

Group Healing

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As many of you know, I have been inpatient in a psychiatric hospital; the same hospital I have been coming to since two decades ago. I was discharged today after 17 days. Every admission is unique. Yet every time there are striking similarities.

One similarity, alluded to in my [last post](#), is the healing power of the group experience. The inpatient unit I always go to specializes in trauma and dissociative disorders. So, in a certain sense, we all have something in common. All of us know about triggers. We recognize when someone is in crisis and is grappling with safety. We know what it means to struggle with being present and we can sit together outside the nurses station and help each other ground. We empathize with someone who is in acute distress and may need to go to the Quiet Room. Or shudder when we hear the words yelled out from some corner of the unit by a nurse: "I need staff!"

There is a weight to the place that is almost impossible to describe. But it is also a place of levity. There are a few staff who specialize in this. One staff member likes to tell us each morning he received a "Certificate for the Best Blood Pressure Cuff Putter Oner." The other night, one nurse listened to much of my 90s "alternative rock" playlist on my iPod. I gave her the name of a good restaurant, and she shared with me a great grilled steak recipe. I do not think I have ever been there when I have not, at least once, almost peed my pants in laughter. I even got a real doctor's prescription for "One Dog"; yes, a real live dog!

That is the *balance* I often refer to here on Mind Parts. It is the balance that makes the unit the special place that it is. It is the balance where we find true healing.

We are all at different points along the healing journey. I know when I started here I was always amongst the youngest. Now it is not that way. In

fact, someone referred to me the other day, in a complimentary way, as the "Unit Dad," I think, in part, because so few patients are male.

I often meet young people who have so few skills and feel as though their lives will never change. I also meet many who have struggled for decades and are tired of the journey. I am one of those people sometimes. For many, the journey never seems to be worth it. For many, depression never lifts. For many, life is one disappointment after another. It is somewhat natural, in one sense, to contemplate suicide.

I like to think that being around others—going to groups, sharing in the kitchen, being up sleepless at night because of PTSD hypervigilance—is remarkably healing. Many of us do not know the gruesome details of each others' histories. But we know where most are at. We just know. In art therapy group today, the last group I attended before I left, the directive was to draw a fork in the road. We draw for 20 minutes. We post our drawings on the board. And we talk about them and get feedback from others. When you have spent two weeks with many of the same people, you understand what their art means and what they are trying to express. It all makes sense.

Where all this is taking me is that I now have a better appreciation for what "group healing" means. Many of us think we heal by doing therapy, which usually means between two people, a therapist and a patient. So many of us are involved in groups—be they sports groups, book club groups, Internet groups or what have you—and these can all be quite therapeutic. But there is so much healing that can occur in a group focused on trauma healing; especially when the group experience is more than just talking. It is art. It is music. It is laughter. It is crying.

Thank you Proctor 2.