

## **A Case for Ethical Dilemmas**

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*This is the first in a series of articles dealing with the range of actual ethical situations that occur in our work, situations that can perplex bodyworkers due in part to an overzealous application of psychological principles. This is an actual case from my practice. In the next article will deal with the ethical implications of this client relationship and others and hopefully expand our understanding of these issues.*

### **DP – Dual relationship, Transference, and Countertransference**

DP passed away, a year and a half ago. I have learned more about client relationships from her than anyone else. Her first session, in July 1992, was a combination of Trager®, Reiki and craniosacral. She was 81 years old at the time. She was widowed in 1990 and had been depressed ever since. She suffered the discomfort of arthritic degeneration, hypertension, and bouts of angina and tachycardia – she'd had a heart attack in her 70's.

A few days after her first session DP called me to report that she was feeling better than she had in years. She wanted to receive more sessions, but was on a fixed income and could not afford my fees. I wanted to learn how effective my modalities were for someone in her condition. I was willing to work with her if she would see me twice a week – I would accept what she could afford. I asked her to keep a daily record of her symptoms and any health related issues. These things she agreed to do.

After we'd been working together for about a month, I realized that I liked DP a lot – the feelings were mutual. She was very grateful for the care she was getting and I was grateful for her commitment to the therapy process. She would turn in her journals at the beginning of every week. Surprisingly, we both became aware of some amazing coincidences. DP had the same name and nickname as my mother - who had died exactly one year before our first session. Both were just over 5 feet tall, both were high school valedictorians and members of Phi Beta Kappa in college – and both were musicians. DP was depressed partly because she'd been estranged from her son for many years. The same had been true of my mother and I - until a year before my mother died. DP and I became aware of the transference-countertransference issues we were dealing with. We were both willing to be friends... honestly and openly discussing these issues. We both sensed that destiny had brought us together so we could each work on our respective mother-son issues.

I was in graduate school in the first two and a half years I worked with DP. She was very interested in what I was studying in school. When I got approval to do an independent study of healers and healing, I asked her if she'd be willing to be my “graduate assistant.” This she did with fervor. She loved her project and also concluded humorously and poignantly that most persons, writing about health had not experienced what life feels like in their eighties.

I worked with DP until she died at the age of 93. Many of my colleagues and friends got to know her. My wife and I, my children and other relatives all saw her as a mother/grandmother and friend. When she had power outages we would put her up at our home. When we moved she looked after our cat. We included her in many of our activities. Eventually, she courageously healed her relationship with her son. As this healing was happening for them, I felt a true healing of the part I'd played in the estrangement from my own mother – as if DP was a channel for that healing.

Like my mother, DP decided to die consciously in her own bed, with only minimal medical support. One month before my mother died I gave her the only session she ever received from me – when I finished her eyes were full of tears. The session confirmed the forgiveness we were offering one another. I remember working on DP's body for the last time – seven hours before she died. I spoke with her as I was working on her. She was beyond speaking, but I could feel her come in and touch my hands with her mind as her tissue relaxed; it was a good session. She was very peaceful when I said goodbye for the last time.

Our relationship was much more complicated than usual practitioner-client relationships but it was also mutually very healing. DP is one reason that I cannot subscribe to sweeping warnings against dual relationships with clients. The transference and countertransference issues actually produced the healing.

*Respectfully submitted to my peers. © Jack Blackburn 2005*