

MY JOURNEY - A Personal Account

by Michael Seear

When I qualified in medicine from Westminster, I was fine, just fine, nothing wrong with me. I recalled with disdain attending Michael Balint's seminars as a student and ridiculing the psychoanalytical approach. After all, there I was, Doctor Kildare number two about to be liberated on the world so why should I indulge in that kind of self scrutiny. Why, goodness me, I even had a full head of hair in those days! Time past and nine years later I ended up in an alcoholic unit having the DT's. Perhaps in this short paragraph I can indicate the depth of denial that can exist concerning the amount of damage one can carry, live with and yet function up to a point.

At the time of writing I have been continuously sober for just over thirteen years thanks to regular attendance at Alcoholics Anonymous meetings. When I was about seven years sober, I felt that further help was necessary because although I was dry, I was not happy and intimacy was not possible for me. I might just say something about the difficulties in finding a decent therapist. It was easy initially - after all, if I had good judgement, why would I be seeking therapy anyway- so it was not easy. Three therapists came and went. They were good recipients of the projection from me of my abusive parents but what I want you to hear is that they were abusive in reality in their speech, attitude and behaviour. One of them used to fall asleep which proves that you don't have to stay awake to go unconscious! I did find a beautiful Jungian analyst with whom I felt safe.

Oh what an awakening followed. It was like a scalpel going into an abscess and the blocked in pus of years poured out, all sorts of stuff that had been buried deep down especially the incest between my mother and half brother when I was fourteen years of age leading to me being emotionally excluded from the family. Nothing was said at the time at school where I was head boy and working up my role of star and future Doctor, my other roles were my mothers caretaker and surrogate spouse, family garbage can, clown, Infantile professor and rebel. There was not much space in all that stuff to be a functional human being who could give and receive love. There was a lot of painting to reach and express this material. There was an "archaeological phase" of revisiting the places of the past.

By the way, the question of qualifications didn't help in relation to seeking a good therapist. Two out of the three whom I experienced as abusive were highly qualified on paper but so what. Someone could be in therapy for years because they want to train and still largely avoid their original pain work and avoid the commitment to continuing growth.

Anyway the one to one talking therapy was tremendously helpful although a point came when I felt something more was required. I got into inner child work together with analytical bodywork and this was really salvific. I feel that, for me, the damage of the first eight years are really much more encoded in my body and feelings than in any mental aspect of memory. Very rapidly I got in touch with my infantile scenario.

My mother was still grieving for a daughter when she gave birth to me. That daughter died a year before I was born. As an infant, my mother was looking at me with laser eyes and castrating me. She was acting out the abuse she experienced in her family of origin and pouring her manhatred into me. She also poured into me projections of the body of her dead daughter. It was an infantile abandonment compounded by my father being absent because he was still grieving the death of his first wife. I was only able to get in touch with this through bodywork. It helped greatly that my bodywork therapists is also many years recovered from his alcoholism which gives me a lot of confidence in working with him.

I believe it is necessary to have the courage in therapy to go through an empty place. This is the where the original pain work has been done but creative filling of the empty space has not yet occurred. I got to a place where I was really empty and needy. I had never really experienced love except little bitty fragments here and there; when I got to be empty it was really difficult. Bodywork had removed my armour and continuing recovery in twelve step programmes had gradually removed the various ways of acting out. I was vulnerable and very needy of love. I reached out in my 12 step groups and was given lots of love. I also do my bodywork in groups and I emphasise the value of a strong supporting therapy group. I was accredited as a therapist/counsellor in 1985 but it is only this year that I have really felt ready to get going. This involved getting the confidence to appreciate the unique contribution I can make. I don't have to conform to any academic set of rules, I have made the journey and will continue the journey with my spiritual development. I am the best Michael I have ever been and I am ready to pass this on to others. Of course it is important to continue to learn and I am involved in further training but I also feel it is important to validate my own journey.

My influences include Jungian analysis, analytical bodywork, John Bradshaw's inner child work, developmental understanding. I am also very interested in 12 step programmes especially AA, Alanon, Overeaters Anonymous and the exciting stuff coming out off Co Dependents Anonymous and Adult Children Alcoholics. I am very involved in a men's group and this is important to me. The absence of the Father is a male wound and with Robert Bly and John Bradshaw I am firmly convinced that this can only be healed by the interchange of nurturing by men in recovery from that wound.

I am sick and tired of outdated therapist's defences of pretending to be a blank screen, directiveness and down right dishonesty. The best therapists work through their own vulnerability and continue some work on their own process.

It is getting better and I meet more practitioners now who work in an open way which is more loving and sharing and they are not afraid of touch. There are times when the client is deep into their original pain work that they need to be hugged. A total taboo in this context is just cruelty. We all know about poisonous pedagogy in therapy producing cruel therapists. And I want you to hear that I am not advocating being a rescuer so as to abort a clients process, I am talking about retaining some humanity.

For me the journey is only just beginning; I look forward to creative and flexible ways of working with clients. It was OK to qualify in medicine and do psychiatry but it has been through my own journey that a way has become clear to work with my clients in order to be there for them while they make their own unique journey.

STAND UP AND BE A WOMAN

by Shan Jayran

My mother was a stunningly beautiful woman. Really beautiful. When she came in the room people who hadn't met her caught their breath; family history is littered with the corpses of those who loved her hopelessly. As her daughter my looks were a battleground, as were grace of movement, wit, charm, tact, elegant dress etc. Household shopping was punctuated by exhortations to 'pull in your stomach darling', 'try to walk from the hip' and so on. At our dinner table men frequently dissected what they liked and didn't like about female looks; such dictates I dutifully studied.

But by eighteen years old I rebelled against living with the high wire anxiety of the seductress. I took a long, hard, but friendly look at my face and body. 'You and I are stuck with each other' I said firmly. 'So we may as well get to like each other.' With difficulty I accepted my thick short legs and my childlike face that never would look sophisticated. I planned reasonably comfortable clothes that were quite stylish, but practical too. I discovered that lots of men don't want 'perfection' at all because it makes them nervous; there are those who actually delight in neolithics like me. However, society didn't help me sustain this equilibrium so it often caved in under pressure.

Then seven years later, in the mid seventies, feminism blasted Britain and encouraged me to whinge and complain pretty much as Fran Mosley does in 'Dishy' (*Self and Society* Nov 91). How men were so arrogant, and whipped us poor things into line with their labels - Sexy/ Bitch goddess/ sweetie/ cutie It felt so good to have a good moan about it.