

Dreamspeak: Ancestral Healing

By Toko-Pa. May 28, 2013

One of the most powerful dreams I was ever given was a visitation from my maternal Grandfather who came to me as an adult, twenty years after he died.

Like many ancestral dreams, it was singularly vivid and more lucid than everyday dreams.

I looked into the bright clarity of his eyes, felt the warmth and weight of his hand on my shoulder, and recognized the melody of his thick accent even though I was 7 years old when last I heard it.

A great stillness stretched around us as he looked at me tenderly and said, "I'm sorry for having given you my eyesight."

Towards the end of her life, my Granny told my brother and I many stories she'd kept secret for a lifetime. She spoke of many unfathomable atrocities, and the near-death miracles that kept my Grandparents alive.

But there's one story in particular which haunts me, of a long walk they took together to escape Poland at the end of the war. My Granny always told it with pride for the man my Grandfather was, how he covered her eyes so she wouldn't have to see the piles of corpses strewn by the roadside.

"Nothing influences children more," Jung says, "than the silent facts in the background." Survivors of the Holocaust mostly take one of two ways to cope with the horror they lived through: One is to speak at length about their experiences, and the other is to never speak of it at all. My Grandpa was a never-speaker. In fact, it wasn't until my mother was in her fifties that we found out he was Jewish.

"The child is so much a part of the psychological atmosphere of the parents," Jung writes, "that secret and unsolved problems between them can influence its health profoundly. The *participation mystique* ... causes the child to feel the conflicts of the parents and to suffer from them as if they were its own. It is hardly ever the open conflict or the manifest difficulty that has such a poisonous effect, but almost



My grandparents, Tadeusz & Irena Konbrat

always parental problems that have been kept hidden or allowed to become unconscious.” (1924/1981, p. 124 [CW17, par 217a])



Illustration by Ericka Lugo

What Jung calls “participation mystique,” is the deep enmeshment that can happen in intimate relationships when an individual doesn’t do the inner-work to heal their unconscious pain. The wounds get passed through the generations, metastasizing through our relationships, shaping our children’s lives. The sickness will stay in the family tree until someone in the outer branches has enough support and awareness to face and move through that ancient grief.

Perhaps my Grandpa had to bury his pain in order to survive his lifetime. Indeed, it was too much for one generation to bear. He came to me in the dream to apologize for having passed on what he denied, and while I recognize the echoes of inherited

shame, anxiety and despair in my own psyche, I also understand that it is the privilege and responsibility of my lifetime to heal the trauma, past and future, personal and collective alike.

As Paul Levy so beautifully puts it, “we have the precious opportunity to liberate these ancestral, rhizomic strands of trauma which extend far back in time and equally far into the future, but which also converge and are spread throughout the present in the form of the society and culture in which we live. We can be the ones to break the link in the chain and dissolve these insidious, mycelium-like threads, which are literally the warp and woof upon which the tapestry of the past, present, and future history of our species is woven.”