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Voices2(3)editorial

Women Must Wait

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In 1976 I met a young Algerian man. He was a patient in our psychiatric day treatment program at the University of British Columbia. The Dayhouse offered a six-week intensive program of psychotherapy for people with personality disorders. This patient had been referred to our program because of attachment disorders and aggressive behavior. The program was designed and run by a Czechoslovakian psychiatrist named Ferdinand Knobloch. Knobloch had established a similar residential treatment program in Czechoslovakia. He was, himself, a survivor of the death camps in the Second World War. Our Algerian patient was a survivor of the Algerian Wars. As a child, he had been raised largely on the streets with bombs and guns as his companions.

At the time I was working as a music and social therapist at the Dayhouse. Often I would create a large circle of instruments asking the 21 patients in the group to sit outside of the circle. I would ask for a volunteer, someone who wanted to own the music house. If no one volunteered, the group members would select a player for the house. The designated player would step inside the ring of instruments and play his or her instruments of choice. The owner of the house made the rules and invited other group members into the music house. Usually, when we did this exercise, the player would eventually gather from five to twenty group members into the house for a group improvisation. Sometimes they would invite the entire group to play with them. Not the young man from Algeria. He stayed in his house alone playing the kalimba.

Prior to this music therapy session, he was in danger of getting kicked out of the group because of attempts at violent behavior toward both women and men. In previous musical improvisations he had only played the drum. He had dominated the group and other group members had fallen away from the improvisation in disgust because he left no room for them to express themselves. Several women and men in the group had complained that he had gotten too rough with them physically while joking around.

He had managed to alienate just about everyone at Dayhouse staff and patients.

Yet, as he sat in his music house alone, playing the kalimba gently, rocking back and forth on the floor, almost everyone wept. After playing alone for a long time, he invited one female patient into his house to play with him, only for a few moments. This was one of the women he had previously roughed up. This is the first time we had seen him in a visibly vulnerable state, accessed through a simple thumb piano. This was the man hiding under the violence.

In my many years as a music therapist, this is probably one of the most moving moments in my professional memory. In the music, with the kalimba, this patient was finally able to give voice to his sadness, his sense of isolation, his gentle side, which no one had seen up to this point. In the verbal processing, he was finally able to describe his life on the streets of Algeria. He didn't really have a home. The way the little boys expressed their closeness to each other was through fighting. This is what they observed around them all day everyday. His range of expressions was limited. After this session, he was able to continue his therapeutic process in music therapy and other groups.

At the time, I remember having the awareness that I had not known many patients or people, in general, who had experienced the trauma of war. Yet only one generation back in my own family, my fathers parents had escaped from the Ukraine in the Russian Revolution. We never spoke of it in our family gatherings. And though the Indian Wars and Trail of Tears (forced relocation of Native tribes) were also a part of my family history, we never spoke of this either. So, the horrors of war were not a direct aspect of my experience.

Now we have an important new textbook for music therapy that places the complex issues of trauma from wars and other forms of violence in front of us. I didnt want to wade through the quantitative data about the deaths in Northern Ireland in Julie Suttons new book, *Music, Music Therapy and Trauma: International Perspective* (2002). But the stories and facts and figures and ideas for music therapy with trauma were important to me. Each chapter helped me to see with new eyes stories of work in music therapy in Northern Ireland, South Africa, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and other countries and places where I have friends and colleagues. I see the images of their troubles on the news. I communicate with them about their lives and their works. Can we forget the image of the cello player who sat in the public square in Sarajevo and played while bombs fell all around him? The cello means something different to me now when I play.

In America, Music Therapists must deal with attacks on their own soil for the first time in many years (Wheeler, 2002). The traumas of war have come our way in a direct sense. And now, perhaps, there will be another war, in spite of the thousands of young people who march against war with Iraq in America and around the world, in spite of those of us who contact our government officials daily to object.

In 1991, America went to war. I couldnt believe that the Air Force was calling my house attempting to recruit my 18-year old daughter. Then I remembered my friends in Israel. I looked at my 14-year old son. And we quarreled. I wrote.

Women Must Wait

*Where is the man who in the middle of the water goes while I
meanwhile am crying into the long Winter nights with screams
which barely cut through times in space where shifts of Earth
surprise babes in the night and innocence of all souls?*

*Is there the sound of blood on some distant fields of sand where
gods are more human than we dare to imagine on desert nights?*

I wait

And shake

*In long nights of grieving women who scream and thrash at old
stories we thought would never return from ancient wounds of
Earth our ground of being we thought long would be healed now.*

Who are these men, my son?

*In your voice I hear the call of the old drum that no longer need be
played for killing things.*

*Go away you into the hills now from the sound of blood spilling in
spaces where we could embrace and eat Earth.*

*I am woman who wants to melt away these killing metals though it
be in ancient screams and hot tears in caves where bewildered
spirits crouch in fear of what man has made upon us the Earth.*

*It is the longest night beyond the Winter Solstice Feast beyond
some babe who spoke of love and died beyond the Full Moon when
mothers wait for signs of life from distant lands where young men
do some useless old piece of hopefully soon to be forgotten thing
called war.*

Your eyes reach out for my anger at this

You are not afraid.

Can you say the names of all of those who have died?

*My scream is reaching out into the night for existence in time itself
and after the first rain a dewdrop comforts me and dolphins
swimming in waters by my tent on that first day of some new hope
for peace to the sound of tears of mothers of sons.*

*Take me to salt and sea and the dissolution of old ways, of killing
things.*

*Where is the man who waits for peace on sandy shores of quiet
places and lights on my fear in a boat where fog and mist cover the
edges of harsh words and the letting go of old ways?*

In a few years when Julie Sutton revises her text, how many chapters will she need to add?
How many countries will have music therapists working with Post-traumatic stress and Acute
Traumatic Stress caused by our inhumanity to each other? Will there be a chapter on
America?

References

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