

CENT PAPER NUMBER TEN:

The Story of Relationship: Or coming to terms with my mother (and father)

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“Whoever inquires about our childhood wants to know something about our soul. If the question is not just a rhetorical one and the questioner has the patience to listen, (s)he will come to realize that we love with horror and hate with an inexplicable love whatever caused us our greatest pain and difficulty”.

Erika Burkart, quoted in Miller (1983)¹

1. Preamble

In an earlier paper, I mentioned that I had a partial Freudian analysis at the age of 22 years. It was incomplete because I could not act upon my analyst’s advice:

‘My analyst (had) announced my challenge at the final session we had together: “You need to examine your relationship with your mother in particular”. This was where the analysis failed. Why? Because I had no ‘schema’, or map, definition, or any other ‘handle’ on the concept of “relationship”. I had no awareness of having something called “a relationship with my mother”. I had no idea what it could possibly mean to “examine” something called “a relationship”.’ (CENT Paper No.4²)

My mother and I were never close – and the situation with my father was no different. All of my subsequent relationships with women were affected by this central fact of my early life: Just as my relationships with men were affected by my poor bond with my father. In Cognitive Emotive Narrative Therapy (CENT) we maintain, in harmony with Freudian psychoanalysis and the Object Relations School, that the earliest family relationships form the non-conscious, mental templates for all subsequent relationships; and

¹ Miller, A. (1983) *For Your Own Good: Hidden cruelty in child-rearing and the roots of violence*. London: Faber and Faber.

² Byrne, J. (2009d) A journey through models of mind. The story of my personal origins. CENT Paper No.4. Hebden Bridge: The Institute for CENT Studies. Available online: <http://www.abc-counselling.com/id166.html>

that problems in those earliest family relationships need to be corrected as we proceed through life, if we are to achieve reasonable relationships with others. We also maintain that human beings are essentially emotional beings, and that our reason and thinking skills are overlaid upon a bed of emotional wiring. Thus our earliest emotional experiences are formative, and set certain limits to what can be done, thought and felt in later life: unless and until we digest those experiences, drain them of their emotive charge, and file them away in inactive stores in background memory.

There is, of course, a deeper level to human existence, which is explored in various spiritual traditions, and that is our relationship to *everything that is*: to infinity, to eternity, to the absolute of which each individual thing is a small part. To exist as an isolated consciousness is a problem for each individual, and I will try to look at that aspect of human existence at the end of this paper.

However, in this paper I mainly want to apply some of the ideas of psychoanalysis and Object Relations, in a CENT format, to try to resolve my problems with my mother in particular. (I will also necessarily have to include some consideration of my relations with my father). In the process I will be illustrating how seriously CENT takes early childhood experience, which is quite different from CBT and REBT.

The central tenet of Freudian psychoanalysis is that repression of traumatic experiences is at the root of all neurotic disturbances. Given that I had some significant disturbance in my ability to relate to others over the first three decades of my life, I need to ask myself: *Did I have some traumatic experiences which I then repressed, which account for how I was in relationships?* (My ability to relate to others is much improved in recent decades, but may still benefit from completing this work of analysis of my relationship with my mother [and to some extent with my father]). So in this paper I will be looking for evidence of *repression of disturbed experiences* to do with my mother [and father] in the first few years of my life.

Freud (1910/1962)³ said:

“Since these repressions belong to the very early years of childhood, the work of analysis leads us, too, back to that period. Our path to these situations of conflict, which have for the most part been forgotten and which we try to revive in

³ Freud, S. (1910/1962) *Two Short Accounts of Psycho-Analysis*. Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books. Page 116.

the (client's) memory, is pointed out to us through (his/her) symptoms, dreams and free associations".

What is sought is to make some repressed experience conscious, and then to **complete** our experience of it; to resist the temptation to push it away; to simply allow it to be; and to accept that that was how it was, no matter how unpleasant that reality might have been. Why would we do this? Because of the belief that once we have 'completed an experience', it goes into the background of life, and ceases to have a strong emotive charge. And to 'complete' it means to allow it to be; to accept that it exists; to accept that it happened; to embrace it, despite its painfulness; and to chew through it, digest it, and thus to 'draw its sting'.

One of the main ways we do this in CENT is to get the client to tell their story, in writing or verbally – whether that be a story of relationship; or about their origins; or about some life transition; about their career; and so on – and to face up to the buried bits of the story, to try to unearth them, to digest them, and thus to allow them to be: meaning to be **accepted** as former realities, which will draw their sting, and then allow them to go into the background of life, and not to keep rattling away in the 'basement of their mind', throwing up neurotic symptom after neurotic symptom.

As Freud (1910/1962) said:

"By encouraging the (client) to disregard his resistance to telling us these things, we are educating (his/her) ego to overcome its inclination towards attempts at flight (or denial, or repression) and to tolerate an approach to what is repressed. In the end, if the situation of the repression can be successfully reproduced in (his/her) memory, (his/her) compliance will be brilliantly rewarded (with a relief from symptoms – JB). The whole difference between (his/her) age then and now works in (his/her) favour; and the thing from which (his/her) childish ego fled in terror will often seem to (his/her) adult and strengthened ego no more than child's play". Page 116.

In other words, we will come to recognize that we can accept and tolerate whatever happened, which has been unconscious until this time; we can come to see that it was not totally unbearable, though we ran from it at the time it occurred; and we may come to be more accepting of ourselves, others and the world as a result of our conscious reviewing process. But this process is as much *emotive (or about feelings)* as it is *cognitive* (or about our thinking and reasoning). We have to **feel** *what we originally refused to feel*; to

face up to strong negative emotions (like grief or anger or terror); to embrace them; and then to allow them to take up their rightful (de-charged, or discharged) place in the background of our lives. This 'moving into the background' is an *automatic process* which occurs once the emotional charge has been withdrawn from the former experience. And the emotional charge is withdrawn by fully experiencing the emotions that we refused to feel all those years ago.

The rule then is this: tell your story in detail, omitting nothing, whether it be disagreeable or banal, apparently unimportant or senseless. (Freud, 1910/1962, page 131). Feel whatever feelings come up. Do not resist anything that becomes conscious. And that is what I must do in this paper about my relationship with my mother (and father).

Freud argued that nobody can understand psycho-analysis unless they undertake their own analysis. (Freud, 1910/1962, page 109). That kind of analysis used to be called 'self-analysis', but was later renamed 'a training analysis', as this was the form of training that a potential psycho-analyst had to undertake in order to know how to analyze another person. So far I have undertaken one training analysis, in CENT Paper No.4.⁴ In this current paper, I will attempt a more central 'training analysis': digging up the early history of my relationship with my mother (and father), to see what can be found and resolved that might enhance the quality of my psychological functioning in the present moment. (Of course, I have an even more important ulterior motive here. And that is to *develop ways of working* that can be used by the readers of this account – and to allow the reader to see what *emotional honesty* is, in practice).

2. Introduction

It is just a short while since I completed CENT Paper No.9, in which I explored the nature of "the individual" and its social roots. When I had finished it, I passed it to my wife, Renata, to read. We sat in our living room, on separate armchairs. As she was reading it, I got in touch with some grief about my mother. I had never been able to feel anything for or against my mother. (This is only true because my memories of my mother do not stretch back into the first seven years of my life!) She seemed (in my later memories) to be a matter of complete indifference to me: A 'quite strong' indifference; which is clearly a contradiction in terms.

⁴ Byrne, J. (2009d) A journey through models of mind. The story of my personal origins. CENT Paper No.4. Hebden Bridge: The Institute for CENT Studies. Available online: <http://www.abc-counselling.com/id166.html>.

But now here I was gently sobbing, right down in my guts. Fat tears running down my cheeks. It lasted for a couple of minutes only, but that was at least something: in fact a major breakthrough in contacting some emotion about her – about Maureen, which is how I normally think of her. Always Maureen: never Mum, or Mammy, or Mother.

The day I left home, at the age of 18 years, never to return⁵, my mother went out 'to get her hair done' (which she had never done before!), and was not present when I left. My father had gone to work, or somewhere. None of my siblings approached me, nor I them. I said goodbye to nobody, and nobody said goodbye to me. I went to the railway station on my own, and on to the seaport, and on to the boat to England. Nobody waved; nobody spoke; nobody was present. I went alone; a kind of aloneness that had hung around me, like a shroud, for as long as I could recall.

During that night, as I lay on the deck of the boat, looking up at the stars, I cried. I had no idea why. No thoughts or ideas came into my mind. I cried in much the way a cat might cry when it has a sore paw. We do not infer any conscious thoughts to the injured cat; nor do I to this injured 'me' lying on the foredeck, looking skyward.

Now, here in Hebden Bridge, 45 years later, I sit in my armchair, recalling that time. The day before I left home I was woken – from non-consciousness – by my parents' voices. They were at the bottom of the staircase. I was at the top, inside my bedroom, lying on my bed. It was mid-afternoon.

"He's crying up there", said my father, in a loud whisper of concern.

That surprised me. I had not realized I was crying.

"He's not crying for us", hissed my mother in acid tones. "He's crying about some girl he met".

I had met a girl, from work, on my final day of work there. And I'd delayed my departure for England so I could see her again, and again. But was that why I was crying? I did not know. And I did not know how to find out. That was that. I went back to non-consciousness.

⁵ (Apart from a brief stay [of one week] some four years later; and then for a few weeks some five years after my original departure [when my mother had already left my father and moved away, becoming uncontactable]).

Back in Hebden Bridge, in January 2010, Renata looked up from my paper on the social roots of the individual to see how I was. She could see I was grieving, and she asked me what had 'come up'. I told her as best I could:

I had suddenly had a shocking realization. I realized that I had never related to my mother as 'a fellow human being', with her own life and her own goals; her own feelings. I seem to have related to her as something like 'an imperfect institution'; a 'bad environmental component' which had let me down, in some vague, undefined kind of way.

Having written Paper No.9, I now understood what "an I" is; but I still did not fully grasp what "a mum", or "a mother", is. I therefore decided to explore that question as part of my 'Story of Relationship'. So far, I have identified three elements of my proposed journey:

1. Part of my journey will involve a review of Margaret Mahler's book on the psychological birth of the human infant - (Mahler et al 1975/1987)⁶ - to find insights into the process of separation and individuation in young children, and how their relationships with their mothers play out in those dramas. Between 1959 and 1968, Mahler and her colleagues studied 38 children and their 22 mothers, at a specially designed research centre in New York City. The children were aged from soon after birth up to about four years. In addition to their broader study, Mahler and her colleagues also presented case studies of 'five typical children'; and one of those in particular (a boy called Bruce) triggered off some emotional memories, and intuitive hunches in me, regarding some aspects of my relationship with my mother.⁷ I will use that material to try to reconstruct some aspects of the probable dynamics of my early relationship with my mother.

2. Part of my journey will involve 'writing therapy'⁸, to unearth ideas, thoughts, and connections, relevant to my relationship with

⁶ Mahler, M.S., Pine, F. and Bergman, A. (1975/1987) *The Psychological Birth of the Human Infant: Symbiosis and individuation*. London: Maresfield Library

⁷ (I don't have many clear memories of my childhood. Repressed out of conscious awareness?).

⁸ Bolton, G., Howlett, S., Lago, C. and Wright, J.K. (eds.) (2004) *Writing Cures: an introductory handbook of writing in counselling and therapy*. Hove, East Sussex: Brunner-Routledge. And:

my mother. This will include any relevant dreams or associations of ideas, memories, reflections, and so on.

3. And part of my journey will be audio recorded 'chair work' – based on the Gestalt Therapy method of getting personality elements of the individual client to converse with each other in present time. I want to "talk to my mother" (who has now deceased), as if she were present, and to try to resolve any remaining tensions between us.

4. The data, or narratives, that come out of these three approaches to my researches, will be woven together, as best I can, to produce a new narrative about my relationship with my mother, and how it affected my subsequent life. Much of this work may be done using the Five Windows Model of CENT counselling.

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### **3. Earlier attempts to complete my relationship with my mother**

I left home in 1964, and managed to cope reasonably well with my relations with others, in a kind of remote, autistic manner. I could not be said to have a fully engaged style of relating; or even to engage to any significant extent; and I did not have any intimate friends. I was a loner, on the sidelines of life. Not isolated, in that I went dancing every Saturday evening, danced with girls, had a few drinks with some lads who I met; and so on. This did not involve much conversation, just greetings and farewells, and occasional, minimal small talk. But nobody 'knew me', nor I them.

My attempt to hold some formal, cool relationships (or acquaintanceships) together finally fell apart in early 1968, when I was just 21 years old, or almost 22, and I got into an embarrassing public conflict – a major public humiliation - which I could not avoid, and became overly stressed about it. I could not process the experience, which restimulated my ten years of rejection in school for being a 'rotten Culchie' – a country boy in a city school. I went into a formal Freudian analysis, combined with relaxation therapy, music therapy and some other protocols, to try to process the experience and get some relief. I was eventually told that I needed to examine my relationship with my mother, and in that year I saw my mother and father briefly. My mother prepared a meal, and my

father and she and I sat down together to eat it. At the end of the meal, I put the market value of the meal on the table, and left. I must have been as cold as a fish with them. I did not see my mother again until about 1986 – a gap of 18 years. I saw my father occasionally when I was back in Dublin for a while in 1969, but we were cool and distant with each other; and I did not see him again until about 1983, when he was close to death.

My Chilean friends in Bangladesh – Carla and José Burquez – introduced me to some ideas from person centred counselling, and meditation, in 1977, but that did not bring up anything about my mother. At one point, José said “You must have very nice parents”. I was shocked at this absurd idea. “Why do you say that?” I asked, in horror. “Well, because you’re such a nice person”, he replied. “Is that how it works?” I asked. “Yes”, he replied. “We become like our parents!” I could not image a less likely eventuality at that stage in my development – when I was 31 years old – than that I might be, or become, anything like my parents.

In 1980 I met Renata, and she introduced me to Zen Buddhist meditation. In 1982, when she was training as a Gestalt therapist, she introduced me to some Gestalt exercises which are designed to help individuals to express their anger towards their parents. This involves punching a cushion. Well, that’s how it began, but I could not hit “my father” (cushion) hard enough with my fists, so I took to putting a large Indian cushion on the floor, by the skirting boards, and kicking and kicking and kicking, while crying and sobbing and feeling like I was going to die. I was so full of anger and hatred towards that man. That man who had beaten me with his belt. And intimidated me, and terrorized me. He never comforted me when I was distressed or disturbed. And he failed to model being a big, strong, courageous, moral man.

But I could not feel anything for my mother. The cushion lay on the floor, and I did not feel anything for it. I did not want to hit it, or touch it, or embrace it. I was indifferent towards my mother.

In 1984, Renata and I went through marriage guidance, to help with conflict in our relationship. When our relationship was good, it was very good, and then I would flip moods, and become angry, critical and controlling. I would not be much fun to be around. And it was hard to get out of those moods. The marriage guidance helped because it taught me about ‘ego states’ – or ways of being – which included thinking, feeling and behaving like a Parent, or an Adult, or a Child. Our counsellor’s analysis was that I was too high on Critical Parent and Renata was too high on Free Child. I took that analysis on board and set about changing myself. (But nothing

came up about my mother during the formal marriage guidance sessions).

Immediately after our marriage guidance counselling ended, I went into some training with Werner Erhard and Associates, the creators of 'est', or Erhard Seminar Training. In particular I took some 'encounter training', and some training in communications skills and relationships training. The *Communications Workshop* had a profoundly transforming effect on my way of being. It was like a rebirth. I felt like a new person. One of the profoundest of my insights was the way in which we humans "create each other" in our perceptual constructions. And how we can change those "creations", by changing our former interpretations.

During the est training, I was encouraged to 'clean up my relationships', and in particular, to write to my mum and dad to thank them for everything they had done for me. This was based on Erhard's idea that "You have to create for your parents the experience that they made it as your parents. That at least in their role as parents they had succeeded; that they had done that!" And this had a profound effect on my parents, and on our capacity to get along. My mother in particular treasured the letter in which I had thanked her for giving me life, for feeding me and clothing me, and a few other things. I opened quite a lot towards her, and was able to comfort her on one visit to Dublin when she was very distressed, but I was still unwilling to keep in touch with her. She phoned me once to ask why I don't phone her one month, and she would phone me the next. I was uninterested!

Then my dad died, in about 1983. I had not seen him since 1969, when I got the call that he was unwell, hospitalized, and near the end of his life. I went to see him and told him I loved him; hugged him; talked with him. A few weeks later I got the word that he was dying. I went to Dublin as quickly as I could, but he had already died. I saw his corpse at the funeral parlour, laid out in the coffin. I kissed him on the forehead, and was shocked to find that 'he has gone'. The body was a case, or what Erhard had called 'a body bag'. It was empty of 'Billy Byrne'. I helped to carry his coffin to the graveside. I was in tears. We buried him. I visited his grave several times. I was complete with him. It was all over with Billy Byrne. I loved him, and accepted him as he was, and forgave him for all the times he had hurt me.

I did not see my mother at my father's funeral. They had split up years earlier (in 1969). She was living with somebody else, and difficult to contact.

Renata and I went to Dublin in 1986, I think, and were able to see my mum. But it was not a very pleasant visit.

I continued to try to get in touch with some feelings for my mum, but failed. Eventually I decided that she had a malign influence on my psyche, and decided to do something about it. Renata and I had found a book by Phyllis Krystal<sup>9</sup>, on how to cut one's ties from former influences and negative conditioning. One of the exercises was a 'puberty rite', in which you cut the ties to your parents, if they are holding you back, to allow you to move forward as an independent individual. Krystal's approach and perception is quite spiritual, but I chose to treat the process as a secular, psychological process of visualization. Krystal writes:

"We ... explain that most problems stem from often unconscious reactions to early training, and we invariably start a person to work on these by helping him to release from his parents using what we loosely call 'puberty rites' or 'cutting the connecting cords'. Not only does this free him from unhealthy dependence, but also from the often negative programming by parents, which had still been active on a deep unconscious level, preventing him from knowing himself". (Page 13)

I did this 'cutting the ties' with both my mother and father, and then replaced them with new, fresh, 'visual archetypes', to carry in my mind in their place. As a result of this work, I felt very much better, psychologically, and I became a 'clearer', more stable, happier, more generous, compassionate and loving kind of individual. (Of course, I was also engaged in daily meditation, daily autogenic training [or reciting positive affirmations], listening to audio hypnosis programs [on self confidence, self esteem, self assertion, happiness, and so on], and working on trying to relate Adult-to-Adult in all of my relationships).

I was shocked today when I looked at the illustration on page 17 of Krystal (1986). It consists of two circles, one representing 'me', and one representing the parent to be separated from, which, in the first instance, was my mother. And the penny dropped. The *cutting the ties* process was a reversal – at deep, non-conscious levels – of the original intersecting circles which are at the foundation of the individual (including me), as shown in CENT Paper

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<sup>9</sup> Krystal, P. (1986) *Cutting the Ties that Bind: How to achieve liberation from false security and negative conditioning*. London: Sawbridge Enterprises Limited.

No.9<sup>10</sup>, Figures 5 to 8. It was a substantial undoing of the original colonisation of 'little me' by my mother and father.

Based on this review, it would seem I have already done the bulk of my therapeutic work on my mother (and my father). And yet...

#### **4. The psychological birth of the infant**

Margaret Mahler et al (1975/1987) distinguished between the *physical* birth of the new baby (neonate) and the *psychological* birth of the child, some months after birth. Before the psychological birth of the child, s/he (or 'it'?) is assumed to be in a state of symbiosis with the mother, feeling as though they are one unit. Their research observations and theorizing produced a new, four stage model of the process of separation between the infant and mother, and the individuation of the child, as follows:

"Briefly, then, we find four subphases of the separation-individuation process, as follows:

1. The *differentiation* subphase from 5 months on (with dawning awareness of separateness);
2. The major spurt in autonomy called the *practicing* subphase from 10 to 15 months (with attention directed to new motor achievements, seemingly to the near exclusion of mother at times);
3. The *rapprochement* subphase from 15 to 22 months (with renewed demand upon the mother, who is increasingly experienced as separate, and with continued growth of the autonomous ego apparatuses);
4. Progress toward the gradual attainment of libidinal (or 'love') *object constancy* (from 22 to 36 months)." During this subphase the (well adjusted) child internalizes a constant memory of the existence of the mother, and is happy to be separate from her for significant periods of time.

Earlier Mahler and her colleagues had argued that this separation-individuation process *is a crucial one* with regard to the development of the ego of the child, and his/her development of 'object relationship', which refers to the child's relations with significant others ('objects'), especially mother and, later, father:

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<sup>10</sup> Byrne, J. (2009i) The "Individual" and its Social Relationships - The CENT Perspective. CENT Paper No.9. Hebden Bridge: The Institute for CENT Studies. Available online: <http://www.abc-counselling.com/id185.html>

(Mahler, et al, pages 9-10). The achievement of autonomous separation from the mother is the drive that urges the child onwards through this phase, but the *rapprochement* subphase is about having their confidence knocked, and returning to mother with at least some temptation towards trying to restore the symbiotic phase; a return to unconsciousness; safety from the threats of the real world. They also argue that anxiety is the key emotion during this developmental phase: separation anxiety.

We then come to an idea which can begin to give me some purchase on what might have gone wrong with my development as a young child. Mahler et al say:

“It was hypothesized ... that in certain toddlers the maturational spurt of locomotor and other autonomous ego functions takes place concomitantly with a lag in emotional readiness to function separately from the mother and produces organismic panic, the mental content of which is not readily discernible because the child (still in the preverbal stage) cannot communicate ... . This panic never consolidates into an appropriate signal anxiety, but retains the character of acute or insidious organismic distress, with the child’s concomitant inability to utilize the ‘other’ (mother) as external organizer or auxiliary ego. This further arrests structuralization of the ego...” (Page 10).

I have an intuitive sense that something of this kind is what happened to me, and I have some factual evidence that seems to fit with this view. Mahler et al provide a little more detail which helps to firm up this idea:

“This view of intrapsychic events remains, of course, a hypothesis – especially in light of the preverbal nature of the phenomena which it is meant to explain. However, it seems to fit very well the observable clinical data – which are not hypothetical but descriptive – regarding loss of already achieved autonomous functions and a halt to subsequent development. This fragmentation may occur any time from the end of the first and in the course of the second year of life. It may follow a painful and unexpected trauma but often follows upon a seemingly minor event, such as a brief separation or a minor loss”. (Page 11).

So let me revisit what I know of my early family history, and check to see how it fits with this possibility.

My parents had an arranged marriage. My mother was just 17 years old, and my father was 34, when they got married. The gain was supposed to be that my mother would get economic salvation, and my father would get a home-maker and family life. In practice, my father's farm went bust, and his land was seized by the bank, when I was about 9 months old, and he had to go to work as an agricultural labourer for a sadistic landlord, who whipped him when he was unhappy with my father's work. We had to move into a 'haunted house' (which my parents sincerely believed to be the case – which must have terrified their superstitious minds) and it transpired love did not blossom between my mother and father (which sometimes does happen even in arranged marriages).

My older sister was born when my mother was 18.5 years old, and I came along when mother was just 20 years old. She told me I was 9lbs 10ozs birth-weight, and that I had a huge head. I apparently caused her so much pain she never forgave me. (Her words!<sup>11</sup>) When I was 15 months old, at the start of the rapprochement phase, my mother would have been six months pregnant with my first brother. When I was 18 months old, and still trying to achieve rapprochement with my mother, three things happened:

1. My older sister, who was now 3 years old, burned most of the flesh off my right hand, with a lighted newspaper; damaging my tendons, and three finger nails failed to grow back correctly. The pain must have been excruciating. And this must have produced an almost total loss of trust in my mother as my carer. If this could happen when I was 18 months old, how much other, perhaps less extreme, sadistic behaviour did my sister visit upon me, when my mother was not paying attention? During the 'practicing subphase', when I was 10 months to 15 months old, when I was supposed to be heady with delight at my new found freedom of crawling and toddling, how much of my fun and excitement was blighted by my sister's sadism? (I do not blame my sister, as she was just three years old, and had not reached the use of reason. She must have been very jealous of me. There was very little love going around, and I seemed to get most of it, as I was the 'new' babe-in-arms – a position she occupied until I came along).

2. My first brother was born, and we know from subsequent experience in our family, I would then have been jettisoned in favour of the new babe-in-arms. My mother loved having a baby in

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<sup>11</sup> "I suggest that the mother hates the baby before the baby hates the mother, and before the baby can know his mother hates him." (from 'Hate in the Transference', 1947)", in Mahler et al (1995/1987). Perhaps my mother came to hate me, for more reasons than the *big head* problem.

her arms, and had no time for toddlers. (This would have made it impossible for me to complete my rapprochement with her. Each time I approached her, to get closer to her, she would have pushed me away, to concentrate on her baby).

3. My father got a gardening job in the city, and the family moved into a tied cottage (a gate lodge) on the outskirts of Dublin. The stress of moving must have been considerable. We arrived in a snowy winter, with a few pieces of furniture, and moved into a cold and damp cottage.

Because I thus could not achieve a rapprochement with my mother – because she was busy with my brother, and because I hated her for letting my sister burn me - I continued to long, angrily and lovingly, for union with her. The more I longed, the more she would have pushed me away. The more she pushed me away, the more I would have hated her/longed for her.

My parents had very low emotional intelligence, and thus they did not manage their kids very well. They did not understand their own emotions, had difficulties controlling their own emotions, could not express love or tender emotions, were indirectly angry and sulking with each other much of the time, and therefore could not teach us to manage our feelings. They used extreme anger and verbal barracking to maintain control of our behaviour. When verbal abuse did not work, they used physical violence to control us.

Around my fourth birthday I had two additional traumas:

1. I developed appendicitis and was hospitalized for one week for surgery. This was in 1950, at least five or six years before the groundbreaking work of Bowlby<sup>12</sup> and Winnicott<sup>13</sup>, on the emotional lives and needs of children, became widely known. My parents did

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<sup>12</sup> Bowlby, J. (1951). Maternal care and mental health. *World Health Organization Monograph* (Serial No. 2).

Bowlby, J. (1958), The nature of the child's tie to his mother. *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, XXXIX, 1-23.

Bowlby, J. (1959). Separation anxiety. *International Journal of Psycho-Analysts*, XLI, 1-25.

Bowlby, J. (1960). Grief and mourning in infancy and early childhood. *The Psychoanalytic Study of the Child*, VX, 3-39.

<sup>13</sup> Winnicott, D. W. (1965). *The maturational process and the facilitating environment*. New York: International Universities Press.

not stay with me at the hospital; nor did they visit during the working week. When they arrived at the weekend, for a half-hour visit, it was too late. I had experienced a huge break in the sense of belonging. In the process I developed an 'avoidant' attachment to my mother. I longed for her, but avoided reaching out to her for fear of greater rejection.

2. Soon after coming out of hospital I had to start school. My sister had started school the previous year. My mother was now frequently informing me, as she pushed her big carriage pram past the school building, that 'One day you will go to that school'. My inner response was 'Oh no, I won't', but I kept silent about my objection to that idea, as I did about almost everything. I wanted to stay close to my mother, without actually admitting that I needed to be close to her. One day my mother wheeled her pram into the school playground, up to the front door, and she brought me by the hand into what I now know was a classroom. At the front of the room was a woman (later identified as a teacher) who held out a bag of sweets. I rarely had sweets, because we were so poor. So I was keen to get a sweet, but I was also keen to keep an eye on my mother, as she stood by the room door. I edged towards the sweet bag, glancing back at my mother as constantly as I could. I reached the bag, looked in, saw a huge 'sucky sweet', reached in, got it, put it in my mouth, and turned my head towards the door: but my mother was no longer there. I had been 'given away' to the woman with the sweets.

If Bowlby had been there, he would have empathized with me, in a way that Sigmund Freud and Melanie Klein would not:

"Klein held that children's emotional problems are almost entirely due to fantasies generated from internal conflict between aggressive and libidinal drives, rather than to events in the external world. She hence forbade Bowlby to talk to the mother of a 3-year-old whom he analyzed under her supervision (Bowlby, 1987<sup>14</sup>). This was anathema to Bowlby who, in the course of his postgraduate training with two psychoanalytically trained social workers at the London Child Guidance Clinic, had come to believe that actual family experiences were a much more important, if not the basic, cause of emotional disturbance". Bretherton (1992)<sup>15</sup>.

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<sup>14</sup> Bowlby, J, (1987). Colloquium presented at the University of Virginia.

<sup>15</sup> Bretherton, I. (1992) The origins of Attachment Theory: John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth. *Developmental Psychology*, 28, 759-775.

I am grateful for Bowlby's empathy, and I am increasingly critical of theorists and therapists who cannot empathize with the childhood traumas of suffering individuals. (People who have not cleaned up their own early childhood, using therapeutic processes, are not well placed to become psychotherapists or clinical psychologists!)

I was in significant pain and distress within my family, due to rejection, verbal abuse and physical punishment. I did not feel that my parents cared for me. They took care of my body; were protective to ensure I was not abducted or killed, or run over on the road, or 'interfered with' by the many predatory sex maniacs who seemed to lurk behind every concealing object in Catholic Ireland of the 1950s.

My parents fed me, and clothed me as best they could, given their poor economic circumstances. But they could not love me, because they did not love themselves, or each other. It was to be another 26 years – when I was thirty years old – before somebody would identify *my need to learn how to love*, and to set about teaching me. (Carla: my Chilean friend, in Bangladesh).

Meantime I would have to soldier on, in a kind of autistic, frozen state.

I got a couple of boosts along the way:

1. Along the road from where we lived until I was nine years old was the cottage of two 'spinsters' – unmarried sisters. They would call out to my mother as she passed their garden gate. "Let's see your babies". My mother would pause, and the sisters would look longingly at me and my siblings. They would comment on how nice we looked. They beamed smiles at us. My mother was bemused by this performance, and as soon as she could, she dragged us away from the gate towards the shops.

2. When I was seven years old, my mother made friends with a nun. Sister Louise. She was about 25 years old, I guess, and she came to our house to talk to my mother about 'social work' issues. She wanted to help my mother with her financial problems, but not with cash: With ideas for making money. During one of those first visits, Sister Louise knelt down in front of me and invited me into her arms. I did not understand. I was scared. I walked forwards, slowly, haltingly. She embraced me. Her embrace said: *All will be well; and all will be well; and all manner of things will be well*. It was one of the most magical moments of my whole life! When I met Carla in Bangladesh, I told her 'Sister Louise saved my life!'

Because I could not achieve my *rapprochement* with my mother, I could not properly *individuate*. I could not separate from her and 'cross the bridge' to my father's side, so I could grow up modelling myself on him. I got stuck in a psychological limbo – carrying that frozen relationship with my mother in the basement of my mind – hatefully-loving-her; lovingly-hating-her - until I met Carla. Carla began the process of melting the huge early childhood iceberg in my heart. And Renata finished the process. (Unless, that is, we find in this paper that there is still some way to go)...

## 5. Echoes from the life of Bruce

Mahler et al (1975/1987) found infinite variation in the four sub-phases of the separation-individuation process, but in Part III, Chapter 8, they present five representative case studies. Of those, I was able to identify with some aspects of the development of some of the children, most especially the one called Bruce; plus some elements of the development of Wendy.

Bruce got off to a bad start with his mother, because "...from birth on, mother imparted to the young infant her anxiety about his intactness". In my case, I think my mother imparted to me her disappointment that I was a male; and that I had hurt her so much during the labour of delivering me into the world. Her first child had been a girl, and girls and mothers have an easier time getting along. (Gilligan, 1982/1993<sup>16</sup>). Also, my mother had two mental-scripts about men, each apparently operating from different ego states. The first, from Critical Parent ego state, was this: "Men are parasites, exploiting and oppressing women; just like your father's father, who worked his wife into an early grave". The second, from Free Child, was this: "Men are exciting and fun, and it's good to have a giggle and a roll in the hay with them". I think more often than not, she projected her negative stereotype of men onto me, while she projected her positive/playful stereotype on to my first brother.

As in the case with my mother: "When Bruce was 9 months old, his mother became pregnant again. At the same time, she seemed impatient with Bruce, especially if he wiggled while she diapered him (changed his nappy, in UK English)". ... "We felt that Mrs. A's behaviour toward Bruce was a displacement onto him of the anger she felt about the new pregnancy, about which she complained repeatedly, and which caused her to feel physically rather poorly and continually nauseous". (Pages 126-127). In my own case, I

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<sup>16</sup> Gilligan, C. (1982/1993) *In a Different Voice: psychological theory and women's development*. Harvard University Press.

think my mother's anger towards me was a displacement onto me of her disappointment in my father as a breadwinner, and his not loving her, plus her financial misery and the drudgery of her married life. And of course, I was a 'bad male', and I had a big head that hurt her during my delivery.

"At this time, when Bruce was 9 to 10 months old, she felt compelled to teach him the meaning of the word, 'No'. It seemed that at this time during her own crisis, she found it difficult to let Bruce be an individual in his own right; she wanted him to remain passive, a controllable appendage of his parents". (Page 127). This fits with what I know of Maureen from later years. She would not brook any challenge to her authority. Children were to be seen and not heard. Absolute obedience was demanded, down to the point of challenging me (and my siblings) to not even use any eye movements that suggested we were unhappy with her demands and commands. She watched our eye movements and threatened to beat us if we did not desist from sending negative messages with our eyes. To open our mouths to speak a negative thought seemed to me to be equivalent to inviting death by physical beating! We were her 'dolls', to be washed and dressed, and lined up in an orderly row, and marched to and fro. Not to speak or have our own desires and goals. Not to rebel, not even non-verbally. Not even to raise an eyebrow, or roll our eyes. Not even once!

"When he (Bruce) returned (to Mahler's centre, in New York City) after the (summer) vacation, at 14 months of age, he was beginning to show behaviour typical of the period of *early rapprochement*, very prematurely indeed. His awareness of mother's whereabouts was very keen; he took pleasure in sharing his possessions with her, particularly his food..." I was always paranoid about my mother's whereabouts. I was so insecure I could choke with panic and anxiety. I followed her everywhere, and clung to her skirt desperately. But she was not interested. She would dash this way and that, whisking me along behind her until I let go or fell over.

"...towards the end of her pregnancy, Mrs. A became increasingly tired, depressed, and irritable. She again started to feel unduly burdened with Bruce. She compared him unfavourably with the other children at the Centre, and she reduced contact with him. At first Bruce seemed to react by trying to help himself; for example, he started to feed himself. He would make appeals in an indirect way; ... But finally a quality of passive surrender crept into his behaviour. He became more clinging and depressed". (Page 128). I think this was how I responded to how Maureen related to me. It is interesting to think of just how depressed I probably was at that

time in my life, and for some years to come. That is a helpful insight. I was depressed because I felt I had lost the love of my life – my mother. She was stressed, overworked, and heavily pregnant at this time (and many later times – she had seven children in rapid succession) and she undoubtedly found my clinging to be oppressive, and pushed me away or brushed me off.

“Bruce’s rapprochement crisis had received its particular flavour from the birth of his baby sister, as well as from the mother’s periodic turning away from him because of the pregnancy and her periods of impatience with him”. (Page 129). My mother was not occasionally impatient with me. She was **constantly angry and bullying** with me (based on memories of later years). She had no time for any kind of ‘individuality’ from me. I was to do what I was told, and that was that. And be like a passive doll, which she could pick up and put down as and when she pleased; and not to be autonomous, or to have any needs or opinions, values or attitudes of my own.

“Bruce could not easily express his needs directly; he touched his mother while avoiding looking at her. Many signs indicated that both mother and child were trying to improve their relationship, but their attempts were tentative and feeble”. (Page 131). In my case I had very little sense of what I needed. For a couple of years I clung to my mothers skirts, and got whisked around the kitchen by her rapid, indifferent movements (based on actual memories of that experience). If my mother ever wanted to reach out to me, I certainly did not notice it. I was a male, and not the funny, playful type. I was too solemn for her; unlike my first brother, who was just her cup of playful tea! I wanted to reach out to her, to cling to her constantly, but more and more I found it too painful to do this, to be constantly rejected; and so I must have stepped back, and longed for contact with her from a distance.

“Bruce resolved his rapprochement crisis suddenly and for the time being rather successfully. It seemed he had done this not so much by coming to terms with his mother (even though he had identified with the active mother [role in relation to his little sister]), but rather by **disidentifying** from her, in Greenson’s sense, (cf. Greenson, 1968<sup>17</sup>) by turning to his father”. I’m not sure I turned to my father in any very obvious, physical sense. I neither talked to him, nor played with him, nor he with me. But I might have silently, without noticing myself, attached whatever hope of salvation I then had to his being on my side. (However, this may be unlikely because, every so often, when my mother was very

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<sup>17</sup> Greenson, R.R. (1968) Dis-identification. *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, 49: 370-374.

angry with me, and she did not feel that slapping me with her hands was enough punishment for me, she would 'set my father on me' when he got home from work, and he would use his belt to beat me!) Given this situation, perhaps I turned to God, or my prayer book. (Who could blame me? If 'religion is the opium of the people', as Marx said, then I was direly in need of opium. Who could deny me that succour?) Or perhaps I just clung to life, like a rock climber who has lost his safety harness, but still clings to the rockface, hoping against hope that he will not fall off.

Furthermore: "As mentioned before, (Bruce's) good relationship with (his) father seemed to have helped Bruce in his subsequent attainment of the second level of identity formation, (which is) that of gender identity". (Page 132). I certainly seemed to have identified more with my father than my mother, though there were things about my father, like his violence, and his cowardice, that put me off him. Nevertheless, he seemed to serve to some degree as a role model, to the degree that I had one. However, this may have been supplemented to some extent by one of my mother's (later) lovers – let's call him Michael – who took an interest in my attempts to draw horses; and he bought me coloured pencils; and gave me (and my siblings) pocket money and sweets. Michael was round from my being about 5 years old, right up to my being 18 years old. (In fact, when I decided to leave home and move to England, my mother asked me to meet with Michael, who tried to talk me out of my plan. "You should always stay with your mother", he said. "Goodbye", I said. I was offended, and uninfluenced, by his intervention).

"Mrs. A continued to extricate herself from the bond with her son (Bruce). Now by her son's third year, she openly segregated maleness (or masculinity) from femaleness (or femininity); she said that Bruce and his father were both compulsive and intellectual, whereas she and her daughter were emotional". (Page 132). Something like this was going on in my family, although my mother lacked the kind of educated psychological distinctions that were available to Bruce's mother. As mentioned earlier, my mother was split about men. Sometimes she liked them, and sometimes she did not. It depended on which ego state she was in, and which man was 'in the frame'. She could be very flirtatious and saucy, even with some of her own sons; and she could cut me dead. As an introvert, I was far too serious and solemn for her. And my father was hated by Maureen for his inability to make money, and his lack of passion and romanticism in relation to her. Furthermore, as mentioned in the previous section, Maureen liked to have a babe-in-arms, but did not like individuating or autonomous children. In this respect she was like Wendy's mother (who was also in Mahler et al's

study): "Once the symbiotic period was ended, Mrs. M. (Wendy's mother) was characteristically less comfortable with her children. She was unable to enjoy the playfulness of the individuating child and her relationship did not grow into playful mutuality". (Page 154). Maureen distanced herself from me, was cool and rejecting, and never cuddled me or kissed me; never tried to offer me any form of physical comfort or even verbal reassurance.

"Bruce's resourcefulness and innate endowment helped him to adapt to the difficulties in the mother-child relationship. His liabilities, on the other hand, seemed to have derived at least in part from the conflicts inherent in that relationship, the need for turning away so early (18 to 19 months) from closeness with her, and his tendency to rely on his own resources to such a large extent, by the chronological end of the rapprochement subphase". (Page 129). As I was reading through this section of Mahler et al's book, I was struck by the very strong sense that "this is me": Strong and resourceful; woefully badly supported; and consequently untrained for social relationships. I was physically 4 years old; probably 3 years old in my cognition/thinking, because of my parents' lack of education and engagement with me; and emotionally 2 years old, or less; lacking appropriate, age-specific emotional intelligence. A big strong baby lost in the world! A big baby stuck at the stage of wanting to 'die in mother's arms' – to return to symbiosis; and forever unable to do so. A big silently and secretly angry baby: afraid of its own anger. And desperate to escape from the pain of separation and isolation.

### **Postscript to Section 5: The Brick Man and the Big Baby**

About fifteen years ago, when Renata and I were visiting Leeds City Art Gallery, I discovered the Brick Man by Anthony Gormley.

This was quite a shocking, startling experience. I stood in front of this sculpture, built from tiny bricks. See the image that follows:

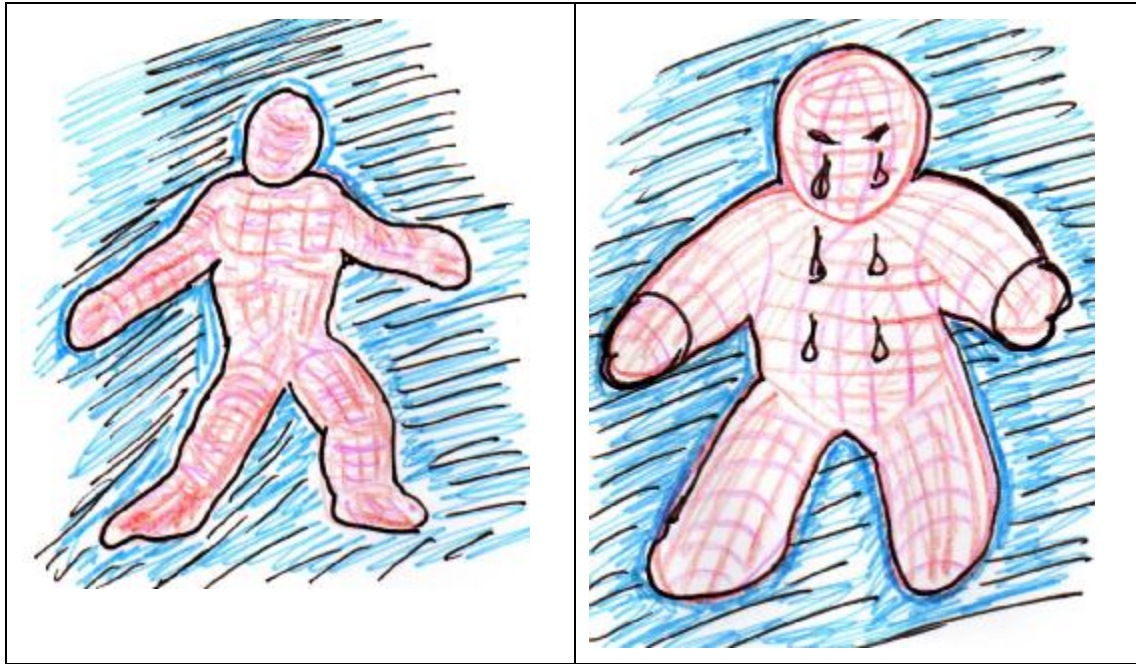
My head came up to about chest high on the Brick Man. From memory, each brick was no more than three-quarters of an inch long by about a quarter of an inch high. The sculpture is hollow. There are tiny holes where the ears should be. All other features are 'locked in' by this human-wall of bricks. I had the sense that this work 'spoke to me' – in the sense of echoing something of who I am: a man locked in by walls; a man with a hard exterior; a man who cannot see the world, or be seen by the world.



It was an amazing, thrilling and frightening experience at the same time.

I walked round and round the Brick Man, feeling like I was locked inside of this sculpture – trapped – restricted – remote. (And I went back many times to look with horror at this image of a man locked away from the world – entombed).

I bought a copy of the postcard of this exhibit and took it home. Over the next few months I experimented with my own drawings of the Brick Man. I began with virtual facsimiles of Gormley's work. But gradually these images became more and more animated. And I could sense the anger in those movements; an anger I had not previously thought myself capable of. And then, over time, the images reduced in age, until they produced the big, crying baby in the right-hand image below:



Of course, the originals were more 'artistic' than these rough examples that I have scribbled above. The point is to note the evolution of the big crying baby that is locked behind some kind of brick wall. In this paper I have got in touch with that big crying baby and helped him to express his sense of loss, grief, at not being able to make contact with his mother.

I pursued this art therapy work until it petered out. The final piece I did was a collage of multi-coloured snippets of magazine images, each one cut to the size of a tiny brick, and pasted together into a joyful, multi-coloured Carnival Man.

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6. Recent writing therapy on my relationship with my mother

It is now Wednesday 3rd February 2010, and I am sitting here in front of the computer screen, planning to do some writing therapy on my relationship with my mother.

Writing about traumatic events has proven over the years to be highly effective and very therapeutic, producing better emotional and physical health, according to Gillie Bolton and her colleagues (2004)¹⁸. However, there is still no clear, agreed on definition of what constitutes 'writing therapy'. (Bolton et al, page 8). Some

¹⁸ Bolton, G., Howlett, S., Lago, C. and Wright, J.K. (eds.) (2004) *Writing Cures: an introductory handbook of writing in counselling and therapy*. Hove, East Sussex: Brunner-Routledge.

systems of therapy, like family and systemic therapy, use a narrative approach to writing therapy, encouraging clients "...to re-author their own stories..." (Bolton et al, page 10).¹⁹

Writing at its best is a form of thinking on paper, and thinking about the past is the essence of doing good psychodynamic therapy. My goal in doing my own writing therapy is to try to 'complete' any incomplete emotional material, related to my mother, which may have been lying around in the basement of my mind. To *complete*, in this sense means the same as: to digest it; to fully experience it; to embrace it; to allow it to be; to burn it up or consume it.

I also decided to combine my writing therapy with some music therapy. What does that mean? According to the British Society for Music Therapy:

"The ability to appreciate and respond to music is an inborn quality in human beings. This ability usually remains unimpaired by handicap, injury or illness, and is not dependent on music training. For people who find verbal communication an inadequate form of self expression, music therapy offers a safe, secure space for the release of feelings. Furthermore, music therapy involves a relationship between the therapist and client in which music becomes a way of promoting change and growth."²⁰

In my case, I am using music as a form of self-therapy, to help get in touch with therapy-relevant feelings.

In order to set the scene for this event, and to become attuned to my feelings/emotions about Maureen (my mother), I will listen to a range of classical music pieces which have been used as theme music for emotional parts of some major Hollywood films. Specifically, I will be listening to 'Movie Adagios', a CD which contains about 2.5 hours of 'beautiful screen classics' - (028946850626).

And now for my mother:

Hi Maureen,

¹⁹ See also: White, M. and Epston, D. (1990) *Narrative Means to Therapeutic Ends*. New York: Norton. And: McLeod, J. (1997) *Narrative and psychotherapy*. London: Sage.

²⁰ BSMT (2010) What is MT? Available online: http://www.bsmt.org/what_is_mt.htm. Accessed: 11th February 2010.

I cannot call you 'mammy', or 'mam', or 'mum', or 'mother'. I know you (and dad) gave me life, and I am grateful for that. And you took care of me and kept me from various potential harms that could have befallen me, and I thank you for that. But you did not relate to me in ways that could have created a happy relationship between us.

I was thinking earlier this morning that you took care of my body to the best of your ability and budget. You fed me as well as you could (and a little better after the [mid-1950s appointed] social workers warned you that they would take legal action unless you addressed our problem of malnutrition). You were so proud and haughty that you found it hard to accept food charity, even though we were starving.

So you took care of my body, and you taught me manners, and you were very concerned to shape my behaviours: to make me passive and conformist, and as near inert as possible, to minimize your problems of child management.

But it occurred to me that you did not care for me as a 'consciousness'; or what some would call a 'spirit', or an 'ego identity'; a 'soul'. You did not listen to me, or ask me questions. You did not relate to me as a 'cultural entity', but rather like a physical possession of yours that you had to house and water and wash and dress – like a doll! A doll with no feelings of its own.

In eighteen years living at home with you, we never once had a conversation. Consequently I had no idea how to have a conversation with others outside our home.

You did not delight in my existence, or show any sense of loving the cultural me – the emotional me.

Another insight that I had this morning was this:

I left home when I was 18 years old. You wrote to me that week and the following week, and I forced myself to respond to your letters. Thereafter, however, I just dropped you out of my life. I crossed you off my list. So much so that, some three years later, when you had somebody track me down to my military unit, and you complained that I did not contact you, and my commanding officer ordered me to write to you, I knew in my heart that I would not obey that command. That I would **never** write to you. That in fact there was no power on earth that was strong enough to get me to write to you. Why? What did that mean?

This morning I had an insight into what it meant. It meant what Alice Miller refers to in her book: 'For Your Own Good'²¹: when she says that people, by their behaviours in the here and now, are showing the world how they were treated back in their parental homes. By my act of *supreme ignoring of you* I was showing the world how strongly and persistently and resiliently and defiantly you had ignored me for eighteen years! You ignored me almost to the point of extinction of my soul! And now I was doing the same to you – to show the world the **pain** that this little boy had experienced through your callous behaviour.

So is there now anything that this little boy can do to recover from the torture of his lonely and distorted childhood? Can he compensate for the pain of looking into his mother's eyes to see a reflection of himself, only to see a bottomless pool of blackness, and a universal void of silence? His existence was disconfirmed by the emptiness of that experience; the opacity of your mirror.

Well, back in the mid-1980s I realized that you were a wholly malign influence in my mind, my psyche, and so I asked Renata to help me to cut my psychological ties from you, and in the process, using the system developed by Phyllis Krystal, I excised you from my mind – replacing you with a 'universal archetype' of the kind described by C.G. Jung – a clean and wholesome archetypal image that reflected me in a wholesome, loving way – as being a lovable human being.

I feel no anger towards you, as I did towards daddy. He, after all, merely hurt my body, and failed to model a good, strong, courageous man. You, on the other hand, threatened my very soul, my sense of being alive and lovable. You also presented me with a model of 'maleness' that was altogether rotten, and impossible to identify with. And when you did show up as 'open to men', I could not identify with that either, as it only occurred when you were hot for some rolling in the hay with somebody other than my dad. And because you could not love me, I could not love anybody! I was like a frozen fish, smelling slightly in the corners of the lives of 'real people'.

However, it is fortunate that some other people found they could love me: Sister Louise; your lover, Michael; Uncle Martin and Aunt Phyllis (in England, when I was 18 years old). My first wife loved me as well as she could, and I tried to love her, in my stilted, wooden manner (because I had no idea what love was, never having seen it in my family home; never having **felt** it!). But we,

²¹ Miller, A. (1983) *For Your Own Good: Hidden cruelty in child-rearing and the roots of violence*. London: Faber and Faber.

my first wife and I, were both damaged, and we were not able to repair the heart damage that each of us had suffered. Carla and Renata finished off the job of teaching me to love, and healing my heart. And what a joyful transformation that was.

Werner Erhard taught me that "a relationship is an understanding and being aware of another person's way of being". And I do understand that you were the way you were. You were a damaged product of your own childhood and early years. Your father probably had unhealthy sexual interests in his daughters. He certainly made one of your sisters pregnant, for which he was punished by expulsion from the family home; and he insisted on *personally* washing the bodies of all of his children every night before bed! Perhaps he gave you good reason to hate men. But all men are not to be judged by the actions of a few. I am a good man; an egalitarian; a supporter of feminism; a Buddhist who follows the Buddha's eightfold path. You cannot paint me with the tar brush that you inherited from your father and mother; nor associate me with the horror stories you got from others about my father's father 'working his wife into an early grave'.

You mother – granny – was an ogre. I know from having spent a few summer 'holidays' with her, when I was 10, 11, 12 years old. She was cold, hard, bitter, mean, suspicious.

Erhard also says that "successful relationships are based on agreed on goals". You and dad had no agreed on goals. You had an arranged marriage which was loveless and directionless. You were merely a baby factory for the Irish Catholic Church. You had no vision of the world you were trying to create for your children. And though you frequently said: "James is going to be a doctor", it was 'James the Doll' to which you referred. At no point did you consult the real James/Jim about what he would like; what he wanted; who he was; how he felt about anything. And then you signed me up to be an apprentice goldsmith. No clarity of vision there.

Finally Werner says that "if you want to have a really powerful relationship with somebody, you've got to stop making them wrong". I don't know if I used to make you wrong – I guess I probably did. But I say now, as clearly as I can, that *you were not wrong*. You were **who** you were. And you **failed** to teach me about love and how to relate, because *you did not know how to love, or to relate*. You passed on to me **who** and **what** you were. And I mirrored it back to you from the age of 18 to about 39 – by ignoring you studiously. Then, at about the age of 40, responding to Werner's advice, I eventually decided to "create for (you) the experience that you had made it as (my mother). That at least in

your role as (my mother) you had succeeded. That you had done that: You know!"

And I wrote you that letter of thanks and gratitude and love, which you kept so close to you, which you told me you read every day, as confirmation that you were okay as a mum. And I visited you a couple of times, and kissed your cheek, and hugged you, and held you while you cried about all the madness in your neurotic mind.

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## **Postscript to Section 6**

And as I wrote the final sentences above, the tears finally came into my eyes, churning my guts, for I now can see that I have examined my relationship with my mother, and completed that relationship. I have recovered from the damage that she passed on to me, which she had inherited from further back up the line. No one is to blame. A **life** is a big cultural snowball that rolls forever down a mountain side, picking up pebbles, mud, plants, rocks, flower petals, and all kinds of good, bad and indifferent debris and detritus. But the snowball (especially when it is still small) is not to blame for its trajectory or its shape. That is a function of its 'thrownness' to use Heidegger's concept. The life, the little snowball, is thrown into the world at a particular point in space-time, and has to begin from that point, with what surrounds it. And it just rolls and rolls unless and until it **wakes up**, becomes **conscious**, and decides that it would be a good idea to steer itself around some aspects of the path ahead, and to choose certain paths over others. (Of course, our systems of justice **must** assume that the snowball was *always* and *only* conscious and accountable; but the truth is that it was not!)

Maureen Byrne, nee Whelan, was **not** a 'good enough mother' in many respects, but she did her best. And that was, after all, the only thing she could do, or be asked to do. She did not show me and my siblings much (if any) affectionate love (in fact, probably none whatsoever! Especially after we ceased to be babes-in-arms), though she did show **a mammoth amount of dutiful love**: washing, cooking, baking, stitching, patching, mending, sewing, scrubbing, painting and decorating, knitting, and knitting and knitting to produce our clothes, and to sell some garments for cash, to keep the home fires burning. One of her favourite expressions was: "I work my fingers to the bone for you!" And she did! She worked like a Trojan for her family.

And underneath the cumulative, interpretative experiences of this organism, sitting here writing, there is the original, pure 'capacity to

be aware' that existed before the first experience came in through eyes, ears or skin. And that **capacity** to be aware is universal, and can be experience every day through meditation. And that capacity to be aware is capable of reinterpreting everything that was once interpreted, and reformulating every one of its early conclusions (that can be made conscious), or **overwriting them** with a new orienting set of interpretations (when they cannot be made conscious).

*Love to the world:* and especially those bits that have not yet experienced love. For love can be found; regained; exulted in. This wish of mine that you should experience love is an expression of my relationship to you. You are loveable; you are love; so long as you grow the Good Wolf side of your character, and shrink the Bad Wolf side. To find love in the world, you have to first find love in yourself. And to find love in yourself, you often have to go back and analyze what went wrong in your childhood. Why should you go back and do this work? Only if you don't know how to love, and don't know how to relate adequately to your partner or loved ones in the present moment. Or if you are heavily 'self medicating' with alcohol, prescription drugs, recreational drugs, or addictive sex, pornography, and so on. Here's a clue from Alice Miller, a world-famous psycho-analyst and writer:

"The former practice of physically maiming, exploiting and abusing children seems to have been gradually replaced in modern times by a form of mental cruelty that is masked by the honorific term *child-rearing*. Since (child) training begins in many cultures in infancy during the initial symbiotic relationship between mother and child, this early conditioning makes it virtually impossible for the child to discover what is actually happening to him(her). The child's dependence on his or her parents' love also makes it impossible in later years to recognize these traumatizations, which often remain hidden behind the early idealization of the parents for the rest of the child's life". (Page 4)<sup>22</sup>.

It was only the extreme nature of my childhood experiences, combined with an acute intelligence, and a dogged determination, plus some incredible good luck, and years of hard work, that I eventually was able to complete my analysis of what happened to me and my mother, and how that shaped me. I hope you do not need to do this work, but if you do, then do it diligently, for the reward is that you get your life back! You no longer feel the need

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<sup>22</sup> Miller, A. (1983) *For Your Own Good: Hidden cruelty in child-rearing and the roots of violence*. London: Faber and Faber.

to die – to achieve non-consciousness – in order to escape the pain of utter wretchedness and a sense of total isolation and worthlessness. You step back into Paradise, from which you were so cruelly ejected all those years ago.

And, as Robin Skynner says: "It's never too late to have a happy childhood"<sup>23</sup>.

## **7. Recent Gestalt chair work with my mother**

When I finished the writing therapy work above, I decided to ask Renata to facilitate some Gestalt chair work on my relationship with my mother, just to see if anything else might still be hidden away in some dark recess of my mind. We scheduled a time that would work for both of us, but that had to be changed a couple of times, due to pressure of work.

It is now Saturday 13<sup>th</sup> February 2010, and Renata and I returned from a visit to Bradford a couple of hours ago. Then, about half an hour ago, we decided to get down to the Gestalt chair work on my mother. Renata set up two chairs, about three feet apart, for the roles of Jim and Maureen; and she sat in a third chair to the side. I sat in the Jim-chair, and imagined my mother in the other. I had a real sense of her image and presence on the other chair. (Not like a real, physical person, but wispy, and imprecise: constantly forming, vaporizing and reforming. But the image had a real emotional sense of presence for me).

I began to talk to "her" (a projection of my mind) by explaining that I thought I had probably **completed** my relationship with her during the course of writing this paper up to this point, but that I wanted to check to see if there was anything left unsaid.

I told her I had felt very unhappy as a child because of her remoteness, but that I understood that she had done her best for me. I was very Adult about it, recognizing that she must have had a very bad childhood herself, since she did not know how to be playful, in a Child-to-Child kind of way. Her only playfulness was a kind of adolescent playfulness, which was about giggling about (certain) men (at certain times). I thanked her for giving me life, and for keeping me safe from various forms of harm.

I then moved to the other chair, and tried to 'give her voice': to allow whatever emotions/thoughts that arose within me, which could be an expression of her perceptions of me and our

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<sup>23</sup> Skynner, R. (1996) *Family Matters: A guide to healthier and happier relationships*. London: Cedar/Mandarin Publications

relationship, to come to the surface. Again, it was bland, and Adult-Adult. She referred to the fact that I was a solemn child, a difficult child, clingy, and with a huge head at the point of birth, which caused her great pain.

I returned to the 'Jim-chair' and made a few additional comments about how she was the way she was; that she could not have been otherwise; and that she had done her best. I said: 'I forgive you; and I love you'.

On moving to the 'Maureen-chair', she said she wished me well in life, and that she was glad I had learned how to love, and glad I had a happy life.

Returning to the 'Jim-chair', I said I did not know what else to say. I could not say I wished her a happy life, since she is already dead.

At this point Renata said: "You could say **goodbye** to her".

"That's a good idea", I said, standing, crossing the room to get a large cushion, and placed it on the 'Maureen-chair'.

I then knelt down by the 'Maureen-chair' and took the cushion in my arms. I began to say goodbye, when an explosion of grief surged through my body. It was not grief at saying goodbye to Maureen in 2010. It was grief about not being able to contact her way back then, in 1948. I began to cry, but it was more of a wail of agony; and fitful sobbing, intermingled. I could see an image of her, moving away from me, pushing her big carriage pram, silk headscarf tightly around her mousy brown hair. Moving away, moving away. I could not keep up. She was escaping me. I was in emotional agony. The grief of trying to reach her encased me, and sucked me into a dark, painful place of isolation, rejection, remoteness, irredeemable damned-ness. She crossed my field of vision, moving from right to left, ignoring me, looking away, and ignoring me. Refusing to pause for an instant. I wailed, keened, choked on the sobs – the sounds of an infant in grief! An infant in unimaginable grief! It was still stuck in there – in my body/mind - after more than sixty years. Still locked away inside me, in a dark little space of isolation and rejection: Pushed away. Pushed away. Rejected, and ignored.

Renata came and knelt beside me, and grasped my body from the side, and cradled me against her body. That provided a kind of safety net that allowed me to feel the pain of utter devastation that welled up within me. She held me and I wailed, keened, cried, sobbed, gasped for air, choked on my sobs.

Throughout this experience, I was seeing images of my mother from way back, wearing traditional headscarves that are no longer seen anywhere, that I had long forgotten about. She was pushing a pram; then walking towards me; then walking away; then crossing from side to side; this way and that, with a set face, tight mouth, mean face, always silent. Expressionless eyes. Always ignoring me. I choked on the panic of not being able to reach her, to touch her, to get her to pay attention to me.

The pain and the keening went on for several minutes. I had never before made such sounds, and never before felt the utter devastation of total grief; total loss; total aloneness. Then it was complete. Then I got off my knees and returned to the 'Jim-chair'. I looked at the 'Maureen-chair' and said: "Goodbye, you cold, heartless bitch!"

Turning to Renata I said: "That feels authentic. That seems appropriate. I would like it to be nicer, and more Adult. But this seems more real".

I turned to the image of Maureen once more and said: "Goodbye, you cold, heartless bitch!"

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Postscript No.1: Three days have gone by since I wrote the previous section, and it is now Tuesday 16th February at 3.30 in the afternoon. I was unhappy with the way the previous section ended. It does not seem to be a *complete relationship* when one person calls the other 'a bitch'. This is a term of abuse that I dislike, and would not choose to add to my vocabulary to describe anybody. It came from the hurt child part of me. But clearly that part of me is still not complete with Maureen, as a relationship can only be said to be complete when it is in the space of satisfaction; of being allowed to be exactly the way it is, without the need to add anything to it; or to delete anything from it; and so this afternoon Renata and I returned to the task of working this through.

I sat on the top of the stairs, holding the 'Maureen-cushion' in my arms. Renata asked me if I had anything to say to her by way of a goodbye; a parting of the ways.

I said: "Sorry for calling you a bitch. You were just 20 years old when I was born – a mere child yourself. You gave me life, and for that I am grateful; and you did your best for me. You could not

have done any more for me, because of who you were, and your own background experience.

"I forgive you. Goodbye, Maureen".

I turned to Renata, and said: "That seems to be it".

Renata said: "Try this as an experiment. Try saying 'Goodbye **Mammy**'." I felt my stomach drop.

Renata knew that that was what my siblings and I called Maureen when we were young: "Mammy".

I turned towards the cushion, which I held firmly in my arms. I tried to form the words, *Goodbye Mammy*, but I could not do it. I tried, but it would not come together. Then:

"Good...bye.....Mammy", followed by a flood of tears. But not the grief of three days ago. Sadness, and loss, but not so intense.

"I loved you, Mammy. You were my first true love. I longed to be loved by you. But you never really loved me, not like I loved you. But now I have replaced you with a better image, or sense of presence: a better, more accepting visual and emotional presence in my mind – a 'universal archetype' – an image of a loving woman, who now substitutes in my mind for you.

"You did not love me back then, and that **cannot** change now. It's over. I am the son of a cold, distant mother. That is the reality. I still love you, but I no longer yearn for union with you. I no longer want to be loved by you, for that would be unrealistic. I am complete with you. There is nothing left to say. I now turn towards the world – to face up to the challenges ahead, without your support. Goodbye Mammy!"

Postscript No.2: All was well for a couple of days. Then yesterday, Friday 19th February, I arose in the morning at 6.00am with a blinding headache. I had a history of headaches up to about fifteen years, sinus headaches, until I found a way to treat them. I have not had a sinus headache for fifteen years.

However, all through Thursday night I kept waking with an increasingly bad headache. I tried my usual anti-sinus treatments, but nothing worked. I tried assuming it was dehydration, and drank lots of water, but nothing would work. (I do not drink any alcohol, and so that was not a possible explanation). I awoke with a pain

through my brain, and my right eye, that felt like a thin steel spike had been driven through my head.

I knew I had to get myself sorted out quickly as Renata and I were do to visit some friends for a big chunk of the day, and I was in no condition to socialize with anybody. I tried meditation, but no change was discernible in the level of pain in my head. I decided to do some gentle Chinese exercise, called Zhan Zhong (or Standing like a Tree), but even that gentle increase in blood flow was excruciatingly painful.

Renata registerd my pain and came across to massage my head. If it was tension then that would most likely help. However, as she was massaging my scalp, I had my eyes partly closed, and I realized that I was seeing a fairly constant stream of images of Maureen passing from left to right, and right to left, rushing and ignoring me, avoiding me, leaving me behind.

"I know what to do" I suddenly said to Renata. She stopped massaging, and I crossed to the sofa and removed two large cushions which I placed on the floor, on top of each other. I then knelt beside those cushions, held them in place with my left hand, and began to punch downwards in the middle of the top cushion with all the strength I could muster.

"You cold, mean, miserable cuffing bitch", I intoned, as I punched and cried, punched and cried. (The images I had in mind were of Maureen whacking the back of my head with a hairbrush because I would 'fidget' while she was brushing my hair. Or hitting me so hard on the back with her big, flat hand, that if my tonsils had still been in my throat, they would surely have been catapulted out of my mouth!) My hand was hurting with the force of the blows that I now rained down on the Maureen-cushion, but still I continued. Punching and punching, dozens of times. "Cuff you, you cold and miserable bitch!", I wailed as I punched, punched, and punched, again and again. Then it was all over, in less than five minutes. I threw the cushions across the room in disgust and contempt, or was it infantile rage?

I went to the bathroom and got washed up and shaved. I was feeling much better. The headache dropped 40 percent.

Renata and I went out to a coffee shop to get a hot drink before travelling on for our social meet-up with our friends. During the time that I was drinking my hot green tea, I noticed that my headache had fallen 50 percent or more. By the time we met up with our friends, at noon, it had completely gone.

My headache had been a symptom of my bottled up anger towards my mother, stored in my body/mind for more than sixty years. She had screwed up my process of separation/individuation, as well as over-protecting me for far too long, and physically abusing me. And she had intimidated me out of any show of legitimate anger, irritation or even discomfort, as if it impugned her 'perfect mothering'.

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On Saturday morning I felt fine. I wondered just how much more rage there might be in the basement of my mind towards my mother.

On Sunday morning I awoke with a slight headache. I wondered if it might be repressed crying, or angry tension. So I got some cushions on the floor and began to punch them, while visualizing Maureen as an oppressor, and a cold, distant, uncaring individual, who had no empathy for me. I punched the cushions a few times, but no tears came. No great sense of grief. I am complete with Maureen, for sure.

## **8. Repression of disturbed experiences**

At the beginning of this paper I had a question for myself: *Did I have some traumatic experiences that I then repressed, which account for how I was in relationships?*

At that time I did not know what I would find. I did not expect to find that my first two years of life were disrupted by a 'rapprochement crisis', with consequences for the whole of the rest of my life. I did not know that my development had to proceed through the four subphases identified by Margaret Mahler and her colleagues. I never suspected that I had to move away from my mother to investigate the world; to stumble and lose confidence; to turn back to her and try to restore the original symbiosis; and, when she had comforted me sufficiently, to turn back towards the world again, with renewed confidence, and to make the journey across the bridge to my father's side, carrying warm memories of my mother's love in my heart.

Unfortunately, because of the things that went wrong between the ages of 15 months and 22 months, I did not get to complete the rapprochement subphase, and I got hung up on my mother forever; loving her resentfully; hating her lovingly; longing for her; and

seeking a union with her in the subsequent relationships I had with girls and women.

"The more she pushed me away, the more I hated her/longed for her." This originated with my mother, but it became the model for my first marriage. As Werner Erhard said, mostly we tend to marry a symbolic substitute for our parent of the opposite sex. The exceptions are when we marry not-Dad or not-Mum, as a rebellion against the parent of the opposite sex. But there is no freedom in marrying Mum or not-Mum, Dad or not-Dad. We have to get beyond that; to stop projecting our parents unto others, and trying to complete our relationships with our parents symbolically in the present moment with symbolic parent substitutes.

"I longed for her (my mother), but avoided reaching out to her for fear of greater rejection." And this was the universal pattern in my relationships with women, up to completing marriage guidance with Renata, in 1984; completing the Communications Workshop and the Relationships Course with Werner Erhard's organization, in 1984-5; and ***Cutting the Ties that Bind***, using Phyllis Krystal's process, in 1986, or perhaps it was 1987.

In this paper I have finally been able to dig up this part of my past, to digest it, and to allow it to go into the background of my life, with no strong emotional charge attached to it. I no longer need to long for my mother at any level of my emotional functioning: even the most concealed, non-conscious level.

## **9. The impact of my relationship with my mother on later relationships with women**

If my analysis of the disruption of my rapprochement phase is correct, then there would be corroborating evidence in the history of my actual relations with girls and women once I got past the age of puberty. I will now review that history to find what evidence exists.

"I longed for her, but avoided reaching out to her for fear of greater rejection." This is certainly a familiar signature tune of my teens and early twenties. From about the age of twelve years I was attracted to girls, without having much of an idea of what was going on. I was rather naïve, being also a repressed Catholic. But I longed for some kind of (unknown) contact with various girls. It often felt like the missing piece of my jigsaw, which would make me whole.

The first girl I asked out was Helen, when I was sixteen and she was fifteen. I was only able to do it by speaking to her on the phone at work, when she phoned my section for something. I met her, went to the cinema, and we stood at the back, because the cinema was fully booked out. We stood in a kind of half-overlapping embrace throughout the film: me cuddling her from behind. It was an amazing experience. We walked from the cinema to her bus stop. I asked her if I could see her again. She said, "Ask me in work when we see each other next week". I felt totally rejected. I was never able to ask her out again, or even to speak to her in work. And I did not understand why, or what had happened.

I went dancing every week and enjoyed dancing with girls, but found it hard to start conversations, and almost never asked them out. Once or twice I got a date, went on it, was totally tongue-tied, and never saw them again.

The day I was leaving work, at the age of 18, to go to England, I made good contact with one of the girls from work that I had fancied for a long time – for whom I had longed, but to whom I avoided reaching out for fear of rejection. We were in the pub down the road from where we worked. I had a couple of drinks, which (I now theorize) knocked my Critical Parent ego state out; and we got talking. It was a magical kind of moment, in which I seemed to be able to talk, like an ugly duckling magically turned into a swan. I asked if I could see her home, and we took a long bus journey to her home village, outside Dublin. When we reached the lane where I was to leave her, I tried to kiss her. She was not keen. I felt pushed away. But I agreed to meet her again in a couple of days.

I met her twice more, longing for her, but now not even willing to try to kiss her goodnight. It was all spoiled. I lay on my bed and the tears welled up in my eyes. My mother and father were downstairs whispering. Was I crying for the love of Nadine, or my mother? Was there any difference? Were they the same being? Was she not, in some sense "the great mother" with whom I had longed to merge for sixteen and a half years.

I took the boat.

Over the next four years, I met a couple of girls with whom I had two or three dates, but nothing ever came of it. I could not reach out to them, and they seemed wary of me.

Then one evening (when I was about 21 years old), when I was with a group of comrades from a training course at a military base in the south west of England, something happened that confirms my

current analysis of what went wrong with my mother. We had all been on a training course together – involving some revised administrative systems – for six weeks, five days per week. Living together, eating together, working together, and drinking together in the bar in the evening. There was a girl on the course, Lucy, who I found very attractive. That's an understatement: I adored her face, her hair, her walk, her presence. I longed for some kind of contact with her, but did not know how to think about what was going on; did not know how to deal with how I felt; did not know what, if anything, to do. Then came the final evening of the course, and we were all due to return to our home bases the following morning.

We all sat together in the lounge bar of a big hotel in Bristol. I was very aware of Lucy. I had strong feelings about her. I was 21 years old, but emotionally more like fourteen, or even less. We had a few rounds of alcoholic drinks, and had something to eat. The alcohol would have knocked my Critical Parent ego state out, leaving me with Adult and Child tendencies. Still I said nothing to Lucy. Then, at about 10.00pm, I was not feeling so good, and I decided to call it a night. I stood up and said goodnight to the twelve or so faces that surrounded the table. "See you at the railway station in the morning" I said, or something like that; referring to the imminent parting of our ways. I picked up my jacket and walked to the door. As I got into the hotel foyer, Lucy came running after me, put her arms around me and said "I just wanted to say goodbye properly". She kissed me briefly on the cheek. I clung to her. She went to move back from me, but I clung on to her. I did not speak, or think, or try to kiss her, or to do anything. I just wanted to hold her, **forever**. To stand there, motionless, and hold her: forever; and to die in that embrace, because life was just too barren to bear. And that connection would make me complete – and end all the painful thought/feeling/action called life.

After a second or so, she tugged and pushed her way out of my embrace, looked embarrassed, and walked back into the lounge. I looked at her blankly. I now felt something dreadful, which I could not understand. I felt dreadful. Not just because I had embarrassed myself. Something utterly overwhelming welled up inside me – like a spike of pain that penetrated my whole torso. Tears welled up in my eyes, and I choked on a lump in my throat.

I left the hotel and returned to the military base; went to the church, which was still open. (I had never been there before; had not been to church for four years). I sat in a pew at the back, and began to cry. I did not know why I was crying – though I now do. I was crying because this event had restimulated my

rapprochement phase neediness, and subsequent rejection. I felt like I must have felt way back then, when I was 15 to 22 months old. There are no words to describe that feeling, because it happened before there was any language in my mind. It seemed to be just such a god-awful, anguished scream of pain that was welling up in my chest and ripping through my body, and threatening to erupt out through the top of my head: but it remained unuttered, and thus it remained a huge explosive potential, throbbing inside of me. It was unuttered, and unutterable; unspeakable. It had never been named, and cannot be named now. It was perhaps something like the **grief** of an abandoned two-year-old child!

After a while one of the other blokes from our group came into the church. Lucy must have sent him after me. She must have been concerned about me – not that I realized that on that evening. He sat beside me and asked how I was. He was very understanding. (He was training to be a vicar, and was perhaps aware of the concept of 'counselling'). I cannot now remember what he said to me. But his presence helped to calm me somehow. Up to the point of his arrival, I had felt like I had been running away from some kind of monstrous anguish which had now cornered me, and I was pressed up hard against a fence that bordered the edge of the world. And I just wanted to jump over that fence and find eternal peace. I was ..... crucified! Perhaps this man who followed me to the church, and seemed to care about my pain, was another 'Sister Louise' type character – a person who managed to keep me alive; clinging to the world despite the strong desire to leave!

I left the church after about an hour of grieving, parted company with my saviour, and returned to my room. Somehow I got through that evening, and through that night. I left the base early in the morning and found I had the railway station to myself. I left town quietly. Months later I went on to date a girl from Grimsby, but I made a mess of that after a few weeks.

And on and on I marched, blinded by ignorance of my own emotions; and uneducated in affairs of the heart.

Eventually at the age of 22 years I had my first sexual relationship with a woman in St Helens, who turned out to be just like my mother – surprise, surprise! – who cheated on me with another man. And so I moved down the coast to South Wales.

Then I went to Dublin where I went out with a lovely girl who wanted to settle down. But I was cold as ice with her. I refused to hold her hand in the street. So I moved on to London, where I met my first wife.

I blundered through a six year marriage: A royal cuff-up of a marriage. The hallmarks of that marriage were, as before: I longed for her, but was afraid to reach out to her: Until she eventually engaged in some token acts of rejection. And: The more she rejected me, the more I longed for and hated her. The final breakdown of the marriage, separation and divorce, were truly among the most painful experiences I have ever had (in conscious recollection).

And then I went to Bangladesh and met Carla, who taught me to love; and showed me the marks where the nails had held me on my cross. She cut me down and healed me. She healed me with poetry, tea and a listening ear. She cared about my journey through life. She wrote my suffering in poetry which I read. She confirmed my grief as okay, and witnessed my grief for me, so I could let it be.

And then I moved to Hebden Bridge where I met Renata, who educated me emotionally, by introducing me to Gestalt therapy, Zen Buddhism, to Family values, to Fun, to and to Love for love's sake.

And now as I look back across my life, I see how my rapprochement crisis worked its way through everything that has happened to me since that time, up to the point of gaining some healing. And I also see that I am healed, no longer at the mercy of that malfunctioning of the separation and individuation process.

### **Postscript to Section 9:**

Last night I was talking to Renata about Eckhart Tolle's book, 'The Power of Now'.<sup>24</sup> I was saying how much I had enjoyed it, but I could not recall what the main thrust of his book was. And so I got it down from our bookshelves, and flicked through it to refresh my memory. What a serendipitous event: I suddenly made the connection between the grief of the infant that is feeling isolated from its mother, and the angst of the grown up individual who is feeling isolated and separate from the life process. The first is a psychological problem, and the second is normally seen as a spiritual problem. But perhaps they are both interconnected, in the sense that we humans find that the point at which we first get cut off from our connection to the whole of life is localized at our mother's knee. It may indeed be impossible to separate out the psychological from the spiritual problem of isolation and separateness.

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<sup>24</sup> Tolle, E. (1999) *The Power of Now: A guide to spiritual enlightenment*. California: New World Library.

In many Eastern disciplines, such as Hinduism and Buddhism, the whole world is seen as a unity, and the elements of it as mere 'names' – not really 'separate' in any real sense. To illustrate that: in Western thinking I am seen to be separate from the universe; in Eastern thinking I am just a small part of the whole universe, and not separate in any real sense from 'everything' else. (For example, I am connected to you – dear reader – by the atmosphere we are both breathing, and by the earth beneath our feet. And, startlingly: by a common ancestor!). However, a good deal of anxiety is generated by the Western idea of our separateness, and a solution to the sense of separateness and isolation is to become "enlightened", or reunited (in a felt sense) with the whole of life, as in meditation and other transcendental experiences.

As I opened Tolle's book, to try to answer Renata's question: *What does Tolle say?*, I spotted these underlined paragraphs, which I had marked several weeks ago:

"The reason why the romantic love relationship" – and perhaps also the union with the mother – "is such an intense and universally sought-after experience is that it seems to offer liberation from a deep-seated state of fear, need, lack and incompleteness that is part of the human condition in its unredeemed and unenlightened state. There is a physical as well as a psychological dimension to this state".

"On the physical level, you are obviously not whole, nor will you ever be: You are either a man or a woman, which is to say, one-half of the whole. On this level, the longing for wholeness – the return to oneness – manifests as male-female attraction, man's need for a woman, woman's need for a man. It is an almost irresistible urge for union with the opposite energy polarity. The root of this physical urge is a spiritual one: the longing for an end to duality, a return to the state of wholeness. Sexual union is the closest you can get to this state on the physical level" - or sleeping in your mothers arms! "This is why it is the most deeply satisfying experience the physical realm can offer. But sexual union is no more than a fleeting glimpse of wholeness, an instant of bliss. As long as it is unconsciously sought as a means of salvation, you are seeking the end of duality on the level of form, where it cannot be found. You are given a tantalizing glimpse of heaven, but you are not allowed to dwell there, and find yourself again in a separate body" at the end of the experience. (Page 125).

And there it is. There is the explanation for the deep sense of longing that I felt for so many years. My mother was only one

illustration of my ejection from paradise – my posting to a life as a 'separate' individual.

However, that sense of longing also gets mixed up with wilfulness. Young babies have a feeling of omnipotence, of being King or Queen Baby. This shows up in the feeling that "I am **the One**, and I demand to be the centre of the universe, and I want my comfort now, immediately". That is the mission statement of King Baby (and Queen Baby). And so I must have tried for many years to figure out how to run the universe, so I could master it, and return to total connection to it. And this attempt to end my feeling of separateness would always have failed.

Then, in 1980, I met Renata, who introduced me to Zen Buddhism, and loaned me her copy of Alan Watts' book on Zen.<sup>25</sup> She explained how to meditate. I went home, read a couple of chapters of the book, found a cushion, sat on the floor with my legs crossed and my hands overlapping by my navel. I breathed in through my nose and out through my mouth. I counted my breathing: in – 1 – out – 2 – in – 3 – out – 4. And so on, for ten, twenty, thirty minutes. Suddenly a lot of grief welled up within me. I was overcome. I threw myself forward and prostrated myself on the carpet. I sobbed and sobbed, as my belly pumped against the carpet. After about ten minutes I got up, dried my eyes, went back to Renata's house, and handed her back the book. I made some kind of complaint about my meditation experience, and stormed off.

All the next day I sat, looking out through the window at the trees, flowers and grass; and listening to the birds. Towards late afternoon I realized that the sobbing on the carpet was a kind of symbolic giving in to life – giving up trying to run the universe. I submitted to life. All my life I had been like a cork in a stream, railing against the strong river currents that tossed me hither and thither. All my life I had wanted to stop the flow of the river; to get out on to the river bank; and to conduct the flow of the river, like an orchestra conductor, from the bank of the river. Now I realized how perverse this was. The river did not belong to me. I belonged to the river! Or we belonged to each other; together.

And, as one Buddhist author said, years later: "If you have never cried in grief, you have never meditated!"

The next day I went back to Renata's and borrowed the Zen book again, and continued to read it until it literally fell apart. From then on I meditated every day for thirteen years; took a break of about

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<sup>25</sup> Watts, A. (1962/1990) *The Way of Zen*. London: Arkana/Penguin.

five years; and resumed again in 1998 and continued right up to this day. This daily spiritual practice may also have healed my sense of longing, for my mother, for symbiosis, for a 'little death'. For when I meditate I feel connected to everything that is. I no longer feel like an isolated, solitary, separate little reject. I am part of the whole, and the whole would not be whole without my inclusion. I do not need to be held by Maureen, as **I am part of the Great Mother** (as Lau Tzu called *the Way of the World*).

## **10. Applying the Five Window Model to my mother**

The five windows model was the first explicitly CENT model that I developed. I have described it in detail in CENT Paper No.3<sup>26</sup>.

To apply the Five Windows Model to my situation with my mother, we should proceed as follows:

Imagine I am standing on a lawn which surrounds the Mind Hut, like a garden shed, which might be used to store gardening tools, but this Mind Hut is empty, except for a couch near the back wall.

In the past, we conceptualize that I was standing on the lawn, feeling bad about my relationship with Maureen, and my ability to have relationships in general in life. My bias – or delusion – would have been that I am looking out through my eyes at two objective events: how my mother related to me; and how the world responds to my existence.

However, CENT maintains that I am always and only looking at images inside my mind, created by my cumulative interpretative experience, and stimulated by some external event, such as Lucy pushing me away. Or stimulated by some recollection of how Maureen treated me, or how some earlier relationship with a girl had gone wrong. However, the 'frames' or 'schemas' through which I look at the world in order to create my interpretations of 'what happened', or 'what is going on now', are all non-conscious. I cannot know which frames I am using to look at the world.

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<sup>26</sup> Byrne, J. (2009c) An introduction to the 'Windows Model' of CENT. CENT Paper No.3. Hebden Bridge: The Institute for CENT Studies. Available online: <http://www.abc-counselling.com/id174.html>

The solution is to go inside the Mind Hut and use the Five Windows to consciously choose some kinds of common ways of framing things, and see what I can learn from that process.

So I go into the Mind Hut and look out through Window No.1 at the misery of being isolated and alone for the first thirty years of my life. The slogan around this window says: 'Life is normally difficult and frustrating for most people, much of the time'. When I look through this window frame I realize that my problems are just that: my problems. And every other human will have 'their problems'. There will often be some degree of overlap between my kinds of problems and the average kind of problem, but also some uniqueness.

Then I turn to Window No.2, and look out at my thirty years of isolation and inability to love or receive love, and I look at that through the framing slogan which says: 'Life is without difficulty provided you avoid picking and choosing'. And it becomes immediately obvious that at many times in my life I was picking and choosing. Choosing to have a different kind of life than the one I had. And picking a reality that was not present. In other words, trying to have things be how they were not, without any game plan for changing my reality. To the degree that I could accept that 'this is how my life is', to that degree I could have been happy despite my deprivations. Indeed, there were such times, when I was to some (small) degree happy; to some (small) degree at peace with the world; against a background of the imminent threat of *intense misery* erupting from deeply repressed childhood memories.

When I turn to look out through Window No.3, I see my thirty years of misery, loneliness, and gauche longing for love, laid out before me. But now I am looking at it through the frame-slogan that says: "Life is both difficult and non-difficult", and I am reminded, again, that there were some very good bits to my life. Especially the absence of some very bad potential bits that could have showed up, but did not. I was not violently assaulted; I was not sexually abused; I was not burned out of my home; I did not have to go to war (despite wearing a military uniform for three years). And there were some good people around who meant me no harm. And I had some great experiences in politics, and as a student in Oxford. It wasn't all bad!

I turn to the fourth window and notice that the slogan says: "Life could always be very much worse than it happens to be". And that is certainly true. My parents were poor, and we (children) were often hungry and malnourished, but that was as nothing compared with being born into a poor family in Africa or Asia. My mother was

cold and distant, and she beat me, but she did not break any of my bones. She did not physically scar me. She was a well-meaning and dutiful, cold and distant young woman. It could have been a whole lot worse. She did not drink alcohol, or lose total control over her behaviour. She had lovers, but she maintained a veil of decency-driven secrecy over her affairs. My life could have been worse. I have read the life of Adolf Hitler, as written by Dr Alice Miller. He was beaten unconscious repeatedly by his father. My life could have been a whole lot worse. My parents were basically 'decent people' who did not know how to love; and they were so stressed by their life circumstances, they often overreacted to the frustrating behaviours of their children.

Finally, I lie on the couch, and look up through the skylight window in the roof of the Mind Hut. I see my thirty years of isolation, loneliness, sadness, social awkwardness, and inability to give love, or to find it. But I now see it through the frame of Window No.5, the frame slogan of which is: "With regard to your life, there are certain things you can control and certain things you cannot control. You must learn to distinguish these two concepts". I could not control where I was born, or when. I am, after all, at a physical level, just a grown-up version of a little piece of protoplasm (or 'egg') donated by my mother, and a little bio-fertilizer (or 'sperm') donated by my father. I am not (at a physical level) a 'somebody' who could have been born elsewhere, at another time. Only Maureen and Billy could have created me, because that is WHAT (at a physical level) I happen to be. I am 'part of them'.

I was thrown into life by their copulation, and the life I was thrown into was theirs. It had to be the way it was, because they were already 'formed' by their biology and experience. They were already marked, branded and scarred by their own personal histories. And they did what they did, to me, with me, against me, and without me, because of their own 'throwtness': the point at which they were thrown into the world by their copulating parents. And they failed to do what they failed to do because of their throwtness, and their particular cumulative, interpretative experience histories.

There was nothing I could control until I became conscious, and developed some kind of 'game plan' for myself. That began at the age of thirteen when I told my father I wanted to join the British Navy; and he said no (because I would be too vulnerable!). It continued when I left for England at the age of 18. But it really began to take off when I met Carla, and then Renata, and I began to work on creating the kind of life that I wanted for myself:

through various forms of personal development, including counselling, therapy, coaching, and Buddhist practice.

Before conscious choice emerges, all there is is 'robotics' – or 'growbotics': non-conscious, automatic functioning based on thrownness and environmental triggers.

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11. Conclusion

At the age of 22 years, I went into psycho-analysis because of the stress of social rejection, and my analyst concluded that: "You need to examine your relationship with your mother in particular", in order to understand my social problems in general.

My mother and I had never been close – and the situation with my father was no different. All of my subsequent relationships with women were affected by this central fact of my early life: Just as my relationships with men were affected by my poor bond with my father.

The central tenet of Freudian psychoanalysis is that repression of traumatic experiences is at the root of all neurotic disturbances. Given that I had some significant disturbance in my ability to relate to others over the first three decades of my life, I needed to ask myself: *Did I have some traumatic experiences which I then repressed, which account for how I was in relationships?*

In this paper I have found that there was a major relational problem which was out of my conscious awareness, because it happened in the period 15-11 months of age, when I did not have any language, and I cannot recall anything from that period of my life. By making this crisis conscious, I was able to complete my (thinking and feeling) experience of it, and to discharge all associated emotive charges, and to allow it to go into the background of my life, where it will no longer bother me, and no longer affect how I relate to women (and men).

In the process I illustrated some key features of Cognitive Emotive Narrative Therapy (CENT). One of the main approaches of CENT is

to get the client to tell their story, in writing or verbally – whether that be a story of relationship; or about their origins; or about some life transition; about their career; and so on – and to face up to the buried bits of the story, to try to unearth them, to digest them, and thus to allow them to be: meaning to be **accepted** as former realities, which will draw their sting, and then allow them to go into the background of life, and not to keep rattling away in the 'basement of their mind', throwing up neurotic symptom after neurotic symptom.

The rule then is this: tell your story in detail, omitting nothing, whether it be disagreeable or banal, apparently unimportant or senseless. (Freud, 1910/1962, page 131). Feel whatever feelings come up. Do not resist anything that becomes conscious. And that is what I did in this paper about my relationship with my mother (and father). (If you take this journey, make sure your story is **witnessed**. There is something very powerful and healing about having our suffering *witnessed* by an empathic other. That is one of the values of having a counsellor or psychotherapist).

Part of my journey involved a review of Margaret Mahler's book on the psychological birth of the human infant. Part involved writing therapy. And part involved Gestalt chair work and related Gestalt work.

Some earlier work that I did included cleaning up my relationships with my mum and dad during the est training programmes (designed by Werner Erhard); and 'cutting the ties that bind', based on Phyllis Krystal's book. And doing art therapy work on the 'Brick Man'.

The main insight gained from completing this paper was that my 'rapprochement crisis' with my mother was not resolved, until now, and that I had non-consciously longed for symbiotic union with my mother for decades. This affected all of my relationships, because it restricted my ability to relate in an Adult fashion.

In this paper I have finally been able to dig up this part of my past, to digest it, and to allow it to go into the background of my life, with no strong emotional charge attached to it. I no longer need to long for my mother at any level of my emotional functioning: even the most concealed, non-conscious level.

With the help of Eckhart Tolle's book, I also made the connection between the grief of the infant that is feeling isolated from its mother, and the angst of the grown up individual who is feeling isolated and separated from the life process. The first is a

psychological problem, and the second is normally seen as a spiritual problem. But perhaps they are both interconnected, in the sense that we humans find that the point at which we first get cut off from our connection to the whole of life is localized at our mother's knee. It may indeed be impossible to separate out the psychological from the spiritual problem of isolation and separateness.

As I said in the text above, it was only the extreme nature of my childhood experiences, combined with an acute intelligence, and a dogged determination, plus some incredible good luck, and years of hard work, that I eventually was able to complete my analysis of what happened to me and my mother, and how that shaped me. I hope you do not need to do this work, but if you do, then do it diligently, for the reward is that you get your life back! You no longer feel the need to die – to achieve non-consciousness, or symbiosis with another – in order to escape the pain of utter wretchedness and a sense of total isolation and worthlessness. You step back into Paradise, from which you were so cruelly ejected all those years ago.

Once I had worked through the emotive aspects of my relationship with my mother, I finally analyzed my problems with her and my subsequent life by looking at it through the Five Windows Model, which includes some insights from Zen and REBT/CBT, which showed clearly that my problems were not off the scale of normal human problems; that I also had good moments in my life; that I was to some extent causing my own problems by wanting life to be different from how it was; that it could always have been a whole lot worse; and that there are only certain aspects of my life as a social being that I can control. If I stick to trying to control the controllable aspects of my life, I will not go far wrong.

And, finally, I need to answer one question for the curious reader:

Was this 61 year journey worth the effort?

Yes, it most definitely was. I have got my life back. I have a kind of freedom that I did not have before. I have a sense of peace and happiness in everyday moments that is new. I have a more open heart towards the world. I have less fear of others. I have more to give. I am calmer. I am joyful. And I have got my "good childhood" back! I am a liberated man. I am so very lucky! (And, of course, I also don't exist!) And thank you for sharing this journey with me.

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