AIMS For a better birth...

Family Constellations

AIMS Journal 2013, Vol 25 No 3

A workshop with Julia Duthie, January 2013

For me, January 2013 turned out to be quite a busy start in the birth world. The two days following the AIMS lecture in Bristol, saw a workshop from Julia Duthie on Family Constellations and then a day from Relaxed Birth and Parenting on Birth Trauma. I was lucky enough to go to both, so here's a quick round-up of Julia's talk for those of you interested in discovering more about her work.

Family Constellations is a 'therapeutic' process blended from cognitive, behavioural and psychodynamic psychotherapy. I say therapeutic in the broadest sense of the word: it's definitely resolution-based therapy. It guides participants to more closely examine any contributing factor s within the genealogy first to get an understanding of the root causes of (dysfunctional) events that show up, particularly in a birthing situation.

For the last twelve months I've been peering into my own birth 'story' with a bit of a magnifying glass. As I learnt more about the psychological impact of your experience (as the baby) at birth and even before, it occurred to me that there could be things to learn from my ancestral line. I have no knowledge of the details of the birth experiences for my mother and hers but I have noticed a pattern between the generations regarding the way family relationships have gone.

So, even though my interest was initially academically motivated, I hoped that some insight could be gained into any effects my ancestral line has had on my 'modus operandi' and the significant emotional events that I'd experienced around giving birth.

Julia Duthie is a true master, as midwives so often are, at holding space in which healing and resolution can take place. She explained that her midwifery experience had often revealed, when she really knew a mother giving birth, that some of the root causes of a stall or some challenge in labour could be attributed to a pattern or unresolved event or events in the maternal (and sometimes paternal) ancestral line.

'The woman [giving birth] or a midwife could subconsciously inherit suppressed or unresolved challenges ofher ancestors. Sensitive people at a birth can notice thatshe's carrying something even though its not been spoken.'

The Family Constellations process, in particular for birth workers sensitive to the broader picture of a person, could notice that if things aren't flowing easily and if they really know the woman they can identify a pattern or an event with similar attributes to a pattern or event that may have occurred in the ancestral line.

You really have to experience or witness the technique for yourself to get a true handle on how you could apply it to enhance someone's birth. The simplest description I can give is that it is almost like role playing, using symbols that feel right, as representative of people related to the person working on their healing. Then, the conflicts or resistances are assessed in a resourceful state which facilitates perspective, understanding and learning and ultimately allows a healing to take place.

During the one-day workshop Julia Duthie also gave practical advice about how to use aspects of the technique even if your relationship with and knowledge of the birthing mother are limited, for example in cases where there has been a termination or relations with family members is strained, as these can all have an impact on the flow of birth.

'If the woman has had a termination it's really good for the midwife to acknowledge those babies because often the guilt about that can affect this birth.'

Whilst the workshop did not address my 'constellation' it did present an opportunity to re-examine aspects, particularly of my maternal ancestry, that seemed to be a repeat of patterns in place many generations before.

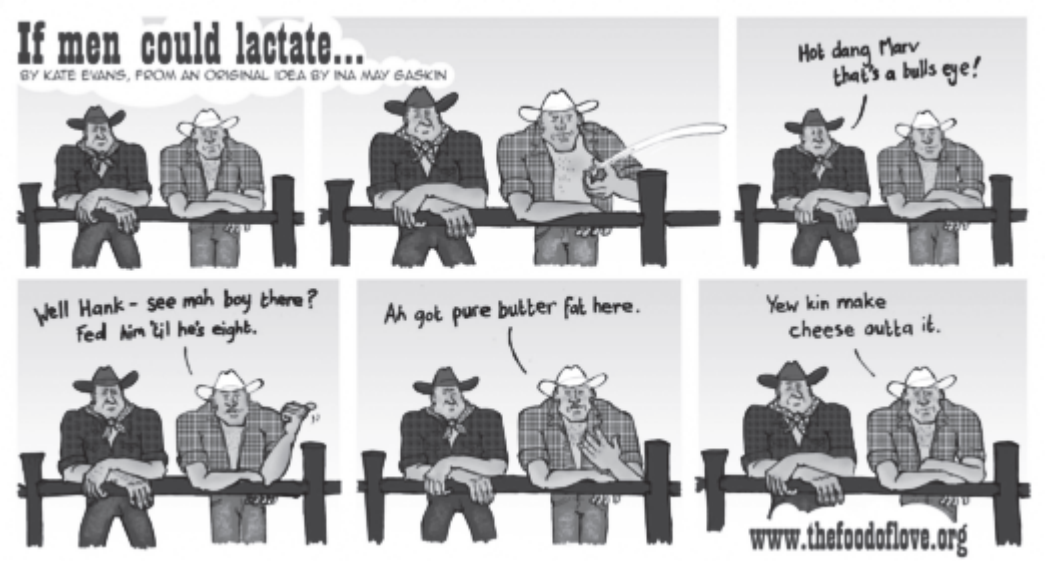
Therefore it does exactly what it says on the tin:

'In a single session, a Family Constellation attempts to reveal a previously unrecognized systemic dynamic that spans multiple generations in a given family and to resolve the deleterious effects of that dynamic by encouraging the subject to accept the factual reality of the past.'

Julia Duthie is an independent midwife in Devon, specialising in home birth. She runs regular Family Constellations workshops.

Marie J Taylor

Further details can be found at: www.familyconstellationssouthwest.co.uk


If men could lactate...
BY KATE EVANS, FROM AN ORIGINAL IDEA BY INA MAY GASKIN
Hot dang Marv that's a bulls eye!
Well Hank - see mah boy there? Fed him 'til he's eight.
Ah got pure butter fat here.
Yew kin make cheese outta it.
www.thefoodoflove.org