

CONNECTING

Healthy Information from the Des Moines Pastoral Counseling Center  November / December 2003

Over the River and Through the Woods

The small child grasps the leathery calloused finger of his grandfather as he is led through the garden. All the while, grandfather admires the works of nature, names these works for the child, and tells of the care needed to grow such wonders. Another small child explores the rubbery feel of her grandmother's face, pinching and pulling lips and ears as the grandmother makes gurgling and cooing sounds, holding the child tightly to her.

These are among the first lessons of contrast for the child, between young and old, the alpha and the omega. It is in the care of our grandparents that many of us (the more fortunate of us) may first experience the wonder of life's cycles and the incredible balance of God's creation.

Therapists hear many stories of grandparents, some not so ideal as those in the opening paragraph. Our therapists often hear of the damage inflicted in many instances of grandparent neglect or abuse, and work diligently with clients toward healing from such wounds. We also hear many stories about the poignant relationships between clients and their grandparents. In extreme instances, a grandparent may have been the one to catch the grandchild when no one else was near. In more traditional scenarios, grandparents are simply the ones that accepted without question, gave without condition, provided love with no strings, and shared themselves without reservation. For the purposes of this article, I would like to focus primarily on the positive and enriching aspects of grandparenting.

Lives are forever changed in the presence of those who were the parents of one's parents. The child's first lessons in regeneration, replication, procreation, and creativity may come in the understanding that "you are my mother's mother!" "My father was once little like me!" A child who is not held in the loving arms of his/her parent's parents is, at least in some small measure, being deprived. That child misses the opportunity to observe in a fundamental way the contrasts of human experience. The lessons are preverbal and come through the senses. Children remember the smells and the touch... "I remember how it felt to have my little hand surrounded by his large calloused hand... to be dried off with that big fluffy towel after the bath in the claw foot tub as she sang our favorite song." Much of this is passed on not in words, but through the memory of the senses.

In today's world where family roles are in flux, the grandparenting role is also being challenged and redefined.

Certainly today some grandparents may have the opportunity to help in administering care, diapering and feeding, babysitting, putting together the swing set, making cookies, etc., etc., etc. There are many children being reared entirely by grandparents. But even in the more traditional removed role of grandparent, the act of just being present for observation and examination, to be one who existed even before the child's parent, is in and of itself an enormous gift. In this availability there is an assurance as well, the assurance that someone holds the child in his/her heart even when away. The coming and going of the grandparent presents the child with the concept that love lives on in the absence of the person. The child learns to hold a special place in his/her heart, to trust that place, and to know the existence of love there. "Over the river and through the woods" is where love dwells and where we know when we get there, it will have been waiting just for us.

Few would argue the benefit to a child of a loving relationship with a grandparent. But what are the benefits to the grandparent? We are all familiar with grandparents who tell endless stories of how beautiful and wonderful their grandchildren are and what the child recently accomplished, from first steps to graduation. These grandparents proudly produce a never-ending stream of photos, fully expecting everyone to be as enamored as they are with the beauty of these incredibly charming children. But are there benefits that extend beyond a simple feeling of pride that mostly serves to boost the grandparent's ego?

When I was first approached with the suggestion of preparing this article for the newsletter, I thought: *What do I know of this topic? This is not my area of professional expertise. Perhaps I should defer this to one of our colleagues in C.O.O.L.* After much encouragement from our editor, I realized that it was my enthusiasm over becoming a grandparent that was in large part responsible for this assignment and that I might just have more to offer than I realized.

In preparing this article, I began to understand that my enthusiasm coincides with some of the research that I found. This research says essentially that the act of giving ourselves into the role of grandparent brings a new energy into our lives that not only benefits the child, but benefits the grandparent as well. The research goes so far as to say that grandparenting may actually help us to live longer; that longevity and nurturance are closely linked, and that the

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continued from page 1 . . .

additional responsibility of grandparenting brings with it the opportunity to once again nurture, which in turn provides purpose and meaning in our lives.

Species that put all of their energy into breeding while giving no attention to rearing often die shortly after reproducing (salmon), while those that do attend to their young are more likely to live longer themselves and in so doing, to ensure the survival of the next generation. The research further suggests that the gender responsible for primary care to offspring lives the longest. Clearly there are many reasons for men to open themselves to understanding their nurturing capacity, but I can think of few examples in which there are greater rewards than in the role of caring grandfather.

An even greater benefit than longevity, however, is having the honor and privilege of participating in the process of nurturing, in being a part of the lives of those we so deeply care for and about. And to do so in a way that ensures our place in their memory so that even when we are gone, the love lives on. "Over the river and through the woods." Again and again, grandchildren will take that trip to the place where they ran into open arms, felt the warmth of complete acceptance, and where love abides forever.

J. Michael Sears, Ed.D.
Grandfather of three, ages 4, 3, 1

Mike Sears is also a sexologist and relationship counselor. He holds a doctoral degree in human sexuality from The Institute for Advanced Study of Human Sexuality. Mike provides counseling to individuals and couples, with an emphasis in sex therapy. In addition to his expertise in the areas of human sexuality and relationships, Mike also has a strong interest in men's issues.

Lee, Ronald D. "Rethinking the evolutionary theory of aging: Transfers, not births, shape senescence in social species," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*. Aug 5, 2003, v.100 (no.16): 9637-9642.
Cohen, Philip. "Thanks Gran," *New Scientist*. Feb 7, 1998, v.157 (no. 2120): 14.

For more information on this topic:

Visit www.grandparenting.org and find The Grandparent Foundation established in 1980 by Dr. Arthur Kornhaber. This site offers information on topics ranging from medical information to tips on talking with your grandchildren.

C.O.O.L. Corner

Give advice!
Read bedtime stories!
Always give hugs!
Need hugs!
Drive for ice cream!
Play pat-a-cake!
Appreciate smiles and laughter!
Respect little thoughts!
Enjoy silly games!
Never yell!
Take time to listen!

Educational Events for the Community

The Center is sponsoring two more community education events this fall to explore various complementary therapies available in the Des Moines community. All events are free and will take place at Plymouth Congregational Church, Ingersoll at 42nd Street, in the Burling Room. Please call or e-mail the Center to let us know you will be attending (274-4006 or info@dmpcc.org).

November 4, 2003, 5:30 - 6:30 p.m.

**Carol Throckmorton, Nutrition,
*Feeding the Body, Nourishing the Soul***

Carol Throckmorton is a registered/licensed dietitian and certified lifestyle counselor. ***Feeding the Body, Nourishing the Soul*** is an introduction to how to make eating a spiritual experience. The hectic pace of our lives often causes us to regard eating as refueling rather than a conscious act of caring for ourselves and those around us.

December 2, 2003, 5:30 - 6:30 p.m.

Michele Martz, Yoga, *Yoga for the Soul*

Michele Martz is a registered nurse, certified yoga instructor and registered yoga teacher, with 25 years of experience in the health care arena. Michele worked with the Dean Ornish Program at Mercy Hospital for six years. She is currently teaching yoga at Pioneer Hi-Bred and Living in Balance. ***Yoga for the Soul*** is an introduction to the practice and experience of yoga. The presentation will be part informative and part experiential, incorporating some yoga stretches, breathing exercises, relaxation, and meditation.

Male and Female Communication Styles: What She Said, What He Heard

We all, male and female alike, have experienced the feeling of "not being heard" by a member of the opposite sex. No doubt about it, men and women think and communicate differently. Researchers now believe that differences in communication styles are inherent in the basic makeup of each sex.

J. Jeffrey Means, Ph.D., pastoral psychotherapist and licensed clinical psychologist at DMPCC, will explore these differences and why we interpret what we hear the way we do. The class is offered through Des Moines Community & Adult Education on **Tuesday, November 18, 6:30 - 8:30 p.m., Roosevelt High School, room 116**. To pre-register call 237-1690 or go on-line at www.dmps-adulted.org.

Working with Dissociative Processes in Psychotherapy – A Ten Week Course

Dates: December 5, 2003 - February 27, 2004
Time: Fridays, 8:15-9:45 a.m.
Location: Des Moines Pastoral Counseling Center
Cost: \$200 plus optional text
Registration Deadline: November 21, 2003
Instructor: J. Jeffrey Means, Ph.D.

This seminar will begin with a brief overview of the spectrum of dissociation. The focus will be on issues commonly encountered in the psychotherapy process with persons suffering from dissociative disorders. For more information, visit our website www.dmpcc.org. The Des Moines Pastoral Counseling Center is an approved provider of continuing education credits. To register, call (515) 274-4006 or e-mail info@dmpcc.org.

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Des Moines Pastoral Counseling Center Foundation

Please consider a gift to the Des Moines Pastoral Counseling Center Foundation when writing or reviewing your will. Help us secure the Center's commitment to future generations: to provide the healing and comfort available through mental health counseling to everyone dealing with the challenges of life, *including* those unable to pay the full cost of such services. Together, we are sure to make a difference in the lives that follow ours.

Consider a Year-end Gift to the Center

The holidays can be difficult emotionally for many people. Issues of depression, anxiety, grief, anger, marital or family conflict, and parenting concerns are often magnified during the holidays. DMPCC counselors experience a significant increase in the number of requests for counseling throughout the holiday season, beginning around Thanksgiving and ending in late January. **We are able to offer our counseling on an ability-to-pay basis thanks to contributions from individuals like you. Please consider a year-end contribution to help us serve clients who are unable to afford the full cost of counseling.** Call Kathleen Murrin at (515) 274-4006 or send your tax-deductible contribution to DMPCC, 550 39th Street, Suite 100, Des Moines, IA 50312.

www.dmpcc.org

Visit the Center's website for more information on the Center's counseling services and staff, special events and classes.

Men and Anger

The Fall 2003 MANifest* workshop will focus on the topic of **anger**. This is a significant issue in men's lives and yet it is rarely talked about. Males in our culture are often socialized to disconnect from their soft and tender feelings ("Big boys don't cry!"), leaving them with only two avenues of emotional expression, humor (which may come out as sarcasm) and anger. These means of expression create difficulty in maintaining close and intimate relationships. Many men deeply regret the emotional damage done when their anger explodes, yet they feel unable to change this pattern. This workshop will look at ways to understand this pattern and provide support in making changes.

Men and Anger will take place on **Saturday, November 8, 2003, 9:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.**, at Queen's Point, 2793 St. Charles Road (stone house six miles west of St. Charles). Lowell Houts, D.Min., and Mike Sears, Ed.D., will facilitate the workshop. The fee is \$50 (includes lunch). Call the Center to pre-register (274-4006) or e-mail info@dmpcc.org. Registration is limited to 20 participants.

* MANifest is a program for men facilitated by two of the Des Moines Pastoral Counseling Center's male counselors. MANifest is for men of all ages and from every walk of life. MANifest is where men can turn when they begin to sense that something is missing from their relationships, their jobs, and/or their social lives.

Mark Your Calendar:

ANODEA JUDITH 5-day workshop: March 23 - 27, 2004

Are you a psychotherapist who would like to bring more powerful techniques into your practice than just talk therapy? Are you a bodyworker who would like to understand the psychological issues behind your clients' chronic complaints?

DMPCC is sponsoring a return visit by Anodea Judith, Ph.D., Psychologist and Transpersonal Somatic Therapist, **March 23-27, 2004**. This 5-day workshop for healers of all types will bring you cutting edge techniques for integrating mind and body. Contact the Center for more information and registration, 274-4006 or info@dmpcc.org.

A Day With SYLVIA THORSON-SMITH: January 23, 2004

The Des Moines Pastoral Counseling Center will sponsor **A Day With Sylvia Thorson-Smith**, co-editor of Body and Soul: Rethinking Sexuality as Justice-Love (Pilgrim Press, 2003). The book is a composite of voices on contemporary issues related to human sexuality. All contributing authors reviewed the 1991 Presbyterian sexuality report entitled: "Keeping Body and Soul Together: Sexuality, Spirituality, and Social Justice" and focused their comments on what has happened since that time.

A Day With Sylvia Thorson-Smith will be held at Plymouth Congregational Church, Friday, January 23, 2004, 9:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m. Contact the Center for more information and registration, 274-4006 or info@dmpcc.org. Watch the January 2004 newsletter for more details.

CONNECTING

is a publication of the Des Moines Pastoral Counseling Center, an independent, interfaith, not-for-profit organization. For over 30 years, the Center has been providing counseling and educational services to adults, families, adolescents, and children for the purpose of enhancing emotional, spiritual, and relationship health. The Center has satellite offices in West Des Moines, Altoona, Ankeny, and Urbandale.

Inside this issue: *Over the River and Through the Woods*

| | |
|--|--------|
| Over the River and Through the Woods | page 1 |
| C.O.O.L. Corner | page 2 |
| Educational Events for the Community | page 2 |
| Male and Female Communication Styles: What She Said, What He Heard | page 2 |
| Working with Dissociative Processes in Psychotherapy – A Ten Week Course | page 3 |
| Connecting Available Through E-mail | page 3 |
| Des Moines Pastoral Counseling Center Foundation | page 3 |
| Consider a Year-end Gift to the Center | page 3 |
| Men and Anger | page 3 |
| Anodea Judith 5-day Workshop | page 4 |
| A Day With Sylvia Thorson-Smith | page 4 |



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