four things in particular that I mentioned then, I think, are equally true now in terms of my coping and they are, briefly to cultivate relationships to reach out to other people, to the extent that one can do that, in a spirit of how are you doing and how are you making out in just, you know, kinship and love. To find sacred places, sacred space, being outdoors to the extent that that's possible. Creating sacred and peaceful places in one's home, where you may have a particular phrase or spiritually significant idea or mantra or image or object that's important to you. Being grateful for the blessings that are in your life in spite of all the uncertainties. And on the last thing I mention that I think is continually

important to me is the idea of what I call remembering who you are. And what I mean by that is that it is important to recognize that you can have all sorts of feelings, feelings of anxiety, fear, sadness, grief, guilt, remorse, and there's no problem in having those feelings, it's so much a part of the human experience. As long as we don't give them the power to run the show. So, remembering who you are as I think of it, as I try to remind myself in my life means to be able to live according to values that are important to you even in the presence of those challenging circumstances and even in the presence of those thoughts and feelings. To be kind. Kindness is important. To be compassionate if compassion is important. To be creative. To reach out in a spirit of, generosity. To be faithful to who you are, even amid these external and internal challenges that all of us face.

**Diane:** I was going to bring this up later in our interview, but you have a reflection in your book that speaks to that. And I'd like to talk about that right now and then we can get into the whys and hows of your book. The reflection was by Wayne Mueller.

"The heart of most spiritual practices is simply this. Remember who you are, remember what you love. Remember what is sacred. Remember what is true. Remember that you will die and that this day is a gift. Remember how you wish to live." And then you told a story about Christopher Reeve.

**Fred:** Yes. Christopher Reeve, better known as Superman. The actor who portrayed Superman, was, in his personal life, apparently a pretty athletic guy and was involved in equestrian activities among other things. he was riding his horse and going over some jumps one day when the horse stumbled going over a fence and fell forward and his hands were entangled in the reins and he landed on his head breaking his neck, which left him for the rest of the nine years of his life, paralyzed from the neck down. And as this situation became clearer, he and his wife, Dana were reflecting on this and he said, you know, maybe it's time just to let me go. And she said, no, because you are still who you are. You're still the same person and she expressed to him you have these profound physical limitations and disabilities. You are still you. Clearly if you look at trajectory of his life after that accident, he was still who he was as a person being very active in disability rights and raising money for research on the condition that he suffered and speaking widely about his experience and about resilience in the face of that he was still him. And so that poses the question of what does it mean to be you for any of us? What does it mean to be me? What are the things that are sacred about my life? What are the things that are central about my life that really are at the core of who I am? So, certainly for Christopher Reeve, that was important to remember and I think for any of us it's important to remember, too, because that's the lifeline in the face of, the kind of challenges Diane, that we were talking about a minute ago, or even for people who, are in the terribly unfortunate situation that people like Christopher Reeve have been, whose suffering in certainly orders of magnitude greater than the suffering that I've experienced personally.

**Diane:** So, for many of us, it can be challenging to answer that question. Who are you really? You could list the various roles that you play, and maybe that can give you a clue, but it takes some deep soul searching, don't you think sometimes?

**Fred:** Yeah, soul searching, reflection, just observing oneself, getting feedback from other people, certainly kind of being an important part of that. I think the roles are important as you think about what are the roles in your life that matter to you? That's a part of the reflection. I am a psychologist and I'm a medical educator, I am father, I'm a husband, I'm a grandfather, I'm a basketball player, I'm a fiddler I'm involved in my community. here are a number of roles that I play, and I can think about what is it about any of those roles that matters to me? What kind of person do I want to be? When I think about being a husband, how would I get a handle on that? What does it mean to me to play that role with kindness and compassion and integrity and dignity? The same thing is true for any of those other roles. What are the values that undergird the kind of person that I want to be in any of the roles that I play?

**Diane:** So, with this reflection and all of the reflections in the book, this is how you have it set up. You have a reflection, you tell a story, and then you have some exercises that you invite people to do. For this particular reflection, it is to try and answer some questions like you've just posed to us. Hard work, Fred.

**Fred:** Yeah, with the book. I wanted to engage readers in reflection and almost in conversation. When I write, I try to think of it not so much as an academic exercise, but I try to think of it as a conversation or a dialogue with people who are reading this and what would I share with them if I were talking with them in person as you and I are talking now. And part of that for the book is, an invitation to follow up on some of the things that we're looking at. So, in this case, think about your roles. Think about the roles that you play in your life. What are those roles? When you think about what it means to do those roles well, in a way that you can take pride in, in a way that you value, in a way that you cherish, in a way that recognizes what is sacred for you, what does that consist of? So, as a worker, what does it mean to do that well? What does it mean to do that in a way that you can take pride in? As a sibling, as a child of parents, as a neighbor, what does that look like when you do that well? When it's something that you can really feel like it reflects the best that is in you? That's the kind of exercise that has been important for me to invite people into, to invite readers into.

**Diane:** So, you said also finding out what other people think, but you can get caught in a little bit of a trap, I think, some people can, in living their lives according to what other people expect or think. So, you were asking us to do some deep self-reflection?

**Fred:** That's an important point. I appreciate your making that distinction. That it's not about finding out what other people want me to be and necessarily conforming my life to that, because I think that that certainly is a perilous way to chart one's course, but it's more getting feedback from people about who you are, what it is that they see and admire and cherish in you. If there were someone. who knows you and loves you deeply what would they say about you? What would they say about the qualities that they see in you that they particularly cherish and admire? It may be a grandparent, maybe a partner, maybe a best friend, maybe a coworker, someone who knows you and sees you and can accept you and love you for who you are, what would they say? What feedback would they give you?

**Diane:** That's beautiful. You know, it's interesting because of COVID. I talk with my two granddaughters, two and four every single day on FaceTime and with the four-year-old in particular, we have some wonderful conversations, but the two-year-old is now talking. And the unconditional love that I feel is overwhelming. I recognized it not too long ago when one of them just said I love you, Nana, and I felt full. I felt like anything else can happen today, anything and it won't matter. It was pure, pure.

**Fred:** That's a good word. Yeah. We have six grandchildren who range in age from four to 10, and we were FaceTiming with one of the six year olds a while ago when he held up a paper that he had drawn a picture of his grandparents with the words, I love you Grampa Fred, that's who I am to him and Grandmommy. I love you Grampa Fred and Grandmommy, and similarly, that really touches your heart.

**Diane:** Yes. Let's go back to how the book started with your weekly reflections, right? That's where the seed was planted. What inspired you to do these reflections? How did that start? The email reflections that you've been sending out for quite some time now.

**Fred:** Yeah, it started in, I think 2004 when a friend and colleague of mine, a psychologist in Maine, died of cancer at the age of 45. And on a beautiful summer day, I and some of my other friends and colleagues went to his Memorial service and the ceremony involved handing out, a little card that had a brief piece that he had written on the back to the effect of I have learned that life gives you all kinds of experiences and that it is so important to cherish them and do your best to live your life now in this present moment, in a way that matters to you. He said that much more eloquently than I'm summarizing it for you, but I thought that that was such a touching and sweet thing that he had written. So, in his honor, I sent that as an email to oh eight or 10 colleagues and friends in the family medicine residency where I was working and teaching. And ah, in the week or two following that had some very nice hallway conversations with people where they said, gee, it was so nice to get that, thank you for sharing that. And that inspired me to think that maybe it would be nice to share reflections and wisdom in some regular way with people in the spirit of having something thought provoking and uplifting appear in one's, email box weekly. So, I got going on that with the quotation from the French aviator and writer Exupéry saying if you want to build a ship, don't tell the man this was decades ago, don't tell the men to gather wood, but encourage them to yearn for the vast and endless seas. So, that was the beginning of it and then since that time, 2004, pretty much I've been sending out these weekly reflections from a whole variety of people, writers, journalists, artists, theologians. prominent people, some people who are not particularly prominent, and it's been a meaningful, spiritual discipline and practice for me, and, think it's been meaningful for people who received them, too. So, that was really the genesis of the book. I had a friend who said many years ago, gee, these reflections are really nice. You ought to write a book about that, and so, that was the beginning of the thought process that led to the book.

**Diane:** In finding the quotes in the first place, you must've had to do some digging, a lot of research.

**Fred:** That's interesting. They come from a variety of places. For some of them I had been, aware. for a long time about these quotations, I have no idea where I found them. One of

my favorites, for instance, that comes in that category is from Howard Thurman, who was an African American theologian and civil rights activist. A friend of Martin Luther King, who said, "Don't ask what the world needs, ask what makes you come alive and go do it because what the world needs is people who have come alive," and somewhere I found that years ago and that became one of them. I read a fair amount and I underline things and I put little stars next to things that have the potential for inclusion in this category. Some things I see online, so, there are a variety of sources. I usually try to make them one sentence, couple sentences, in some cases, a short paragraph. I probably had several hundred of these. So, the process was going through this compendium and thinking about what is it that these quotations say to me, and then organizing them into categories that have become the chapters in the book, miracles, aliveness, gratefulness, forgiveness, creativity, presence, laughter and joy activism, hope, and two or three others.

**Diane:** Civility.

**Fred:** Civility.

**Diane:** So, as we talked about before, when we were talking about remembering who you are, you give us the reflection, but then you also write something. It could be your perspective, how you were touched by this quote. It could be a story of somebody else. You also tell us something about the author and you give us a little bit of homework, these specific activities to do. Why did you choose to use that format?

**Fred:** It begins with the quotation and that was important to me because I think it's important to honor the wisdom of other people. I can certainly write a book with my reflections, but if it's grounded in wisdom from Albert Einstein and Thich Nhat Hanh and Thomas Merton and Dorothy Day and dozens of other people who have lived their lives and some of whose life experiences and wisdom can be distilled, at least in part of these short clips I think it's important to do that and to honor them in that way. So, the book really is about these people as much as it is about my reflections. And then there is, as you have said, my own reflection. I really am an observer of people and an observer of their experiences and have gathered a collection of stories, both firsthand stories from my work and my life experience and some wonderful stories from other people like the Christopher Reeve story that you mentioned before. It's been, fun and I hope meaningful for readers to share with them some of those stories. And the third part, as we've talked about so far are posing questions for reflection. I wanted this to be not just something that people would read, but something that would engage them and would invite them into an exploration of some of these ideas and to give them some particular ways of doing that. Then the fourth piece, biographical information on the authors of the quotations, I think probably was inspired by the Writer's Almanac. Garrison Keillor would share a poem and then he would say something about the poet and it occurred to me, I guess this is what I had said at the beginning of what the quotation, that knowing something about these people and who they are and how they've lived their lives can be a nice complement and an affirmation to the quotation. So, Studs Terkel, for instance, as one example that at the moment comes to mind. It was interesting to read about his journey and how he grew up in Chicago and he hung out in places in Chicago where there were a lot of, spontaneous, presentations on soap

boxes where people would stand up and they would talk about all manner of things. And he listened to these and he was fascinated by what it was that people had to say and the conversation that arose from that, and so he also became an observer of people and was fascinated by people's life experiences. And that resulted both in his long radio program in Chicago and then the the books that he wrote. So, I think that fourth part about affirming who these people are and what brought them to their life experiences and their wisdom has been important, too

**Diane:** And the quote by him. Do you have it committed to memory?

**Fred:** I don't have it committed to memory, but it's something to the effect of a comment on activism. That all of us can in some way be activists in the sense that being active means doing something, and that doing something however large or small the scope is being active and makes us into activists and the doing of that makes us realize that we count, makes us realize that we can make a difference. I think that that's important because all of us can be active in the world and in our communities in large ways, some of us have much more large and prominent public roles, or in small ways, too. If you advocate for lowering the speed limit in your rural town or if you volunteer at a daycare center or you bring groceries to your 89-year-old next door neighbor who can't get out because of COVID restrictions. In any of these ways you're active and you make a difference.

**Diane:** What you were saying made me think about the epidemic of loneliness and isolation, that older people in particular experience, and it probably is especially problematic right now because of COVID. But how can we as a society, we as individuals, COVID aside, reach out to people who are experiencing loneliness and isolation. I guess that maybe a lot of us, our lives are so busy that we don't even recognize it. We're busy trying to coordinate all of the things that are happening in our lives, but do you have anything to say on that issue?

**Fred:** I think that's just right in posing that as an issue. Loneliness and social isolation really are significant public health issues too, in the same way that the pandemic is a public health issue and as we were talking before, I think that polarization and incivility are public health issues, but so it is with loneliness and social isolation, particularly in a place like Maine that is such a widespread, rural setting. We would see people in our family practice center who lived in very rural places and they would come for healthcare because of medical and health concerns but I think that the value to them of just connecting with somebody and just having that personal engagement with somebody, it was something that mattered a lot, too. So, I think it is a real challenge. I think that as a society, we don't do very well with honoring the aging process as well as some other societies do. If you look at other societies that are more community oriented and probably less prone to families dispersing for economic and financial and occupational reasons where families are more together there is, I think a lot more honoring of aged people and a lot more contact with elderly people and a lot more inviting them to be a part, an active part of families that we have here. So, what does one do about that? Infrastructure probably is a part of that. How can we create an infrastructure and systems so that people can feel less isolated and more connected whether that involves public transportation or broadband access may be a part of the situation? I think that the individual initiative of trying to create some opportunities to engage with people in your life

who are out there, who might be socially isolated or lonely and to reach out to them certainly is a part of that. Creating opportunities for people to come together, certainly senior centers that many of our communities have to the extent that people have the ability and the health status to be able to take advantage of those, certainly can be good resources where people can come together. Coming back to the idea of curiosity about people and honoring people's stories, my window on it is that that's important too, that some of the richest experiences that I've had in hearing people's stories have been from aging people reflecting on their lives. And what are the things that have meant something to me? What have I learned about living a good life? What is it that I would like to pass along as a legacy? What is it that I'd like to share with other people about how you live your life well? I appreciate your raising the issue. I think it really is a significant issue, particularly in Maine, and I think it's a multifaceted project of trying to do what we can to redress that.

**Diane:** Yeah. When you talk about storytelling, we all have a story to tell, but somebody needs to ask and that's the missing piece sometimes. There's a story, there were lots of reflections in your book that spoke to me, but I picked this one about laughter and joy, because I think that we need it right now and the quote is by Frederic and Mary Ann Brussat? Yes. Okay.

**Fred:** When Native American medicine men talk to the sick, they often ask three questions. When was the last time you sang? When was the last time you danced? When was the last time you told your story?

**Diane:** I love that quote because if we took the time, took a split second to look around us, we would probably notice something that makes us feel joyful. But how often do we take that split second to do that or to even acknowledge it?

**Fred:** The point of the quotation is that as you're saying that seeing these things and being able to sing and being able to laugh and being able to find joy, being able to tell your story that these things enrich your life and that life indeed is serious. What we've been talking about so far of finding your purpose, you know, what is it that you take pride in in your life and what does it mean to be an activist and so forth? These are serious questions, but life is about being joyful. And being serious and living one's life purposefully and intentionally is not to the exclusion of laughter and joy.

**Diane:** So, what brings you joy?

**Fred:** We talked about a connection with one's grandchildren before just feeling love that they express and the love that transpires in our relationship and the joy of seeing them grow up and becoming the people that they are. That certainly brings me joy. A lot of my life in semi-retirement is about loving my wife and I mentioned in the reflection that you invited me to do in May for Catching Health, that I wake up every morning and I think about what is it that is going to bring her joy today? And I am singularly blessed that I think that she wakes up with the same question about me. You know, being able to help her to have a good and wonderful life and have her there helping me to have a wonderful life is a joyful thing for me. I love being outdoors, seeing the natural world, I love the work that I do in trying to affirm and encourage other people and helping them to see and express the best that is in

them. That brings me joy. Being able to laugh brings me joy, taking care of myself, being active brings me joy. I'm fortunate and blessed that at the somewhat advanced retirement age where I am, I'm able to play basketball with a bunch of people, all who are younger than I am, and, stay in the game and enjoy that. I jog, that brings me joy and provide some meditative time for me. So, there are a lot of things. I'm blessed that there are a lot of things that bring me joy in my life.

**Diane:** Nice long list. Very inspiring. One of the things that brings me joy is my cats. And while you were talking, one of my cats climbed up on my lap. So that brings me joy, but she was purring so loudly, it might come through on the microphone.

**Fred:** That'll be a wonderful addition to our conversation. And, you know, our dog our succession of dogs over the years have brought me joy. I grew up without pets. One of the singular blessings that my wife and her sisters, all of whom have been dog people, have brought into my life is an appreciation of, cats and dogs and just the friendship and the unconditional love and the joy that they bring into your life. Along with the quiriness. Our dog is Dewey the golden retriever. Dewey named in honor of Dwight Evans whose nickname is Dewey. Right fielder for the Red Sox in past days, because both he and Dewey the dog are good spirits and good at catching and retrieving balls.

**Diane:** You love your baseball, don't you?

**Fred:** That brings me joy too, yeah. If you had seen me on the day that the Red Sox finally ended the long suffering in 2004 and won the world series, that would be a nice image of joy in and of itself too.

**Diane:** Well, we need to let people know where they can find your book and remind us of the name of your book.

**Fred:** *Weekly Soul: Fifty-two meditations on Meaningful, Joyful and Peaceful Living.* And there is information about the book and the ordering information on my website, which is [goodnessofheart.com](http://goodnessofheart.com). One word, [goodnessofheart](http://goodnessofheart.com), and there they can find, information about the book, some comments and reviews about the book. There is a reading of one of the meditations on hope that they can listen to there on that and then there's ordering information. If people order books there there's the option that I'm always happy to sign or inscribe copies of books otherwise, one can order books online, Amazon, Barnes and Noble, Powell's, or from the publisher, which is [MSIpress.com](http://MSIpress.com).

**Diane:** All right. Thank you. What do you hope that people are going to take away from reading your book?

**Fred:** Well, you know, for me, it's been, a wonderful spiritual discipline and exercise to think about what I know in my life experience as a psychologist and maybe even as equally or more important as a human being. What do I know about what makes for living your life well, and my adjectives are meaningful, joyful, and peaceful? And it's been really a wonderful spiritual exercise to think about what goes into that and that formed what I call the chapters of the book. Each chapter consists of four or five of the weekly meditations, chapters on miracles and the liveliness and civility as we've discussed and purpose and

presence and mindfulness laughter and joy, gratitude, forgiveness, activism, hope, creativity. What are the things that make for living your life well, but form themselves into those categories? So, I hope for readers, it would be thought provoking about my experience and that of the authors of these 52 quotations about that subject. What does it mean to live a good, meaningful, joyful, peaceful life? I hope that it will invite them into some reflection and exploration of their answers to those questions because ultimately, I think that's what counts. It's not so much reading the book, and this is what Fred says and this is the final word. It's reading the book and thinking about what do I know? What do I as the reader know? What is my life experience tell me? What do I cherish? What is sacred for me? How is it that I can make that part of my life now and going forward? Those are the things that have been passionate for me in writing the book and inviting readers into that exploration.

**Diane:** Did you grow up in a spiritually minded family? I know it was a musical family, although not rock and roll, but

**Fred:** Not rock and roll, no. It was in a sense spiritual. It was not manifestly religious in the sense that my parents occasionally went to churches and were involved in churches to some extent, but that was never a particularly prominent part of the landscape when I was growing up. They were both good people. They were both people loved me deeply and who I loved and continue to be inspired by. And I think, you know, when you asked about the spirituality of my upbringing, I think it probably had to do with what I saw in them and how they lived their lives that taught me something about what mattered to them and what they cherished. My mother always had a heart for the word that she used growing up in the sixties was underdog. She always had a heart for people who were kind of marginalized in serious ways. People who had challenges of disabilities, people who had socioeconomic challenges, people of color. She spoke about having a heart for their life experiences and often did what she could to support them. I remember her incessantly knitting or crocheting things for the old people at the state hospital, for instance, so she did that for a long time. My dad was someone who was curious about life. He had all sorts of interests. He was interested in music and he was always involved in the world of books. That's what he did professionally, working for a publishing company, supervising people who did editorial work. He was passionate about railroads. He was passionate about traveling. He was passionate about all sorts of things, and he was curious about life. We were talking about before the value of the quality of seeing what is there. Of looking beyond the day-to-day kind of plodding through the things you need to do with being able to step back and see the beauty and see the wonder of the things that are there. So, it was really not an expressly spiritual household, and I'm not sure where you had used that word very much at all, but there were things in their lives about how you live your life and what is sacred that I think had a lasting impression for me.

**Diane:** And at what point did you delve into this connection between spirituality and healthcare? What drew you to that?

**Fred:** It came about in stages. I think that it certainly began with my own spirituality and cultivating spirituality in my own life. A sentinel part of that for me was in college when I developed friendships with a number of people who were on spiritual journeys of their own

and to whom this was, was really important. And it was fascinating for me seeing them and seeing how they related to me. When I went to college, this was wonderful place. It was a wonderful academic environment, but there was kind of an undercurrent of protecting your turf. and a little bit of one-upmanship and so forth, which, maybe that's the way it is a lot with guys in their late teens and early twenties. it wasn't like that with these people. They clearly valued me for who I was, and I would even dare to, to use the word love. That there was that degree of caring and regard for me, and it was clear that that was rooted in their own spiritual values and their own spiritual experience, and that made me think about spirituality and what that meant to me. And so, that really ushered in a period of reading and thinking and conversations with people that has taken a variety of different forms over the years. I think that certainly was the genesis of recognizing that as a person I'm on a spiritual journey and I think that the more I am at a place of spiritual groundedness and centeredness and equanimity and presence, that I can relate with more generosity and authenticity and wisdom to other people. So, that was the beginning of it, and I guess I'm beginning to talk about the next stage in that evolution, which is not only in my personal life, but in my life as a psychologist, recognizing that that this mattered. Recognizing that my own spiritual journey and my own spiritual presence and that the setting of intentions about my work with people mattered, and that wasn't so much that was talked about in my training. My training was more kind of technical training about, you know, this is how you do, relaxation training, and this is how you do assertiveness training, and this is how you work with children in a school environment by setting this contingency and that contingency and so forth, but it wasn't so much of the conversation about who we are as people and our own presence. So, that certainly was a part of the journey for me. And then I began to see in people that I worked with that it was their faithfulness to values that mattered to them that often was a key part in their journeys. So, as people came to recognize life is really hard for me, but it's important for me to be kind or it's important for me to be compassionate or it's important for me to try to love my dad, difficult person as he is, that the more I saw people on a journey of being faithful to what is sacred to them in their lives ,that that had a role in healing and that had a role in their own recoveries. So, more of that became a part of the dynamic people I worked with about me recognizing my own spiritual journey, and coming to people with a degree of presence and groundedness and healing intention and trying to really be present to them and meet them where they are ,and in the people that I would work with, trying to affirm really matters to them in their life, what do they cherish? What is sacred for them and helping them to see that and to give life to that.

**Diane:** So, when you're teaching, are you teaching medical students? Are you teaching psychology students? Who are you teaching and how do you teach them to practice in a more spiritual way?

**Fred:** Yeah. In my life of retirement from my teaching in the family medicine world, my teaching, which overlap to some extent, I've been doing this since 2002, I think, with the integrative medicine program at the university of Arizona has been with students of integrative medicine and they are physicians from a variety of specialty areas, nurse practitioners, allied health professionals, nurses, nutritionists, acupuncturists, an occasional psychologist, counselors, and some people who are medical students and residents. All of them have different programs that they relate to that offer them content in integrative

medicine, the bringing together of traditional and, modern, healing modalities in a caring and person-centered context. So, that's the venue in which I do teaching. My conversation with them about spirituality starts with some dialogue about what spirituality is, and I think that that's important because people have all kinds of perspectives spirituality and I think often get tripped up in what I think is, a limiting factor of defining spirituality in terms of specifically religious practice. Spirituality certainly does embrace religious traditions and ceremonies and values and practices and is expressed that way for a lot of people, but spirituality is not expressed in terms of formal religious traditions and practices for a lot of people. In fact, there's recent data from Pew that recently the number of Americans who answer the question about religious affiliation by checking the box for none — N-O-N-E — has, for the first time exceeded those who check boxes about particular religious affiliation. So, it starts with a conversation about what spirituality is and when I begin that conversation, I often share with people my favorite soundbite definition of spirituality from former Surgeon General Everett Coop, who was a presenter at one of the symposia in the early years, whose definition was "The vital center of a person. That which is held sacred." And I love that definition because it has to do with aliveness, people may recall that the Latin root of our word vital is vitae. Aliveness, life-giving. And it has to do with aliveness and it has to do with sacredness, what it is that people cherish in their lives, which may be expressed as I say, in religious terms or in other terms. That's a definition that I value a lot because it speaks, I think, to, human qualities of meaningful living that are important in the sense of aliveness and sacredness and it is an inclusive definition that honor where different people come to in their own experience of spirituality.

**Diane:** So, at the core of what you're teaching is to open yourself up and to be aware of everything that is sacred. Sacred in yourself, sacred in your patients, sacred in your family, sacred in nature. It's almost as if you're opening the door for these people.

**Fred:** It's interesting when I talk with people about what is sacred for you, what is really meaningful in your life? Consistently, I hear three answers. The first answer that people often give is my family and people that I love. Parents, partner, siblings, children, and grandchildren, so forth. The second answer that people give often has to do with, more expressly, spiritual values. People may say God or people may refer to God in different ways. Yahweh, great spirit, the universe, presence. People refer to, that presence in different ways. And the third thing is interesting too, that as I talk with people, the third thing that people very consistently say is something like, I want to make a difference in the world. I want to give back to my community. I want the world and the community to be a little better place because I lived there, and it is fascinating. Having your life count for something and making a difference. And so, all those three things can be prompts for further exploration and dialogue with people. What does it mean to love your family? How are you doing that? How have you done that? How could you expand that? What does it mean to be in a relationship with God or a higher power or a great spirit, or however you think of that presence? How do you open yourself to that presence? How do you live in faithfulness to that presence? And when you say, I want to make a difference in the world, I want to make a difference in my community, how have you done that? How do you see other people doing that? What might some next steps be n how you can do that? So, looking at this idea of sacredness and what it is that people cherish and inviting them into a conversation that

affirms how they have been faithful to those things invites an exploration of where do you go from here and how you do that now?

**Diane:** Well, if you asked me those three questions, I would answer that way and on the making a difference. The tagline on my Catching Health blog is health reporting that makes a difference.

**Fred:** That's wonderful.

**Diane:** And when I am asked, what do you want people to take away from the work you do, I say, I want to know that I've made a difference that somebody I have interviewed or some story that I've done maybe made a difference in somebody's life. And it happens. I've heard from people saying thank you for writing that story, it changed my life. It made me look at something I hadn't thought about before. In some cases, the looking at something was symptoms of a potentially deadly disease, but they caught it early. So, little things like that.

**Fred:** that's well said and that's beautiful, Diane and the, you know, I certainly see that as I look at it Catching Health, I can see the ways in which people take away things from that and I think another wonderful thing that you're doing with that is that you're giving people a voice. Because I think that so much of what we learn and so much of what we come to cherish has to do with what we express and being able to use our voice. So, you're providing people with the opportunity to share from their life experience and that certainly is important to them in addition to the benefits of other people hearing what they have to say. I often quote Mary Oliver's wonderful seven-word poem, which is *Instructions for Living Life* and it is Pay attention. Be astonished. Tell about it.

**Diane:** You made me think, Mary Oliver also asked the question, what will you do with this wild and precious life, something like that. Well now you are semi-retired. as you reflect back on your life, is there anything you would've done differently?

**Fred:** I think it's a good, exercise. In one of the reflections, I think I make a case for regret. Regret as a factor that you face that, and if you look at that, it can have implications for how you change your life and what you do now. It's an honorable, reflection to think about what we regret or what we might've done differently. It's interesting at this point in my life I ask a lot of questions, I think about human qualities that make a difference in people's lives and what that shows for me. And if I had had the presence of mind to do that, I think I would have done that earlier in my life. I would have asked more questions, I would have done a better job looking for mentors and being in a dialogue with them, you know, some of the things that I've done, I think I've kind of figured it out on my own and it is what it is and I think I've done reasonably well in many areas. But I look at people who have mentors professionally, for instance, which really has never been the case for me, and I think of the richness that has gone on with that. I think about the idea of asking questions to come into a richer understanding of things. I didn't much ask questions of high school teachers or college professors or coaches in the athletic things that I did and I looked back thinking Oh, gee, you know, here's some things that I know now and if I had had the presence as a younger person to ask those questions maybe these folks who know a lot more than I did would be able to help me more on more journey.

**Diane:** Is there anything that you wish I had asked you that I didn't?

**Fred:** Ooh, that's a nice question. Questions I wish you had asked. You know, I have enjoyed this conversation. I think you ask good questions. You're asking both about my professional life and how it is that I try to work with people and a lot about my personal life and how I cultivate my own spirituality and how I try to pursue what is sacred for me. I think the, you know, those are the, those are the important questions. And I think those are the questions that I really enjoy having in conversation with other people too.

**Diane:** Well, I thought of another question. What makes it a good day for you?

**Fred:** It's interesting, in the closing years of my full-time work, teaching and practicing and family medicine, I remember sitting down one day and thinking, I really enjoy this work and I really enjoy the people that I'm working with and what I'm doing is meaningful, but if circumstances allowed, I think what I would do would be to leave this behind and spend my days hanging out with my wife and friends and doing things that I enjoy and teaching in a focused way in integrative medicine and doing some writing. Basically, that's my life now. I cherish my relationship with my wife and being able to go on walks and go bike riding and go on hikes and just hang out with her is such a blessing and such a joy. And the work that I do teaching in integrative medicine is work with kindred spirits who really have a heart for the humanity of medicine and their caring and compassionate relationships with other people. And it's work that I can do pretty much on my own time in the way that works for me. I have appreciated writing. Writing is a spiritual discipline and a spiritual practice for me however it is that readers may find some benefit from it and I enjoy being active, being physically active, taking care of myself, being outdoors, being in the natural world.

**Diane:** you've got a beautiful day for that. As we do this interview on the 11th of November Veterans Day, it is about 70 degrees out and sunny. Okay. any last pieces of wisdom you want to share before we say goodbye?

**Fred:** There's an organizational consultant whose name is Margaret Wheatley who quotes a proverb, I think that it's not original to her that you can't hate anybody whose story you know and, in this conversation, we've talked about polarization and incivility and so forth. And how are we going to find our way out from that? And I think this idea of curiosity about people's life experience is part of that. As I think about people who are at polar ends of the spectrum from where I am it's probably not so important that I get engaged in a heated argument about why I'm right and why they're wrong. That there may not be much of a future in that, but maybe the conversation more is how did you come to where you are? What are the life experiences that you've had that have brought you to that place? And in that, there's a possibility that you can see the humanity in somebody else and maybe you can understand what it's like to be them and to be on their journey and maybe there's a little sliver of opening, a little sliver of daylight that can come between us in that. Well, you're doing wonderful work with your blog and your podcasts Diane. It is important stuff for you to be doing and I appreciate the way that you're giving people a voice, as I said before and it's a pleasure being a part of that. Thank you.

**Diane:** Well, thank you Fred, for spending time with us. And I know for a fact now that you do practice what you preach.

**Fred:** I try.

**Diane:** And thank you for listening to the *Catching Health* podcast and to my conversation with Dr. Fred Craigie. If you would like to read his new book *Weekly Soul: Fifty-two Meditations on Meaningful, Joyful, Peaceful Living*, which I highly recommend go to [goodnessofheart.com](http://goodnessofheart.com). Goodness of Heart, [all one word.com](http://alloneword.com). I would also like to say thank you to our *Catching Health* sponsors, Avita of Stroudwater, a memory care facility, and Stroudwater Lodge an assisted living community, both in Westbrook, Maine. My mother who had Alzheimer's lived at Avita for about two years and she received excellent care and a lot of love. So did the entire family. For more information about both go to [NorthbridgeCOS.com](http://NorthbridgeCOS.com) and to read my blog *Catching Health*, to listen to more episodes of the *Catching Health* podcast and to find a transcript of my conversation with Fred, go to [catchinghealth.com](http://catchinghealth.com).

That's it for now. Stay well and stay calm.