

THE *Knowing Field*

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Editorial

Dear Reader,

Welcome to 'The Knowing Field', the new name for the 6th issue of the Systemic Solutions Bulletin. This term was coined by Dr. Albrecht Mahr in 1997 at the first International Conference on Family Constellations in Wiesloch near Heidelberg in his keynote lecture entitled: *Wisdom does not come to those who sit back: on the use of technique and 'being guided' in family constellations*. To quote Albrecht: *"We were deeply impressed by the richness of knowledge emerging in family constellations. The term 'Knowing Field' seemed to be the most appropriate term for describing the phenomena which were informing and guiding us in family constellations."*

On the one hand it can be seen as a poetic term, poetry being the most accurate language at the level of the soul. On the other hand 'Knowing Field' is inspired by Rupert Sheldrake's findings on morphic fields and extended mind and by quantum physics and their surprising discoveries regarding the transmission of information and knowledge through quantum fields."

In the sub-heading, the term 'Constellations' seems to have been most consistently used from amongst those borrowed and translated from the German and the closest approximation to the work that is being carried out. The journal is and has always been international and it is hoped this focus will increase with the impending moves towards a greater international cohesion, initiated by the IAG* at the International Conference held in Köln, Germany at the beginning of May.

At that Conference. I attended a panel discussion on the theme of taboos in constellation work and it became very clear to me that those of us who are outside Germany have a quite different relationship to constellation work. We have not been exposed to the negative publicity that constellation work in Germany has had, and it was clear to see how closely this is connected to the Second World War

and the issue of the Holocaust. At the same time, we are all part of the field of constellation work and in that sense, whatever happens at the core will be reflected elsewhere in the field.

This leaves me wondering whether the choice to depict shadows of the dead on the cover and have death as one of the main themes in this issue may be a reflection of a wider dynamic. Is something of the constellation work dying to make way for the new? Or is it simply a reflection of a move into the darker side of the work? Struggles within countries seem to be coming out into the open more. The ConstellationTalk website (www.constellationflow.com) has recently been flooded with debate on the risk of ego inflation when doing constellation work, and some honest and open sharing about our vulnerabilities around this issue has taken place. The constellation work is powerful and this means the destructive energies that exist will be as powerful as the healing forces.

I am reminded of Bert Hellinger's words to me once: 'Strife and destruction are necessary and inevitable'. At the same time, those same energies can be transformative and this becomes particularly apparent when working in the realm of the dead. We who work with constellations will be aware of the way in which both the living and the dead appear to co-exist in the 'Knowing Field' and have a mutual influence on each other in both a positive and negative way. Albrecht Mahr focuses on this theme in the first article of this issue, as he describes with examples the many different ways it is possible for that influence to happen and how it can be transformed into a healing force for both the living and the dead. Christine Wilson's moving tribute to her father is a wonderful illustration of that same healing force and how peaceful the transition into death can be. In the Opinions section, Susan Lanier writes of her experiences of the Spirit world and the need for caution, honouring and respect when dealing with these greater forces.

Moving from death to birth, a number of new initiatives are emerging in this issue: We see the beginning of an entry into the educational world, with Judith Hemming and Terry Ingram taking constellations into a school in Wiltshire as part of an exciting new project. Ursula Franke's visit to South Africa sets the scene for some ongoing healing work in that troubled country. As Bert Hellinger worked in South Africa and was influenced by the Zulu many years ago, this seems like an important and appropriate development.

The field of organisational constellations has often been considered to be quite separate from family constellations, so it is particularly valuable to have Ty Francis' article which makes more explicit the overlap and the separation between the two. He provides us with some innovative ideas of how to take constellations in to the organisational arena with some very interesting examples.

At the same time, others are combining their skills and knowledge from different areas with the constellation work, to good effect: Henne Arnolt Verschuren & Marjolijne van Buren Molenaar use their experience of bodywork to show how to help clients and representatives who may have difficulty becoming aware of what is happening in their bodies. Julia Hyde's translated extract from Jakob Schneider & Brigitte Grosse's book on fairy tales illustrates how metaphor can be combined with constellations in work with clients.

Increasingly popular is the adaptation of the work for individual therapy: Eva Madelung and Barbara Innecken have further developed Vivian Broughton's review of their book *Entering Inner Images* with a more detailed explanation of Neuro-Imaginative Gestalting, accompanied by an interesting constellation, whilst Chris Walsh describes how he used constellations alongside other approaches to work with a long-term client.

Also included are two poems: the Wordsworth poem was posted on the ConstellationTalk website

by Helena Sprake and seems very appropriate for the theme of death whilst Gary Stuart's poem reminds us of the importance of humility and bowing down to our ancestors and all these greater forces.

Quite where these greater forces will take us over the next few years in terms of the constellation work, I guess none of us knows. With a new move to set up his own training programme, Bert Hellinger shows no sign of slowing down or retiring – quite the opposite in fact! In the meantime, the constellation seed he has sown likewise continues to move forwards, evolving and expanding into new areas.

Once again, my thanks to all contributors and to all those who have helped to produce this journal and a special thank you to Carol Siederer, my Associate Editor.

Barbara Morgan

Editor

*IAG – Internationale Arbeitsgemeinschaft Systemische
Lösungen nach Bert Hellinger e.v.
International Association for Systemic Solutions

Editor's Correction:

In the Editorial of Bulletin 5, 2004 it was stated that Barbara Stones had said in her Editorial of Bulletin 4, 2003 that "she wondered about the possibilities of the work becoming distorted through long accredited trainings." This paraphrasing did not accurately report her concerns about trainings; what she actually wrote was: "With the growing number of training programmes we may see a growing 'professionalisation', longer trainings, restricted access etc."

How the Living and the Dead Can Heal Each Other

HOW THE DEAD CAN BECOME HELPERS TO THE LIVING

The dead who are dismissed, forgotten, or excluded as being bad or 'dark ones', leave an influence that brings fear into the system. One of the living will unconsciously atone on their behalf with a 'dark love', or these dead may appear in disturbing dreams. Family constellations indicate that the dead remain restless and unredeemed until their burdensome effect on the souls of the living can be resolved.

In the last few years I have found it necessary to make a distinction between the supposed 'independent state of being' of the dead and our inner images of them, which we have imposed upon them. This distinction can make a dramatic difference, as illustrated later in this article.

Usually, as soon as the dead are remembered and their fates acknowledged, they are able to withdraw and become guardians of the living, bestowing their blessing and benevolence on them. In this way, even after decades, the living and the dead can help to heal each other. Such connections can be particularly moving when families have experienced strong guilt feelings and great suffering.

In his book, *Farewell: Family Constellations with Descendants of Victims and Perpetrators* (2003), Bert Hellinger illustrates:

In this article I want to focus on one specific experience that comes up in constellation work - meeting with the dead. In constellation work we can see that the dead can bring healing and benevolence when they are honoured and when their fates and life contributions are seen and acknowledged. Often healing solutions come from dead family members or from other dead ones who are connected to the family in some way. Parents who died early; children and siblings; partners or friends who died; people who sacrificed their lives for family members; as well the people who died in wars or never returned - they are all remembered in the family consciousness. Their influence can be supportive and strengthening. However, we also meet those dead who have not been redeemed and who burden

"Jacob, when he crossed the River Jabbok, could not let go of the angel, struggling with him until he received a blessing from him. In the same way, it is impossible for the descendants of persecutors and victims - and in the same way for us too - to let go of the dead until they are honoured through our suffering and we are blessed by them. Then they retreat quietly and we can move on. We can then cross the river with all our belongings, marked, yet free. This river separates us from the dead, for a while, until the time comes for us to join them."

the system. In these cases respect and acknowledgement are not enough to bring about resolution. In the constellations, these unredeemed souls behave as if they are not fully aware that they are in the realm of the dead, and they remain attached to one or more family members, with serious consequences for the living. I will demonstrate how, in my experience, constellations can offer possible solutions that liberate both the living and the dead. Then the dead can help the living, and so find peace within themselves.

(Editor's note: This article was originally published in 1999 in German in the German journal Praxis der Systemaufstellung. It has since been translated by Heiner Einsenbarth and kindly updated by Albrecht using the extra knowledge and insight he has gained since that time).

EXAMPLE: THE PERPETRATOR'S BLESSING

In one family constellation a group member represented a father. This father had committed atrocities against his family and innocent people during the war and they only regained some peace when he left the family. In the constellation this was symbolised by the representative of the father leaving the room. However, over the next few days after the constellation the father's representative felt unable to separate from his role. He felt tense, guilty, and angry as if he had been denied something. We repeated the

ARTICLE CONTRIBUTOR: ALBRECHT MAHR

constellation with him again representing the father. Immediately he knew what was missing. He said, "I have committed terrible crimes. I have to be responsible for them, even if it is very difficult for me. But, I also have a 'heart', so please accept my blessings for you all, otherwise I cannot rest." The moment the family could accept the father's blessing then he could leave them and take his burden with him. At the end of the constellation the representative felt relieved and free to be himself again.

The dead who are caught up in their guilt can cause great turmoil and suffering in the souls of the living, when they are judged by them and when their blessings are rejected.

However, in some family constellations in the past, we experienced an incredible 'evil', which did not allow this kind of transformation into benevolence. In some cases of serious wrongdoing the descendants might feel an overwhelming pressure to participate in the guilt and to atone for their ancestors' actions. Then there were those dead ones who remained hard and inaccessible to their families. They seemed only to become aware of themselves and their crimes when they participated in the fate of their victims. This 'evil' in its inconceivability, forced us - in constellation work and beyond - to be humble and not to immediately judge or claim to know what was 'right' or 'wrong'. We were given the opportunity and the task, to deal with the dead in a direct and impartial way.

More recently, we have gained

more insight into how deep the bond is between perpetrators and victims - it is literally deeper than any other family bond. And we know that often the only perceivable melting force to reach the hearts of perpetrators is love - being loved by someone above and beyond his guilt about his actions. The facilitator of a constellation can support this possibility by opening his compassionate heart, even for the most 'evil' person - certainly not an easy step and not always possible. The concept of 'movements of the soul', which was developed around 2001 was very much based on the observation that former victims and their perpetrators could meet in a space beyond the distinction of good and evil i.e. beyond the limits of personal conscience. I have proposed the term 'integral conscience' to describe its more embracing quality of including and transcending the realm of personal conscience.

DYING IN A CONFUSED STATE OF MIND

Another phenomenon we have come across in constellation work is when someone has died in a confused state of mind. Sometimes the representatives of the dead experience a deep clarity and wisdom and as observers we immediately feel respect for them and see they are at peace. We feel something of the essence of the soul of the dead person with whom the representative is in contact. However, sometimes the dead remain confused and entangled in unresolved issues. Such confusing dynamics stay alive in the family in

a very charged and negative way.

EXAMPLE: "GRANDMA, PLEASE LOOK"

Franziska, a married woman with three children, was in a constant panic that her dead relatives would make her ill and cause her death. She appeared distant with clouded eyes; as if in a constant trance in order to avoid meeting the dangerous gaze of the dead. In the constellation, her sister who had died of cancer and her father's brother who had died in the war, both seemed very benevolent towards her. But her maternal grandmother was entirely focused on Franziska. She spoke to her granddaughter in a very determined and demanding way, "You, I need you. You have to come to me." Franziska realised how much her fear was related to her demanding grandmother.

At first it was not possible to understand whom Franziska represented and who it was that her grandmother was really looking for. The grandmother insisted that Franziska came to her, which in turn created more panic in Franziska. It was only when Franziska said, "Grandma, please understand, this means I have to die and leave my husband and children behind," that Grandma was able to see the consequences of her demand. She was shocked and started to cry, saying again and again, "That is not what I want." Franziska responded, "Look, Grandma, where you are now there is far more help than I can give you." This caused her grandmother to feel great pain in her heart and it became clearer who she was really looking for. She called for her own mother, Franziska's great

grandmother. We brought her into the constellation and she embraced and held her daughter. The pain in the grandmother's heart disappeared and, for the first time she was able to look lovingly towards the living. This was a great relief to Franziska.

Sometimes the living have to show the dead the consequences of their confused state of mind in order to free them both from fear and guilt. If we haven't achieved clarity and reconciliation with the dead, especially our parents, when they were still alive, then we in turn, when we are dead, seem to look for them amongst the living. The living can help the dead to understand their confusion and often it is then possible for the dead to turn to the ones that they really want to be close to, to call to them and finally be welcomed and received by them. This is always a relief for everybody involved.

In such cases two things seem to be important: Firstly, there needs to be some reconciliation, albeit belatedly. Secondly, there needs to be an invocation of those who died before, so that they can now guide those souls who have died in a confused state of mind to find their place in the realm of the dead. These are also the same guides who may have helped our souls at the time of our birth to enter the world of the living.

EXAMPLE: AN ILLUSIONARY WISH AND ITS SOLUTION

Burkhard, a technician and father of two complained about his loss of energy. He felt resigned and unable to put his brilliant ideas into action.

In the constellation it became clear that the first fiancée of Burkhard's father was the cause of his loss of energy. She had become very ill with tuberculosis during the Second World War and this was the reason why after the war Burkhard's father had broken off the engagement and married another woman, Burkhard's mother. His first fiancée had lived on for another couple of years and then died.

In the constellation the fiancée was entirely focused on Burkhard and his father. Several times she said in a melancholic, dreamy way, "Yes, you two are my family, my husband and my son." The father acknowledged their love for each other and his deep regret, and Burkhard's mother honoured her as 'the first'; yet none of these actions brought about any change in the fiancée's feelings. Finally, we concluded that at the moment of her death the fiancée must have been completely absorbed by her deep, but illusionary wish to have 'her' family with her. When she was confronted with the consequences for Burkhard and his family - the continuing entanglement with this 'illusion' - she came out of her delusion and said, "But now I am totally alone." Then she knew who she was really longing for - her parents. She called for them and recognised them as the ones who had once helped her into life. Now, close to them, she could see and accept that she was dead and could feel deep and honest goodwill towards the living. Burkhard could now begin to experience being his parents' child, and in particular his mother's son. He could experience the flow of energy derived from his real roots.

Family constellations seem to confirm very clearly a major belief held by all spiritual traditions: that it is important for us to live our lives in such a way that we can die with clear, calm and loving minds. Ancient knowledge tells us that the transformational process of death and beyond contains powerful energies, which can have equally benevolent or devastating effects. Our state of mind when we die, our last thoughts, wishes and decisions have a long standing effect on our nearest and dearest, and the larger circle of people to which we belong. In constellation work we find these effects particularly when family members have died in a traumatic way, without preparation and without having a chance to say good-bye. Death caused by war, persecution, suicide or accident can become the source of powerful unredeemed mental and spiritual energies, which can burden families for several generations to come.

EXAMPLE: "THE WAR FINISHED LONG AGO"

Heinrich always felt very intimidated, totally blocked and paralysed when he met very self-confident men. He had a younger brother. His father had died during the war outside Stalingrad when Heinrich was six years old. The representative for the father felt this war experience very vividly: "Everything is covered in snow...endless...my body is deep in snow, cold, hopeless. What is going on with the others down there? This black tunnel in front of me...fear...blackness...Please, where are my wife and children?" At this moment Heinrich moved to his father's right side and supported

him. His father was very relieved but at the same time very confused. He did not know what had happened and could not understand that he was dead, that he could not share his life with his loved ones and that his longing for his wife and children put a frightening pressure on them, which resulted in them feeling suicidal. Heinrich explained to his father, step by step, what had happened up to the present moment. Finally his father's confusion lifted and he was relieved that he could see the boundary between the living and the dead. Now he could withdraw, filled with kindness, even cheerfulness. The realisation: "The war finished long ago," was a relief both to him and Heinrich. Heinrich was very moved as he remembered his childhood and his fear that he might have caused his father's death. Before his father had returned to the front line and died he had promised him, "I will always be a good boy, Daddy." With a pounding and excited heart Heinrich could now, in a very dignified and determined way, hand back his promise, remembering how much he loved his father's zest for life.

Solutions in constellation work draw their strength and power from the acceptance of reality and the acknowledgement of 'what is'. The shift from: "That cannot be true," to "That is how it is," is liberating, even if painful. It frees the heart and allows the flow of a great healing force. Solutions are based on deep love, love for the other, and love for life.

As illustrated in the last example, there are individuals who have died

suddenly and unexpectedly and have therefore been unable to prepare themselves for death. Such people often do not realise they are dead and feel confused, unable to make a clear distinction between the realms of the living and the dead. Through family constellations, the living can often help these people to die more consciously and let go of their confusion. It is thus helpful for facilitators of family constellations to learn a compassionate and yet very clear and concrete way of facilitating this process of dying consciously. Conveying to the dead person the concrete facts of what led to their death requires loving determination and courage so that the dead person can eventually absorb them, relax and move on.

THE IMPORTANCE OF DISTINGUISHING BETWEEN ONE'S OWN IMAGES AND 'OBJECTIVE TRUTH'

Issues of heavy guilt - whether assumed or directly linked to action - have the potential to distort our perception and may have far-reaching consequences. Basically, unresolved guilt contains images of the victims with their terrible suffering, hate, need for revenge or aggressive accusation. Perpetrators or descendants of perpetrators stick to the conviction that the victims are in a negative state of mind. This conviction and the negative images associated with it are projected onto the victims. What we then meet in constellations i.e. aggressive vengeful victims, is not their own state of being, their 'objective truth' but rather the image carried of them by the perpetrators. This distorting process plays an important role in

the ongoing negative after-effects of collective trauma. Typically, in such cases nothing changes these supposedly angry victims; however hard the perpetrators feel regret, and try to honour and include them - they remain un-reconciled and negative. The only thing that helps is for the perpetrators to acknowledge that they have imposed their images on them and have taken their guilt-ridden fantasies of them to be their essence and have thus badly distorted the true situation. If this possibility is stated and the perpetrators are then able to look very mindfully again at the victims, the situation may change dramatically and in a split second the truth may be revealed - the essence of the dead victims. Very often they themselves are calm and at peace with their fate while the living are struggling with their dark and negative images of them.

It is useful to consider this possibility when, for example you meet an aggressively accusing aborted child - that the mother is imposing on the unborn child her own inner judge and does not therefore see the tender essence of this little being. Or, when there seems to be no reconciliation between one of your ancestors and his victims, it may be that you are unconsciously carrying the guilt-informed projected images of that original perpetrator or even that of generations before him. Looking the victims in the eye may again change the situation immediately and lead to their release into peace, after a long time of not being seen.

It is helpful for me to recall the fact that psychoanalysis discovered a long time ago, the enormous significance of unconscious

fantasies and it is a pleasure for me as a trained psychoanalyst to be able to apply that precious heritage so usefully in the context of constellation work.

EXAMPLE: THE PRAYER

A friend of mine once said, "Constellations are really a prayer, aren't they?" I think she is right and I would like to add, "Solutions are like a prayer, a healing and loving image in which we include ourselves and others." To go back and revisit the image of a solution again and again with soul and body is 'praying' or 'a prayer'. Larry Dossey in his book *Healing Words* (1997) calls it 'prayerfulness'. This is probably the most effective way to take a solution into our hearts.

In a supervision session a colleague set up a supervisory constellation of the family of Eva, a severely traumatised patient. Eva's mother had killed herself after many previous suicide attempts and a long history of alcohol and drug abuse. In the constellation the mother felt extremely pained and tried in a hazed and desperate way to keep hold of her daughter. This must have been the mental state the mother was in when she died and it left her daughter under immense unrelenting pressure to follow her into death, in order to help her. The only way to protect Eva's soul from the influence of her mother's confused mind seemed to be to send the mother out of the room and close the door behind her. When this happened everybody was greatly relieved, but then all participants felt very clearly that the therapist had to look after the mother. The therapist stood next to the mother

and both mother and daughter felt relieved. The therapist was deeply religious and knew immediately what was needed. In the coming weeks she prayed that the mother would understand what had happened, and be helped to find a way to feel lovingly welcomed into the realm of the dead and turn towards the light. The therapist observed that from then on, her patient felt less pressured by her mother's presence. Eva's treatment developed into a long-term trauma therapy and resulted in her increased stability.

CONCLUSION

We do not really know where the dead are. However, family constellations indicate that the dead and their fate share and influence the same timeless space that we inhabit. They also indicate that when the dead are still entangled

with the living and are preventing both from moving on, then it is possible for the dead and the living to find a common solution. This can be done in a loving, direct and uncomplicated way that does not disrespect death or the dead, but allows us to use our limited possibilities to support life in the best possible way.

It is my view that constellation work places before our eyes a space of consciousness, which we are only just beginning to be able to visualise - a space containing everything that has ever been experienced. This is not a new idea. And so, I think, if we allow ourselves to be guided by this 'knowing field' of a constellation, there are many insights - still yet maybe unimaginable in our present state of consciousness - waiting to help us in our search for healing solutions.

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My Father's Death

ARTHUR CLIFFORD HARRISON

My Father

Born 10th May 1911 — Died 29th June 2003

One afternoon there is a phone call to tell me that my 91 year old father has taken to his bed because he feels too tired to get up any more, and he is also losing his appetite. Since my mother's death 22 years ago, my father lives alone, very independently, close to his 'roots' in the North East of England. I live and work 290 miles away, and usually visit him for a long weekend every month.

As I make the journey to see him the following day, I know that my father, in asking me to come, is not himself. I reflect on our father-daughter relationship and how he is always at pains to reassure me he is perfectly all right on his own. Perhaps there is something characteristic about this special generation of old people born at the beginning of the last century that makes them particularly independent and proud. They have lived through a World War, even two, a long time before the National Health Service and the welfare state were introduced. They really had to learn to 'stand on their own two feet'.

My father has had a wonderful life and has really rich memories. He is the youngest of six children, born to a Hartlepool couple, William and Ann Harrison (nee Thompson). He was born at home on 10th May 1911 and there was some concern over his health as a newborn. Now he is nearly 92 and has always had wonderful health. There were 20 years between the firstborn child and the last born and they are affectionately known as: 'Alpha' and 'Omega' !

As he grows into old age, my father loves to relate all the family stories and I cherish our time together. I am now studying the Hellinger work

and am astonished how much he already knows. A particular ritual that gives him great pleasure is to list all the family members using their full names in the correct order. They are all dead now. This ritual brings them all to each of our 'family meetings', making sure no-one is missed out, and I feel very grateful to be a member of this large family.

"Via the soul, the living and the dead continue to be in contact." (van Kampenhout 2001, p.10)

He tells me that the family always call their parents 'Mother' and 'Father', never any other form of address. Once out of curiosity he asked his mother how she came to meet his father. He learns that questions like this are not to do with him and he never gets an answer.

A cousin called Alice Maude Hill also lives with the family. She takes on the role of looking after Cliff, and listens to his prayers as she puts him to bed, "God bless Father, Mother, Grandfather, Alice, brothers, sister, aunts, uncles, everybody, and please make Clifford a good boy."

Great Grandpappy Thompson, Cliff's mother's father, who also lives with the family, lives to the healthy old age of 98. He is still apparently riding a bicycle at that age. We are not sure how he dies.

Cliff meets Betty, my mother, when they are very young schoolchildren because the Glovers live in the

same street, and he generally walks to school with her older brother.

The families grow up together and after a somewhat tempestuous courtship Betty, the youngest of the Glover family, marries Cliff, the youngest of the Harrisons on 9th May 1936 at St Hilda's Church. Their honeymoon is spent at a hotel called 'Stormy Hall', an apt choice for a couple whose marriage appears to thrive on friction! Nonetheless, they go on to celebrate their golden wedding together.

I am born on New Year's Day 1937, arriving prematurely while my father is playing rugby in the local New Year's Derby game against West Hartlepool. I am the Glovers' first grand-child and they all argue about what I shall be called. Eventually my Godfather stops all argument by writing 'Christine', which is Betty's choice, on the necessary form.

My father decides to join the Territorial Army so when war is declared in September 1939 he is quickly called up as a Gunner, first of all serving in the Orkneys protecting the convoys and then in East Africa for five years.

The long war years pass and eventually he arrives home one day without any notice, standing on the doorstep without ceremony. 'Goodbyes' and 'hellos' tend to be like that, no matter how long you are away. For me, his only child

ARTICLE CONTRIBUTOR: CHRISTINE WILSON

and daughter, the long separation during the war, means that my father stays distant, forever a 'hero' in my heart. I am always in awe of this man, my father.

My most vivid memory is being called out of the singing class at school. The teacher explains, "Her Father's come home." The phrase engraves itself in my heart. Without a second wasted I fly down the school steps towards where they are standing; my mother and father, together for the first time in memory, to welcome the father I know so well and yet do not know at all.

However, it isn't so easy after the war. A lot of men find it very difficult after their war experiences to come home and settle into their old lives again. All the rejoicing that the long war is over is followed by the difficulties of rejoining their families, resuming the old relationships and marriages where they left off, and their old jobs. In fact my mother has become an alcoholic during the war years and I have become her carer. She says at this point it is harder to get back together with my father than it is to stay apart.

The experience of travelling abroad has made its impact. My father goes abroad again to the Far East, with the plan that my mother will follow him and I go to boarding school. It doesn't quite work out as planned. My mother stays behind and four long years later my father eventually comes home for six months' leave. I am 13 years old. Being at a strict boarding school, I am not allowed much time away from school to spend with my parents.

I eventually go to live with them in Kuala Lumpur. I am now 21 and have become independent. At this point it is difficult to accept his authority as my father, and he is surprisingly strict and Victorian. It is the first time in our lives that we as a family of three people live together for any

length of time. We live as three individuals rather than as a family, which isn't so surprising. We don't know how to do anything else.

My father makes the decision to retire from working in the Far East at age 50 and return to the UK before he is too old for another permanent job. So we all travel home. Typically, we travel separately.

Father and I become a little closer when he is left on his own after my mother suddenly dies in 1981. By this time I have been married for 20 years and, following in Great Grandmother and Grandmother Harrison's footsteps, have six children of my own - five sons and a daughter.

My father insists on continuing to live on his own until it becomes obvious that the house is too big and he begins to have trouble with his eyesight so can no longer drive a car. Just before he leaves there we learn he has fallen off a tall ladder, aged 84, trying to get onto the garage roof.

So from there he comes to live in a sheltered flat right beside St Hilda's Church, where he was christened, confirmed and married and tells us he will be buried; back to his roots. He arranges it all himself. He continues to lunch weekly at his Cricket Club and to visit Twickenham to watch the Five Nations rugby. He attends Church every Sunday up to the last. Going to Church is the last outside thing to go.

His only medical treatment has been for malaria in the early 1950s in the Far East, and a dislocated shoulder playing rugby after the war, then a chesty cough more recently. He is now registered blind, and can't watch television; more importantly he can no longer read. He listens to the radio instead. The doctor has been to visit to give him 'flu inoculations each winter but he sends her away. He

does his own shopping and cooking, and a good family friend comes in every Saturday to do washing, ironing and cleaning.

Some time last Autumn we notice he is beginning to lose weight. His GP persuades him to have just a little bit of help during the week. Knowing how much he loves porridge for breakfast, we put this indirect pressure on him to accept a carer coming in each morning to make a bowl of porridge, no more. When the carer arrives he tells her to go away, he doesn't want her. Fortunately she persists and after a while he grudgingly lets her in. Since then he has accepted the 'Porridge Lady' as part of his daily routine.

One by one all his old friends have become infirm and died. He has been to all their funerals. He stops going out as much but attends Church each Sunday morning and that is the highlight of his week.

Each time we visit he recounts stories from his boyhood, his school years, and he sometimes sings for us; he has a wonderful voice, very pure and absolutely on the note. Not a sign of a quiver.

The GP comes to see him shortly after I arrive - he has now taken to his bed. He is not on any medication and she can't find anything wrong. The consultant physician comes two days later to examine him, and after a thorough examination can still find nothing wrong. He says he would like my father to be assessed by his colleague, a geriatrician, involving a trip to the Day Hospital. However, he says as he leaves, "If he has turned his face to the wall, there is nothing you can do."

Even though he is not ill, perhaps my father is facing his death.

"The soul wants to return to the source of being at the time when it's right. Someone who accepts age with dignity and yields to this

movement can sink back peacefully when the time comes. That is the fulfilment of life." (Hellinger 2001b, p.134)

My Father has talked about dying. He checks if his Will has been made. We talk about some of his favourite hymns. He sings an old favourite for us one day: 'Will Your Anchor Hold?' 'Will you anchor safe by the heavenly shore when life's storms are past for evermore?'

He checks once again about his Will:

"Have I made a Will?"

"Yes, its all been done, Daddy."

"And my investments?"

"Yes, all in order. Everything's in order; all taken care of; nothing to worry about."

(pause) "Then I can go then."

(long pause) "Yes, Daddy, you can go, when the time is right."

The nurses think this is being depressed. I cannot agree. I think he is looking forward to being re-united with my mother, which he believes will happen after death. Having been an accountant all his life, he wants reassurance that everything is in good order.

I don't want him to leave me; a voice inside me cries, "Not yet, please!" However, there is something very much more powerful than both of us guiding the way here. It is Fate.

He is upset about all the fuss, all this sudden attention from doctors and carers. From my father's point of view it's all about other people taking over and being in control. What has it got to do with them? One weekend it seems very clear that he is feigning sleep so that they will leave him alone. While saying goodbye to the nurse, I hear a voice from the bedroom, "Get rid of them all, will you!"

The most difficult decision is whether we should listen to the doctors' advice or do what my

father wants. There would be no conflict if instead of trying to 'rehabilitate' him and keep him going, the doctors could speak to him of dying. Perhaps this is not what doctors do.

Each day my father seems a little less interested in the whole process, letting it pass over him. Everything they suggest he refuses. A nurse comes to explain about the day hospital appointment next week. Somebody from Social Services telephones. They need to come and do an assessment of my father's needs, not realising two assessments have already been done.

My Father is now 'In The System'. We go to the Day Hospital to see the geriatrician. He suggests physiotherapy to keep his legs strong, visits to the Day Hospital to meet other people, tablets to cheer him up. My father re-iterates there isn't anything wrong with him; he's all right as he is. He wants to go home. He just wants things to go back to how they used to be.

Next morning my father says to me, "Will you look after me? Will you stay with me until I die?"

I love his courage! This is one request there is no doubt about, and it is the first time he has ever asked anything of me, ever needed me to stay with him.

"If you need me, I will take care of you as is appropriate." (Hellinger 2001a, p. 274)

I still find it very difficult to believe that he could be facing death because he is well and enjoying life. With all my heart I want to stay and look after my father until his time comes like they used to do in the olden days. I won't need to do a single assessment. We are flesh and blood. I know what he likes, this wonderful, difficult, frail, grumpy, vulnerable, independent old Hero. I read the paper to him, telling him bits of news:

"England are all out. They have to follow-on."

"Surrey beat Kent by 109 runs."

Occasionally we can have a bit of, "What would my Mother say to this do you think?" We spend time, sharing lots of happy memories together.

For a while, my mind goes back to a constellation that I had set up a few years ago:

I place the three of us as far apart as we can go. It is a very simple piece of work. My father and mother are moved to be on either side of me, and I am asked to turn first and look at my father. My shoulders start to shake and I sob. It is suggested that I say, "I missed you, Daddy," which I do, and it is true. The representative replies, "I missed you too." Though I could not be more surprised to hear this, the words enter my soul. It has never occurred to me that my father has missed me also, that he loves me. Do we really know each other?

My father suddenly intercepts my thoughts, "We should have taken you to Malaya with us!" It feels amazing. I cannot decide whether this has been part of the constellation or real life! However, there is no doubt. It is real. I hear those words, and feel my soul move to heal from the painful absence all those years ago.

I feel closer to my father than I have ever done. It is a very special time.

Sometimes he will sing a song; sometimes we sing together. Sometimes we have music, an old vinyl long-playing record. Sometimes I am in one room with my computer or book, and he knows I'm here. We are fine. He has such a wonderfully rich inner world of memories and experience. When he doesn't remember exactly, he applies a little artistic licence and creates a slightly different version

of the old story. He confuses me with my mother, and my daughter with me. His memory is back in the time when we were all young. It is such a different world for me now, here with my father, away from my husband, my family and my work. I wonder how it will be when the day comes for me to return to my other world.

"The adult child does not exist only for the parents. Thus children cannot always do what their parents want, but it is usually possible to do what is right." (Hellinger 2001a, p. 274)

Over the following weeks I notice he is gradually eating less and sleeping more. His blood pressure, pulse and heart are still very strong. There is a slow quietening down of all his physical needs and loss of function, but spiritually he is magnificent.

We are enjoying the closest relationship we had ever had. I am so grateful he is my father. My respect for him grows beyond bounds.

"To honour one's parents is to honour the earth." (Hellinger 2001a, p. 324)

He celebrates his 92nd birthday and an old friend arrives to see him. He insists on getting dressed and being up in his chair again. He has many cards and presents and the chance to recall old times and old memories with his friend. I have written his life story down as my gift to him, and read it to him after he is back in bed. He listens very carefully, very alert, correcting a few details, but I have got all the family stories mostly right.

Another six weeks pass in the same way. It is now nearing the end of June. My husband decides that he will come for the weekend.

Saturday morning - the day my father has enjoyed so much all his

life is known as 'The Feast of St Clifford'. The sun is shining and a blackbird is in the habit of coming outside his window to sing to us. There is an air of expectancy in the room. My father seems much more alert than usual, talking more, though often too quietly for me to hear. He is talking to his ancestors.

"Our body is not just a body, it is united to our soul and the soul is united with all the members of our families." (Hellinger, 2003, p.4)

I take the morning paper and a little breakfast. I find myself wondering about the air of expectancy and thinking to myself,

"He won't die on the Feast of St Clifford, I know that for sure!" and promptly wonder why I have thought this. We were reassured that he was fine only two days before.

He seems comfortable and peaceful but purposeful. It feels like he is preparing himself for something. He talks a great deal, sometimes to us and quite frequently to other people who appear to be present in the room. The ancestors are with us.

"All those who can be remembered, back to the grandparents' generation, sometimes great-grandparents, have an effect as if they were there." (Hellinger 1999 p.57)

The day passes and my father sleeps less than usual. At the end of the afternoon he suddenly asks me, "Is this the end then?"

With a shock I find myself replying,

"I think it may be, Daddy."

"Well, I'd better get out of here then!"

He starts to inch forward and swing his legs over the side of the bed. I ask him if he wants to be in his chair. I put my arms round him and gradually position him in the armchair next to the bed. However, this doesn't seem quite right, and he doesn't stay there long. I can't

make out what is happening but he is quieter after this. Eventually he sleeps and as darkness falls we pass a quiet night.

The following morning, Sunday, there is the same air of expectancy in the room. I bring some breakfast and he eats a spoonful. My jaw drops as he suddenly announces,

"I think I'll have a large glass of beer!"

I can't believe my ears! I think I've misheard. But there is no mistake.

"Is that really what you want Daddy?"

It definitely feels as if we are celebrating something and it's still only 9 o'clock in the morning! I fetch the beer in his favourite glass, and give it to him. He takes two sips and puts it on his bookcase by the bed.

"I'll have the rest later!"

My husband takes turns sitting beside my father. Apparently the conversation goes like this,

"Is all my work done?"

John replies, "Yes, all your work is done, and done very well."

The day passes as yesterday, with lots of talking, some audible and some not. We sit in comfortable silence sometimes. Once again, he goes through the ritual of naming his mother and father and all his brothers and his sister, one by one, in order, then my mother and her family, and all the ancestors. I remember Hellinger's conversation about death, (Hellinger 1999, p.58) that when the dead have their place, they are peaceful and are experienced as a positive energy. This is certainly true for us today as we sit together.

For some reason I am prompted to say,

"They'll all be so pleased to see you again."

I really do not know what is prompting me to say these things, but my father is very pleased at this idea. He repeats, "So pleased to see me!"

I am being guided and our souls are connected, very sensitive to some presence greater than ourselves. It feels true that the family and kinship group all share the same soul and conscience. (Hellinger 2002, p.124)

Later that afternoon it becomes apparent that my father is still worrying about the responsibility of looking after us, his family. I know what I am doing when I am prompted to say very certainly,

"There is no need to worry about us anymore, Daddy. We are perfectly fine. You don't have to worry about us anymore."

On hearing this, his body relaxes, as if at long last he can let go of all feeling of responsibility. Then he sits up very straight and turns towards me to say very solemnly and clearly,

"Then Goodnight and God bless you all."

I recognise the importance of this blessing.

"They wish the living to live on, with their blessing." (Hellinger 2002, p.125)

Once again my father moves to the edge of the bed and, as before, I put my arms round him so that I can gently lower him into his chair. Even before I can relax my arms and lean back to see his face, I feel and hear his breathing change. He takes several very deep and slow breaths, followed by lighter irregular breaths, further and further apart. I hold him close to my heart with my head on his, and quite soon his breathing stops, along with his heart.

My father has left us. I stay holding him for a while, knowing he is no longer here.

His manner of going is the most gentle and wonderful I could

imagine, the separation between life and death so small. I did not believe that death could be so gentle, so much easier than birth. I am left feeling only amazement and wonder.

His lovely wise doctor writes on the Death Certificate that the cause of death is 'Frailty of Old Age'.

His funeral is held in St Hilda's Church where he was baptised, confirmed, married, and is now being buried, just exactly as he

planned. The large Norman Abbey Church is full. My father's coffin is carried high, borne in by his five grandsons and my husband, my daughter and I walking behind.

There are some marvellous and very personal tributes and all his favourite hymns, including: 'Will Your Anchor Hold' which rises to the roof. He is taken to be buried in the cemetery alongside many other family members in the grave that he bought 22 years previously for my mother and himself.

A man asked his companion along the way,

"Tell me what counts for us."

The other answered,

"First what counts for us is that we are alive for a time,

Before that began, there was much, and in the end,

it returns to that which was before.

Like a circle which joins its beginning and

its end and they are one and the same.

What comes after our life joins with what came before

as if there had been no time between.

We have time only in the now.

The next thing that counts is that what we do in our time here

carries us with it as though it belonged to another time.

And although we believe we are creating, we are held only as a tool

used to achieve something beyond ourselves and then set aside.

We are complete when we are released."

The man asked,

"We and our creations exist and end, each in our own time.

What counts when our time is finished?"

The other spoke,

"What counts is what came before and what comes afterward, as equals."

The two parted ways and their time together was at an end.

And each paused and contemplated.

(Hellinger 2001b, p.273)

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