



Defining Moments for Therapists

An Interview with Serge Prenzel

by Nancy Eichhorn

It started simple enough: a conversation between colleagues that spawned a felt sense.

As Lynn Somerstein spoke, Serge Prenzel noted a possible transgression in her story—the antithetical sense of working as a psychoanalyst (where the profession relies on a neutral stance) and as a yoga teacher, where, by nature of the work, she was focused on directedness and attention to the body.

“I imagined all the internalized ancestors and psychoanalytic role models rolling their eyes and saying, ‘Oh my God, what is she doing, this is terrible’, and conversely, the yoga ancestors looking at the neutrality of the human body in psychoanalysis,” Serge said. “I checked in with her, to see if she felt the same, and she did.”

Brainstorming further, Serge realized that conceptually they transgressed but also how people integrate things in life.

“I am interested in integration, but not just in terms of different modalities. I don’t like to think of integration at the level of say applying theories, as if Tool A and Tool B can be put together and used, but rather what happens inter-

nally as we absorb Tool A, not just how to use it but its philosophy, its meaning, and digest it and make it ours, and then we also absorb Tool B, its philosophy, meaning, and uses, and then we integrate the combination of A, B and you—that is integration. It is a personal process,” Serge said.

As Serge and Lynn conversed, they wondered what happens when people face circumstances that force them to find an original response, not a rote maneuver.

“People are trained in certain ways, and we hang on to what’s familiar. Even people who consider themselves creative find comfort in reverting to what they know. But, what happens when we find ourselves in a situation or conflict and we don’t have an auto response? We have to come up with our own way, a different movement which becomes a defining moment,” Serge said.

The book was born. *Defining Moments for Therapists* is an anthology offering a broad range of stories that while diverse all deal

with being confronted and having to improvise—each author’s standard repertoire imprinted from life’s lessons, mentors’ guidance, and professional training gave way to an organic personal integration resulting in new behaviors and unexpected outcomes.

Serge and Lynn reached out to friends and colleagues. They shared their book idea: “to capture the therapist’s evolving sense of self as it is shaped by *their* experiences as active participants in a creative interaction.”

A quick response resulted in a core group of therapist/authors willing to explore and share their “‘Aha!’ moments when they got to understand themselves better, and to understand better why they do what they do.” Serge and Lynn split the Editorial tasks with Lynn covering the more traditional editing/copyediting and Serge working as a developmental editor.

“I was talking with them from the beginning about what they wanted to say,” Serge explained. “It was a mixture at times of talk-

writing, helping them to develop their story. . It is a similar process in therapy—someone comes in with a story, an episode in their life that they want to deepen and explore, to look at in different dimensions, relations/associations and meanings. Only this was different because the authors were not in therapy, and we were not uncovering pathology. But we were using this capacity to go deeper.”

Though many of the authors deal with trauma in their essays, Serge said it is not a book about trauma. The essays share traumatic events that could have been overwhelming, and the person might have been destroyed by it; but, they overcome it and in so doing became a different person and grew from the challenge. When they integrated it, the traumatic experience became the defining moment.

“Like the hero in a story who confronts a challenge, it could be his undoing, but by reorganizing the experience and response, it transforms and defines you,” Serge said. “You are reorganized at a deeper level; through this trauma you discover in yourself resources to overcome it. Looking at this as a process, these authors have a built-in capacity and interest in processing what happens in them; they reflect and process what’s difficult. They’ve been trained to do this, and as good psychotherapists, they help their patients practice this process.”

Kindred Spirits

“A large part for me in doing this book was a sense of connecting with kindred spirits,” Serge shared. “Lynn and I came into this idea and then found a larger group. At that

time, these authors were not in contact with each other; they were willing to explore these moments on their own, and I was able to see them evolve with each other and as a book. I witnessed this community taking shape amid a growing a sense of excitement. There was a degree of earnestness and depth with each author as they found new layers and ways to explore them. I also wanted to find other kindred spirits who would resonate with the book, with certain stories in the book. I think it is wonderful to have it spread, that’s why we offer it for free. They can try it and see if they like it, if it resonates. We are sending it out into the world not as a product but as a vehicle that creates community where other people can find kindred spirits to discuss psychotherapy as a process not a product.”

“Part of the beauty of it is that there are no predetermined outcomes for the book. We will let it evolve organically, let a community develop where people can find that sense of kindred spirit to exchange ideas about therapy as a process,” Serge said.

Whether this community develops into people sharing more defining moments of deeper meanings or find themselves writing in small little bits for online groups or online articles or books, anything is possible. Serge noted the wonderful capacity that results as people observe what is happening and in synchrony also notice where the energy is and then they ride that energy.

“It feels promising to put together a group of people with an earnest, deep interest in exploring their process and willing to share it.

Wonderful things happen in process groups. Perhaps this will expand beyond a gathering of 10-20-30 people and can become virtual. We will wait and see what happens,” Serge said.

Self-publishing books for over 15 years, Serge said that his first book, entitled, *Still a Dad: The Divorced Dad’s Promise*, was printed in an old brick and mortar publishing facility, though he created his own imprint. The pdf was offered for free on his website because he didn’t want people to not read his books due to financial constraints. Ten books later, Serge is still offering his writings for free on his website, with hardcopies also available for a small fee.

Defining Moments for Therapists can be downloaded for free on the website <http://www/LifeSherpa.com/therapists>. The trade paperback is available at online bookstores: Amazon.com and BarnesAndNoble.com.

Serge Prengel, LMHC, is in private practice in New York City. He sees change as a creative process, drive by the depth and immediacy of felt-sense experience. He wrote *Scissors: A Whimsical Fable About Empowerment* as well as other books, and is the editor of *Somatic Perspectives on Psychotherapy*. He has also been leading experiential workshops in a variety of venues.

Lynn Somerstein, PhD, NCPsyA, LP, RYT, is a licensed psychoanalyst in private practice, is Executive Director of the Institute for Expressive Analysis. She is on the editorial board of the *Psychoanalytic Review* and the author of numerous articles about yoga, anxiety, attachment issues and psychotherapy. Lynn is also an international speaker and has presented her work in India, Turkey, China and in the United States. She uses the wisdom she has gained as a yoga teacher, psychologist, and student of Ayurveda to help people reach their inner most goals.