

even when she felt exhausted. The "controller" had co-operated to help the "child" release a joyous energy and the dance of her body had indeed become a spiritual expression. The words of William Blake come to mind, "*Man has no body distinct from his Soul; for that called Body is a portion of Soul discerned by the five senses, the chief inlets of Soul in this age*".

## **G. Straker**

### **COMMUNION WITH vs COMMUNICATION ABOUT: BREAKING THE CODE**

*The purpose of the paper is to illustrate that communication which is healing must be communion with and not communication about. Communication about feelings, events, issues etc. represents the context within which communion with another takes place. The paper aims to show this by describing a therapeutic encounter with a child who not only had a speech problem but seemed to lack even the desire to communicate.*

It was from a person who lacked speech and indeed in the beginning even seemed to lack the desire to communicate at all, that I learned what communication is. The person I refer to was a little boy who, from the age of four, who, together with a very dedicated speech therapist, I treated for three years until the end of his first term at a special school.

The purpose of this paper is to share with you what I learned from my contact with him and there are two ways in which I could do this. The first is to give you an abstract synopsis of the concepts that I learned from my work with him. For example, I learned the difference between communication **about** and communication **with**. I learned that in conventional psychotherapy we talk **about** our lives, our problems, our pain, our past but that all this is only the vehicle that we use in our overriding desire and need to be in communication **with** or to be in contact **with** another. Because we use this vehicle of speech to communicate ourselves, the person who has a speech

problem or who has a language problem could be at a disadvantage in therapy but it is the purpose of this paper to show that this is not necessarily so. Certainly in everyday life where most communication is **about** things and events this person has a most definite and distinct disadvantage. It is particularly so as most of life is not spent directly trying to communicate ourselves as such, but in the participation with others in a common world under and in mutual tasks. If within this we succeed in communicating ourselves with another, we count ourselves fortunate and bask in the warmth of intimacy (obviously not always physical) and the security is joy of feeling that we have been met.

However, the important thing to note, is that it is seldom our sole purpose in life to communicate with another. Even in marriage where we probably married because we felt we could be with and be ourselves with the other, not much time is spent in direct communion, an activity on which the relationship was probably originally constituted. There is so much to communicate about - wages, groceries, repairs, children, etc.

However, all of us long for communion and the ability to be with another and perhaps the emotionally disturbed person longs for this more than most. In fact one may go so far as to say that their disturbance results from or at least is maintained by a lack of this kind of contact. Therapy for me therefore is a process of striving to be in contact with the other, with the authentic real self of the other which may be conveyed by words, gestures etc. but in fact is in some way beneath these. The material of therapy are those forms of consciousness which lie outside the level of public knowledge and are incapable of being reduced wholly to its norms and forms. Its data are the fugitive sensations, perceptions, intuitions and intimations of the private consciousness. Its aim is to release the uniquely personal self determination of the free personality (Blackham, 1961). Like Karl Jaspers (1961) I believe that the world, including private consciousness and being, is a secret text which in many ways is not translatable into public knowledge.

Therapy whose sole purpose for me is communion **with** is an attempt by one person to be in touch with and to somehow start to learn the private text of another. Obviously the therapist can never totally

read the secret code of the other because his reading is biased and influenced by his own code. However, the closer he can approximate a reading of and entering into the being-oneness of the other and communicate this, the greater the healing. Perhaps it should be noted here that our imperfection in reading the secret code or cipher of another is part of communion. To perfectly read the text of another, one would have to be the other and once that merging occurred there would be no communion as one would be the other and not ourselves in relation to the other. The imperfection is not what is important but the desire, the willingness to try to read the text, the being-oneness of the other. The extent to which we succeed is not dependent on eyesight, reading or language competence as such but rather on the depth and sensitivity of one's ability to read, to be and indeed to create one's own text, or cipher, and one's own being-oneness.

These then are some of the abstract concepts which were living realities for me in my treatment of Sean. I have tried to communicate them, perhaps successfully, perhaps not. But these abstract concepts are but the flesh which clothed the real life of the therapeutic relationship between Sean and me. I am therefore going to experiment with the second possible way of presenting this paper by trying to bring alive the communication between Sean and me.

Sean as I have said, was four years old when I saw him. He had been assessed twice previously and both psychologists had felt that Sean was psychotic, query autistic. The complaints were that he didn't speak, he was destructive, uncontrollable, had nightmares, temper tantrums, was bed wetting and generally hyperactive.

When I first saw Sean he had been in psychotherapy for 1 year and had also had intensive speech therapy. He was saying single words and sometimes was stringing a few words together but these words were often unintelligible e.g. Sean had become Nonny. As a psychologist untrained in speech therapy it took quite some time to decipher various words. However, at least in the beginning there were precious few words to decipher, and most of the deciphering had to be of actions. It would be impossible to document a full three

years of painstaking therapy. As mentioned earlier therapy can only be based on communion with the other: so I shall attempt to present here a very brief synopsis of the first 10 months of therapy which in my mind represented the building of the relationship and communion within which Sean's later development took place. To give a full description of even one full 45 minute session would take far more space than I have: so I shall try and describe activities that were recurrent and then present my interpretation of these activities which represent my attempts to decipher Sean's secret code.

My first contact with Sean was in the presence of his earlier therapist. As she was not sure how much Sean understood about the fact that she was going and he was to see a new therapist she asked me to come so we could mime what was to happen and act it out concretely. We mimed her leaving and my staying for a month. Whether or not Sean deciphered our code we were never sure.

Within my code what seemed odd to me was that Sean seemed unperturbed about my intruding into his session and private time with his therapist. This led me to conclude that he had not formed a real relationship with his earlier therapist. However, at the last session with this therapist and in subsequent sessions Sean's behaviour and way of being suggested that I had been wrong and I had to revise my interpretations. When his therapist finally said "Goodbye" Sean in his usual way did not indicate that he had heard. She knelt at eye-level to him and repeated "Goodbye" which he again gave no noticeable indication of having heard. She turned to leave and as she reached the door I saw Sean look up and whisper "3ye". He then lay down on the carpet looking disconsolate and started dropping objects through the hole in the doll's house floor. He spent the next 30 minutes in this repetitive activity.

I respected Sean's grief and did not intrude. I commented twice on his sadness but otherwise sat in silence, trying somehow with my being to communicate an understanding of him. Sean spent a lot of time on this carpet and dropped objects through the doll's house for a number of sessions subsequent to this. By association I interpreted to myself that somehow the dropping of objects i.e. holding them and letting them go was somehow a concrete way of working through separation and the letting go of important people. Was this decoding correct? I still do not know and all I can do is report the process of

therapy. However, I do know that whenever there was an impending separation because I was to go on holiday or Sean was to be away he would revert to this activity.

Similarly as Sean became more verbal he would express anxiety about things disappearing down the plug-hole of the basin in the playroom. He also began after about 4 months in therapy to bury a little pig in the sandpit and to check if it was still there the next session. I interpreted this as his need for constancy in his world and tried to respond to this by in my person being reliable and predictable. Was this interpretation of Sean's behaviour correct? Again we will never really know but certainly separation anxiety would tie in with Sean's background. Sean had lost several important figures in his life including his father. Mother had divorced when Sean was approximately 2 years old (the critical psychological period for separation anxiety) and father was an extremely infrequent visitor. However, Sean slowly began to resume his normal playroom activities which comprised the eating handfuls of sweets from the sweet jar, mixing sand and water, building with the Lincoln blocks and mixing paint. These activities were carried out with a kind of ritual obsessionism. Sean did not involve me in these activities at all at first and despite my attempts to communicate myself to him through commenting on his activities and being present, though hopefully not intrusive, he showed no sign that he even knew I was there. He made no comments to me and made very little eye contact.

As I was beginning after 2 months to interpret this as indifference an incident occurred which changed my reading of the code. During a session I was called to the phone. To my surprise a few minutes later I looked up and saw Sean in the office. When he noticed I had seen him he returned immediately to the playroom. From this it was clear that Sean was sufficiently aware of my presence to at least react to my absence. In what had been a rather bleak two months this seemed a ray of hope.

Two weeks later Sean positively acknowledged my presence. He picked up a furry cat that was lying in the playroom and gave it to me. I did not attempt to interpret this but rather attempted to show

Sean what I felt. I smiled and said "This is lovely, Thank you Sean" and stroked the cat, trying to convey concern and care. When he left at the end of the session I showed Sean that I was putting the cat in a safe place. Sean, 6 weeks later went to the place and checked to see if the cat was there. He showed pleasure on finding it there. Perhaps on a concrete level this incident affirmed for Sean that people and objects could be constant. This session at least as far as my perception and understanding were concerned marked yet another beacon along the very slow road to the becoming of Sean. From this session on he began to share his sweets with me and to include me far more in his play. He would with looks and gestures and sometimes words indicate that I could play with him in the sand or water or paint. Previously he had tended to move away if I walked or sat too near. I tried to express enjoyment at playing with him. I interpreted to myself that Sean was feeling more trusting about allowing another person into his world. I would sometimes verbalise to Sean "Nonny not frightened of Mrs. Straker anymore". He would ignore this. However the important issue was that he allowed me to be closer and I tried to show enjoyment and happiness at his trust.

His activities at this time were still ritualistic but they had become more diverse. He had begun to include my tape recorder into his range of activities, switching it on and off. He was now actually not just aimlessly filling the basin with water but putting the dolls into it, sometimes commenting that one doll was mother. He was actually building with the Lincoln blocks and was humming tunes during the session. Not much progress in 5 months but for me it seemed a great deal.

I have already commented on two themes as I saw them viz. the separation anxiety issue and the issue of the building of a relationship with me. These two issues were of course interconnected and both were locked in my mind to a third issue which was Sean's need to integrate his inner and outer worlds. I deduced that this was an issue for Sean on the basis of the following observations:

Again my interpretation of Sean's code may have been wrong but for me it made sense of what was happening in my interactions with him.

In about the 6th month of therapy Sean began to bring three cushions from the waiting room into the playroom. He used to give these to me as if he were giving me a present and I would react as if he had given me a present, commenting on the lovely colours of the cushions and saying how much I liked them and how pleased I was with them. At about the same time he began to want to take something with him from the playroom at the end of the session. It was usually something small, something which would be worthless to someone else, e.g. a pick-up-stick, a bit of plasticine, a crayon. It seemed as though Sean wanted to bring his outside world into the playroom and take some of his playroom world into the outside. I said to Sean "Nonny wants Mrs. Straker to see outside and wants everybody to see inside". That this interpretation was correct seemed confirmed by the fact that shortly after this he began asking me to lift him up so we could look out of the playroom window. Perhaps my interpretation had not been a correct deciphering of Sean's code, perhaps what I had said, had suggested this idea to him. Nevertheless it seems to me of no consequence which came first, somehow there had been a connection and the horizon had begun to broaden for Sean.

After several sessions during which we had at intervals looked out at the world, Sean took the plunge of bringing a significant part of his world into the session. At about the time that he was asking to look out the window, he was also beginning to make paintings. These paintings were formless and black but the fact that he was now using objects in a social way was a delight. He had been doing this for a while prior to the window episode but he now began to take these paintings with him when he left and I saw that he gave them to his mother.

He now took the final step of asking his mother to come into the playroom with him. Mother refused at first but when on subsequent sessions Sean again indicated his desire for her to accompany him she did so. The first session was from my point of view disastrous. Mother was anxious and obviously hostile to me. I too experienced the situation as a threatening one. Perhaps the only one who did not feel on trial was Sean even though mother made many comments to him which seemed to me to be disparaging and disqualifying when he tried to show her his building or sand play. I tried to continue relating to Sean in my usual way as I felt this was what he wanted

me to do even though I felt inhibited by mother's presence. With patience and determination Sean continued to invite mother in session after session. The change in the therapy was discussed with mother's own therapist. Following this Sean, his mother and I continued to be together for several weeks. During this time I relaxed and so did mother. With the help of her own therapist and perhaps with the opportunity to model some of my own interactions with Sean, mother became more affirming of him during this time. After a while Sean began to ask her in, only at every second session and eventually he stopped asking her to join us. I could not help feeling that in a very concrete way Sean had begun to integrate his inner and outer worlds. He had succeeded in showing me what some of his world outside the playroom was like and had also perhaps succeeded in showing his mother another side of his world.

In the meantime he was improving at home. The hyperactivity had lessened, his temper tantrums were fewer and he was certainly talking far more. But there was still a long, long way to go. Yet I felt we had covered a great deal of distance. Perhaps for me one of the most touching sessions I had with Sean came after about 9 months. It must be remembered that though I felt Sean was much more in contact with me 9 months after the therapy began, he still spent most of his time in therapy playing in a fairly detached way, seemingly quite cut off from me.

However, after I had been seeing Sean for about 9 months one day he saw some cold tablets on my desk. He took these and looked at them long and hard. He then looked at me, pointed at the tablets and at me and asked "Mrs. Straker sick?, Miss Straker medicine?" I said that it was my medicine and that I had a cold. Sean nodded, looked at me for a while longer and then opened the box. He took two tablets out, came to me, opened my hand and put them in it. He then closed my hand and said "Drink". It is difficult to convey the tenderness of that moment or the joy of being acknowledged as a person by someone who before had only indicated a knowledge of my presence by signalled awareness of my absence.

This was one of the first indications Sean gave me of his own tender heartedness. Alternatively, perhaps it was one of the first ones I was fully able to receive his tenderness. After this on a number of



occasions Sean would make direct personal contact with me. He would rub the furry toy cat against me, he would take my gloves from the desk and ask "Mrs. Straker's?" and when I said "Yes", he would kiss one of the fingers of the glove and smile at me in his shy, quizzical way.

It is difficult to say who grew most in the therapy but certainly moments like these touched me deeply and affirmed for me the beingness of others underneath whatever exteriors they present. Sean himself went on, not quickly, but slowly in a quiet unfolding. From the beginning when I had felt like an object in Sean's fantasy world we moved through what I have outlined here into moments of deep personal relating. As we went along these moments became more frequent and the moments became periods. Slowly I became, not an object in his fantasy world but rather a participant in his world of fantasy. We became ladybirds together, ants and bees. We took turns at feeding each other and playing at putting each other to sleep. One of his favourite games was to be a ladybird who I had to put to sleep, cover with a blanket and feed. He began playing in the doll's house and telling a little story about the figures in it. I was now a person in his world.

Sean's life outside the playroom had changed too. At 5 we managed to get a Nursery School to accept him despite his behaviour which was still odd. Sean spent two years here. Sometimes he would share some of the joys and frustrations. He was sad that the other children teased him but joyous about learning about flowers, and ants and bees and insects of all kinds. His bedwetting and soiling had stopped. His whole way of being was more relaxed, more interactive and less ritualised. At seven we took the big step of sending Sean to primary school. It was a school for children with difficulties and Sean certainly still had many of these. He was still highly selective about his interactions, he still seemed to enjoy his fantasy world fitted with animals and insects rather than the world of reality full of people and he would move into his fantasy world whenever stressed either by the A-B-C or a teasing child. Yet the gains had been great.

Unfortunately at about this time I had to say goodbye to Sean who had taught me so much and became part of my reality as I was intending to go on extended study leave overseas. Our parting which

took place over a six month period was sad, but somehow I felt that for both of us what had been learned, never to be forgotten, was that true communication is communion **with** and not **about** and that within communion with another lies the secret of our own existence.

**POSTSCRIPT.** *It is now three years since I have seen Sean but I have enquired after him and know that my friend is still actively engaged in the battle of becoming.*

*He can now read and although he can't write because of a fine motor co-ordination problem he will soon learn to type. He has more people in his world or perhaps I should say persons as he still chooses carefully those who he allows to populate his personal space. He still likes being an ant or a bee but is less afraid to be a person and with his new-found ability to read his ladybird fantasies can truly take flight.*

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**Sue Patman**

## **THE CREATIVE USE OF PAIN, CRISIS AND FAILURE**

### **Introduction**

Pain, crisis and failure can be preludes to, and most certainly are messengers for, ecstasy, harmony and triumph. Like the I Ching hexagram of the Book of Changes, the extreme Yang of pain and crisis can quite naturally turn into the Yin of ecstasy and harmony whilst the Yin of failure can equally naturally turn into the Yang of triumph or victory, or as Jung pointed out: follow anything far enough and it will turn into its opposite. Just as the extreme of grief and crying flips into hysterical laughter, so we can laugh until we cry or have tears of happiness. This follows the natural law of balance. In pain is the existence and potential birth of ecstasy; in crisis is the seed and promise of harmony; in failure is the blueprint for triumph. I believe the above to be true - but the switchover is not inevitable. It is here that, as always, we have free will and it is the lack or presence