

A LEMON-AIDED LIFE (PART 1)

Interview with Dr. Jane Bolton, PsyD, LMFT

Question: What were your early influences that impact your work as a therapist? And how did you chose which therapeutic theories suited you?

Dr. Jane: Hmmmm. I realize that there were many difficult things that eventually turned out to be great support and guidance. I think of them as lemons that I made into lemonade (a favorite drink of mine).

Question: Could you give an example from your family of origin?

Dr. Jane: An early lemon, okay. Christmas was one day of the year that was unlike the other 364 days. Every one in my family-except perhaps my father was miserable those other 364 days. Starting on Christmas Eve, my parents pulled together for the kids. We seemed semi-normal at then. All year long, we 3 girls “behaved” so we would get the long desired gifts from Santa, not the dreaded coals. So for the lemonade part: In the 3rd grade, when I found out there was no Santa, I was crushed. I wanted to maintain the good feelings in the family. And particularly I wanted to prolong my 2 younger sisters’ joy in believing in Santa Clause. So that year I cut 2 Santa’s elves puppets out of cardboard shirt backing and painted them. Then I hid them for an auspicious moment. One evening when my sisters were in front of the kitchen sink window, I raced upstairs, and hung the elves out of the bathroom window by long strings directly above the kitchen sink window. Making something, creating something, saved that season at least. My sisters believed the elfish display.

A major theme of my life has been my development through creativity, making things. My earliest memory is of the beauty of sunlight shining through the cloud of comet cleanser I was upending. Art-making, I learned early, helps me to maintain hope- mine and others. It helps me make meaning of painful events.

Further, it indicates my unconscious understandings and directions. For example, in my senior year in high school I drew a picture of a woman trapped inside an upside down martini glass. Later I learned my mother was alcoholic. Art has saved my life. Once, quite literally. The one time I ever even considered suicide, about 30 years ago, I got a phone call telling me that a gallery wanted to give me a one person painting show. I quickly forgot the suicide idea in my excitement.

Question: So how did that impact your choices of therapeutic theory?

Dr. Jane: The creative process is some thing I know well, and has been the object of my devotion for decades. Transitional space was my companion. So when I found Winnicott in my Object Relations class at Antioch, I felt I had met a twin. I lived in Devon, PA, he was born in Devon, England. He was a pediatrician, and I had been a big part in my first husband’s choosing pediatrics as his specialty.

This love of transitional space shows up in my work in the way I love working with clients who can experience many layers simultaneously, who can bubble and blurb with me. With several of my clients, we examine the images, dream images they can access.

This process has supported our deeply resonant relationships. In the coaching, too I work with the pictures people make. If we can change the pictures we make, we can change our patterns.

Question: Could you give another example of using life lemons to guide you?

Dr. Jane: Let's see, a lemon. My mother's mother died in childbirth. My mother's father blamed my mother for killing his bride, and he sent her off to live with a crazy woman who used to chase my mother with an ax. My mother, understandably, was severely depressed. She was also very smart and was Phi Beta Kappa at Bryn Mawr College. She had to leave school during the depression, and in a financial panic, married my father. She hated him and her married life.

Question: Sounds so sad. How did that help you?

Dr. Jane: Lemonade. I just listened to her strains of the song "Sometimes I feel like a motherless child", or her storms of "I can't stand my life, I want to die." Or, more poetically, "If I had the wings of an angel, over these prison walls I would fly." I learned that if I listened long enough, she would feel better after a while. And I would feel safer. The storm was over I could rest for a while.

Question: So how did this affect your therapeutic theory interests?

Dr. Jane: Well, Winnicott's ideas about the therapist's containment of feelings felt right at home to me. And I am able to weather storms, and not feel depleted at other's pain. Sorrowful, yes, but I trust that if I don't interrupt the body's own healing processes, healing will occur.

Question: I read your letter to the Los Angeles Times, mentioning how you respect the people who are reaching to make their life the best it can be. Can you comment?

Dr. Jane: Yes! It's a big button of mine when people pathologize others, or insist that their own meanings are "The Truth". I think it is demeaning. I developed this value of non-pathologizing again from a lemon: my mother's disappointments. Not only was my mother very smart. She had longed to become a psychoanalyst before she was forced by her family's lack of finances to leave college. She couldn't do it professionally, but she continued with her desires by practicing Freudian interpretations on me.

I'll give an example of intrusive interpretations: Scene #1: Mother and her grown, pregnant Daughter sit on the Williamsburg style couch in the Williamsburg style living room. Mother turns to daughter asking, "Were you nauseated during your first trimester?" Daughter: "No, but I wished I were, so I could be sure I was really pregnant." Mother: "Well that's good that you weren't, because that would mean that unconsciously you didn't want the child. Now when I was pregnant with you, I was SOOO nauseated I had to be taken to the hospital for IV feeding."

Question: But how do you really feel about that? (laughter).

Dr. Jane: (laughing) Well, we can continue with that next time we meet.

Dr. Jane Bolton, a marriage and family therapist, master results coach and contemporary psychoanalyst and is dedicated to supporting people in the fullest self expression of their Authentic Selves. This includes Discovery, Understanding, Acceptance, Expression, and Empowerment of the Self. Call 310.838.6363 or visit www.Dr-Jane-Bolton.com.