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## Remembering a Quiet Place

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As I sat in the large, book-filled office, frightened yet somehow strangely comforted by the white-haired doctor sitting behind his desk, I had a sense that I had found a safe place. I was 10½ years old, too young to last much longer in my battle to try to figure out what was going on in my life, in my mind, in my family.

Fifty years ago, child therapists were not particularly common and school counselors were not as available as they are now. Consequently, I spent considerable time in my family physician's office and the principal's office, since I was refusing to learn anything, despite the fact that the tests I was given indicated that I should be performing on a much higher level. I will never know whether it was these school officials or our personal physician who prevailed upon my parents for me to see a child psychiatrist, but one day I found myself walking up the stairs of a brownstone, on the Upper East Side of Manhattan, with my father. My father, a self-made man who had achieved a comfortable middle-class life with a home in the rural northeast Bronx, was quietly angry at his failure to control this second son of his who was causing him such embarrassment.

I cannot remember my psychiatrist's face, but I know it was kind

and interested in me. I recall his buying me a magic set and that we talked and talked and played some games together—on equal ground between us. And slowly, as each Sunday morning session came and went, I began to sense that I did not have to learn other people's answers to school questions before I had figured out what was going on in me. I was finding out that it was okay for me to be me; I was finding out that I could talk to someone about my father's constant puzzling demands, my older brother's special place, and my mother's distracted attentions, and I would be listened to and not reprimanded. Something positive occurred since ever so slowly the capacity to learn, which had eluded me so far and caused me such embarrassment with my peers, was showing itself. But as it became obvious that my therapy was progressing my father announced that he could no longer afford the twenty-dollar weekly fee and, since I seemed better, I would have to stop. I can still feel my bewilderment and grief at this fiat decision. I retreated. Angrily. I believe I had seen my white-haired doctor for about eight or nine months. I cannot remember our last session. It must have been locked away in a timeless place.

Twenty-five years later I would establish my own psychoanalytic office on the Upper East Side of New York. Was I, perhaps, looking for my old friend as I walked those streets, studied the brownstones, and caught sight of the libraries behind the bay windows? Those twenty-five years were turbulent, painful, enlightening, and fulfilling—ending with my being married, having two life-giving children, and graduating from a psychoanalytic institute. Why I became a psychoanalyst is hidden in the recesses of those years and the childhood that preceded them. But, aware of the inevitable distortions that accompany such a task, I will try to rescue some of those reasons and bring them to light.

If we cannot love the world, we cannot learn from it and we have no place to stand. I was unable to learn because as a child I had too much anger and confusion in me, as well as a yearning to find a place from which to take my first steps into a personal history. What I have come to understand, paradoxically, is that to learn the most is to stand nowhere, so to speak, neither in the past nor the future. As for the present, it is always slipping by us anyway. So if I can stand nowhere

for a while, I hope I can tell about my still ongoing journey, tell of events that have given me one view rather than another. I will try to do this without the intimidation of a conscious history, of a linear chronology that might make more conscious sense but that ultimately belies the truth of a life. T. S. Eliot is correct, I believe, when he muses that both past and future are rooted in the now, that time is simultaneous. If we know the past, we know the future, most dramatically in the sense that to know of our birth is to know of our death, and more modestly that to know of our past struggles is to know of our future goals. Analysis taught me that. As my deciphering goes on, I continue to find myself around this becoming a psychoanalyst.

The past, as we know, does not exist, except as it lives again in our different readings of it. So we are seemingly lost, but not quite. Despite what I have just said about a conscious chronology, let me recount a few events while recognizing that their meaning is constantly changing. By the time I was 13, building on the help given to me by my psychiatrist and a special reading teacher, I decided to make friends with the world. So I finally learned to read and tell time. I read everything I could, starting with Homer and the classics, with Freud's (1905) "Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality" thrown in by age 17. During my adolescence, the turbulence in my household continued with my mother, whose depression finally found intermittent and prolonged expression. This period of her life lasted for four years; my sense of having a safe and quiet ground out of which to grow was again undermined. As her depression progressed, love, grief, rescue fantasies, and anger danced ominously in my soul. Fortunately, a series of supportive organizations and some electroshock treatments brought this period to a definitive close. It was not until after my first year of college, however, that, unrelieved of my emotional conflicts at home and within myself, I decided to flee to a Carmelite monastery, intent, somewhere inside me, on finding a new family.

For ten years I lived a semi-monastic life filled with study, friendship, and ideals into which I was to funnel my desires and ambitions. There was also the absence of sexuality in any form. During my last year of study in the seminary, I elected to see another psychiatrist, this time a pleasant, highly perceptive middle-aged man, whom I visited

once a week. During this treatment period, which lasted for about eight months, my growing discontent with monastic life came clearly to the fore. I eventually decided, not without a great deal of anguish, to leave this safe place and my close friends—just three weeks prior to my ordination to the Roman Catholic priesthood. I returned home, became a lay professor of religious studies at a local Catholic college, and within a year and a half met and married my wife.

Within three years of leaving the seminary, I was completing my studies for a doctorate in theology and psychology at Fordham University and had started my psychoanalytic training at an institute founded by Theodor Reik, the National Psychological Association for Psychoanalysis. I committed myself to this training with an energy that now bemuses me. While teaching a full schedule of college courses, increasingly with a focus on the psychoanalytic understanding of religious symbolism, I had a five-time-a-week analysis, took eight academic courses a year, and completed the requisite hours of supervision and control analysis. This took five years to complete. By 1970 I had completed eight years as a college teacher, all the required analytic training, and most of the courses for my doctorate. I left full-time teaching, with some reluctance, and found a new monastic cell, so to speak, a quiet office on the Upper East Side that I shared with a colleague, who soon became a friend.

These are just some of the facts, yet it is their trail of memories, fantasies, and needs that I have to unfold if I am to get closer to their meaning.

My search for a new “mother” church and a new “father” God found expression in my Carmelite decade. I had not been brought up overly religious and so my choice was fueled from many sources. Had I been ordained, it would have been my father who would have had to address me as “father”—not only an oedipal victory but a reversal of the humiliation and submission he had demanded of me as a child. Happily I had resolved enough, albeit waiting to the last minute to do so, not to stamp my life irrevocably with that fantasy. I had to choose an alternate route—I chose further understanding and hidden knowledge. Having achieved firm ground intellectually, I needed to do so emotionally.

Psychoanalysis, I hoped, would offer me not only a reversal of my childhood humiliations, but a broader intellectual terrain than my seminary training afforded. By becoming the one who knows, not only of the obvious but of the hidden, I would find the respect and the power that had eluded me in my childhood. But feeling respected is just another way of feeling real. I needed to feel real as much as I needed to keep faith with that little boy in that big, book-filled, psychiatric office. I needed to find him again, inside me, and continue his treatment—a treatment that my learning to read had attempted to continue, and did, to some extent, but necessarily left too many empty spaces that only another ear could fill. My early readings had brought me to Plato, Socrates, and the Greek classics, to the discovery, to my bewildered delight, that I was not alone in a foreign world. I had found friends, mind to mind, albeit two thousand years away, yet still present. It was this most obvious of discoveries, of what reading could bring, that spurred me on. That made me realize that I loved understanding other people as well as myself, that I loved the inner world as much as the outer, and that I had, quite fortunately, found a terrain I could travel on safely.

Although I have no clear understanding as to how this knowledge came so early in my life, I always knew that emotional pain could be a bridge to others, not just a personal prison with mirrors. I remember George, a classmate in my grammar school, who was, in all likelihood, autistic. He would stand alone in the school playground just watching the other children, almost always silent. I remember standing by him, telling him that it was OK, that other people were afraid also. He would look at me and let me know, with his eyes, that he heard me. Did I sense, then, that I would have to help another to help myself? Was that a private fantasy, or a preconscious awareness of our human interconnectedness? And if I follow D. W. Winnicott's thoughts today, in my practice, have I simply found a corollary intellectual model to Freud, or have I remembered both being injured and seeing injuring before my eyes?

With this history behind me, I was both ready and surprised to hear about psychoanalytic training that was available for those who had not taken the medical route, when a close friend of my wife came

to visit, a graduate of New York Psychoanalytic Institute. I knew, despite all the work I had done with my second psychiatrist, that I was still curious about my ten-year seminary stay, about my capacity to have sublimated my sexuality, and about my growing alienation from organized religion. Such sublimation, I was convinced, had its roots in more than oedipal soil—I had had to put my self together. I knew that although I was happily married, the task of self consolidation was still in its beginning stages. The promise of an analysis was a powerful lure; I had had enough therapy to know that I needed a sounding place. Having re-created myself from the superego down in my seminary years, I needed to put my hand to the same task and try it from the id up, so to speak. I needed to find my ambition(s) and my anger, my yearnings and my competence, if I was ever to complete this task of self-ness.

It was also true that these, as well as other, motives were brewing beneath my conscious desire to be of help to others, to find myself through that activity. As a college professor, a profession I truly loved, my income was modest and very frustrating; as a psychoanalyst in private practice these constraints could be removed and I could show my competence in the only way my family could recognize. My mind also echoed with my father's constant advice: that one should work for oneself—just as he did.

And so I became a midwife of memories, fantasies, and desires, my own and those with whom I worked. In the gathering of days that has marked my twenty-five years of practice, I have done some foolish things as well as some helpful things. My own analysis was enormously helpful in my finding my voice and my name, but it left some unaddressed issues as well, issues that have echoed back to me in my work with patients and that I have had to address, address in a quiet way, similar to how I try to work with patients—self-forgetful when possible, speaking whatever insights the moment brings. And I have wondered, at times, Are we analysts voyeurs of ourselves? Have we had a growing appreciation of narcissism as we have been slowly able to hear ourselves with our patients?

I still wonder about my being a psychoanalyst, whether or not it was a necessary path I deluded myself into thinking I had chosen freely.

And about the cure we provide, which, of course, is no cure at all. "If we are merely sane we are poor indeed" (p. 150), D. W. Winnicott (1958) would write, as he hoped to enable people to achieve personal aliveness rather than the given-ness of existence. Is that what I do, help aliveness? My own as well as others? Who are these others, anyway, if not ourselves?

These are my thoughts when I think about my becoming a psychoanalyst. I have other thoughts as well, and as my life goes on I will, I hope, come to know them.

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