



IN MEMORIAM Zerka T. Moreno

Zerka Toeman Moreno was born in Amsterdam on June 13, 1917 and moved to London in 1932. In a meeting that was to change her life forever, Zerka moved her elder sister from Belgium to New York, to pursue treatment for her sister's mental illness. This bringing her sister to J.L. Moreno was the status nascendi of 85 years of a rich collaborative love relationship with Zerka and her world.

Zerka's many contributions to the field of group psychotherapy and psychodrama began immediately upon meeting Dr. J.L. Moreno. Within a year of their meeting J.L. and Moreno founded the Sociometric Institute on Park Avenue, New York City. They established the Psychodramatic Institute in New York in 1942. Zerka was one of the co-founders of the International Association for Group Psychotherapy. Zerka and J.L. also began producing the *Journal Group Psychotherapy* (originally called *Sociatry*) in 1947. This publication was a volume of research documenting the application and refine-



ment of their work in the social sciences of sociatry, psychodrama and sociometry. Zerka was J. L. Moreno's partner and co-creator for over thirty years until his death in 1974.

Zerka continued training and teaching the psychodramatic theory and method for more than 35 years since Dr. Moreno's death, training and deeply impacting psychodramatists worldwide. Zerka Moreno is recognized as a leader in further realizing Dr. Moreno's vision and in bringing this method to the lives of communities worldwide. In the 2000s she lived, welcomed, and trained people from all over the world in Charlottesville, Virginia.

Zerka T. Moreno was honored in the annual "The Lives They Lived" issue of the New York Times Magazine Sunday, December 25th.

https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2016/12/21/magazine/the-lives-they-lived-zerka-t-moreno.html?_r=1





THE WIT AND WISDOM OF ZERKA

There are many ways that we will celebrate and honor Zerka's life – our upcoming journal, photo collages, at our Annual Conference. And we carry her with us in private memories as well. I invited our community to share "Zerka-isms"... special memories and words they carry with them.

2006 – *Originally written and then recirculated at a difficult time to the ASGPP Community on November 10, 2016.*

A Message from Zerka T Moreno

"Dear Friend,

I share the dark view of all that is going on and wishing we had a more direct positive influence. But then I remind myself that we must recall that in some ways Moreno was a Utopian who nevertheless hoped to make an impact. He also knew that the reality is something different. The fact that I lived in the first therapeutic community in the world, in Beacon helps me to support the idea that a small community can make a difference. Margaret Mead pointed out that we should never doubt what a few dedicated people can change the world.

We lived through the 2nd World War knowing we had to. We made it. It was important to make our life count. It is still important. Even if politics are dirty, we can keep ourselves clean."

Love, Zerka — January 2006

From Dena Baumgartner:

Zerka was a strong support to me and I have letters and words of wisdom from her over the years. What she wrote says a lot about who she is. After my mother and my partner David died, she wrote letters of encouragement. She suggested I should role reverse with David and sit in his lap and feel his love.

"In my office I had a picture on the wall that reads, 'Life is a test. It is only a test. If this were your actual life, you would have been given better instructions.' I always thought that Psychodrama was full of better instructions."

"I learned to live with loss when I was a preschooler, when a baby cousin died. And now, at age 97 it is becoming a frequent experience as people much younger than myself pass on. Maybe what helps me is that I believe this is not our only life, that we return to our place in the cosmos where we will all be united. At 22 years of age, I had the experience that we are all connected."

From Jeanne Burger:

Zerka's wisdom comes back to me so often. She would break my anxiety about doing new things by saying, "Important question, what are you going to wear?" Also, "Let's stay curious" was always great advice for directing and for life. She had lots of caveats about directing in the classical style such as "Double only when necessary" and "Your protagonist does not owe you a catharsis."

From Dale Richard Buchanan:

Despite wracking my brain I can't think of a single "phrase" or "mantra" that Zerka gave me. I suspect that what she give

me was energetic. She was always very kind and respectful of me and to me. When speaking to me I felt her attention was "present" and that she was speaking to me directly - even when in a very large group or setting. I felt a sense of faith that she supported and believed in me — I do think it is in "To Dream Again" that she thought the most important thing for people to know was to believe in themselves. The double — or the "Daimon" as the Greeks described it — that inner true voice of the soul guiding.

From Ann Hale:

I remember one evening (1974) after the last session Zerka asked all of us to walk her home.

There was a full moon and she sang to us as we slowly walked down the road.

From Kate Hudgins:

Her favorite saying to me was "become a psychodramatist and see the world!" Something that has certainly been true for me. This is how I got to Asia and other countries.

From Ed Schreiber:

"Our instruments are basically spiritual and existential, pointing to and supporting the value of the human spirit."

"My task is to find and touch that autonomous healing center within, to assist and direct the protagonist to do the same. I am merely a guide in the wilderness, clearing away obstacles so protagonists can find their very own path."

"With the passing years I stopped thinking of myself as a psychotherapist, because it became clear that I do not heal any psyche. Protagonists themselves do the healing."

March 2014 – *We (Conference Committee) asked Zerka if she would send something for us to read during the ASGPP Conference. And this is what she sent:*

"Welcome and have many encounters. Remember, we are all part of an ever growing network, around the globe. Your presence enriches us all."

March 2014 – *In correspondence with Phoebe Atkinson as they were sharing about Positive Psychology.*

"Abe Maslow regularly brought his students to our open sessions at 101 Park Avenue where for 17 years we conducted our work. At this time Maslow was a tutor at Brooklyn College. Maslow wrote a letter to the Editor of Life Magazine when it had a large article about Moreno's underground disciple, the Gestalt man. He told them they should have had Moreno, who produced those ideas and was still inventing more creative ideas on the banks of the Hudson."

From the New York Times Magazine, 12/25/16

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ZERKA MORENO

She had little doubt that acting out experiences and feelings could save people—and help with child-raising.

BY BENOIT DENIZET-LEWIS DEC. 21, 2016



Zerka Moreno with her son, Jonathan, in Beacon, N.Y., in July 1955. Credit From Regina Moreno

When Zerka Moreno gave birth to her son, Jonathan, in 1952, she saw his arrival as a “golden opportunity.” How much more fun and creative might

Moreno, Zerka's husband and the founder of psychodrama, a form of therapy in which people act out their experiences and feelings in an effort to gain insight or achieve catharsis.

J.L. called his method "Shakespearean psychiatry," and he and Zerka had little doubt that it would save the world — if only the world would play along. Not only did psychodrama help people suffering from grave psychological problems, the couple believed, but it had the added benefit of building understanding and empathy, whether for a nagging spouse or a beggar on the street. "Put yourself into the place of a victim of injustice and share his hurt," J.L. once suggested as the first rule of psychodrama. "Reverse roles with him." Warring countries might also benefit from psychodrama, if only J.L. could get their leaders in the same room. During the Vietnam War, he unsuccessfully lobbied Bill Moyers, the White House press secretary, to let him direct Lyndon Johnson and Ho Chi Minh in a psychodrama of potential healing.

Though Zerka had never heard of psychodrama before emigrating from Europe in 1939 and meeting J.L. two years later, she threw herself into his life's work. She helped him establish the Psychodramatic Institute in Beacon, N.Y., home to a motley crew suffering from everything from addiction to schizophrenia. Unlike most psychiatric hospitals, this one featured a large stage on which patients were expected to act out their issues. When leading a session, Zerka had little patience for excessive navel-gazing. "Too much talking; let's get into action!" she would yell, certain that physically acting out a problem worked better than endlessly talking about it.

There was little daylight between the couple's professional and personal lives — they lived some 50 yards from their sanitarium — and they saw no compelling reason not to create what they considered "the first psychodramatic family." (They wrote a book by that name.) In her memoirs, "To Dream Again," Zerka insisted that her "goal was not to turn our child into a guinea pig or an experiment." Instead, she hoped to make Jonathan's life — and that of his much older stepsister, Redina. from J.L.'s previous

Trying to see the world through her son's eyes, Zerka would lie on her back next to 5-month-old Jonathan, gurgling along with him. His sounds, she wrote, "induced in me the most fantastic cosmic tales such as it has never been my pleasure to create sense. We exchanged opinions about how strange it was here, how peculiar these humans." When Jonathan was 2, Zerka taught him the concept of role reversal. If he fought with a friend over a toy, Zerka had Jonathan play the part of his friend. The tiff usually ended promptly, and play resumed. "After all," Zerka wrote, "each child was giving in to himself."

'If the unexamined life is not worth living, the un-lived life is not worth examining.'

Psychodramatic techniques also defused typical parent-child squabbles. One night at dinner, Jonathan, then 3, said he wasn't hungry and refused to eat a meal Zerka had spent the afternoon cooking. They bickered until J.L. had heard enough. "This is ridiculous," he said. "Zerka, get up, become Jonathan and take his seat, and Jonathan, you be Mommy and sit in her chair." Playing his mother, Jonathan stretched his spine to make himself taller and looked down at Zerka, who had shrunk her body and lifted her feet off the floor to play the little boy. "Eat!" Jonathan commanded, doing his best overbearing-mother impression. Zerka, who had been grazing on food as she cooked and could relate to her son's lack of appetite, said she wasn't hungry. "So don't eat," Jonathan said with a smile.

When they were older, Jonathan and Regina would wander over to the ostensibly off-limits sanitarium and hang out with patients. "My best friends were drug addicts and narcissists," Jonathan, now a 64-year-old professor at the University of Pennsylvania and one of the country's leading bioethicists, recalls. "I could have very easily been totally nuts, but people are amazed at how normal I am." Though he rarely practices psychodrama

"I'm also told my interpersonal skills are good, but it's hard to know if that's nature or nurture."

Regina, who is now 77 and teaches psychodrama in the Bay Area and in China, has little doubt that her unconventional childhood "made me more empathetic, more open-minded." It also helped her work through teenage anxiety. "When I had a relationship problem, my dad had me talk to an empty chair," she says. "I'd play myself and then switch and play the person I was in conflict with. It helped me work out my feelings."

Zerka never stopped practicing or promoting psychodrama, even after the amputation of her right arm from cancer in 1958 and J.L.'s death in 1974. She wrote extensively and wasn't one to mince words, especially when it came to Sigmund Freud. Zerka mocked his penis-envy theory, what she called his "military model of the family" and psychoanalysis itself, which she believed was insufficient to achieve catharsis. In her memoirs, she wrote of the time J.L. confronted Freud after a lecture. "You analyze people's dreams," J.L. told a surprised Freud. "In a way, you disillusion them." By contrast, J.L. said, "I teach them to dream again."

Until her death, Zerka trained therapists from her room in a retirement community and then a nursing home, where she liked to tell jokes. But she could get serious in an instant. When Zerka's nephew Daniel came to visit a decade ago, he told her about a painful conflict with a family member, to which Zerka wasted little time pointing toward an empty chair by the window. They could work with that.

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