

CONNECTING

Healthy Information from the Des Moines Pastoral Counseling Center  September / October 2007

The Wall

I had not seen her for about four years. Then, she was a little girl struggling with the death of her aunt who happened to be her legal guardian. We had played games, written stories, and thrown paint at my office wall in C.O.O.L. Now she stood before me several inches taller than I, a young woman struggling with the issues young women her age struggle with – identity, sexuality, fitting in. She turned in my office, looking all around and asked, “Where’s the Wall?” I laughed and showed her the pieces of what was left of the Wall hanging in the new C.O.O.L. hallway. She walked by and touched each piece, wondering if I remembered the chunk of dried paint we had ripped off and exclaiming about “these popsicle sticks!” and those “craters in the paint!”

The Wall has become a signature of C.O.O.L. (Children Overcoming the Obstacles of Life). The Wall epitomizes, in one fell swoop, what C.O.O.L. strives to be for kids. The Wall is a place to BE more than a thing to do. The Wall is wordless but says it all. The Wall is paint and sticks and fuzz balls and beads AND the Wall is the repository of heart.



Grace Percival standing in front of The Wall, 2005.

The original Wall began about seven years ago. It began out of an intuitive moment and has not stopped (yes, we have begun a new wall in our new location). A scared and shut-down child, struggling with a new diagnosis of a chronic illness came to my office. He was angry, sad, and frightened. He was only ten years old. He did not want to be in my office and he did not want to talk to me, certainly about matters of the heart. He disdainfully

played a game of chess and, after winning quite expeditiously, announced that he would not be returning. Of course, the grown-ups in his life, including myself, had other notions. Still I was left with this problem: how to get to the heart of a 10-year-old boy who had already made up his mind not to participate? Desperate times call for desperate (creative?) measures!

True to form, the boy would not come in the office at his next visit and so his father half carried him in. I had hung two large pieces of cardboard on one wall of my office and had filled some small travel shampoo bottles with paint. I told the boy that he did not have to talk with me but that he needed to throw paint at the cardboard until the timer dinged, which was 25 minutes hence. He began to throw paint and I immediately realized that the paint was not going to stay on the cardboard. Indeed, it was going to fly onto the carpet, the ceiling...me. But I also realized that in the throwing was a release, a relief, a mark of rage, a slash of scared. I stopped his wrist in mid-throw and asked what he was most scared of. He looked into my eyes and told me. I said “thanks” and let go of his hand. At the end of his time, he took his cardboard pieces home and I was left with an outline of spattered paint, as well as a really good feeling that something really good had just happened. The boy never, ever wanted to come to C.O.O.L., but something started to heal in him that day.

Something started to work in me, too. I began to experience a new layer of what it means to provide a safe place for kids to be. At C.O.O.L., we had always paid very close attention to the environment we set up for kids. We wanted it to be a safe place where they could be without fear of judgment, without fear of “getting into trouble,” without fear of being their true selves. We always let kids share their feelings without recrimination – no matter if they had to scream or swear or throw a ball. However, this notion of throwing paint was so wild, so unrestrained, so free...it broke all the rules and yet it was incredibly safe!

The Wall provides a bridge to the heart. It is a way to touch the life spark without words. Words may come and words may be added, but words are not essential. There is an energy that is released when paint is thrown. Any kind of throwing or big movement with the arms helps to open the heart chakra. Any jumping up and down and pounding the feet that occurs when

throwing opens the root chakra. For many children, emotions such as fear and anger are viewed as negative or bad. This is often confirmed by the adults around them but also by the intensity of the feelings themselves which can be much more than a little kid can handle. Kids tend to “stuff” or deny these feelings in hopes that the feelings will just go away. They are often fearful that others might react poorly to the expression of feelings or that if they “let it out” they will never be able to “turn it off.” On the Wall there is only acceptance. There can be no misunderstanding of intent, motivation, or communication.

The Wall is a constant, but it is never the same. Kids who are “Walls” know that they are members here. They belong and can always come back. They know that the really cool blue and silver they made that one day is there under layers of red and orange and purple. They also know, on a beyond-words level, that other kids belong too; that someone else was there and showered the Wall with their own feelings. In this, then, they are conspirators: together in spirit creating an amazing, ever-evolving expression of self.

For the therapists at C.O.O.L., the Wall is a teacher and a forum for witness. We counselors have learned that providing an environment that really fosters the development of self means taking risks with our therapeutic approach and sometimes even “breaking rules.” We have learned that sometimes the most important part of our job is to bear witness in both quietness and celebration.

She was very depressed and angry. She had been fighting with her parents for weeks and there seemed to be nothing good in her life. Her emotions were too overwhelming for talk. She went to the Wall and shouted at it as she threw her paint. After the initial release of the intense emotions so near the surface, her painting began to slow down. She chose her colors more carefully and actually designed their placement. She also began to talk about her deeper hurts and fears. As she did so, her body visibly relaxed. She turned to me and laughed. “This feels good!” she exclaimed. She left the Wall and was able to greet her mother in the waiting room with a friendly smile for the first time in over a month.

Grace Percival, M.A.

Grace is a licensed pediatric psychologist in the Center's C.O.O.L. department. Grace holds a Master of Arts degree in behavior analysis from Drake University.

Grace provides counseling to children of all ages, with a special interest in developmental disabilities and chronic illness in children.

C.O.O.L. stands for Children Overcoming the Obstacles of Life.

C.O.O.L. has five child therapists who create a safe and nurturing environment to facilitate the natural growth and healing potential of children and adolescents.

C.O.O.L. counselors recognize that kids are not miniature adults.

C.O.O.L. staff provides a variety of services for children and their families, including individual counseling, parent training, testing of children,

and presentations within the community.

C.O.O.L. Corner

Children Overcoming the Obstacles of Life

FEELINGS

Children can experience emotions as varied and intense as adults can, but children may not always be able to label them or express them verbally. Here are some ways that children can be encouraged to express their feelings.



PLAY. Allow children to act out what they are feeling using toys such as dolls, action figures, animals, and even vehicles. Children will do this naturally even when not prompted to do so. Remember that play is a natural mode of expression for children.



PUPPETS. If children are able but reluctant to tell you directly what they are feeling, sometimes they will do so indirectly through a puppet. You may try to talk to a puppet that the child is holding, talk to the child through a puppet you are holding, or have the child's puppet and your puppet talk to each other.



DRAWING & PAINTING. Encourage children to draw or paint what they are feeling. In the case of anger, they may simply scribble their angry feelings onto a piece of paper with a crayon and then crumple it up and throw it away.



CLAY. Besides using clay to create something representational, pounding, squashing, kneading, and stretching clay can be a terrific form of emotional release.



FEELINGS CHART. Create a chart with simple smiley-face-style drawings of the basic emotions: happy, sad, mad, afraid, and surprised. When children can't put their feelings into words, encourage them to point to or place a magnet on the one (or sometimes more than one) that matches how they are feeling.

Mark your calendars for a presentation of special interest to clergy, chaplains, parish nurses, hospice workers, other pastoral care providers, and interested healthcare providers and consumers.

Daniel P. Sulmasy, O.F.M., M.D., Ph.D.



"Is Healthcare a Spiritual Practice?"
Monday, November 5, 2007
7:00 – 9:00 p.m.
Des Moines University
Student Education Center auditorium
3200 Grand Avenue, Des Moines
(free parking available in DMU parking ramp)

Daniel Sulmasy, O.F.M., M.D., Ph.D., will be speaking at Des Moines University on the evening of November 5th on the topic, "Is Healthcare a Spiritual Practice?" Dr. Sulmasy is a Franciscan Friar who holds the Sisters of Charity Chair in Ethics at St. Vincent's Hospital in Manhattan, and serves as Professor of Medicine and Director of the Bioethics Institute of New York Medical College, Valhalla, NY. In the introduction to his latest book, The Rebirth of the Clinic: An Introduction to Spirituality in Health Care, Dr. Sulmasy proposes that people in the twenty-first century are looking for a form of medicine that offers healing of the body and soul, and that attending to the spiritual needs of patients is a moral obligation of the present day healthcare provider.

Dr. Sulmasy's visit is sponsored by Des Moines University's Department of Medical Humanities and Bioethics in conjunction with the Des Moines Pastoral Counseling Center. The event is free. Continuing medical education credits are being applied for. DMU is a nursing CEU provider. For other non-physicians, a certificate of attendance will be available. To pre-register, please call the Center (515) 274-4006.

Dr. Sulmasy received his A.B. and M.D. degrees from Cornell University and completed his residency, chief residency, and post-doctoral fellowship in General Internal Medicine at the Johns Hopkins Hospital. He received his Ph.D. in philosophy from Georgetown University in 1995. His research interests include the ethics of end-of-life decision-making, ethics education, and spirituality in medicine. He is the author of four books: The Healer's Calling, Methods in Medical Ethics, The Rebirth of the Clinic, and A Balm for Gilead. He serves as editor-in-chief of the journal, Theoretical Medicine and Bioethics.

INTRODUCTION to PSYCHODYNAMIC PSYCHOTHERAPY

Dates: September 14, 2007 - December 7, 2007
(Class will not meet 10/12, 11/9, or 11/22)
Time: Fridays, 8:15 - 9:45 a.m. for ten weeks
Location: Des Moines Pastoral Counseling Center
2929 Westown Parkway, Suite 110, West Des Moines
Cost: \$200
CEUs: This course provides 15.00 hours towards the continuing education requirements of the Iowa Board of Social Work Examiners and the Iowa Board of Behavioral Science Examiners.

Registration Deadline: September 7, 2007

To register, call (515) 274-4006 or
e-mail info@dmpcc.org.

Instructor: Lisa Streyffeler, Ph.D.



Lisa L. Streyffeler, Ph.D., is a licensed psychologist at the Des Moines Pastoral Counseling Center. In addition to her interest in psychodynamic psychotherapy, she has interests in maternal mental health during the prenatal and postpartum periods, the intersection of theology and personality, and professional development.

MANifest: A Gathering of Men

Sharing the Masculine Journey

MANifest is a program for men facilitated by male counselors, built around weekend retreats and Saturday workshops.

MANifest is for men of all ages and from every walk of life.

Lowell Houts, D.Min., and Mike Sears, Ed.D., facilitate all MANifest programs.

MANifest Weekend

Dates: September 28 - 30, 2007
Time: Fall weekend retreat:
check-in Friday 5:00-7:00 p.m.;
concludes Sunday noon
Location: 2412 St. Charles Road
(retreat center southeast of Winterset)
Cost: \$175, includes lodging and 5 meals
(\$150 on/before Sept. 14)
Facilitators: Lowell Houts, D.Min., and Mike Sears, Ed.D.
Pre-register: Call Lowell Houts or Mike Sears at the Center (515) 274-4006 at least one week prior to the weekend. Retreats are limited to 12 participants to provide optimal interaction.

You Can Make a Difference by Contributing to the Center's Annual Fund Campaign

This is the time of year that the Center looks to the community for financial support in our mission to bring understanding, hope, and healing to persons of all ages through counseling and education. The Center is only able to offer our services on an ability-to-pay, sliding-scale basis to lower- and moderate-income individuals and families thanks to contributions from individuals, corporations, and congregations in the community. Please help us keep pace with the growing need in the community for affordable quality counseling by making a gift to the Center. Contact Kathleen Murrin at the Center for further information on how your gift can make a difference in someone's life.

Leaving a Legacy

As you plan for the legacy you want to leave to your family and community, you have the opportunity to extend the meaning you have found in your life. Through your planned gifts, you can send a message that reflects your values and continues your commitments to the people and organizations that you have cared for and supported during your lifetime.

If you or someone you know has benefited from or been comforted by the counseling services of the Center's fine staff, please consider making a planned gift to the Des Moines Pastoral Counseling Center Foundation. Gifts to the Foundation will help ensure that the same benefit and comfort are available to those who come after you. Contact Kathleen Murrin at the Center for further information.

www.dmpcc.org

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

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is a publication of the Des Moines Pastoral Counseling Center, an independent, interfaith, not-for-profit organization. Celebrating 35 years of service to adults, families, adolescents, and children for the purpose of enhancing emotional, spiritual, and relationship health. The Center has satellite offices in Ankeny, Bedford, Lamoni, Lenox, Leon, Mt. Ayr and Osceola. Editor: Kathleen Murrin

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Des Moines Pastoral

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