

Restoring Love in a STEPFAMILY

by Joy Ramos

As I approach remarriage this summer, the occasion has been a constant reminder of the unresolved hurts from being in an unhealthy stepfamily relationship.

I can recall the many times with my former husband and step-daughter when we'd lash out at each other with anger. There was a fierce competition for attention, respect and power. It was a mismatch, I logically concluded. We weren't really compatible, so divorce seemed the best way out after four years together.

Entering into a new stepfamily, the grief from my past had left me worried. Am I destined to repeat the painful lessons with new children involved?

In an effort to heal, I sought help to make the pains go away. The various therapies I did try only resulted in a surface healing that didn't seem to last.

One day, a friend had told me about Family Constellation. Developed by a German named Burt Hellinger, it is a healing method that can energetically affect the "greater soul of the family" to restore balance and harmony within the present generation and past ones. At the heart of suffering are invisible forces at work like hidden family loyalties, hidden truths, and broken orders of love. It's also the stories we create around them that can cause dysfunction in our lives.

The explanation didn't impress me very much until I observed the healing process on others in a private, group session. I better understood why it was also called Systemic Resolution. Family Constellation work takes a systemic approach to healing that uncovers and restructures unconscious family blueprints.

The Resolution Begins

I had contacted Catherine Van Wetter, a Family Constellation therapist from Corvallis for help. My intention was to resolve the hurts of the past: the guilt, resentment and anger from conflicts with the stepfamily.

Catherine got my attention right away when she mentioned that confusion in a stepfamily happens when its members don't know their place within the family system and former partners are not acknowledged. It had never occurred to me before.

Guiding me in a visualization, I had to imagine a circle that contained my stepfamily. The circle represented the invisible morphogenic field, a kind of "knowing field" of conscious energy that binds members of a family, race, nation or tribe together. It can reveal underlying issues because it also has memory and influence. Through this field, I am able to tap into the mind and soul of my whole family using my intention.

Within the circle, every person I imagined assumed a position in relation to each other.

Restoring the Orders of Love

Love in a family system flows best when a certain systematic 'order,' or law, is respected. Under the "Orders of Love" outlined by Burt Hellinger, there are three natural patterns that exist and can be violated:

- 1) Everyone in a family belongs. Exclusion can create an imbalance in the system. This includes rejecting a member through divorce, abortion, banishment, and other ways.
- 2) There must be a balance of give and take. A harmful pattern can come from parents trying to give and children take what is harmful. Or, parents try to take from children and children try to give to parents.
- 3) Everyone has their rightful position. Children have an invisible alliance to their parents. When they refuse to take their parents as they are, they can arrogantly become angry, self-

righteous and judgmental towards them.

If everyone really belongs in my step-family, that means including the two ex-wives of my former husband. By excluding these women out of disrespect, I had broken the order of love, leading to my own suffering and creating an imbalance within the whole familial system. They all have their rightful place.

Bowing to Former Marriages

As I continued with the visualization, I was able to see the web of step-family entanglements I was caught in. To restore order, Catherine had me imagine staying within the circle's energetic field and approaching each person, starting with the first wife. I was asked to bow deeply to her. This was done out of reverence and not subordination. I was honoring her place because she came before me. I spoke honestly, letting her know that I honor and respect the love she had with my former husband. It was repeated with the second wife.

When I went before my step-daughter, I also bowed deeply and told her that I "honor the position you hold in this family and who you are."

Just from acknowledging them this way, a gentle shift had taken place within my heart that felt like a release. There was no tension or anger anymore. It's as if a resolution had taken place.

The whole experience was so simple, yet so profound.

I continue to do the exercise, which leaves me feeling only love and compassion towards all of them. I am truly grateful for the lessons they've taught me over the years.

Even though the marriage is over, in spirit, they are still my family.

Catherine VanWetter is a transformation coach in Oregon. One of the healing disciplines she offers is Family Constellation therapy. To learn more about it, you can go online to www.courageconsultants.net.