

COMMENTARY / CULTURE

Lonely in Plain Sight!

“Terry, you hav’ Last week when I was really lonely, I felt that I was the only person in the world who ever felt it. That’s what loneliness is all about. If we feel connected to people, even other lonely people, we wouldn’t feel

-Writing Down

the Bones, Natalie Goldberg.

“Loneliness” is the focus of this narrative. Why? There’s plenty of evidence that after almost three years of being locked into the grip of COVID, political upheaval, economic uncertainty, and the loss of family and friends, an epidemic of loneliness has been one result.

In a sense, loneliness today is like the proverbial “elephant in the room” in that we know or suspect that it’s there, yet it rarely gets discussed let alone addressed. Of all the problems that confront us, loneliness is often brushed under the carpet. We don’t like to admit it. In a very real sense, many are ashamed to be lonely. Just ask yourself when was the last time someone said to you, “hey, I’m lonely!”

Now I had a loneliness confirmation moment recently. Actually, it was two. But they both landed at the same place – the largely silent epidemic of loneliness.

The first moment was a conversation with “Connie,” an events specialist whose job is to coordinate activities at four different elder care centers. She told me about the number of senior citizens who are elated when she shows up at their center.

“Several said that in addition to being terrified of contracting COVID, they’re so lonely that they can’t wait to go to their doctor’s office for checkups.”

My second moment happened the next day when my “Martha,” a college

professor, spent three hours across from me at a local restaurant and talked about how invigorating it was to get out of her house after COVID and the recent loss of her husband of many years.

“It’s so difficult being home alone with so many visual reminders of my husband. If it wasn’t for my kids, I don’t know how I would have gotten through all this.”

Okay, it didn’t take me long to connect the dots between these two conversations and to scores of other people who are likely struggling with loneliness these days. Loneliness can be an aching admission to make, especially to friends and family.

Masking loneliness is an exhaustive camouflage. Truth is that a person can feel lonely with a smile on their face and even when in a crowd. In fact, being in the middle of a crowd can make some people feel even lonelier if they feel unable to connect with others around them.

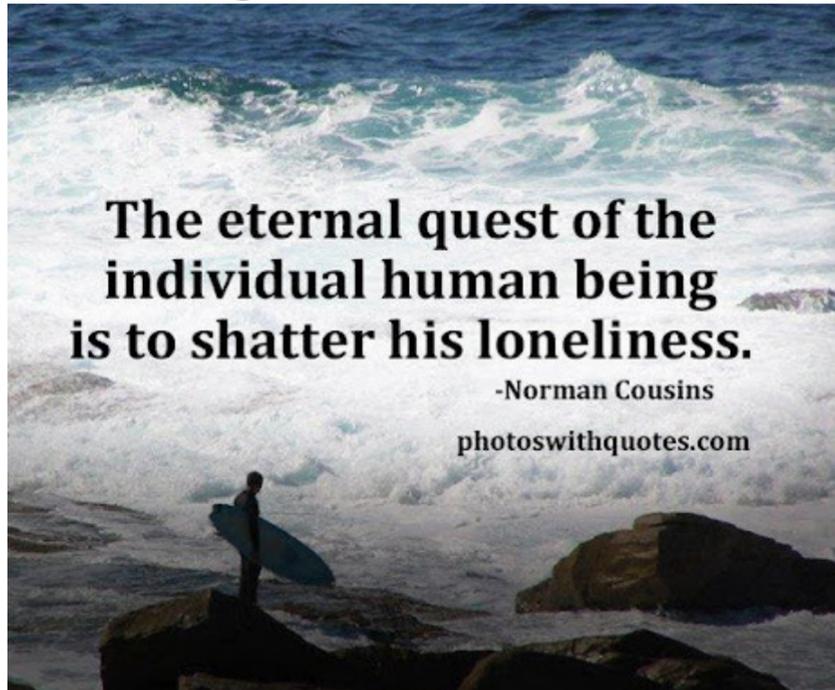
To be clear, being alone is not always a bad thing. Allowing ourselves to be lost in our thoughts while alone can lead to stress reduction, relaxation, rejuvenation, and personal reflection. So, folks who are alone aren’t necessarily lonely.

“If you learn to really sit with loneliness and embrace it for the gift that it is...an opportunity to get to know you to learn how strong you really are to depend on no one but you for your happiness...you will realize that a little loneliness goes a long way in creating a richer deeper more vibrant and colorful you,” concludes Mandy Hal

Now although not all loneliness’ are the same, “emotional” and “social” loneliness’ appear to be the most common:

“Emotional loneliness” arises from a feeling that you lack relationships. It can be felt when you need someone to talk to about something going on in your life but feel that there is no one available to contact.

“Social Loneliness” occurs when you don’t feel a sense of belonging to a



group. When you walk into a situation and don’t recognize anyone familiar, a feeling of social loneliness may wash over you if you don’t typically feel comfortable approaching new people.

So, how can we combat the plague of loneliness in our midst? Well, I haven’t the space to exhaust all of the resources I found that address loneliness, so I’ll highlight a few that jumped out for me.

Of course, the most obvious – and not all that easy – is to establish and maintain a support system. Maximize your chances by reaching out and being willing to be the one to suggest a meet-up or get together.

As allies, we could be aware of those situations when people may experience loneliness. Chief among them are people like “Martha” who lost a loved one, or senior citizens who are sometimes tucked away and forgotten about in senior centers. In those situations, a periodic call or, even better, a visit could

work wonders for them.

And keep in mind that young people who are introverts and seem to be alone most of the time can be targets for bullying and vulnerable to recruitment by gangs, etc.

In the end, understand that there’s nothing abnormal about loneliness. We have all experienced or will experience it at some point. The challenge is how we and help others respond to it productively.

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This Week in African American History

THE TEMPTATIONS



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LEARN
TO READ
READ
TO LEARN

By Jason Ankeny

Thanks to their impeccable harmonies, a parade of hits, and fine-tuned choreography, the Temptations became the definitive vocal group of the 1960s. One of Motown’s most elastic acts, they tackled both lush pop and politically charged funk with equal flair, and over time have weathered a steady stream of changes in personnel and consumer tastes with rare dignity and grace. Among their many achievements are 15 Top Ten pop hits, including the number ones “My Girl,” “I Can’t Get Next to You,” “Just My Imagination (Running Away with Me),” and “Papa Was a Rollin’ Stone.” The last of those four and “Cloud Nine” earned the group Grammy awards for Best R&B Performance, and the group continued to receive accolades from the Recording Academy into the 2010s, including a Lifetime Achievement Award. Nineteen of the Temptations’ albums and compilations have gone either gold or platinum. These include R&B chart-topping titles such as Greatest Hits (1966), Cloud Nine (1969), and Masterpiece (1973). Still led by original member Otis Williams, the Temptations celebrated another major milestone with the release of Temptations 60 (2022).

The Temptations’ initial five-man lineup formed in Detroit in 1961 as a merger of two local vocal groups, the Primes and the Distant. Baritone Otis Williams, Elbridge (aka El, or Al) Bryant, and bass vocalist Melvin Franklin were longtime veterans of the Detroit music scene when they came together in the Distant, who in 1959 recorded the single “Come On” for the local Northern label. Around the same time, the Primes, a trio comprised of tenor Eddie Kendricks, Paul Williams (no relation to Otis), and Kell Osborne, relocated to the Motor City from their native Alabama; they quickly found success locally, and their manager even put together a girl group counterpart dubbed the Primitives. (Three of the Primitives -- Diana Ross, Mary Wilson, and Florence Ballard -- formed the Supremes.)

In 1961, the Primes disbanded, but not before Otis Williams saw them perform live, and he was impressed by both Kendricks’ vocal prowess and Paul Williams’ choreography skills. Soon, Otis Williams, Paul Williams, Bryant, Franklin, and Kendricks joined together as the Elgins; after a name change to the Temptations, they signed to the Motown subsidiary Miracle, where they released a handful of singles over the ensuing months. Only one, the 1962 effort “Dream Come True,” achieved any commercial success, however, and in 1963, Bryant either resigned or was fired after physically attacking Paul Williams. The Tempts’ fortunes changed dramatically in 1964 when they recruited tenor David Ruffin to replace Bryant; after entering the studio with writer/producer

Smokey Robinson, they emerged with the pop smash “The Way You Do the Things You Do,” the first in a series of 37 career Top 40 hits. With Robinson again at the helm, they returned in 1965 with their signature song “My Girl,” a number one pop and R&B hit. Other Top 20 hits that year included “It’s Growing,” “Since I Lost My Baby,” “Don’t Look Back,” and “My Baby.”

In 1966, the Tempts recorded another Robinson hit, “Get Ready,” before forgoing his smooth popcraft for the harder-edged soul of producers Norman Whitfield and Brian Holland. After spotlighting Kendricks on the smash “Ain’t Too Proud to Beg,” the group allowed Ruffin to take control over a string of hits including “Beauty’s Only Skin Deep” and “(I Know) I’m Losing You.” Beginning around 1967, Whitfield assumed full production control, and their records became rougher and more muscular, as typified by the 1968 success “I Wish It Would Rain.” After Ruffin failed to appear at a 1968 live performance, the other four Tempts fired him. He was replaced by ex-Contour Dennis Edwards, whose less polished voice adapted perfectly to the psychedelic-influenced soul period the group entered with “Cloud Nine,” their first Grammy-winning recording. As the times changed, so did the group, and as the ‘60s drew to a close, the Temptations’ music became overtly political. In the wake of “Cloud Nine” -- its title a thinly veiled drug allegory -- came records like “Run Away Child, Running Wild,” “Psychedelic Shack,” and “Ball of Confusion (That’s What the World Is Today).”

Following the chart-topping success of the gossamer ballad “Just My Imagination (Running Away with Me)” in 1971, Kendricks exited for a solo career. Soon, Paul Williams left the group as well. Long plagued by alcoholism and other personal demons, he was discovered dead from a self-inflicted gunshot wound on August 17, 1973, at the age of 34. In their stead, the remaining trio recruited tenors Damon Harris and Richard Street. After the 1971 hit “Superstar (Remember How You Got Where You Are),” they returned in 1972 with the brilliant number one single “Papa Was a Rollin’ Stone,” winner of two Grammy awards. While the Tempts hit the charts regularly throughout 1973 with “Masterpiece,” “Let Your Hair Down,” and “The Plastic Man,” their success as a pop act gradually dwindled as the ‘70s wore on. After Harris exited in 1975 (replaced by tenor Glenn Leonard), the group cut 1976’s The Temptations Do the Temptations, their final album for Motown. With Louis Price taking over for Edwards, they signed to Atlantic, and attempted to reach the disco market with the LPs Bare Back and Hear to Tempt You.

After Edwards returned to the fold (re-



The Temptations: Melvin Franklin, Eddie Kendricks, Paul Williams, David Ruffin, and Otis Williams.

sulting in Price’s hasty exit), the Temptations reentered the Motown stable, and scored a 1980 hit with “Power.” In 1982, Ruffin and Kendricks returned for Reunion, which also included all five of the then-current Temptations. A tour followed, but problems with Motown, as well as personal differences, cut Ruffin’s and Kendricks’ tenures short. In the years that followed, the Temptations continued touring and recording, with Ron Tyson notably joining for the long term in 1983, debuting on Back to Basics. By the ‘90s the Temptations were essentially an oldies act. Only Otis Williams, who published his autobiography in 1988, remained from the original lineup. Although the group was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1989, the intervening years without new studio recordings were marked by tragedy. After touring in the late ‘80s with Kendricks and Edwards as a member of the “Tribute to the Temptations” package tour, Ruffin died on June 1, 1991 from a cocaine overdose; he was 50 years old. On October 5, 1992, Kendricks died at the age of 52 of lung cancer, and on February 23, 1995, 52-year-old Franklin passed away after suffering a brain seizure.

In 1998, the Temptations returned with Phoenix Rising. Their history was also the subject of a televised mini-series, The Temptations, based on Williams’ autobiography. Although it was well-received and nominat-

ed for several Emmy Awards, numerous parties, including David Ruffin’s family, filed lawsuits. Meanwhile, the group continued to perform and record. Ear-Resistible followed in 2000 and won a Grammy for Best Traditional R&B Vocal Performance. Although Awesome and Legacy, released during the next few years, became the group’s final Motown studio recordings, the Temptations kept their label affiliation intact. Reflections, issued in 2006, featured covers of classic Motown numbers. Another all-covers set, Back to Front, followed in 2007 with Issac Hayes and David Porter, Skip Scarborough, and the Bee Gees among the farther-reaching crop of tributees. After three years of steady touring, the group returned with Still Here, a set of new material issued on the eve of their 50th anniversary. Their songbook became the basis of the jukebox musical Ain’t Too Proud: The Life and Times of the Temptations, which premiered in 2017. Dennis Edwards died on February 1, 2018, at the age of 74. Three months later, the group released All the Time, which combined original songs with covers of hits recorded by the likes of Michael Jackson, Maxwell, and the Weeknd. The Temptations, still led by Otis Williams, kept going into the 2020s with Temptations 60, a studio album preceded by “Is It Gonna Be Yes or No,” a new song written by Smokey Robinson.