

A LEMON-AIDED LIFE (PART 2)

Question: The incidents with your mother seem to show her “self-absorption.” How does that lemon impact your therapy?

Dr. Jane: You are right about her. I didn't realize for so long her inability to focus attention on another person's inner experience. But when I called her from San Francisco to tell her I was getting divorced. Her response, “How could you do this to me?” was telling.

I love working with people who are what I call the “adult children of the self-absorbed.” Their self absorption may be from illness, disability, addictions, or Narcissism. I'm not assuming bad intent on their part, just limitation. I love to give people who grew up with that the minute attention they deserve.

Question: any other important lemons?

Dr. Jane: Several, but one of the most important is my difficult relationship with my father. He was the eldest in a German immigrant family. His parents couldn't speak English, so he had to do the grocery shopping. He was ridiculed for his broken English. And grew a thick hide to protect himself. He had to keep the family books, and thought his cabinet maker-father was always being taken advantage of because he couldn't understand the language.

He grew to think the worst of people, and to need to control to make sure no one took anything from him. For example, when he was first introduced to my middle sister's husband, his only greeting was, “You're not going to get any of my money!” He maintained an iron hand at home. “As long as you live in my house, you do what I say,” and “Children are to be seen and not heard” were two of his dictums. His word was law; there **was** no other subjectivity that mattered. He told me outright a few years ago that he preferred my sisters to me because he liked people who were “subdued.”

Before I was a therapist, and before I realized I was working on healing my experiences of having my views invalidated, I did many pieces of art on the theme of simultaneous differing points of view. In the early 80's I read a book, *The Aztec Virgin*, and was enormously moved by the Aztec peoples' ability to hold both their native beliefs and the Catholic beliefs adopted by them. This led me to a study of “The Primal (not primitive) Mind”, and Native American art and shamanism. Here again there is the interface of art and psycho-spiritual healing.

Question: The lemonade?

Dr. Jane: I learned the value of respecting different points of view. I am absolutely rabid about that.

A few days ago I found an artist's statement that I wrote for a show of mine in 1990. I was completely oblivious of any psychological theory pertaining to this at the time at widening perception is a major intention in my work:

I believe that on any one subject there exist numerous points of view, all of them "correct." But holding only one point of view results in a contracted and partial experience of reality. So, to encourage an experience of expanded perception, I try to confuse the viewer optically. I hope to create moments of not knowing what is what-of not knowing what is foreground and what is background, what is two-dimensional and what is three dimensional - a time for the audience of being released from a singular point of view.

Even today, as I was listening to the CD of Eckard Tolle's *The New Earth*, I glowed as he spoke of how our thinking and perception breaks our mental knowledge of the universe up into fragments. The whole picture is the "truth" so our fragments are wrong.

I love that parable of the six blind men of Indostan, all ascribing meaning to the particular part of the elephant they could feel. "Though each was partly in the right, they all were in the wrong!"

Question: Anything else you'd like people to know about?

Dr. Jane: I think the main point is that therapists chose theoretical stances due to the values they develop. Part of the fit between therapist and client is due to the values match- at least at first.