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Pay attention to your dreams

lisa day
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It was a typical conference. After the speakers wrapped up their presentations and the workshop sessions were completed, Christina Becker was mingling. Chatting with one man, the question of what she did for a living came up. When the man found out Becker was studying to be a Jungian analyst, he asked her to interpret a recurring dream.

Fast forward about 10 years and Becker is sitting in her home office on Montgomery Avenue in the Yonge Street and Eglinton Avenue area, one leg crossed over the other, her leg bouncing gently on a chair bathed in sunlight. Laughing, she said she doesn't remember the conference, nor the man she spoke with, but she remembered thinking: "Oh, I really didn't want to know that (about you)."

Dreams, it has been said, provide a glimpse into a person's soul, and Becker takes her responsibility seriously. Always careful about recounting specifics from past and current clients, Becker said dream interpretation is important in a society where people don't seem to take the time to relax, let alone figure out what their dreams are trying to tell them.

"Dreams are the reflection of the unconscious. Dreams lead us somewhere we are not aware of, out of our unconsciousness or awareness. So when we talk about dreams, (it) can be quite vulnerable to the dream teller."

And Becker herself appreciates what it is like to expose oneself to a stranger.

When Becker was about 35 and working as a consultant for a non-profit organization, she endured a mid-life crisis, wondering where her life was heading and how to get creativity back into it. With degrees in fine art and business, she said she wanted to explore which path her life should take. After much thought, she decided to study to be a Jungian analyst.

In order to receive those credentials, she had to undergo her own analysis. In addition, she did about three years of training, including a stint at the Jungian's school in Zurich, Switzerland, where



she adopted her cat, Artemis. At the time of the interview, the black cat was sent out of the room for bad behaviour, but in typical cat fashion, slunk back into the room and curled up in another chair and fell asleep while his owner was talking.

In addition to a private practice where Becker, who is quick to laugh and offers a ready smile that always reaches her eyes, helps clients interpret their dreams, she also teaches, has written a book and has hosted dream workshops where she teaches participants how to interpret their dreams and to understand what those dreams are saying.

And because dreams are sacred, Becker created a space in her home where people would feel comfortable sharing their innermost thoughts. Serving tea and sitting in a circle on comfortable couches, Becker let's one workshop group that is meeting there know about the following rules: There was no advice giving. People could say, 'If it was my dream I would...', but they couldn't tell others what they should do; there was confidentiality in the space in that dreams told within the group stayed there; and people don't have to answer questions if they don't want to.

East York resident Joan Bennell, who took Becker's course, said in order for the workshop to be worthwhile people had to open up.

And while no one that she recalls actually broke down, she said it was an emotional place but Becker's professionalism kept dreamers focused.

Another East Yorker, Ursula Fugger, an astrologer who took Becker's course, said Becker kept people focused during the session.

"She is able to give people a path. She gives them stones to skip on the river." Dreams, Fugger, said are the river.

In addition to talking about what dreams are and the symbols of them during the workshop, Becker told participants about dreams she has heard - with the clients' permission - and asked people to share their own.

She then helped people break down their dreams.

"What we try to do to really get a dream, you need to have this 'ahhh' sense about it," Becker said. "If there is not the feeling of 'ahhh, oh', then the person hasn't got it. It's a moment of reflection."

Becker recalled one client who had just that feeling when she realized her dream was telling her that her inner-self, her 'self' from times past, wanted her to bring that fun-loving, spontaneous person back into her life.

And dreams are living things, Becker said. Often they are telling you something you should be aware of now, other times they have to be put away and re-examined over time.

"It's really important to let dreams have a life and carry forward. Put a dream in a back place and carry it around. Once in awhile, pull it out and see what it looks like."

And while she recommends the New Dream Dictionary of Symbols by Tony Crisp (Penguin Books), Becker said without a dream workshop or course, symbol books are often useless simply because the symbols themselves aren't black and white.

A symbol in one person's dream might be different than the next and by simply declaring that a pair of red shoes means a specific thing, Becker said the dreamer gets shortchanged.

"And that is quite dangerous because in a way you are abdicating the responsibility of the dreamer."

Using examples from a client, Becker said a dream about flying monkeys and a lake requires more thought than simply typing the phrase 'flying monkeys and lakes' into a dream interpretation website. Dreams may take hours to interpret and during the course of an individual session, Becker asks a variety of questions to understand the person and why they are dreaming about The Wizard of Oz.

A series of questions may discover an association with a stuffed monkey or it may be simply that monkeys show playfulness and agility or if the dreamer doesn't like the creatures, the monkeys could mean a sense of irritation.

"We look at words and start to really unpack what the dream is about."

Becker also suggests people share their dreams with a friend, who can offer an objective view of what the dream could mean.

Becker, who does just that, said the dreamer often can't see what would be obvious to another.

"Jung told his gardener his dreams, so it's important to tell somebody."

The accuracy of dream analysis, however, depends on the willingness of the dreamer to share personal experiences. Someone who is private and won't share their feelings and occurrences from the past likely won't be able to have a dream correctly interpreted.

But most people who come to Becker's private sessions or to her workshops understand the importance of finding out what a dream is saying.

Dreams tell you where you are heading. "If you have a nightmare, then you are really off your path. Your unconsciousness is really trying to get your attention."

Remembering your dreams

While the interpretation of dreams dates back thousands of years, Christina Becker, a Jungian analyst at Yonge Street and Eglinton Avenue, said the interest in dream interpretation over the last few decades has changed. While in the 1970s and '80s, there were seminars and groups all over, she said in the last five or six years, interest has dropped off, likely due to people's busy lives.

"We run as fast as we can to stay in the same place. We don't have the time to reflect," she noted.

When trying to interpret dreams, Becker said to keep in mind:

Everyone dreams but not everyone remembers their dreams.

To help remember your dreams, keep a pen and paper beside your bed. As soon as you wake up, write down as many details as you remember about the dream. If you wait until the morning, you will likely forget it. "Hold on to it before it is gone," Becker says.

Join a dream group or workshop: "Jungian is not the be all and end all of all approach."

The Ontario Society of Psychotherapists is a good place to start if you are looking for someone to help you interpret your dreams.

C.G. Jung Foundation of Ontario (<http://www3.sympatico.ca/cgjungontario/lowerframe.html>) offers a list of Jungian analysts.

Sandplay

Miniature toys line a bookshelf in Christina Becker's home office, wait for her's next sandplay therapy client.

Becker pulls off a wooden lid showing a large sandbox. "For me it's like watching the unconscious unfold. It's like a dream being made in three-dimensional." After the client finishes playing, Becker said they would talk about what the client has created and what the symbols mean.

"It has an energy. It reflects something behind the scenes."



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