

“Sometimes The Heart Finds its Own Strange Language”

Remembering Bill Willeford (1929 - 2015)

Jutta von Buchholtz, Ph.D.

Trying to write about Bill Willeford I find myself in the same dilemma his son James talked about: there is just no way to do justice to this unique, complex human being. Whenever I try to formulate something, I tear it back up: insufficient! It's as if Bill continues to defy definition—even after his death. He deeply respected an independent mind and highly valued academic rigor. In 2010 Mary Davis wrote a very good and informative article, “An Introduction to William Willeford,” for the C.G. Jung Society of Atlanta. I do not want to repeat what was so well written. So, here are my very personal reflections and stories.

I had the very good fortune to have him as mentor, colleague, advisor, and eventually dear friend these last three or so years of his life—yet our relationship had a formal aspect. I would call him about every two to three weeks for supervision and collegial case consultations. He would inevitably approach a client's dream or dilemma from a different perspective than mine, which enriched the work immensely. My clients benefited—as did I. His memory banks were like a large reservoir bursting with material he had collected, examined, and stored over a lifetime of intellectual pursuits in many fields. This inner library was the result of years of curiosity and creativity. I took notes during our consultations and became a reliable customer of Amazon as I initiated a “Willeford shelf” on my bookshelves; it soon overflowed with books he had recommended. Much of this valuable impetus for further study, which he gave me, is still awaiting my serious attention. I'll tend to that when I'm really old—a treasure for old age to look forward to.

About books: his own two books, *The Fool and his Scepter* and *Feeling, Imagination and the Self* are marvels of that rare combination of erudite scholarship and heart. Bert Price, current IRSJA president, once told me that he had read the former a long time before he had ever heard about Carl Jung and that reading the book had turned his life around. In her 1992 review of *Feeling, Imagination and the Self* Karin Lofthus Carrington refers to the book as “More than Enough” and “... an abundant and visionary tour de force of psychological thinking.” On p. 17 we find the lovely image of a mother carrying a baby on her back by photographer Liz Major. The caption underneath the image reads: “Openness of mother and infant to one another fosters openness of the maturing individual to self and world. Richness of their interaction fosters richness of feeling and imagination, and creates inner resources for dealing with pain and loss attendant upon such openness.” I experienced this kind of openness, “a particular kind of receptivity” (K. Carrington) in my relationship with Bill Willeford. It is based, I feel, on what C. G. Jung once wrote and as quoted by Carrington: “My task is to make what fate intends to do with me my intention.”

Last weekend Brent Schwarz spent three days with me and we told stories about Bill. For years Brent was Bill's “running buddy”, his occasional chauffeur, fellow cooking and wine en-



Jutta and Bill at Sacred Round, 2012

thusiast, his archivist and during the final weeks his DJ playing pieces from Bill's vast collection of music. “He was my other Dad,” Brent, who lost his biological father this past summer, mused.

Brent remembers how Bill became his surrogate father. After his lecture for the Atlanta Jung Society on “The relationship between the Kabbalah and the I-Ching,” Bill walked up to him and said: “I want to hear more about your manuscript in progress on archetypes.” They had dinner right after that meeting and then, a year and a half later, out of the blue, Bill called Brent: “Let's go to a wine tasting.” That was the beginning of their ten year friendship.

Bill was particular about some things. *Haricots verts*, in his understanding, needed to have both ends cleared of anything that was not directly a green bean! In an analogous and more significant and profound level, he also thought that if the IRSJA forgot about its European roots, it would be to the organization's peril.

Rigorous scholarship was one of his strengths and he demanded that from other analysts. After Susan Olson had published her book, *By Grief Transformed* he congratulated her and wished her “... at least one good review.” Even during the last year of his life, he called one writer rigorously to task. He had published an article in a well thought-of Jungian journal which Bill considered an example of careless thinking. Bill could get right hot under the collar about shoddy academic rigor or philosophical muddle-headedness. When he was president of the Georgia Association of Jungian Analysts, GAJA, he insisted that we read and discuss one of Jungian analyst Wolfgang Giegerich's rather wordy and intellectually challenging articles; he was a new voice that we needed to familiarize ourselves with. This did not win Bill any popularity awards from GAJA analysts—we grumbled and read on.

Like most analysts and parents, we tend to be hard on ourselves. During one of our conversations I was once again deeply critical and remorseful about the way I had handled a session with a client. Bill was silent for a while before he calmly remarked: “Oh my... I suppose you learned you cannot walk on water.”

I could go on for much longer about the gentle, thoughtful, stringent, and rigorous Dr. William Willeford, respected colleague, demanding and creative researcher and writer, jazz enthusiast and lover of Joseph Haydn's music, about his broad range of interests as well as his melancholy understanding of life and the muddle and mess we tend to make of intimate relationships and yet cherishing aliveness in its rich offerings... I don't want to say goodbye.

Jutta von Buchholtz, PhD, is a Swiss Diplomat Jungian analyst. Her home is Birmingham, Alabama, where she has a private practice. She is a frequent lecturer at the Jung Society of Atlanta.