

WAKING UP ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE DREAM:  
A QUESTIONING  
INTO THE PSYCHOTHERAPEUTIC PROCESS OF A DYING PATIENT

by

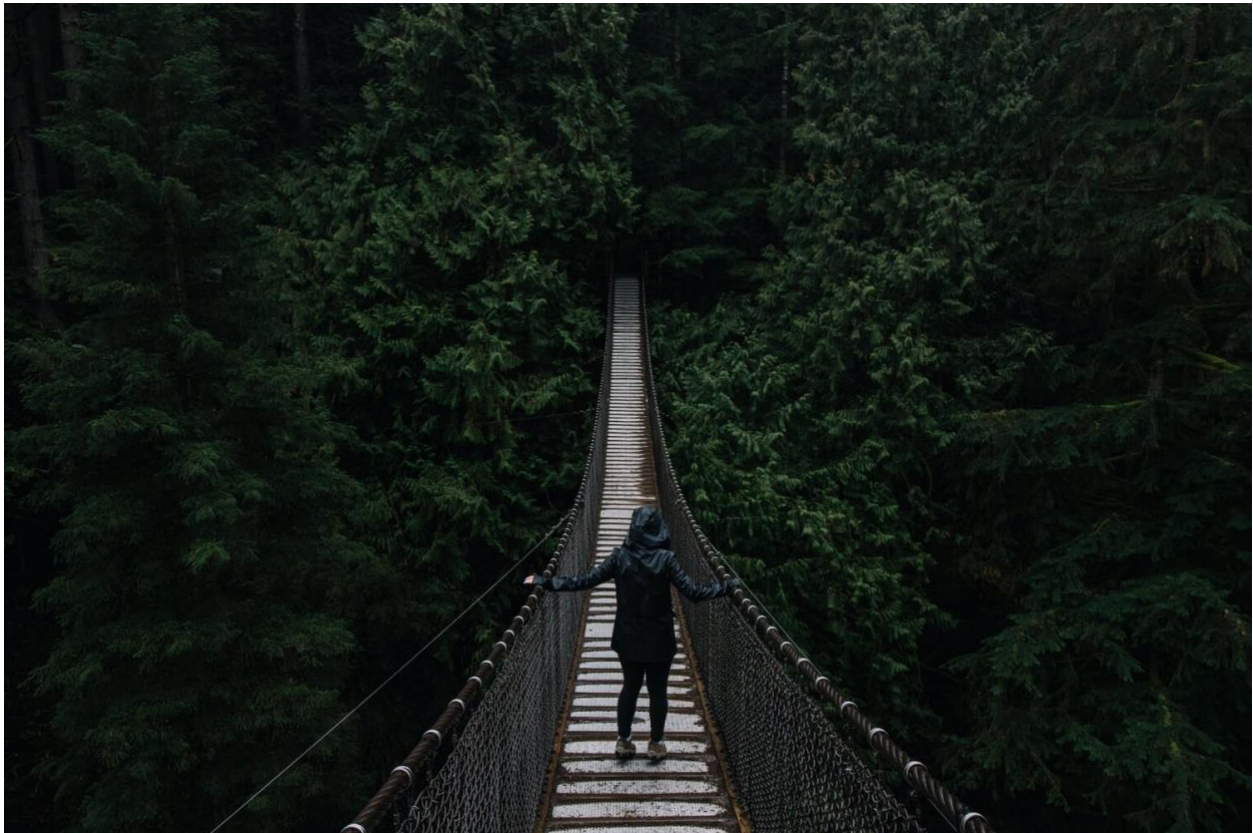
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DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGY

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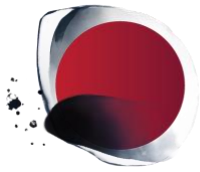
Dr. Dianne Skafte

Fall, 1989



Soon we would say good-bye.

The final moments of our relationship were upon us. Soon we would say good-bye. Within days she would die and there would be several empty hours in each day of my weekly schedule. There was already a vacancy in my heart.



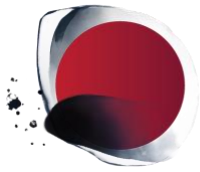
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The memories of our sessions linger at the mouth of an ever-opening cavern that yawns a silent anguish; a pain I have never felt in the context of a therapeutic relationship. I drift back to a time, only weeks ago when she was still alive; she is falling, entering an abyss, against her will. We meet at the edge of the archetypal chasm of "Death." She struggles repeatedly to return to the familiar room in her home in which we sit, with its fire burning in the hearth and her companionably silent husband, weeping in a straight-backed chair only a few feet from her side. Though for her to reach out to him, energy so low, is a lifetime of struggle. There are times she will surrender, releasing her hold on a body that is now simply parched, dark jaundiced flesh; skin that is stretched drum tight over the skeletal form, teeth brilliant white, eyes dark and far seeing, so large in such a small hairless head.

Each day that I go to her she has slipped that much farther away, through the veil, charting her way to the other side. She will return several times during the hour that I spend with her. Each day we both die a little. Her death is of the body. Mine, I don't know, I have yet to understand.

Three years ago, she soared into my office moving as only a dancer moves. It was as though there were small invisible wings attached to her feet giving her, for brief moments, the appearance of a bird in flight or a sleek ghazel-like animal, gliding. However, this animal was wounded, and she had come to heal. For two and a half years she healed into her life. The cancer went into remission, and she traveled, moved into a new home, and married. Now, at fifty-three, she faced yet another transition... another healing. . . into death.

This paper is an exploration of psychotherapeutic work from a mytho-psychological depth perspective. I will focus on the transformation of the form of the therapeutic container, as it shifted through various stages of this healing process to accommodate the needs of a person facing the final stages of life. In this discussion, I will attempt to explore

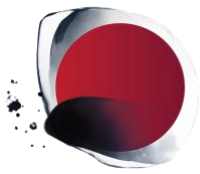


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the psychic field, the temenos, as well as the degrees of posturing required by the therapist in working with a person who's Will is intent on life while the physical body steadily wanes toward death. This is also a paper about the writer, her therapist, and his surrender and letting go. His dying, though different, is every bit as real as hers. Perhaps, at this point, all that separates us is that we wake up on opposite sides of the dream. This is not an academic paper of knowing. Rather it is a questioning into the mystery of Being.

To begin a discussion of the healing environment, I will put forth a rather over-simplified description of a way of healing. For healing to occur, temonos or sacred ground needed to be established. This means that to maintain a place of healing, all that separated our hearts was moved through, step by step, while the "Way" of bonding that would form as a result, was held by what I refer to as an unconscious intersubjective field.

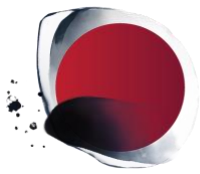
In the early phase of our therapeutic relationship the usual rapport was established and a safe and trusting relationship was cultivated. With Mary, at first appearance, this was an easy task. She was friendly, inquisitive, and open to the challenge of healing. She was diagnosed and operated on for colon cancer one year earlier which sparked a latent desire in her for her personal well-being and aliveness. Much of her earlier life was spent in attempting to maintain her status of "glamor girl" or "wonder woman." She was a dance instructor at a major woman's college, the mother of four girls, and the weaver of magic. (Her choreographic work in the world of dance is still talked about today). She was brilliant in all her undertakings to the exclusion of her own inner needs. Her soul expressed itself by enriching the lives of all whom she touched. Yet, quickly, I realized that someone was being ignored in this life of accomplishment. Something inside was being overlooked. At first, her physical beauty, quick wit and remarkable intelligence kept this hidden. This was evidenced in the fact that she refused to allow a discussion of the fear and the anger that I **was**



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**experiencing for her** in the face of the strong possibility of her coming death. She had come to me as a last resort, having gone through all the traditional routes. However, the acknowledgement of the x-ray, which indicated dark shadows on her liver, and the draining away of her bodily energy, was hidden from her conscious mind by a bold sense of denial.

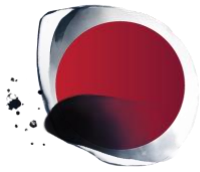
The second phase of our work began with a battle of Wills. Her Will, in an attempt to deny the severity of her illness, began to assert itself by her repeated attempts to manipulate the therapeutic boundaries. First, she expressed her consideration about my fee. This was eliminated in my mind as an issue with the discloser that she had several hundred thousand dollars in liquid assets left to by her mother who died of cancer several years earlier. Then she would show up for our appointments ten to fifteen minutes late and when the session was over would linger, attempting to draw me into further discussions. This all came to a head one day when I observed her walking down the path through the woods to the entrance of my office which is attached to my home. As a standard procedure I am quite clear with all the people that I work with that I want them not to stray from the stone lined, pine needle path when coming to a session. The boundaries are clearly marked to maintain a separation of my professional practice and my personal life. Well, on this day I noticed that Mary had strayed from the path and began wondering among the gardens which separate the two areas. What appeared to be a normal curiosity had been used to mask her next assault on the therapeutic container. She was, in my mind, unconsciously asking if it truly was safe here and could I contain and protect her. When she came to the door, I greeted her. She was in her usual grand style; an expensive fur coat, a European designed business suit, and a long agenda for today's session which she immediately launched into before one foot had crossed the threshold. I interrupted her diatribe and simply said to her, "you stepped off the path." Her reply was that "no" she had not stepped off the path and besides if she had, what did it matter. I explained to her that I



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had informed her of the physical boundaries when we first met. She interrupted me and explained that it was obvious that I had not explained the boundaries to her, otherwise she would not have stepped off the path. The battle of Wills had begun. This became the sole (soul) topic of conversation for the next four or five sessions. I explained to her that we could go no further until we were able to resolve what had occurred on the path that day. I would intentionally interrupt any attempts to move beyond this very simplistic disagreement until it was resolved between us. We were in a battle that, at the time, made me question my own sanity and stability as a therapist. Why was I being so steadfast and unwilling to compromise? Her anger was so amplified at times that she nearly walked out of the office, threatening to never return unless I would drop this "meaningless, ridiculous, pathetic complaint." Yet all that I was asking her to concede to was that she had stepped off the path and that I had previously asked her not to do this.

Little did I consciously know at the time of this battling that our Wills were weaving a therapeutic container that would become the core fiber of our relationship; one which held us and allowed us to trust one another and our work through far greater hardships that were yet to come. It is my guess that Mary's will to survive a childhood of extreme abuse had outfitted her with such an intensity of intelligence that few, if any, had ever directly and openly defied her. My not backing down from this conflict gave each of us an opportunity to measure the other's metal. We were equally matched, though I was determined to win out and told her so. At one point, I said that my Will as the Healer would have to surmount hers and that she would have to learn to surrender. I explained that unlike her past experience, I was demanding a surrender into love which was not a defeat but a necessary condition for her to allow herself to be held and to risk trusting another human being.

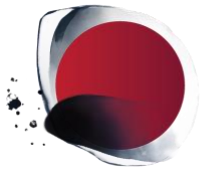


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At the time, I felt as did she, that this was exactly what the cancer was calling for. However, it would be a defeat which would eventually devour her, molecule by molecule. I explained that to battle with the cancer was risky. I knew that this is an approach which was very popular at the time, but it was not my orientation. Rather, I proposed that something from the psyche was being expressed by the cancer and that were it possible to work it out on another level, in psyche, the body might be spared. I was clear that unlike the cancer, my intentions stemmed from a way of loving and healing and that were she able to surrender to the "healer" perhaps her body would not be forced to surrender to the cancer. At worst, if she were to die, her ability to surrender would become most important.

Finally, she broke. In a long session which began with extreme anger directed toward me and my obstinacy, she eventually moved to the first tears that she had expressed in the now ten weeks that we had been working together. She began to talk of her fear of dying and of the rage that she was feeling toward all aspects of her life, ones she blamed as responsible for leading her to this dreaded disease. Finally, she allowed me to psychically hold her and the container that would embrace the both of us had begun to form. The potential to allow temonos had been established and I felt that finally we had the opportunity to do our work in the realm of what I referred to as the "Sacred." "Healing occurs when the sacred and the profane meet. when het archetypes have the opportunity to meet with the ego" (Kreinheder, 1989). The following months I worked to maintain and strengthen this holding environment while she continued to unravel the painful memories of her early childhood.

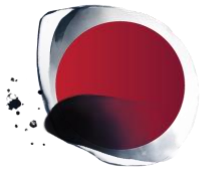
I will present an image that will facilitate a discussion of the methodology employed, at this time, in the therapeutic relationship. I might describe it as, the way in which we attempted to sort out the "mess." It will continue to take a first-person narrative form for I



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feel that this allows for a fluidity that is necessary to explore the "hooks" and "crannies" of this rather elusive process.

We are sitting in the office and at first it is business as usual. Mary places her check in the little box to her right and we exchange our pleasantries. She is noticeably tense today and excited to tell me of her "progress." I half listen, waiting for this chatter to subside so that we can close the circle and begin to work on a deeper level. At first the atmosphere is what I would call "normal-everyday-consciousness". As she talks, I begin to direct my awareness into my body and to allow for the thoughts and images in mind to "re-seed". I am now internally located, with awareness on my breath, the focal point of my experience. I will be referring to this focal point of awareness, the object to which awareness returns, as the "locator." As this occurs, I am aware that my field, my sense of psychic awareness, is becoming denser. I experience this as a thickening quality. The air feels heavier, and my body feels gelatinous. I am only vaguely aware of significant stimulus coming into consciousness through my senses. Rather awareness is turned inward. Once this intrapsychic field is set, I open my awareness to the experience of seeing and begin to visually "take in" Mary. This usually causes a disruption in her momentum, though it appears to remain unconscious to her. At this point, I may also verbally disrupt her. It is my perception that she too is in a field, her "everyday" field of consciousness. However, she is not located within this field but rather at the effect of it. She is adrift, even devoured by the power of her "familiar" way of being. It is my intention to bring her to a deeper level of her psyche. The disruption is intended to open her field, and this is often accomplished by my responding to her in such a way as to create confusion and disorientation. In her efforts to regain her composure it is usually the case that subtle signs of emotion become evident. Her lips may swell, her breath changes slightly or her pupils may dilate. These are a few of the countless signs that tell me that her psyche is opening.



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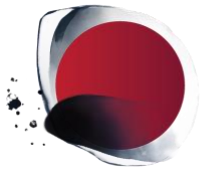
At this point I have the experience of my field expanding to fill the room. In a sense, I embrace her psychically. While this occurs, I identify my position within this intersubjective field that we now share in common. Humor, a story, a smile almost anything that is genuine on my part allows her to be conscious of me and to remain open. I now am the locator for her psyche, that point which is calling her attention. It is my experience that the temenos has been established. We are now in a sacred circle together and we have the potential to open to those aspects of self which are greater than ego. However, I am careful to maintain a kind of inner tension within my psyche which I believe acts to repress my personal unconscious content. I keep my "stuff" from manifesting by maintaining an exceptionally strong concentration which acts to maintain an in-the-moment awareness and discourages significant associations.

The stage is set for our work. My primary function, at this point, is to maintain this inter-subjective environment. I experience the tone of this environment within my body. As it shifts, which it continually does, I respond in whatever way is necessary to maintain its boundaries while encouraging the tensions to rise. Words, now function as tools for holding and stimulating this field and their content are of secondary value. At this point I also function as her guide in the sense that I stay with her and do not abandon her in this process. My guidelines have to do with maintaining this sacred environment while remaining fully present within our **shared world in-common**.

While she is unconsciously confident that she is safe and that I am with her, my next step is to surrender my position as her locator within the field. I do this simply by pulling back within myself while remaining present and available and open in the heart. In Jungian terms, the "coniunctio" is attempting to form:

The Latin term for union - coniunctio - expresses its archetypal nature. The coniunctio is that pattern of energy in which there is a coming together of opposites,



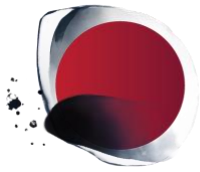


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notably fusion and distance, in perfect harmony. While hidden and arcane, the conjunction is, in a sense, a well-kept secret, yet only when it is seen with another person can one become aware of what one has always known. (Swartz-Salant, 1989, pp37 & 38)

Her tendency is to return to everyday consciousness, and this is initially met with resistance from me. For if she were to do so she would have to break the tension of this joint field that I am posturing to maintain. In a sense we have a nominal battle of Wills. However, often the tension is broken, and she returns to her world while I return to mine and we are simply two people sitting in a room together. "We found ourselves in the depressive state of the nigredo. We were led into a state of soul-loss; there was a lack of contact that was the complete opposite of the union state that had been afforded through the coniunctio (Swartz-Salant, 1989, p. 141). As a matter of fact, this is standard procedure, and we move in and out of this sacred space until she is ready to go to the next level of healing. We dance in and out of this inter-subjective holding environment many times per session. I refer to this as the "breath" of the field. I experience a kind of inhalation and an exhalation of the entire field that is embracing us. As it opens it becomes less dense and as it contracts it thickens. It is when it is expanding, and the density is also increasing that I believe there is unconscious content that is attempting to come into consciousness by entering the field. For Mary it is the somatic unconscious which is usually presenting. However, often she is not ready to open to it, to allow it to incorporate, so my response is to adjust the field. I will, in a sense, close it slightly as a way of filtering the impinging new material. I take my guidance from my reading of her ability to allow this material, attempting over and over to maintain the embrace of her psyche, waiting until she is ready.

In a musical composition there is often a "rondo" which is a refrain that is repeated in its original key throughout the piece. This functions as repetitive theme, gives order, and

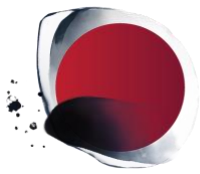


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offers a familiar locator, in contrast to a musical score which is daring and unfamiliar. This rondo is often presented so that it remains subliminal. I remain as a rondo, a familiar and repetitive locator throughout. When she is ready, when there is something calling to her from her unconscious that is demanding to be acknowledged in consciousness and she willing to open to it, we move into the next phase of this process.

As I mentioned, I turn over the position of the locator to her. As she sits, open and embraced within the temenos, I act to encourage an internal locator within her psyche. This could be and often is an image, however in Mary's case she is already highly visual and is easily lost in the realm of the imaginal. Her body is calling for her attention, so we reference her or locate her within her body. That is, we track through her awareness of the sensations in her body constantly sensing the most predominate kinesthetic object. This becomes what I would call a "point of departure". It is the point from which she will open her awareness to the impinging unconscious content, and it is also the point to which her awareness will return. I imagine that it is through this point, in the moment when her awareness is fixed on the object, that her entire psyche breathes. My intention is to be as unobtrusive as is possible while continuing to maintain the embrace and to be in constant contact with her.

The locator, being in the body, is usually easy for her to contact. Often, if at this point, I say something like "What . . . where is "it" or "Where are you experiencing this," she will open to it. (I want to add that for Mary, and it is true for others when we work from this approach, some orientation is required to bring about the faculties of mind which allow for this degree of body awareness. One component of this is to work with the client to increase their power of concentration so that they have the ability, at least initially, to direct the mind within the body. In addition, I find that once they begin a process such as this, the concentration is greatly enhanced as a result. This approach requires what I refer to as



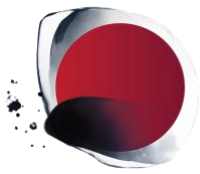
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long-enduring-mind, the ability to stay with a process when other components of psyche are demanding a return to normal consciousness.

As I mentioned, this predominate sensation within the body becomes the point of departure for her opening into the next phase of this work. It is not a particular object or sensation within the body that I encourage her to open to but rather the predominate sensation at the time. For example, the point of departure could begin as a tightening in the chest but as awareness it brought to it the object could open into a burning, throbbing sensation. This approach is often referred to as mindfulness.

Once the locator is in the body and awareness is brought to it, I take on another function. That is, I respond to her in such a way as to "pump" the experience. As she drifts or as her awareness goes to other objects outside of this field which is generated by having awareness directed into the body, I gently continue to guide her back into the predominant sensation. As she repeatedly returns to the locator eventually the object of her awareness "opens up". As the locator opens a new field predominates in conscious. In so many words she falls into or is drawn into the locator. She descends into the body, and she drops out of normal awareness of the room.

As she enters, awareness of the body is no longer her referent. Rather, her psyche is now open to that impending energy which has been demanding her attention. She has entered another state of consciousness where images, sounds, and other sensations prevail. As she moves into this field, I go with her. My function is then to encourage and respond to her in such a way as to maintain the tension, as well as the breathing pattern of this field. In addition, I guide her to the predominate locator within this new field. I refer to these as "process locators". This could be a flow of images, a phrase she hears in her thoughts, or other sensations in her body.

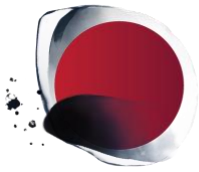


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I encourage her to open her awareness to the predominate experience or to the most compelling or demanding object in her experience. (This differs from the point of departure in that it does not necessitate her returning to the body). Usually, at this point, she is carried by the experience. She is in a flow and her psyche is open. However, I do not encourage that she just totally surrenders to it, to be devoured by it. I will, from time to time, bring her back to the locator in the body, the point of departure, to reinforce the bridge between this inner experience and the experience of her body in the moment. A bridge, if you will, between the sacred and the profane. This is the sorting out process, the opening to and clearing out of the mess. The body is not ignored, rather it is given voice.

In a very real way, the body is honored, and the somatic unconscious has the opportunity to come into consciousness.

Strong discharge is not encouraged. It is my experience that although emoting is very healing, the energy that is lost is what is needed for further and deeper penetration. The release that tears, for example, offer is accomplished in a more productive way. The opening of the field via deeper penetration creates a greater capacity for latent unconscious material to be release. Discharge also tends to collapse the field in that it dissipates the energy. The theory is that as the field opens, deeper energies are released. As this energy comes into the field, or in Mary's case, is released from the body, It functions to further open the field. The opening of the field, while being embraced in a temenos or holding environment, is what allows for the energy to move out of the body and into other levels of consciousness. It is here that the archetypes, which are caught in matter, appear to have the opportunity to be released. As this occurs, the imagery is very real and as Mary remains located in the field through which they find their expression, the body gives signs of enormous relief. What unfolds is often a very rich and intense drama within the mind, that hints of archetypal proportions. Mary reveals her inner experience as this process is



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occurring. She not only is telling her story, but she is also giving voice to the myths of our times. As Mary embarks on these journeys, her body and her psyche step out of the ordinary and into the mystery. As we chart her course, she begins to clearly delineate the temple from the marketplace.

Mary brought the following dream to one of our sessions:

There is this little girl.

She is four years old... perhaps younger.

She is covered with dirt, and she is wearing rags.

And has been living in a basement with years of grime.

Piles of rags, maybe one window and maybe a low table.

There is poverty everywhere... it is not very pretty.

She is encrusted... a Mexican child.

She has short curly hair, yet it is matted and dark.

She has two or three small children in tow.

All are dressed in rags.

One boy, one eighteen-month-old, and another little girl.

She, the four-year-old, is asking me to clean up her poop.

There is a big pile on the table in front of the couch... it is slimy, smelly, and very unpleasant.

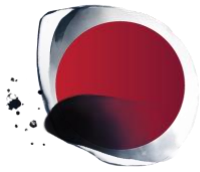
I said "yes" that I would clean it up.

She had been there all this time with them in this abject poverty.

I am aware that I am clean.

I clean up the mess with a pie plate and go to put it in a drawer.

I realize that it should go into the garbage.



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I am thinking that I will do that.

Then the little girl asks, "Wil you please put me on your lap and rock me?"

I realize now that she is me.

I answer, "yes."

We get into a big white rocking chair.

We are rocking.

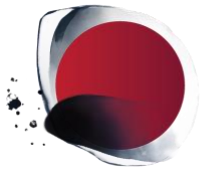
I was still limiting myself to her request.

I will take her home.

I decide I would get a big white house for all of us.

Where to begin to work with such a rich and powerful dream? If we were to begin with images and their associations, we would invite the unfolding of a very large imaginal field. This makes me wonder just how to move outside of ego consciousness. There are images from this dream that, were she to direct her attention to them and allow for associations, she would surely open to her emotional body. She would discharge and perhaps gain insight. However, to hear this dream from a somatic perspective, and to encourage an opportunity to address the cancer at the deepest possible level, we chose the above-described approach.

The question came to my mind as to where to enter this dream. Once the temenos had been established we talked about the dream while "tracking," returning the awareness to her body with a general and open consciousness. We moved from one predominate sensation to the next until a particular region in the body demanded her attention. This, then, became a locator and the point of departure. We worked to continually return her awareness to this locator as a field was generated and the energy built to such a degree that she was able to enter the dream. She was no longer talking about the dream at this point, but rather, she was literally speaking from within the dream. She was

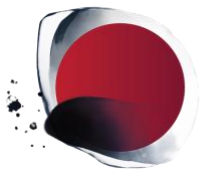


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now in a field of process locators, and we tracked within this field and remained open to the more predominate and compelling objects. This turned out to be the experience of handling the "poop". We then worked to locate her and hold her within this experience while gently guiding her back to her experience within the body. What emerged was an acute sensation in her lower left abdomen, precisely where she was operated on for the removal of the cancer in her colon. By moving back and forth between this intrapsychic experience and the sensations in the body, another field began to open. This was an association from early childhood of the basement in an apartment building where she lived with her grandmother. We then began to track within this field and memories of her mother, who was absent from her life for much of her childhood, came to the fore. The locator then became the image of her mother. At this point, Mary was clearly fatigued.

and was having trouble holding the tension. Images were flooding her consciousness and there were several opportunities for her discomfort to open to tears. Her body was fidgety as I continued to remind her of my presence. However, something deeper was calling to her, demanding her away. We remained in dialogue, and she kept returning to the locator, now the image of her mother's face.

Then the temperature began to change in the room and a greater density was apparent. There was a quickening of the inter-subjective field and clearly there was something beating the ethers. A dark winged creature was seeking release. Fear set in, so we worked to back her off from this field by overlapping this experience back into her body. Grounded in the moment and conscious of her presence within the office, she was able to calm her mind though the sensations within her body had increased to the level of pain. When she was ready, she returned to this intrapsychic field and to the black pulsating wings of a clawing, crow-like figure. It was struggling for release, yet seemed to



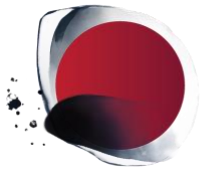
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be transfixed on a carcass, like a vulture on a roadkill, too greedy to leave its meal despite the lights of an oncoming car. By maintaining her location in relationship to this object back to her experience in the body she began a dialogue with this creature. As she did so, another field opened, and she realized that she was witnessing the devastating impact that her Aunt had on her as a young child. Another whole internal drama began to unfold. She stayed with this for a while and then she began to cry and finally to wind her way back into her body and back into the room. We sat together as she wept . . . soft and silent . . . child tears. Something dark flew from the room. We both heard it and smiled. Our work this day was complete. We would talk about it tomorrow ...but for now it was time for her to rest.

Perhaps this approach to working with the dream has in it some of the elements of active imagination as defined by Dallett as "dialogue with the gods" (Dallett, 1982, p.174). I don't know, I may prefer to think of it as dancing with the gods.

As best I can summarize the understanding that came out of these early months of our work would be that, cancer, and its manifestation in the body, for Mary, came because of failed rites of passage. Mary, the Initiate, became lost in the Ritual. Life circumstances caused her to break from the familiar and to enter the underworld, unguided and without consciousness. Within a matter of years ritual and daily life began to merge into an obscured playground where the Gods and Goddesses danced. The result was a loss of boundaries between the sacred and the profane. Our way of working together then became a process through which we attempted to re-establish, define, and maintain, Sacred Ground. We worked to protect and delineate boundaries between the everyday and the archetypal realms. Because conscious awareness was not, up to the point in her life where she sought therapy, brought to the impinging archetypal energies; Mary's body had taken on the function of the liminal phase of initiation. Those devouring archetypal aspects of psyche which run rampant in the unconscious had moved into the realm of Soma and





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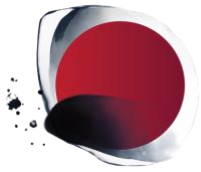
attempted to unfold their karmic drama in matter. Healing began by demarcation of these aspects of Being where elements of the archetypes are carried out in the unconscious and matters of ego are carried out in consciousness. In short, the daily world this initiate had to be protected through bringing conscious awareness to the archetypal energy which had manifested unconsciously in the body.

The healer was faced with several questions; **"Is it possible that disease is a manifestation of failed passage and that the resultant images and experience, because they are not integrated on an intrapsychic level, seek completion in the body"**? Does the healer then become the one who facilitates a process to re-establish the boundaries of the sacred realm within which ego and unconscious can be differentiated? Can the healer share the internal experience of the client in such a way as to free the archetypes from their entrapment in the body? If we neglect the realms of the archetypes, the collective unconscious, are we not left in disharmony? And if we actively value the archetypes and open consciously to their message, can we not then initiate a way of healing?

It seems, for Mary, that a collapse occurred in psyche where body, mind, and spirit melted into the course of her daily life. The years of her therapeutic work have been a process of sorting out the "mess" and relegating questions of spirit to the realm of the spirit, concerns of daily life to the realm of the mundane, issues of mind to mind and matters of body to the body.

One day she came to my office to share a poem. She tells me that she has carried it with her, in her handbag, for much of her life. It reads:

Soul of sweet delight never can be defiled,  
Young enough to seek  
Old enough to find  
Wise enough to put back

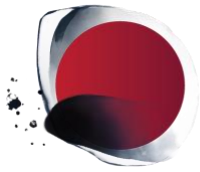


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We worked with this poem for several sessions. It became clear to her that she had indeed felt defiled. Given the unending trauma in her life, her reliance on a willful and repressive mode for survival, she was able to continually seek, and in fact did find. However, she realized that she lacked the wisdom to put back. Repression surfaced as her singular methodology for survival. Through her deep desire to seek she continually opened her psyche to the archetypal. "What do you expect of me anyway", she asked at one point in our work. "Whatever it is I am not going to do what is expected". "I had, as a child, to swallow something that I didn't like. It was their opinion of me which I knew was wrong. To be acknowledged, I let it lie there. I know where the cancer came from, my defenses!" She imagined the cancer to be the manifestation of all that should have been put back. "All that pain and rage and nowhere to go with it. It has been devouring me", is what she said. Our work then became clear. Her way of healing was to instill a process, a Way, of putting back.

Today, so close to death, Mary has moved back into symbolic time. She speaks, word's coherent, in sentences that leave out an object. Her words encircle the object of her awareness yet leave the space empty. It is as though she is aware of and able to describe her experience of her desire within her body, yet she is unable to describe the object of her experience. She attempts to report back to the listener her internal experience yet is unable to describe it fully and she is only understood by the listener intuitively.

I enter her room, the home office of her husband, which has recently been converted to her healing room, a room that is soon to become her "death house". The hospital bed is in the corner piled high with pillows and Mary is reclined back amongst them, buried in the soft scented fluff in an attempt to comfort her pain. There is a fire burning in the fireplace. Always burning, day and night.



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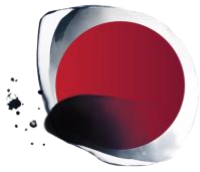
To sit by the hearth is to take up a position in the interior spiritual centre. The hearth has always been an omphalos, a sacred centre, the place of transference of the spirit by fire; it is the inner world of the soul's experience. It is a place of communication with the dead, as the hearthstone covers the entrance to the underworld and is also a place of safety from spirits wandering outside at night. In Celtic rites the cult of the dead centered on the hearth. In Scotland, so significant was the hearth as the centre that no tenant could be evicted before the fire was extinguished. (Cooper, 1983, p. 25)

The therapeutic container has now changed. No longer do Mary and I meet in my office. I sit with her at the side of her bed and pray mostly. I would guess it would be called prayer. However, I am inclined to say that we now have continued our relating more directly, we now dream together. Images replace words yet still the work is the same. . . find the heart connection and deepen it. Yet now there is little interpretation, little guiding. Mostly my responses to her are designed to keep her moving in a process of letting go. She suffers when she tries to hold on and is clearly in pain when she attempts to resist what is happening in the moment.

What do you do when you are working with someone who is dying? How far do you go? How far can you go? The following are notes taken directly as I sat at her bedside.

She surfaced for a moment and said, " The outstanding will pass." She then drifted off and I wrote:

She is struggling gently on the edge. Eyes closed, head jerking backwards. Something is demanding her away. She rests and I sit, silent, listening to the sounds of life in the distance. The maid is vacuuming, a daughter keeps above it all, her pain, chattering loudly in the kitchen. I think the most striking element of the patient's experience is that their external world shrinks to include only their most



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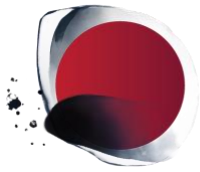
immediate surroundings. The crunching sound of clean crisp sheets, the experience of the body as it shifts to alleviate pain. The whispering voices of the nurses and family press in upon her reality as her outside world slowly, yet steadily, diminishes. (October, 1989).

It was now from within this contracted world that Mary would speak.

Closed off to our "living reality" she was opening to a far greater existence. I would sit with her for one hour each day and simply wait for any contact. In addition, I worked with family members and nursing staff to educate them as to the environmental conditions that would facilitate Mary's dying process. I stressed above all other considerations that Mary, when apparently unconscious, must be treated as though she were fully coherent yet was simply unable to communicate. For indeed she was developing a psychic capacity. When she would communicate or report back, it was quite remarkable. It was as though she were bringing back messages from "the other side". Mary: "Should I put something... back?" Healer: "Yes, when you are ready." Mary: "Maybe... He... will come and join me." Healer: "Who?" Mary: "Love."

Each day, right up until her death, she delivered messages that left the listener humbled. Mary: "We work experimentally... He works by himself. Your work depends on someone else, you know, for its life source. . . By the way, you know that when you were twelve to sixteen, you were a dreadful child. The beautiful thing is that you took responsibility, and it is paying off now"

Otc18,1989: Mary: " Getting better. Can open. Food. Can taste food. Something else. Big spread of food. Party almost. Lots of different things. I can have them all. Today, yesterday, thinking of having a baby. Heavy fecundity, that could help. get rid of this lousy stuff (Cancer)." She drifts into a deep place as though she is searching for an answer. Minutes pass and with a start she says "not the food outside but the food that is



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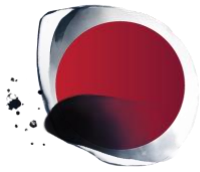
inside... food inside my soul.”

October 23, 1989: I am working with Mary to continue a process which we talk about as going to the deepest level of healing. She is more coherent today. "Food inside. I missed a whole many years without eating. The food with the flaws in not the one. Should be crisp as well as chewy, not soft. I robbed myself of food. Not the right way. Today around my heart...a space. I must cross apart that was empty. I was willing to have all kinds of things, anything, so that I didn't have to eat." She drifts off and when she returns says, "Would you grant me that I can live here in the heart, that I may be healed?"

As she goes off again, I drift into a fantasy. I see a dark chest, a treasure chest, which she is trying to get into. She needs to get into. Just then she speaks, "I was with a chest just then. . . dishes with food on them". I sit amazed on one level, yet fully accepting on another, of the mystery of the dying process that she shares with me.

Mary died on November 19, 1989. I had left the island that day ostensibly to have my computer repaired. However, **I knew, we both knew that on some level our bond, which once protected her while she did her healing work, now held her back.** It was also clear to me that my work was complete. I had gone as far as I could go. The family was prepared, her husband was now the one she looked to in the quiet hours of the night. He would sit by her bed and gently guide her into letting go. For the past the days she had someone in the family by her side twenty-four hours a day. Silently they would sit, praying, completing any unfinished business, letting go.

The ferry was due back to port at ten thirty pm. At ten fifteen I was on deck and as I gazed at her house, which faced the harbor, I could see, not imaginally, but literally, a brilliant white light directly above her house. My conscious mind discounted this phenomenon with the most rational interpretations; late night construction crews, a light to guide the ferry on a foggy night. However, the night was clear and why would the light be



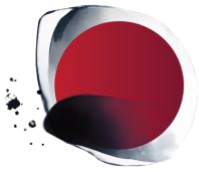
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directed up into the sky? My unconscious mind knew, and my body responded, first with waves of relief and then with a heavy grief, she was gone. I went home for a shower and went directly to the house. So certain was I that I didn't bother to call ahead. The family members were all there by Mary's bed weeping and saying goodbye. As I surveyed the room, I noticed that the fire in the hearth was out. One of the daughters told me that her breathing had stopped at ten-fifteen. For them she was dead. However, in my experience she had never seemed more alive. In the next hour, as we all grieved by her side, her open once gasping mouth, slowly closed into a most beautiful smile. She appeared to be in total bliss, what the Buddhists call deep Samadhi. It was as though she was hovering just outside of her body, silent, still, yet alert. It was now past twelve midnight and most of the family, exhausted, tried to sleep. Her husband and I sat with her body until the next morning's dawn. When I left around eight her presence was less noticeable. She was now going to a place beyond.

Mary held to the threads of her life with as much Will as she had energy to muster. Near the end her suffering became too great. It was time for her to let go. She knew this "I know... and I feel stuck. I don't want to die. I don't want to let go. I know I ... it is so difficult." I respond with, "It is o'k to let go." She cries, "you are killing me!" And I respond, "I am loving you and telling you that you must struggle. But make it a meaningful struggle. The task is to know when to struggle and when to let go."

One of her last communications to me went as follows: "Butterfly wings... it is so exciting; I make my entrance with the bugles blowing. You helped me so much. You walked with me... showed me the way home... You love her so much... you have always loved her. Butterfly wings...sit of deeper consciousness... membranes."

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**Note:**

*Tim,*

*One can only stand silently in reverence before this beautiful account. The gift that you gave her, that she gave you, continues to be given in your writing. I want a thousand others to read it. Perhaps they will someday —*

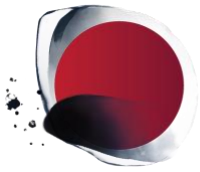
*The literary observer in me can't help but marvel over your metaphors, your images, which I noted were non-visual ("exhalation of the field", "I remain as a rondo", "something beating the ethers"). This lent them unusual force. Perhaps, in service to your subject, they did arise from the somatic unconscious, clothing themselves in a special language which would speak directly to the patient.*

*Thank you for this piece of your work and of yourself.*

*Dianne*

Image courtesy of: [len Jackson](#) [@glenjjackson](#)

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