

WHERE WERE THE LEAVES BEFORE THEY CAME OUT?

MICHAEL CONFORTI AT 56

Something organizes the activities that occur when two people meet.

—Michael Conforti

ENCOUNTERING JUNG

ROB HENDERSON (RH): How did you become interested in Jung?

MICHAEL CONFORTI (MC): As with any story, there's a story behind this one. I grew up in a large, extended Italian family in Brooklyn. There were scores of cousins, aunts, uncles, grandparents, and many tales of the relatives on the "other side" in Palermo, Sicily. For me there was nothing as grand as being with relatives and, to this day, gathering with family and friends is still a wonderful experience. As you know, food, wine, conversation, madness, and passions abound in these settings, and this was the norm for our family as well.

Our family lived a very modest existence. My father worked for over thirty years as a stevedore on the New York waterfront. He went to school up to the seventh grade, and then had to "find" money for the family. His first language was Sicilian, then Neapolitan, then Italian. He's still alive at age ninety-two, and still going strong. He knows it's best not to say too much about his early years—*miglio dice nient*—"Better to say nothing!" While I am close to my father, I am very much a mother's son—but I guess this goes without saying for Italian males. My mother had some college edu-

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cation, and taught in elementary schools in Brooklyn and Staten Island for close to thirty years. She was a phenomenal teacher, and received many awards for her creativity and inspiration.

Basically everything about my life, especially in the early years, was about the Italian family and way of life—the language, dialect, temperament, and attitudes. In fact, one of my early analytic experiences captures the importance of my cultural background. One particular analyst, an upper-class Anglo-Saxon Protestant, listened attentively as I described my dealings with friends and colleagues. He would shake his head in disbelief and say, “Michael, you are just so paranoid.” I realized that if he really saw me this way, he failed to understand the archetypal and cultural backdrop of my life. So I quickly shot back, “I am not paranoid, I am Siciliano!” The analysis ended shortly after that. One should know better than to call a Siciliano paranoid!

During my years at City University in New York, the school had just begun the University Without Walls division, which I saw as a way out of the rigidity of the traditional educational regime. Enrolling in this program saved my personal and academic life in many ways. Since I was a good athlete in grammar and high schools, I had enrolled as a physical education major. However, I only needed a few hours in my first Phys Ed class to know that I wanted out, and needed more.

That first semester was a near disaster. I had a 1.7 grade point average, and was on the verge of flunking out. My mother, a master at interventions, calmly reviewed my first report card, and said that perhaps I was not college material. Maybe I should work with my father on the New York waterfront. She reminded me that college was not for everyone, and perhaps I was better suited for manual labor. My father, however, had other, higher hopes for me. He felt the waterfront was far too dangerous (as it was then and still is now), with the influence of organized crime. He wanted more for me, and said that I should become a truck driver, not a lowly stevedore! While my father’s suggestions were sincere, my mother’s were strategic, and both worked to kick me into gear.

I switched to a liberal arts major and, at the end of the next semester, joyfully invited my parents to join me for a gala event honoring all the Dean’s List students. In a matter of months I went from a 1.7 GPA to Dean’s List, and from there my academic life took off. Suddenly, I loved learning and couldn’t get enough of it.

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Part of our program involved volunteer work and, with a budding interest in psychology, I took a position at Willowbrook State School, a center for severely disturbed children on Staten Island. You may recall Geraldo Rivera's exposé of this institution. Well, his descriptions of the horrid conditions were all true, and I found these "patients" living in relative squalor. From children to chronological adults who functioned as children, they all spent the majority of their days on the locked units. However, as sad as this was, it did provide me with a number of experiences that actually were an intimation of my future in Jungian psychology.

Ralph

A thirty-year-old man, whose appearance and countenance were that of a ten-year-old, he would spend hours by the water fountain each day, spinning water through his fingers that, mixed with spittle, would create intricate and beautiful web-like designs. I could never understand how he transformed water into a threadlike substance. When at his "sacred font," he was at peace. However, at all other times he was a scared, angry child, finding great pleasure in saying in a half teasing, half serious voice, "Youwannafightme!" Which translated to, "You want to fight me?" I liked Ralph. It was something about the creation of the image and about the texture of what he made that settled his restless soul.

Carlos

Carlos was a young man in his forties, about four feet tall, barely able to speak, deformed, and with a very tender smile. I often wondered if anyone ever visited him. I enjoyed spending time with him, and will never forget one particular day. It was a magnificent day with a glorious sunset. I asked Carlos to join me by the window. I was deeply touched by this sunset, and suddenly began to wonder if he was able to experience its beauty. I refused to believe that there was no part of him that could appreciate this sight, although outwardly he seemed oblivious. Then, out of the blue, a thought came to me, unlike any I had ever had. I wondered if there was a way to translate his brain waves into language, to translate these images into words, and to develop a lexicon based on brain-wave activity and frequencies.

If this were possible, then we could understand what sort of mentation, and perhaps even soul activity, was occurring beneath the surface. In many ways, I now see this intuition as the beginning, an unfolding of a future path for my life's work. Not so much in the area of brain research, but how events

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in the material world, like a sunset, affect the psyche, even without conscious recognition. While this event occurred in 1970, today this work is commonplace in the field of neurobiology, where researchers involved in various forms of brain mapping and analysis of wave frequencies are doing what I had hoped could be done for Carlos and others like him in understanding thought processes through brain activity.

Boy with a Crown of Flowers

Perhaps my most powerful experience at Willowbrook involved an eleven-year-old boy who, during outdoor recess, would immediately run to the flower garden to create a crown of flowers to wear on his head. Like Ralph, this boy found great peace and serenity in this activity. Through the making and wearing of this crown, he was transported to another world, a world of beauty, color, and the rich textures of the natural world. The walls on the unit were generally stained with feces. As I watched him, I would literally see this transformation occurring before my eyes. I began to wonder what it was about his relationship to this ritual, to this image, that provided such a deeply felt sense of peace and comfort. I wanted to understand this activity, and thought that if I did, perhaps I could help others through my insights.

Each of these experiences shaped my life, and provided unimaginably rich material to nurture a life's work existing *in potentia* within my psyche.

Another college experience that awakened my interest in Jungian psychology occurred in a Personality Theory course. Of all the ideas and terms used during the semester, I recall feeling electrified when the professor mentioned the words "anima" and "alchemy." Even before he began describing what they meant, I knew that in some strange way these words were profound and important—no, essential!—to my life.

That was the very first time I had had such an experience with unfamiliar words. This has only happened once since, during my doctoral dissertation meeting, when the term "catastrophe theory" was mentioned. Again, I was thunderstruck! It is so fascinating to see how psyche gathers what it needs to create a life. Anima, alchemy, and catastrophe theory—all concepts central to what has now been a thirty-year fascination with the confluence of matter and psyche.

In my third year of college, I found myself yet again being guided by some force towards what was to become my destiny. I was at Goddard College in Vermont, and all students were to take a non-resident semester,

where we were encouraged to pursue our interests anywhere in the world. My “decision” was clear. I was going to Zurich to train as a Jungian analyst.

Up to this point, I had read a few books about Jung, and was developing an interest in this work. But it wasn't until I decided to travel to the Jung Institute in Zurich that I ever thought of being an analyst. So, at age nineteen, I mailed my application, and with a backpack, a few dollars, and hair halfway down my back, I arrived on the front steps of the Institute. The secretary, who I believe was Frau Baumann-Jung, greeted me. She read my papers and said, “So you are Conforti. We were expecting you.” Feeling quite pleased that she knew me, I said quite confidently, “Yes, I am.” “Well,” she continued, “you are too young to be here. You can go home, or maybe you can audit a class, or take the Jung tour, but don't think of training until you are at least twenty-six years old.” In 1979, seven years later, at age twenty-six, I was accepted for training at the C. G Jung Institute of New York. Yet again, I felt so fortunate to be following this thread, which was guiding me toward some seemingly preordered future.

Interestingly, years after I had completed my training in New York, I was invited to lecture in Zurich (at the new Institute in Kusnacht). I was so filled with emotion, realizing that somehow I had made this journey and had come full circle, arriving back to this most generative beginning point of the journey.

So there is my story, from the “initial conditions”—which as we can see foreshadowed this path—to training at the Jung Institute.

A MOTHER'S SON

RH: What have you found to be some of the strengths and weaknesses of being a mother's son?

MC: The good news is that the mother is the central focus of the son's life—and the bad news is that the mother is the central focus of the son's life. At least, that is the case in this particular story. Now add to this mix an *Italian* son and an *Italian* mother, and you're into this mother field pretty deeply. A mother's son begins life strongly aligned to the mother's psyche, and remains there throughout.

There is a deep sense of connection and love that goes with this sort of positive mother complex. You not only feel but *know* that you are the center of the universe. When in the glow of this love, whatever you dream of is but

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a step away and *will* be accomplished. While the strength of these feelings about ourselves carries us into the world as the "special ones," we will, despite our mother's best intentions, eventually have to leave home and encounter a world much larger than this mother-son dyad and some of the illusions spun within it. But the foundations remain strong, as these mothers taught us to feel like the prince and king.

My mother worked full time, maintained a home, and cooked all the meals for our family. For more than thirty years she taught in the Catholic school systems in Brooklyn, and later in Staten Island, New York. She was revered as a teacher, and had an ability to inspire students to think bigger and to want more out of life. She made history lessons come alive, and would often stage plays depicting great historical moments. Just as she did for me, she helped these students to see themselves as kings, leaders, and pioneers, all discovering great worlds.

While encouraging them to soar, she was careful not to infuse them with an unrealistic sense of self, because she was fully aware of the milieu, most of these kids returned to after school. For these working-class families, education was an important value, but at the same time a bit superfluous to the exigencies of daily life. However, she hoped to have these young students still dream and imagine a horizon beyond what they could see from their front porch. My mother gave us all wings, even if only to soar for a few moments.

She was the daughter of a powerful self-made man, who later became a high-ranking official in the New York Police Department, but she rebelled in many ways. She was not to be sequestered and silenced, or so she believed and hoped, but unfortunately this was not to be her final story.

My mother taught me to write by using an old Royal typewriter. This typewriter, and writing, were my mother's world. She would sit at the kitchen table writing out notes and stories about her life. As a child, I too loved to write, and would hunt and peck for hours, loving the melodies of this word-maker, which almost magically took ideas within my head and suddenly made them visible.

In my third year of training at the Jung Institute in New York, I had to take the qualifying exams for entrance into stage two of training. An eight-hour period of thinking, feeling, reflecting, and writing responses to questions was the order of the day. The other candidates came equipped with their #2 pencils, erasers, and pencil sharpeners. I brought my typewriter.

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Asked what I was planning to do with this typewriter, I replied that I wanted to type out all my answers to these exams. Upon reflection, I guess I should have asked if this was permitted—but, here again, the Italian mother's-son drama: my world is the world's world. So, with the fastest two fingers in the world (OK, a little hyperbole), I typed my answers to the examination. Unfortunately, there was no eraser to clean up mistakes on this machine, and I had “forgotten” to bring any correction tape or fluid. A very gracious exam committee read this paper filled with typos, but on these wings I hunted and pecked my way to a successful entry into the next stage of training.

My mother, this daughter of a New York cop, married a Sicilian longshoreman, whose friends were all “friends.” A difficult blending—the Sicilian husband and the “northern” Neapolitan wife—perhaps impossible, but we lived through it, making the impossible livable. Though it was not quite so sure who truly benefited from these gallant attempts at survival.

Throughout it all, I remained my mother's son. She taught me to ride a bike, and later in life I participated in long-distance bike racing. She taught me to play ball, and as a young man I excelled, until I entered one of the most prestigious sports high schools in New York, St. Francis Prep, and there I more than met my match.

I began high school feeling a bit “cocky” about my athletic abilities. In a casual conversation, my mother mentioned that one of her students, big Frank D., was also going to St. Francis Prep to “play ball.” And she mentioned, in passing, that big Frank, who was thirteen or fourteen years old at the time, was 6' 7". I was 6'. Not until that first day of practice did I realize what she wanted me to know about sports and about life. Lacing up my sneakers and running into the gym, I was met by a group of “big guys” —“Redwood Trees,” as one of the faculty loved to call them. These young men, also only thirteen and fourteen years old, were 6' 4" to 6' 7", and phenomenal athletes. My neck hurt after that first practice—I just kept looking up! It was my mother who, in a subtle way, had tried to teach me to see myself *in relation* to the outer world. She sought to help me ground an identity in a reality far bigger—and far taller!—than what I had been aware of. While a tough taskmaster, my mother always helped me to see what I was capable of, and more often than not this produced in me a natural tendency towards greater challenges than many of my friends.

When, more than thirty years ago, I first envisioned the idea of an Assisi Conference, I never once doubted that this potential could grow into a

reality. Not one for details, I neglected to do anything like a cost analysis or marketing plan. I moved forward without ever looking back. From the first intimation of a future to the actualization of this dream, I remembered the wings! The Assisi Conferences and Assisi Institute were built on these wings of inspiration. For me, if the idea of an Italy conference was attractive, then of course it would be attractive to *everyone*. Like gathering around the table of an Italian home, these wings always gently welcomed others to join in.

Aside from love and devotion, not much is demanded of the Italian son. For us, the only truly relevant commandment was to Honor Your Mother, and that we did. Devotion and love provided a free pass from other family responsibilities. Not much was asked of me in terms of general contributions to the home. My room was always cleaned, great meals were always on the table by 6:30, dishes washed, floors scrubbed, the home spotless, and I was never asked or even expected to do anything to help in these efforts. Italian fathers grow frustrated with the spoiling of their sons, but live in fear of ever contradicting the women. Remember, the Italian family is a matriarchal structure. We used to kid around, saying that the men all wore gold chains around their necks to make it easier for them to be controlled!

My mother was a bit of a psychic, and always seemed to know what was on my mind and whatever I was doing in my more private moments. This made things difficult on many levels. So, lying in bed at night, not only did I have to contend with all the statues of saints lined up on the shelf watching my every move, but also for my mother's "knowing ways." I was never alone—all those eyes were on me. On my way to confession each Saturday afternoon, Mom would remind me of other "things" I needed to tell the priest about. But how did she know?

Living in the mother's world meant I was predisposed to care deeply about the world of the feminine. Clearly I needed many years of analysis to understand the deeper nature of my relationship with "HER," yet I can see now, even more clearly, how that relationship provided the central ground for my life, interests, and proclivities. The world I care about is the world of people, cooking, making wine, discussing recipes with friends, finding that extra special olive oil, and seeing a warm, tender smile. All these interests translated well into my love of Jungian psychology, which, in distinction to the patriarchal underpinnings of Freudian analysis, is deeply rooted within the feminine. Working with the objective psyche and iconic images, and learning to recognize how the forward-moving, meaning-making dimen-

sions of the deep unconscious provide access to the world's wisdom traditions suit me as well as preparing a wonderful meal.

The joy of sitting with a patient, knowing that we can engage in discussions about things that are never talked about anywhere else, is such a gift. If and when the day comes when I no longer practice analysis, this will be a great loss. While the connection to the patient's world is a deeply touching and profound experience, the *processes* underlying these encounters also fascinate me. Here we finally see some needed blending of the fathers with the mothers!

Something organizes the activities that occur when two people meet. They are drawn into a domain far greater than any individual experience. Patient and therapist become entrained into the workings of archetypal dynamics, and their behavior, communications, and movements are thoughtfully orchestrated and choreographed by the workings of Self. Sitting around the kitchen table with the "mothers," and just being and listening, provided the groundwork to both engage with and appreciate this other world—the world of the archetypal.

My mother died close to eight years ago. I miss her, and can see very clearly the life she had and its effects on me. Like everything in life, there were gains and losses involved in this relationship. Yet I remain deeply appreciative of her values and the world she helped me to see and to be part of. In a significant way, she will always be part of my journey.

THE MOTHER COMPLEX

RH: With such a powerful bond with the mother, I would imagine you have also had a wonderful opportunity to learn about the mother complex as part of a man's life. What have you learned?

MC: One first has to say that there are numerous facets of the mother complex that need to be examined, including aspects of the mother's own life. Was the mother a generative or non-generative presence for the child? Did she live a creative life? What was the nature of her marriage? In many respects this piece needs to be understood before we begin to talk about the son's mother complex.

It is important to note that the son's experience with the actual mother is not the primary factor determining the nature of this mother complex. Rather, the field within which the mother lives becomes the dominating

force in the son's life. Here I am speaking of "field" as an expression of an activated/constellated archetype. The mother's behavior falls somewhere along a continuum, from the nurturing, good mother to the other extreme of the death mother. Although experienced personally, these behaviors need to be recognized as essentially archetypal, and it is this archetypal influence that exerts the greatest presence in the son's life.

How and why can a mother have such an enduring, often lifelong, influence on the son? Can this be explained purely from the realm of personal psychology? The answer is a definitive *no*. The influences are purely archetypal, and transcend the temporal mother-son relationship. It is for this reason that the effects are so profound. The mother is embedded in a field, and it is this field that creates these long-lasting effects on the son's life.

For example, the mother complex in a man's life can orient him to the feminine in some very interesting ways. A sense of the *affascinante*—"She," the mother, the feminine—remains captivating throughout his life. A deep sense of the *numinosum* surrounds the feminine for this type of mother's son. However, when the tie is too strong, the man is unable to leave the mother, and is thus prevented from living a full and vital life, both internally and externally. This is often manifested as a general disturbance within the realm of the *anima*—from creative malaise to the inability to form stable and meaningful relationships in the outer world. The negative mother complex works to keep much of the man's energy *in potentia*.

In my case, I experienced the warmth of a mother who expressed genuine love and concern for her son, while at the same time being thwarted in living out her own potential for a larger life—plenty of talent, too many obstacles, too little strength, and still living within an Italian-American culture that wasn't supportive of independent women. Her gifts languished, and eventually were all but extinguished. So it went, with my mother reveling in my successes, never envying my life, but perhaps silently mourning what she knew she would never experience.

These experiences prepared this "mother's son" to see, with the acuity of an eagle, where talent, even when deeply repressed, resides in a man's and especially a woman's soul. In many ways, this predisposition and sensitivity towards the mother instills in the male psyche a deep sadness for her unexpressed life, and often results in a seeming inability to extract oneself from the mother's psychological, emotional, and archetypal field of the un-lived life.

And the plot thickens—if it were only that easy for a male with this sort of mother complex to be involved only in *supportive* behaviors towards this type of woman. But alas, this is not the full story. These men will be drawn like the prince to the princess needing redemption. The *puella* woman, the princess with wonderful talents who needs that *one* person to help her bring her potentialities to fruition, is a magnet for such a man. Like a moth to a flame, he is inexorably drawn and caught. Such a son, with his heightened sensitivity and ability to nurture the gifts of the other, is primed to connect with this type of woman, to want to help her attain a full, creative life. However, there is also a negative side to this type of relationship. While the man's desire to support and love the other is real, so too is his terror of and resentment toward this woman whose un-lived life denies him, the son-lover, the richness of a meaningful relationship to a vital woman.

This drama also plays out intrapsychically in the workings of the man's anima, which is also shaped by his experience with his mother. The anima remains a consort to the repressed mother, and it is the anima that is the damsel in *real* need of rescue, as she too lingers in this half-lived life. For these reasons, he deeply resents the "woman," and secretly harbors fears and resentments that prevent his heart and soul from being truly present to her. He remains reluctant to fully engage in the relationship because of his unconscious recognition that she is emotionally unavailable, and his fear that things will never really change. Then, as often happens when illusions of happiness and joy in the relationship are shattered by the reality of his partner's weaknesses, he inevitably withdraws. In many respects, it is the workings of the Self that alert him to the futility of this relationship and urge him to leave.

I trust that, at this point in the story, we may be wondering when and if he should stay and help his partner to live a better life. The answer, while quite complicated by moral, ethical, and spiritual issues, comes down to a number of pivotal questions, such as the partner's interest in and ability to change, her capacity to accept the help of the other and, perhaps most important, to use this guiding hand to create a better life. In close to thirty years of clinical experience, I have rarely seen this issue resolved in the mother/son-lover archetypal drama. The son-lover typically lingers on in the relationship with his psychologically immature and unmotivated partner, and he and his anima remain undeveloped in many respects. So where does one find redemption, and how does freedom from this possession occur?

A number of years ago, I worked with a client whose mother complex closely resembled the dynamics described above. Time and time again, he found himself involved with deeply troubled women who did little if anything to help themselves. Once the possession and intoxication of the relationship began to wane, he had to wrestle with the difficult question of whether he was indeed abandoning someone in need. To some extent it was true that his behavior could be considered as abandonment, but his own psychological and spiritual survival required that these deeply flawed relationships end. Otherwise, he would surely have been dragged into some truly terrible life situations, which would only serve to strengthen the possession generated by this mother complex. In leaving the last (or at least we hope it will be the last) of these relationships, with a woman named Francine, he suddenly became aware of a deep loneliness and hunger for a healthy relationship. A year after the breakup, he found himself once again with a deep longing for this woman, and had the following dream: *I am with a woman and her children. The woman tells me that she has something for me. She then sprays a mist of perfume towards me, and I recognize it as Francine's perfume. I feel a deep longing for her. I begin to think of how much I miss her and want her. I regret all the mistakes I made, and feel that I really should be with her.*

From this dream it was clear that he was still unconsciously possessed by some aspect of the anima. When I asked him to describe Francine, he painted a picture of a classic *puella*, unable to bring any of her many talents to expression in the outer world. She continued to live as the tragic, victimized daughter and, in her mid-fifties, was still dependent on her parents for financial support. We then discussed how he himself was allowing a number of his own important projects to linger, because he could not find the energy to complete them. With our work on his dream, he began to realize the spell this anima-mother complex had on him. He suddenly reached a breakthrough, and saw how his anima and his own blocked creativity paralleled Francine's (and his mother's) unlived life. The spell was broken. He felt as if a logjam had been freed, and was able to resume his creative work.

In time, he began to regain even more control over his life. Now, after years of analysis, he is much more conscious of the workings of his mother complex, and far less susceptible to the beckoning of those hungry sirens. His life has improved, and he has begun to prepare his inner and outer home for the emergence of the feminine. He longs for a good relationship

with a woman, and is aware of his estrangement from his generative anima. Healing and redemption are now becoming part of this man's life.

Much of what I have learned about life and psyche comes from the work of Jung and the first generation of Jungians, including Marie-Louise von Franz, Barbara Hannah, Esther Harding, Aniela Jaffé, and Erich Neumann. There is a profundity in their work, a deep knowing about a world residing somewhere outside of conscious awareness. Theirs was knowledge about the real ways of human nature and the eternal rhythms of life. When these "wise old ones" spoke of the mother complex, they clearly understood its creative as well as its destructive aspects. Their descriptions are accurate and even predictive; their recommendations toward redemption are profound. As I continue to be influenced by the enormous contributions of these pioneers, I am especially dismayed by the trends prevalent in contemporary Jungian thought, which ascribe subjective interpretations to archetypal dynamics. We have entered a phase of what I call "subjective relativism," where feelings, perceptions, and desires override and occlude the autonomy of the archetype. Subjective relativism is generated by fear, a fear of those forces that we are unable to tame. It is often cunningly disguised by our hubris and our clever constructions about the world and the psyche.

Clearly we need to live in accordance with these preexisting archetypal entities, and that is exactly the point. We have not created the world in which we live; our lives need to be lived in response to the objective, both externally and internally. In many ways, this *is* the soul work described by Jung and the early Jungians.

I would like to conclude my comments about the role of the mother complex in a man's life with a beautiful image of redemption. In his book *The Sabbath*, Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel describes the spirit of his home as he and his family prepare for the Sabbath:

On the Sabbath we especially care for the seed of eternity planted in the soul. The world has our hands, but our soul belongs to Someone Else....It is incumbent on every man to be very, very zealous in making the Sabbath day preparations, to be prompt and diligent as a man who has heard that the queen is coming to lodge in his home.

Heschel continues, saying that these preparations should be as precious as the work that goes into readying a home for the arrival of our bride. It is knowing that the bride, the anima, is coming home that transforms the

man's struggles with his mother complex. He is aware that a new life awaits him as he walks hand in hand with his "spouse." He knows that he has found redemption, and his life—internally and externally—will be lived with a deeper love and greater consciousness.

ARCHETYPAL PATTERN ANALYSIS

RH: You have brought about a new approach in analytical psychology, which you call Archetypal Pattern Analysis. Briefly, how would you explain to an educated non-Jungian what this means? Perhaps you can give an example from your own life or from someone else's.

MC: Let me begin with a quote from Teilhard de Chardin: "Matter is spirit moving slowly enough to be seen." At the end of our interminably long Vermont winters, spring (*la primavera*—the first green) does finally arrive. Living in this type of climate, one reaches a deeper understanding of seasonal rituals and myths. Each season arrives with its particular flurry of activity and, suddenly, one's life is changed.

Some years ago, when my son was a young boy, as the trees began their annual process of unfolding, I would ask him, "Where were the leaves before they came out?" A great way to teach about nature and psyche, as it is all so immediate and visible. These leaves were somewhere, existing *in potentia*. In this state devoid of form, something in the field of the tree was waiting for a set of very specific conditions in order to begin the process of unfolding. And this expression of field into form results in the verdant beauty that we know as spring.

Through fall and winter these frozen soldiers, following their natural cycle, knew the time had come to pull in, conserve energy, and build momentum for the next season. Perhaps Eckhart Tolle might not appreciate this idea of form *in potentia*. For him, it's all about the now. Well, biological science and other domains allow us to see how life is so much more than the present. Among the poets, mystics, and artists who have captured this infusion of matter by spirit, perhaps it was zoologist Adolph Portmann, long-time colleague of Jung, who expressed this idea most beautifully. With the eyes of a scientist and soul of a poet he wrote:

This early preparation (for the future) includes the setting aside of...cells that, even before the individual for which the egg is destined begins the course of his life, provision is made for the next

generation. If the plasma of the species begins at so early a stage to prepare the way for the end of the individual and the coming of a new generation, you will readily understand how a biologist may incline to agree with the mystics that the end is in the beginning, the beginning is in the end.

The arrival of spring brings the warmth of the sun, the “eternal return,” virgin spring—profusions of blossoms, canopies of green. For the moment, one is fully immersed in this glorious season. Each season brings *its own* initiatives, needs, behaviors, and tendencies. We are drawn, like reading a great book, into their story. We respond to nature’s call, developing what we hope is a meaningful response to the mandates of each time of year.

So too with the archetypes. Each has its own “season,” carefully orchestrated by life’s eternal, cyclical dance. As we come to understand the habits, traditions, and behaviors attendant to each stage, we are also beckoned into their archetypal world. From the exuberance, ever-expanding horizon, and sure-footedness of spring and summer, to the fecundity and harvesting of the autumnal season, to the slowing and pulling in that nature requires in winter, we too need to prepare for these seasons, to engage with them in a meaningful way. What exists externally also lives internally. Perhaps we are approaching a time when Einstein’s dream of a unified field may finally be fully recognized. The ancients saw this connection eons ago with their concept of the *unus mundus*, a world connected by ontological principles.

For the past twenty-five years, I have been interested in this confluence of matter and spirit, and have devoted my career to investigations in this area. While matter tends to be viewed as an epiphenomenon of spirit, in much the same way as a symbol or image is seen as an expression of an archetype, I sensed there was more to matter than met the eye.

So to further these studies, I began to invite many of the world’s leaders from the traditional and new sciences—including chaos theory, nonlinear dynamics, perturbation theory, and the overall field called “the science of emergence”—to engage in conversation about these ideas. In 1989, I convened the first of what have become annual international forums in Assisi, Italy, and for the past twenty years, the beautiful Country House Tre Esse in that medieval village has been our European home. Assisi, the land of Saint Francis, whose life was emblematic of the relationship between matter and spirit.

Following a strong intuition, I sensed that there was something rich and

profound in the discoveries of these sciences, and that within this domain lay yet another vital key for understanding something essential about the workings of psyche. In many ways, their insights rivaled Jung's work in alchemical studies. Both offered a wonderful vista for viewing the workings of psyche and soul, and for understanding those processes involved in the generation of form. I came to see that matter was even more miraculous than I had ever imagined! From a nonlocal, nonmaterial field, we experience the emergence of life, form, and specificity.

From here it was easy to see that the new sciences of complexity and emergence converged with Jung's view of the transcendent. The transcendent, the psychoidal, self-organization, and innate ordering processes all speak of something existing within the nonmaterial domain, but governing our lives from birth to death. For many years I have been following a thread, much like a character in a fairy tale picking up twigs and stones along the road, sensing that each is in some way essential for this journey. As I look back at these markers, I see that they have formed a pattern of what continues to be a richly textured life.

Now, I find myself immersed in the work of our cultural and spiritual teachers, who throughout history have stood as the guardians of eternal wisdom. Reading these texts, I see that archetypes provide us with a contemporary view of these sacred traditions. Listen to your dreams, and learn something you may never have known about yourself. Listen to the great masters and storytellers—not the ones who take a weekend course in shamanism or sacred studies, but those whose life is dedicated to this search, to this vision. Far too many snake oil salesmen ply their trade to anyone who will listen. Today, enlightenment is sold on every street corner. The great ones never solicit.

Humanity has always been confronted with profound questions requiring equally profound answers. Instead, we are offered simplistic platitudes and quick fixes. Psychotherapy, religious education, and spiritual guidance all too often support a concept of life and of God that is childlike and naive. Personally, I revel in the scholarship and rigor of the Talmudic masters and their students, who pore over sacred texts with a fine-tooth comb. Belief and scholarship belong together. Is knowledge really anathema to spirituality? We have gone way too far with inadequate answers to life's deep questions.

Through all of these studies, I have continued to learn about the workings of complexes, the generation of form, and the dynamics that create and

strengthen patterns. Why do some patterns persist, and what conditions can help them to change? I have been struck by the fact that energetic forces and other influences existing independently of the individual personality have the capacity to eclipse the conscious mind.

At times, this may lead to a sort of spiritual ecstasy and the emergence of novelty and complexity in the psyche, while at other times it can result in a possession, drawing the individual or collective into the spin of a potentially destructive archetypal complex, as we saw in the devastation carried out by the hands of the Nazis. This is an archetypal possession at its worst, drawing millions of people under its spell of hatred and violence.

What helps to break these spells and possessions, which often last for years, or even for a lifetime? Several years ago, while working on this question, the proverbial book fell off the shelf—Marie-Louise von Franz's *The Psychological Meaning of Redemption Motifs in Fairytales*. Von Franz explains that spells, complexes, and possessions, which are the theme of many fairy tales, are resolved and integrated through acts of redemption, but she cautions us to view redemption as an archetypal event, not a theological concept.

This idea of redemption as breaking a spell was the exact piece I needed in order to better understand the workings of complexes, and the possibility of healing in these transcendent experiences. Von Franz's theories provided an important dimension to my work, and new insights into ways of stopping the stampeding force of these possessions. More and more doors began opening.

As I continued my research on the dynamics of possessions, I inevitably arrived at the issue of the Holocaust. Above and beyond all else, this act of genocide remains an unimaginable atrocity. However, I knew it contained important clues about the workings of such autonomous archetypal forces, and the need for freedom and redemption on the part of the survivors of this atrocity. I began to get an inkling as to why so many of them either committed suicide or lived the remainder of their lives somehow, somewhere suspended between life and death.

I recently watched a documentary, *Forgiving Dr. Mengele*, which tells the story of one of the survivors of Josef Mengele's infamous twin experiments at the Auschwitz concentration camp. Not wanting to live any longer under a cloud of sadness and misery, this woman decided to forgive Mengele and the other Nazi perpetrators as a means of self-healing. In

thinking through the bizarreness of her decision to forgive, I began to realize that it was in fact redemption that she sought. She wanted and needed to break the spell under which she had lived since her days as a young child in the camp.

Simon Wiesenthal's *Sunflower: On the Limits of Forgiveness* has also contributed to my understanding of possessions, redemption, and the unforgivable. In this book, Wiesenthal recounts an experience during his internment in the camps, when he was asked to offer forgiveness to a dying Nazi soldier who admitted to killing many Jews. How can a person be pushed to such limits? How could you not want to slit the throat of the man responsible for killing so many of your kinsmen? Interestingly, some months ago I received a call from a Hollywood studio asking if I would be interested in serving as a script consultant for an upcoming movie that is to be based on this very book! So psyche had been guiding my work in this new direction for some reason, which I am beginning to glimpse a bit more of each day.

I view life as a collection of threads of varying colors and textures. Not fully knowing what they want to become, we somehow sense there is a design waiting to be expressed. Put aside the cutout pattern we bought and had envisioned as their end piece—instead, allow for the intermingling of talent and mystery, chance and destiny to guide this work. Pray to Arachne for guidance as the spinning and weaving begin, and life and destiny unfold.

If we are fortunate, we find that one person who knows us, and who loves us in ways we can never fully understand. I have met such a person, Dr. Yoram Kaufmann. Originally trained as a physicist in his native Israel, and later as a psychologist and Jungian analyst, Dr. Kaufmann was a true scholar and innovative thinker. From my days as a trainee at the New York Jung Institute, he recognized something about this destiny living deeply within my heart and soul. Mentoring me with love and wisdom, he saw through the games and street-savvy bravado of an Italian-American boy from Brooklyn. He knew what dwelled in my heart, what lived beneath the tough exterior. I owe much to him, for so many things—most importantly for who I am and the life I live today.

In many ways, I am now experiencing a sort of homecoming. Growing up in an Italian family, with a mother who was a bit of a psychic, I was immersed in a world of Catholicism and mysticism. It was only later, after finishing college, that I felt the need to temporarily leave these familiar waters,

to develop a sharper intellect that would balance the incredibly strong intuition I relied on and that often saved me. As I made these transitions, both internally and externally, I deeply missed the comforts of all the familiar touchstones of my life. Playing cards with cousins Bill and Robert at Aunt Liz's house, with sandwiches brought to our table at midnight. Walking down 18th Avenue, always knowing where you could get an incredible "slice." Listening to the cadence and resonance of the Brooklyn dialect that I still love to hear.

But I had to leave. Leave both New York and the familiar terrain of an interior landscape that offered such sustenance and security. After many changes and a sense of being exiled, slowly the reality dawned on me that I could never truly go home again. I could go back, but with a deep sense of certainty that I was never ever completely part of them. Like a gossamer shadow, intimations of another world had always beckoned, but in a language I could not fully understand until I met Dr. Kaufmann.

Now, with a more solid foundation, I am reintegrating these other ways of being back into my life. The son, who left home at different times, in different ways, but for the right reasons, is now returning to a world that feels so right. In many ways I have paid my dues, and now return feeling more balanced, and with a new multilingual fluency—Italian/English, English/Brooklynese, science/spirit, traditional/nontraditional ways of healing. I can smell the home cooking on the stove. Awakening on a Sunday morning to the aroma of meatballs frying and the faint hint of a sauce that will simmer all day. That is heaven! That is paradise! Yoram, please come sit with me at the table, embraced by the richness of a culture that welcomes who you are. You will always have a place set for you there.