

If We Meet the Shadow:

One Family's Interruption of Bullying and Blame

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This presentation would offer one road to healing the schisms caused by our general and culturally applauded tendencies to project our wounds onto others, even within our own families. Carl Jung coined the term **shadow** to indicate the feelings which frighten and disgust us to the extent they are put in unconscious compartments where-- though we might fantasize being rid of them--they fester and ultimately explode or turn into the demonizing of another against whom we justify hatred and blame.

In standards that include odes to perfectionism and competitiveness we often are deprived--and then deprive others-- of appreciating that it is our imperfection, willingness to own vulnerability and getting help in recuperating from hurts and mistakes, that makes love and evolving in relationships possible.

In an atmosphere of widespread attention to student bullying, it can be effective to look at **context** which includes the undigested violence left to the side of our awareness and responsibility or as part of our entertainment. Here attention is paid to one family, in which a 10 year old girl was originally dubbed the bully, the sole source of terror.

In this family as in many, the demands were to prove competency and "decency" by producing conforming behavior of the children. The parents initially tried to (in the father's words) get Maria, a baby so highly sensitive, to become someone she wasn't." Years of crying without comfort, threats, and punishments that ended with parental guilt left this girl without trust, with compartments for the whole of her functioning as well as her own lust for revenge and humiliation of her parents and brothers.

This is the story of how we struggled together to get to know Maria, and ultimately the parents' role in the continuing over-focus on her instead of their own implications that kept going. In addition it is the story of our working together to recover from our own excesses, giving me as well an opportunity to experience the falling down and getting up necessary for any change or real growth.

The humility about context and implication, and genuine respect for the words and feelings of any child are necessary ingredients to healing instead of scapegoating, even in our current widespread preoccupation with school and internet bullying. This shift isn't easy, particularly when children are for the most part still precious "possessions" rather than being worthy of dignity for their own developmental needs and contributors towards intimacy within our world.

In general as in the case of Maria and her family, dignity for all children and respect for their complexity, requires we address our own shadow lands so we don't demean or minimize their humanity. The bouts of violence, confusion, hate, and beginnings of light will be shared during the presentation, with space for digestion and discussion.