Family Constellations

In one scenario, I joined a workshop with over 20 participants. We sat in a circle. I will use random example with a person I will call Jane. She explained some trauma or family issue she was trying to work out or understand. In her case it was chronic pain. She wanted to understand where it was coming from. She told the story of her family. Her mother was a very active solid woman and her father had no major trauma to report except that he had been in World War II in Okinawa. Jane knew nothing of his experience there. In the constellation, the facilitator picked a few people to represent Jane’s pain, her spirit and her self. Three representatives stood up not speaking unless asked. None knew which part of Jane each played. Instead, they each just moved around, moaned, or spoke when asked to by the facilitator. One person stood to the side and continued tapping her fingers in an agitating way. When the papers were revealed who was representing who, this woman was Jane’s pain.

The representatives fascinated me. They said they were doing nothing. Some other energy was working through them. I asked the facilitator, “What if the representative feels nothing? Can they step out?”

“Yes they can, but usually I do that to verify whatever is coming up is accurate.”

The facilitator knew I was interested but afraid to represent in case I felt nothing. I never acted and do not like to. I felt these people were pretending, and I could not do that.

As the story progressed, the facilitator pulled out a person to represent Jane’s father and mother. Jane’s father always remained very close to Jane. The mother was off to the side doing her own thing. At one point the father approached her and the facilitator asked them to speak. The father said, “I need you. I need to talk to you about my experiences in Okinawa.”

The mother replied, “I can’t. It is too much. I can’t be there for you.”

The father then gravitated to his daughter, Jane.

The facilitator then asked someone to represent the soldiers who had raped many women in Okinawa. A woman got up to represent this part of the story of Okinawa. Shortly after, the facilitator looked at me and said, “I want you to get up and represent. You can sit down if you don’t like it. But I would like you to represent all of the women who were raped in Okinawa.”

I was happy to try it as she gave me the freedom to step out, but what a role to represent- all of the women who had been raped? I stood up in the center of the group and felt heat rise up my back. I was staring at the ground and my eyes filled with tears. I started to sob. I knew it was real and something was working through me, because I do not act. This came out of me from somewhere. I could not lift my head. I felt great shame.

The facilitator asked me to look up. I said, “I can’t.”

She then said, “How do you feel?”

“I feel hot.”

“I would like you to look at this person- she represents all the soldiers who raped you.”

“I can’t look up,” I said again.

“Ok,” and she walked over to the woman who represented the soldiers and said, “I want you to apologize. Say I am sorry I raped you. I did not know what I was doing. I was just doing what everyone told me to do.”

The representative of the soldiers said, “I am sorry. I did not know what I was doing. I just did what I was told.” I suddenly felt the heat dissipate from my body and I could slowly lift my head. I watched the representative take slow steps towards me. She reached my side and curled into a ball at my feet. I watched her do this but felt no change.

The facilitator then approached me and said, “What do you feel now?”

“I didn’t need that,” I replied as I motioned to her curled in a ball at my feet. “I needed her to apologize.”

The facilitator sighed and said, “Yes, she needed that. You needed to be seen and heard.” I felt great relief in having someone acknowledge my pain and grief. I heard others around me say that as I cried they saw my grief. I needed to see and feel and hear that.

Jane’s mother sat off in the distance and the father was close to his daughter.  It became clear that the daughter was holding a space for his suffering.  The mother could not.

This constellation echoed my own life, which often happens in constellations. Someone else’s story may resonate with something

you need in your life. I had recently been in a situation where I was unable to fully be myself and feel supported as such. I had to make changes rather than find that support in unhealthy ways as this father was unknowingly doing with his daughter. Only by letting go could I access what I truly needed in life without harming those around me. I needed to live my truth and freedom.  That was clear in this session.