
CARL'S 87TH BIRTHDAY

by

Natalie Rogers

The Setting:

It is January 8, 1989, a cold morning in Northern California. I am with twelve other women at a retreat centre, where I am facilitating a ten day training programme in Person Centred Art Therapy. The place is familiar and the women have a deep sense of trust in each other and the person centred process, since this is Level III of my intensive training programme. It is early morning, 7.30 am. We are on the top floor of the lidge, where we do movement and meditation every morning. There is a soft beige carpet on the floor, a fire in the fireplace and the early morning sun is just beginning to come into these upstairs windows.

As I lead the morning movement with yoga-type stretches and gentle music, I realize that today is my father's birthday. I think to myself, 'He would be 87 today,' This is in the back of my mind, as we bend and twist gently, urging our bodies to be flexible and supple.

After the half hour of stretching, I tell the group, 'I would like you to be aware that today would be Carl's 87th birthday. As we

meditate, I was wondering if you would be willing to keep him in mind and have us celebrate his birthday, in that fashion.' I was aware that all of these expressive therapy participants either knew Carl personally, or had read his work, or had seen him on our video tapes as a faculty member of the Expressive Therapy Institute. They were touched that I asked for their cooperation in such a celebration. We sat in a semi-circle, with the warmth and light of the fireplace creating a soft atmosphere. As we quieted down, we started the meditation with some chanting, which was our custom.

The Meditation

I am aware that our individual sounds are in harmony. The spontaneous flow of people's voices creates a musical space to become centred and quiet. The sound comes naturally to an end; all is quiet. As I close my eyes and attempt to settle into an inner calmness, I say these words to myself, 'Happy Birthday, Dad, wherever you are. We are here to celebrate who and what you are - how you have deeply touched my life, our lives. I send you my love. I forgive you, as I forgive myself for the times we hurt each

other or caused emotional pain. I know how much you love me. I return it. I would like to know if I am contacting you. If you could give me ANY sign, I would appreciate it.'

Now my breathing is deep, rhythmical and flowing. I feel peaceful and calm. The flicker of flames penetrates through my closed eyelids. Now, I am aware of some sort of harsh noise. I feel agitated and uncomfortable and I say to myself, 'What's going on? Is there something wrong with the plumbing?' Then I tell myself to ignore the intrusion and place my focus inward, but the persistence of the knocking is distracting me. 'Knocking?' I say to myself. 'What IS IT?' As I listen, I am aware that it is a woodpecker on the roof just above us, tap tap tapping, with great persistence. 'Knocking?' I then realize that I have an answer to my request. Of course, it is the sign I have asked for. CARL IS PRESENT. I chuckle to myself. 'Well', I say to myself, 'I might have known that he would be a woodpecker coming to knock persistently on my roof.' I settle into a warm glow of peaceful presence and nothingness. The woodpecker keeps tapping away

relentlessly for the next twenty minutes. As the time comes to close the meditation, I open my mouth to sound an 'Om', the signal that our meditation time has ended. As I let out the sound, the woodpecker ceases tapping and apparently flies away. I pause for a moment in my own thoughts, knowing that the woodpecker had never tapped on our roof before (we have meditated over several years in this same place.) It is incredible to me that the tapping lasted just so long, and stopped just at the end of our celebration of Carl's birthday.

I was not going to say anything about the woodpecker, but the women do not leave the meditation area. They are sitting silently, with their eyes open in contemplation. One woman says, 'That woodpecker was Carl's presence.' We look at one another, knowing that we all had the same notion. We laughed and agreed that our thoughts were unanimous.

My own words were, 'Thanks, Dad, for letting me know that you are still around. I feel your continued love and support. I hope you can feel my gratitude and love, as well. - your daughter.'

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