

When asked by Muriel Whitaker to give a eulogy at Carl Whitaker's funeral, I struggled with what to say--"Remembering Carl Whitaker" is adapted from that eulogy presented April 25, 1993 in Wisconsin at his memorial service. Muriel requested that I send it to your publication. Then when asked to prepare this article, I continued to search for words to express more personally my memories and feelings after Dr. Whitaker's death. "A Personal Tribute" is the result of that effort.

Remembering Carl Whitaker

"The act of dying is also one of the acts of life." Marcus Aurelius

I knew Carl Whitaker as part of a family therapists' group in Ohio in which he and Muriel participated for six years until his stroke in 1993. We were fortunate enough to experience Carl when he had had eighty years to synthesize incredible memories, insights, and warnings. What a gift to know a great teacher at the end of a long, productive life! Cesare Pavese states, "We do not remember days, we remember moments." One of my first "moments" (Carl provided many "moments"!) was his stating, "I don't want to be part of this group if it's looking for a guru. I want to be part of a process."

I celebrate the process of this man's life. I remember and venerate Carl Whitaker's life by: reflecting on what he has done, remembering what others have said about him, remembering his own words, thinking about the company he kept, and recalling how he affected us.

First, measured by his accomplishments, Carl Whitaker's life was impressive! Filled with numerous books, hundreds of articles, and a career that spans over fifty years - doctor, therapist, teacher, mentor, writer, and philosopher- his vita is an inch thick.

Secondly, if we remember him by what others said, what words were used to describe him, we appreciate his ability to evoke reaction, both positive and disconcerting. Here is a sampling.

Original	Honest	Validating
Crazy	Grandfatherly	Zen Master
Irreverent	Self Disclosing	Respectful
Right Brained	Irrational	Existential
Infuriating	Lovable	Wise

Confusing	Present	Nurturing
Empathetic	Intuitive	Ironie
Provoking	Playful	Warm
Sexist	Non-sexist	Human

Carl Whitaker's own words resonate with wisdom and originality. Some memorable quotes:

"The most difficult dialectic is that found in the opposition/synthesis of belonging and individuating."

"Stay confused."

"Guard your impotence as one of your most valuable weapons."

"Psychotherapy is a counter culture process, and if the therapists are not protected, the community will wither them."

"I don't believe half of what I think."

"I'ness and 'We'ness --the back and forth --produces growth."

A person's company tells a lot about him. Those closest to Carl were his family--his children, his grandchildren, and, most especially, the woman who shared his life, Muriel Schram Whitaker. They were partners and parents together for almost sixty years. Muriel is a wise, grounded, intelligent, warm, loyal, insightful, and gracious woman. Finding her proved Carl Whitaker had good judgment and early on knew what was good for him! They raised a large, loving group of human beings that have the wonderful ability to make all feel welcome. One of the greatest gifts Carl and Muriel together gave us, was allowing us to witness their relationship - their struggles, their triumphs, and their stunning and inspiring devotion to and delight in each other. What a gift to witness a vital marriage that spanned six decades! They taught us reverence for their "WE".

And finally, we remember how Carl stimulated us. He denied he was aware of the powerful transference aura he carried, but we found our brains always "gorked" by his presence. Our primary process was unleashed and let out of the confinement of words and theories. We all knew we were in "a presence"--a fully alive human that challenged us to live consciously and unconsciously. His work has encouraged me and countless others to continue to surprise ourselves, to be sensitive to our intuition - to care for ourselves, to acknowledge the really dangerous pitfalls of the world of therapy and of being overly "responsible." I've observed him listening to "experts" in the field

and to 22-year-old students with the same interest and intensity. Chuckling at the ironies of this existence, he was always curious, always learning, always full of humor.

Dr. Whitaker's humanity and his willingness to share in this perplexing, complicated, frustrating and wonderful process of living continues to challenge us. He taught us the meaning of Edgar Lee Masters' famous line, "It takes life to love life..."

We said goodbye to his body, those great farmer hands and that impudent face. But his spirit as a teacher, therapist, fellow human, lives on in hundreds of clinics, offices, groups, and in the hearts of all who knew and loved him.

Dr. Carl Whitaker was an important man of his time and an important human being for all times. The experience of knowing him means consequently knowing ourselves better. We are glad to have been on the path with him. We love him. We celebrate his whole life. Goodbye, you gentle, giant of a man.

April 23, 1995

A Personal Tribute

Many have asked me why I loved and enjoyed Dr. Whitaker in the context of my life as a woman and as a clinical Social Worker. The reasons for my revering him, his work and his marriage:

Whitaker-The-Transference-Lighting-Rod provoked the following in me:

- Fear of authority and my elders, anger at authority and my elders, a longing for authority and my elders!
- The recognition of the "mother" voice in me saying, "Don't go. You might get hurt and I might lose you." The "father" voice saying "Go! You might well get hurt, we might be separated; isn't it exciting you have a life!"
- Wanting to sit in his lap, suck my thumb, and knowing it was safe to do so. This included knowing I might have to hold him while he sucked his thumb, too!

Whitaker used the language of the people to talk about himself and the families with which he worked. He never used medical, professional jargon, words that can distance and diminish.

I remember him crying in front of an audience of several hundred when he

related the death of a resident he had supervised many years ago. She had been murdered by a patient and Carl believed he should have protected her or taught her not to sacrifice herself to her work. This became a warning to us, especially the women he mentored---being a psychotherapist is a role. Care, work, struggle, but save yourself for yourself, for your family and especially for a loving mate, if you are lucky enough to have one.

He used his experience as a family member, husband and father - not school work or theories - to understand and to explain to others the process that formed him. He reveled in his marriage to Muriel. Watching him lovingly tie Muriel's shoes after she injured a hip, listening to him envy her graceful ability to nurture intensified my love for him. He truly mourned not having the easy intimacy he witnessed between his wife, daughters and grandchildren--an intimacy he felt men seldom experienced. He really loved and respected women in the truest sense, enjoying their company and their lives. His experience of gender and power was certainly different from my own, but those differences did not hinder our relationship.

At one of the last workshops he did in April, 1993, a therapist asked him what he thought of the men's movement. He stated the only men's movement he knew was when a man would lie down with his naked baby on his own naked chest and experience fatherhood flesh on flesh. He knew the process of touch - real contact with babies and children- being intimate with the body fluids of life which connect people in basic ways. He said, "A man needs to have a baby in a urine soaked diaper sit on his face." He believed missing this experience is why men often feel untethered to life.

And finally when I felt deflated by my three adolescent children who seemed bent on total rebellion, self-destruction, and rejection of the current educational system, Carl thought they sounded wonderful, exciting, passionate, and alive! He and Muriel both respected their process and helped me appreciate the big picture that was obscured by my mother-fear.

How does one find words to express experiences that have no easy words? Those experiences do evoke tears and laughter. Carl was a rollercoaster ride through the id with no brakes! Being with him forced me to pay attention to being really awake, scared and excited. May everyone that knew him always carry that life "jolt" in his honor.

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