

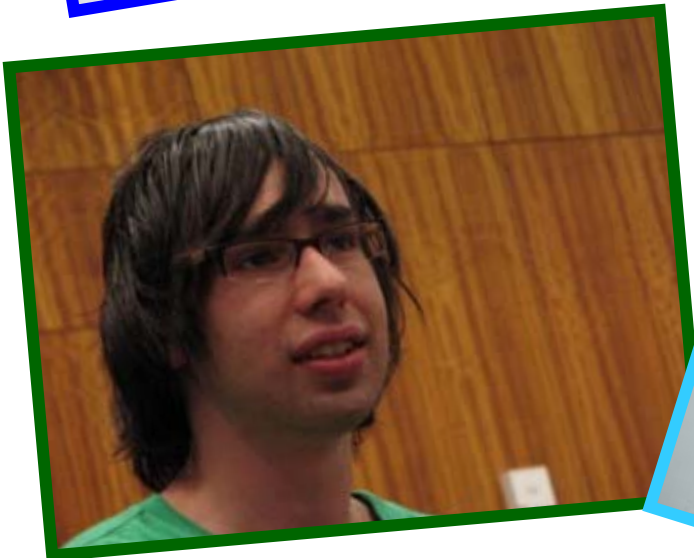


3rd Generation Holocaust Workshop Feb 2006

3GH: Portrait of a Workshop 2006

Participants: Adam, Adam, Andrea, Deb, George, Kim, Maaryasha, Nat, Ofer, Ronch, Simon, Sue, Yoel





A Recorded Conversation for the 3GH Doco

George, Nat and Ronch:

4 June 2006

Nat: How do you think these Workshop engaged the 3GH?

George: I think back to when you and I first talked about setting up the workshops in December 2005-January 2006. I heard you mention about drama therapy and art therapy. I had no idea what you had in mind. So for me it was a real learning curve, first, to see what drama therapy and art therapy was like as a group process; second, I slowly started to realise why they became so engaging as workshops.

My past experiences in Holocaust work have been very language based, therapy group work, workshops, mostly talk. Both drama therapy and art therapy taps into totally different parts of our experiences and here in the third generation I think the power of it was that it tapped into the, let's say the "trauma transmitted" in a way that's totally tangential to trauma. Let me just explain.

In the traditional approach to working with trauma you await until the person recounts something of an experience as they enter traumatic scenes, traumatic moments and that's the traditional way of tapping in. In these workshops I think that the drama setting where Sue invited us to take on roles (Workshop 2 & 5) already was in itself an extraordinarily creative moment, because as third generation each of you, and myself included, we moved into roles that were outside our own generation.

So, that stepping into a role as a process already taps into a creative imaginative part of experience. From there we engaged in the workshop with intense dialogue within the roles of the first generation, second generation and third generation. At one level, we were in roles that are beyond our identities and then, and this was I think the power, we actually were invited to dialogue, to relate about serious matters from there.

Now if you think through what that means, that is really a profound human experience, because most of the time in our lives we remain in two, three, four standard roles, but rarely do we cross generations. In fact, "*generational consciousness*" is a hallmark of who we are, it defines parts of who we are. In that workshop we were asked to actually go beyond, to transcend our generational consciousness. That's one thing to go beyond a generational consciousness and say I'll do an acting piece, but in our group dynamic we were actually in groups as survi-

vors, second generation, third generation. We were invited to and we did relate from there. Now that's an awesome generational conscious shift. That processes already loosens up our being, our structure and our identity and so that gives access to parts of our self that normally we would never get anywhere near.

Now, that in itself would be pretty exciting, but, then Ofer comes along in Workshop 3 & 4 with art therapy. We are invited to do warm up exercises, to engage our imagination, to think of 'objects' arising in our minds. No longer are we talking, from that moment our mental activity deepens beyond words. Ofer says 'here's some clay, shape your imagination'.

So in week two we were in the shifting generational consciousness change; week three we move into our tactile senses. We can start to see how far we are moving, right away from the traditional way of relating in our Holocaust families. The cliché is, 'would you like some more food?, no? that is because you don't like me'.

That unconscious formula of food equated to emotions is deeply challenged in the workshops. Here in our roles we were saying 'would you, as third generation, as second generation, can you actually speak with a survivor (in role) and relate to me'. We were in each of the roles, survivor, second and third generation being related by each other. Totally mind bending.

Week after that we get out of language and instead get into tactile, creative, artistic shaping. That's certainly not the usual relating in a Holocaust setting. Week four we go back to our creation from last week - what we did in week three, with the clay. Again not usual to value what we do week from week. We do more warm up exercises, we re-enter that special creative zone, from that zone we start to put our clay work into 'painting consciousness'. We elaborate, go deeper, further.

So from the first exercises in the drama therapy the expansion of our awareness is nurtured, encouraged, trust develops in the group and we relate from that position. Then from the tactile we get into our creative artistic expressive self, still no words. Then our space is infused with that music as Ofer asked us to bring along one of our favourite sounds. That sound bathes our creativity.

If we take an imaginative leap, we could just visualise a part of our brain that has been totally asleep, numbed, frozen, whatever metaphor you want to use. Suddenly little vibes go in, you know, from the role changes, consciousness changes, generational changes, tactile changes, artistic colour changes, music changes and suddenly you see, like if you go inside the brain, all these little neurones firing away that have never had a chance to say 'Boo' to each other. Not only to each other, but across boundaries that are so well defined in our socially defined roles of who we are, third generation, second generation.

So this extraordinary workshop process evolved, week by week by week. All these boundaries start to gradually loosen, dissolve, transcend, become fluid and start to move. Now what an

amazing way to make contact with something that is so sealed off as trauma is, by definition, dissociated, split off, repressed, unconscious, implicit.

Week by week a sublime process gradually engages us and we start to make connections with each other so that by week five as Sue guides and facilitates, we have a major drama unfold in Ronch's most extraordinary and personal, even intimate revelations emerge. Some things perhaps have never been spoken before let alone related with in front of an 'audience, with other human beings. So that fifth workshop unfolds into a drama of what happens between the third generation and parents, second generation, and what happens in the background with the first generation, the survivors.

These five weeks then become an extraordinarily deepening journey. I don't like the metaphor, but it is a journey. I was listening to the summaries from our last workshop as we speak reflect back on week one – likened to entering a 'black hole'. If you enter a black hole usually you get lost. In our workshop people enter the black hole and they became found.

So over the five weeks there was a revelation of what happens in the black hole. This is contrary to every metaphor about black holes. Each person who in the 6th week gave a summary of what was the critical experience for them and also what was a turning point within the sessions, highlighted a sort of initial wariness, the anxiety of 'I don't know what I'm doing here', the vulnerability.

Kim mentioned that she wanted to hide under a rock after the first session. Adam didn't think he should really come back because of all the intellectual stuff, Andrea reflected 'I can't know me until I know you'. How true.

By week three, four, five we were exchanging the most intimate experiences making links within ourselves and with each other. I think that your creativity, Nat, was to bring this vision into a reality. You couldn't have known this at the start as a script that this process would unfold. You invited and engaged people, your friends to participate in a journey of uncharted terrain. You invited me as a co-facilitator to ferment a chemistry that actually, I think, touches on the essence of transmitted trauma.

Now I'm aware that's not always a politically correct thing to say because I know everyone's a bit weary of saying 'I have trauma'. Its OK for others, they can be traumatized but not me, I'm trauma free. I'm strong, as if trauma is a weakness. Whereas in fact the truth be known I don't know how anyone in a family of Holocaust survivors or non-direct descendents who lives in a community like Melbourne can escape having either direct or vicarious trauma. These by the way to me are equivalent. I don't make a distinction because at the brain level, which is my professional perspective, it's the same brain cells that are firing away.

So to me this was the power of this workshop that without declaring, saying, certainly not promoting that this would be a workshop of a reparative, healing, psychological kind. In fact, it

was an artistic, creative, expressive, exploratory and a courageous journey into the black hole.

Now from there what to me as the second participant co-facilitator with you happened was a transformation. There were no longer black holes. There were revelations, maybe the word is a bit too spiritual, but there were such powerful acknowledgements, sharing of experiences as people said, “I know exactly what you are going through”, “that’s exactly what I go through” with an unspoken empathic resonance between people, without words being spoken. I think that was part of the ‘magic’ of these six workshops.

Ronch: I wondering if you could now focus on what the Workshop was like for you?

The workshops were certainly for me a unique experience. It was unique and powerful and transformative.

Firstly, the workshops were a space that created experiences I had not experienced before. It was unprecedented. Essentially I met with ten strangers, sort of strangers also to each other at this deep level we eventually related from. I mean there may have been social contacts, but Nat essentially trusted that strangers who accepted her invitation would ‘click’. A very general brief is all we had - an exploration into third generation identity related to the Holocaust, how this was lived and where to from here. It’s very, very vague.

For me, experiences unfolded week by week in the workshops. A good metaphor might be of going into a pool: at the beginning one enters the shallow end, and gradually moves to the deep diving end. Normally this process occurs gradually from the shallows to the deep. In these workshops I experienced that within the first fifteen, twenty minutes we were in the depths. It was extraordinary.

Let me explain what I regard as the ‘depths’ – it is such openness about where each of us were in our lives. So one usually warms up to share intimacies, it’s normal social discourse. Here there was an unspoken agreement, knowledge, bond, implicit understanding that everyone respected each other’s experience and was prepared to listen.

Now, most people experience Holocaust families as a place where there is great difficulty in speaking and listening. In fact, for this reason we have workshops in Melbourne, the *Inter-generational Dialogue Workshops* to sensitise family members what it means to speak and to be listened to. That’s how serious this issue is. Here as group as third generation, and myself a second generation co-facilitator, within fifteen, twenty minutes each person was starting to relate from some of the most private places.

For example, Debbie related how after she was knocked off her bike she ached as she felt that she wasn’t registered or recognised for her injury in her family. Fortunately not serious but her mishap went unacknowledged in her family. Simon, related experiences about himself as be-

ing very open-minded to encompass different values as peoples expressed their political and social values on websites. But I recall he was prepared for me to confront him fairly vigorously within the first hour or workshop one. Another person spoke about the struggles they were having with their personal health in the family setting. I won't go into who and the details. Another one who didn't actually know whether they had a right to be there in the group, were they entitled they wondered.

Now, I regard these as examples of being extraordinary open to share vulnerable, personal, intimate experiences. Especially noteworthy as we live in a culture where trust is as you know often cynically treated with comments like 'trust me'. Here no one said 'trust me'. Trust seemed to be just there, it was agreed, there was trust in the air, let's put it that way. For my part, I became deeply emotional a few times, especially in the final workshop when I shared my thoughts about my artwork, to Adam's sensitive questions, Simon's rendering a poetic version of my words, Yoel's almost clairvoyant artistic depiction of my writing at my father's grave and Nat's moment of re-enacting Shabbat candle-lighting – taking a poignant moment to breathe.

For me, week by week the power of the group just amplified with each exchange. Now that didn't happen by 'magic'. I think there was safety, security, thoughtfulness, planning, preparedness, equipment, videos, journals, a weekly plan, six week agenda, all discussed, all trusted.

So everything engendered serious professionalism, serious work ethics and I think everyone came to the 'party'. Everyone engaged in serious work because of that. Seriousness to me here means that thoughts, experiences, relationships about Holocaust issues that have never been thought about, by the end of six weeks became a currency of our reality. If one thinks about that happening in six weeks, compared to, for example, other settings where changes happen like psycho-therapy, social relationships and so on. How long does it take to get to those levels? Certainly it is not usual to arrive to these levels in six weeks. So for me the power of the workshops is self-evident, if only we are prepared to look at it.

My concern now is that it was so powerful that I can't actually relate to it without then having to take a few days break, take a deep breath, go away from it and then maybe come back for another dose of recalling and reliving, looking at the photos, writing and most recently painting. That's the power of the workshop for me.

Ronch: If you would sum up what the workshops in just two sentences, what would you say?

If I have to summarise what these six workshops represented, no, not represented, they were lived, I believe they were extraordinary transformative experiences. Transformative meaning how we entered, how we were immersed, were totally different experiences to how we emerged. That's what I mean by transformative. We've changed, profoundly.