

Messy Memories: Extracts from a Journal

Mary Smith

Most of what goes on in therapy can't be interpreted as definitely meaning one thing or another about the past. What comes up is related to the past, but it is a mixture of wishes, fears and fantasies and remembered events — both external events and internal ones, things I experienced inside me, but which no-one else was party to.

The current interest in 'false memory syndrome' got me returning to my diaries of a few years ago to check up on a process that was going on for me then about sex and my father. With the perspective of a few years I now see what happened with more clarity than I did then, but does that mean I am closer to the 'truth' than I was at the time? I don't know.

What follows consists of extracts from my journal, together with my current interpretation of it all. (Note that many of the entries are made at the same time of year, but in different years. Maybe some important event did happen in an early summer of my childhood.) Feelings about my father were an important part of my therapy, and I transferred many of these to my male therapist. Difficult feelings about sex were a feature of many sessions.

June 1988

'Something to explore with my therapist: bad feelings I have about someone happen

partly in my vagina. I feel I'm being intruded on, not because the person is behaving intrusively, but because their existence intrudes on mine. This is somehow related to Dad, and feelings about him in my vagina.'

June 1989

'Dream: Several of us are sleeping outside. My bed starts vibrating as if attached to something mechanical or someone is wanking. I become aware someone behind me is wanking and fantasising about me. Then in horror I realise this person is right by me and is holding my left hand. I'm paralysed and can barely cry out "Who are you?" then force myself awake.'

At this point in therapy, dreams like this and other feelings were making me wonder if there was some terrible event I was due to remember. My therapist, more laid back, also suggested there might be a 'memory' to recover.

May 1990

'Asked my therapist why I was still like a 5-year-old, trying to make Daddy love me, and he suggested there may have been some event, now buried, which wasn't dealt with, to which this need is attached. Maybe I could uncover it by lying down, breathing and relaxing. In fact there was not enough time to do this!'

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June 1990

'Dream: A messy parcel of sex which I'd set aside and wanted now to go and fetch.'

Later in June 1990

'Dream: I'm a child in an adult-size body, naked. A Daddy has some sort of unspecified designs on me. He puts a jumper on me. *Very* sexual. Later he takes it off.'

I was due to leave my therapist in the summer of 1990, because of circumstances rather than because I wanted to. The fear of losing him (and, embodied in him, my renewed hopes for a relationship with my father) precipitated a crisis for me. I think what happened in the session described below was a metaphor for what had happened between me and my father as a child, rather than a memory of any external event. I was prepared to give him my sexuality in some way, in order to earn his love, and he took it and threw it away.

July 1990

'In session started feeling sad because my future therapist won't have cushions. Felt like a baby aged 2 or 3. Grabbed and held a cushion. Eventually sucked my thumb, and was crying, sighing a lot. I felt secure and cocooned, sucking my thumb with a cushion. My therapist led me through a series of images. "What does two-or-three feel now?" he asked. Felt my Daddy was there. "Daddy is there. What happens next?" I wanted to put my arms around him. "And can two-or-three put her arms round Daddy?" Yes. "What does that feel like?" and so on. The series went: I cuddled my Daddy, both standing up. A willy in the way. Nice when little, not so nice when big. I want to suck it. I do, like a lolly. It's disgusting, and nice too. His head

is back not looking at me. Then I feel power in my head and heart and tummy. Also cold in my heart and tummy and between my legs. And disappointment like a cold piece of metal in my body, that spreads. "I'll never *really* get what I want. It's all pretend."

'Came out of the state quite easily. Talked a bit about what happened. My therapist said it could be fact, fantasy or a mixture. But it's good to have got there. Joked with him about the edible cock I sent him. Felt very free and light-hearted coming out of his house.'

The edible cock seems to be a give-away here. I don't remember anything about sending him such an object, but it does suggest that I was identifying him with my Daddy, and in my regression I had been both enacting the disappointment of being rejected by him (having to leave therapy) and re-enacting the disappointment of being rejected by my Daddy as a young child.

August 1990

"Therapist said of the sucking Daddy's penis regression that it wasn't as fraught with emotion as a memory would probably be. "Keep it in mind" and see how it fits with other things in therapy.'

What I feel looking back is that both my therapist and I had a good sense of what was appropriate in the real world. (Even if in my therapy I might send him edible cocks!) However, I was very much under his influence, and if he had been less wise, and I less grounded, we might both have come to believe that as a child I had been the subject of an incestuous attack by my father.