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Genogram Assignment

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McGoldrick's book *The Genogram Book* brings to light the importance family of origin patterns playing out in our lives. The book begins by describing how past generations both consciously and unconsciously pass down positive and negative traits and experiences to the current living family members. Furthermore any hope of deviating from negative patterns that have been established in generations long before your or my existence must be faced objectively and looked at historically rather than with blinder's on. These "blindness" we have are often fashioned by family myth, which is established by various perspectives on incidents that have occurred in the past. Exploring family history can be a daunting task, especially if the family unit is not close and even more so if you are unable to speak directly with all the family members about how they see themselves and events that have contributed to the family.

In fact, McGoldrick urges readers to be cognizant of their ability to objectively question family members before pursuing exploring family history he says, "if you can get yourself to the point where you can express a genuine and noncombative interest in what happened, family members might actually welcome the opportunity to tell their versions of the story" (McGoldrick, 2011. p.48). I actually grappled with this throughout reading the book as I have a complicated family history; interestingly many other people do as well which was thoroughly illustrated in this book. When I finally sat down to draw my genogram I did so with a slight degree of apprehension because I haven't spoken to my mother in several years and we really only spoke a handful of times after I left home nearly eleven years ago. As I wrote my genogram I realized that my severed relationship with my mother has really impacted my knowledge about the maternal side of my family and her lineage. Of course I remember even as a young girl, my mother discussing some

of the dynamics of her family and the archetypes that each member fit but I never asked any deep questions because in my youth I didn't have the curiosity that I do now. The break in my communication with my mother has also severed ties with her siblings to some degree, my Aunt Deborah has reached out to my father several times asking to be in touch but I have declined. I had an inclination to reach out to my mother about a year before I had started this program I was about five months pregnant at the time and I suppose I wondered about our connection and I also started to question about what I would tell my son about her. I wasn't ready to connect though, through several text messages back and forth over the course of a few months it became clear to me that I wasn't in the right headspace to take on the possibility of rebuilding our relationship. When I read about Maya Angelou's experience with her mother and how despite the tumultuous relationship they had that at the end of her life she loved her and enjoyed her company, it gave me a pang of hope, guilt, and sadness about where my relationship stands with my mother now. I think McGoldrick said it best when he said "No matter what has happened at one point in the life cycle, change in relationships is possible as families grow along with each other" (McGoldrick, 2011, p. 54). It is my hope that at some point when I am ready to face my mother we will be able to discuss the past openly and move forward in positive direction together. Something that I never really took note of until reading McGoldrick's book is the fact that both my mother and I are the third child in our family of origin, and interestingly my mother was not the youngest but her sister Deborah is, I wonder often if she didn't want a fourth child because of the disdain she has for her own sister.

My father's parents were both survivors of the Holocaust both were married and had children when they entered respective concentration camps and both lost all members of their families by the time they were liberated. This wasn't a secret from my father or his brother, they had known that they had half siblings who had died at a very young age, though my father doesn't recollect what their names were nor does he know the names of

their former spouses. All of my grandfather's siblings had moved to America prior to the imprisonment of the Jews and so after he was liberated he joined the rest of his family in Philadelphia, aside from his parents who had died in the camps. My grandmother was a lone survivor, when she was liberated she made her way to the United States for a fresh start. My grandparents met while taking classes to learn to speak English in Philadelphia, the story goes that my grandfather courted my grandmother repeatedly asking her out to which she declined until he told her that he would kill himself if she didn't go out with him. That was the start of their relationship and they remained together until they died. My grandfather worked as a tailor and my grandmother assisted him with his business along with caring for my father and my uncle. Both my father and uncle grew up to be highly successful individuals, both doctors and my father went on to receive his juris doctorate less than a decade after. I never had the opportunity to speak to my grandparents about their experiences during World War II, in particular, what their experiences were in the concentration camps. I know that my grandfather was able to escape from Bergen-Belsen the camp he was at and lived in the woods with several other escapees until liberation happened. My grandmother wasn't as fortunate, she did not escape, but because she had blue eyes and blond hair she was favored by soldiers and that saved her life. I am sure that the experiences that my grandparents had significantly impacted how my father and uncle were raised and how they in turn have contributed to this generations upbringing. I wish I had been closer to my grandparents growing up and had been able to explore their history with them, my grandmother died the same year as my uncle's wife in 2005 and my grandfather passed while I was in college.

McGoldrick's book has really encouraged me to explore the background of both my paternal and maternal family members. It is said that information gives you power, the power to make decisions and analysis about individual family members yourself without blinders or goggles inhibiting your perceptions. Information also grants you the ability to move forward in reconciling relationships.

Works Cited

McGoldrick, M. (2011). *The Genogram Journey: Reconnecting with Your Family*.
New York, NY: W.W. Norton.