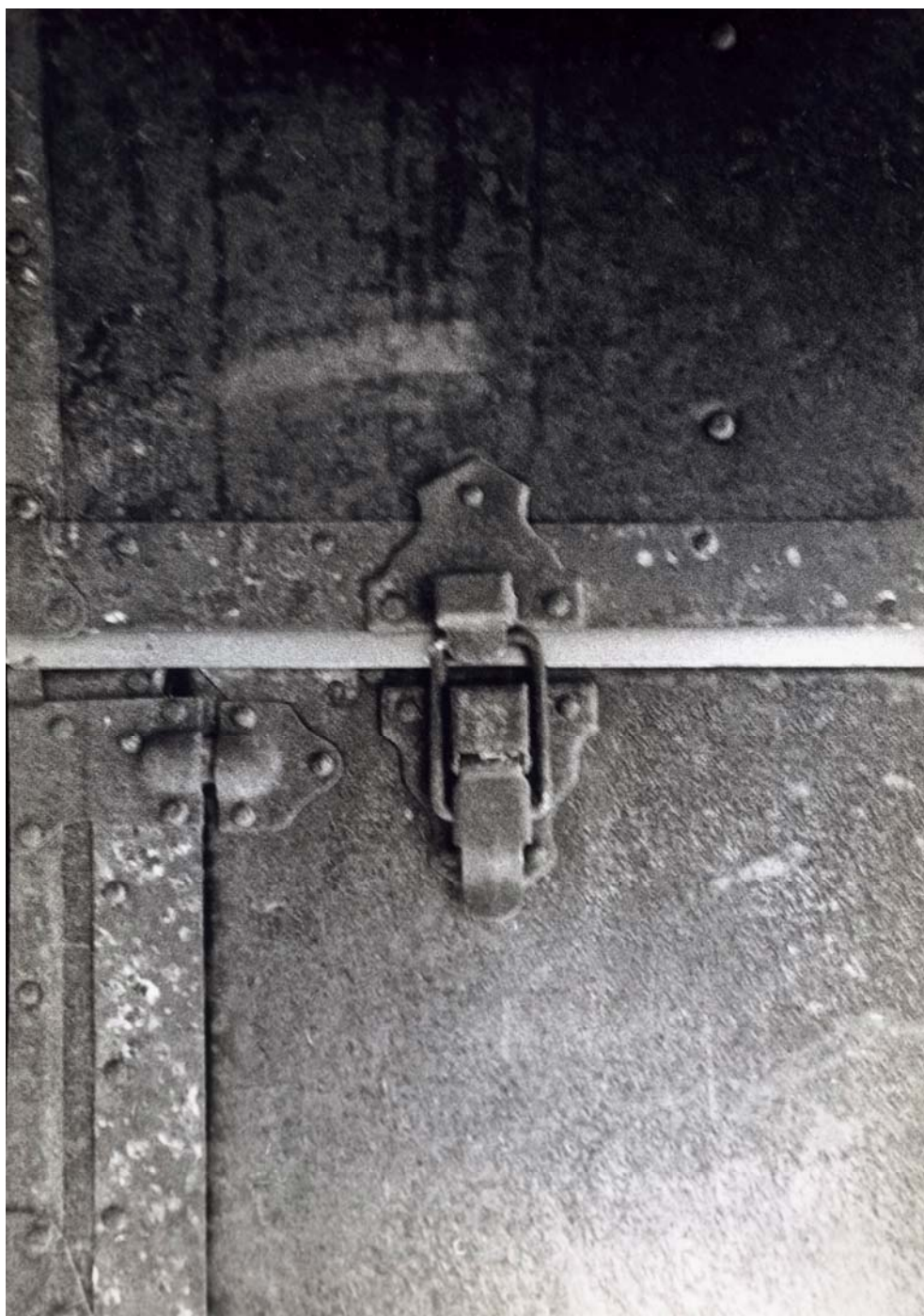


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Spring: — to rise, leap, move or act suddenly or swiftly; to be released from a constrained position; to come into being by growth; to begin to appear; a source or fountainhead of something; elasticity or resilience; the first stage and the freshest period; the season of the year following winter that is characterized by the budding of trees and the growth of plants; to bring out, disclose, produce; to issue forth suddenly; arise; explode; the dawn—as of the day, of the light; the place of such an issue | dictionary.com

A Hand in Healing: The Power of Expressive Puppetry by Marge Schneider

A Book Review by Judson Davis, PhD

In her book, *A Hand in Healing: The Power of Expressive Puppetry*, Marge Schneider has assembled a collection of extremely moving stories in which the use of puppetry brings solace, comfort, and hope to people struggling with some of life's most challenging circumstances. The author reveals a unique ability to animate the life conditions and attendant emotions of the often distressed and disillusioned individuals she encounters, and her work brings much needed caring and compassion to the people with whom she communes.

Schneider's approach to this very sensitive subject matter is direct and straightforward, but in a soulful, heartfelt sense rather than a theoretical one. She deals head on with the myriad of emotions (or lack thereof) that her patients contend with in line with their respective conditions, and her ability to deeply empathize with their circumstance while at the same time accepting them exactly as they are is one of the truly essential messages of her work. Although she works with all ages, much of her therapeutic activity involves meeting with elderly patients who are suffering from depression, dementia, or other forms of cognitive impairment, and many, being in the very last stages of their lives, are undergoing hospice care. Often such circumstances greatly inhibit their ability to express themselves, and at other times the conditions in which patients find themselves are so disheartening and seemingly hopeless that they can no longer express emotion. And that's where puppets come in, as Schneider revealed in the following passage:

I have found that puppets can sometimes be magical in their ability to connect hearts, minds, and spirits—and to provide moments of joy. Something from deep within emerges, and a profound, sometimes startling link can take place...A puppet can break the ice and lead the way to establishing a trusting, nonthreatening relationship. A puppet can help a client, patient, or loved one connect to a genuine sense of self, promoting spontaneity, openness, and honesty. A puppet can provide a creative outlet, helping patients express their pain and struggles, make sense of their situation, and come to some resolution about a problem in a creative and loving manner, (pp. 25-26).

As the above passage clearly suggests, Schneider received training in spiritual counseling in correlation with her broader education in the healing arts, and this aspect exudes a constant presence throughout the book. The text is divided into eight succinct chapters that variously articulate the healing power of love and the role of laughter (chapters two and three), the selection and animation of different puppet characters and types (chapters four and five), and both the rewards and challenges of dealing with different age groups and circumstances, (e.g., chapter six addresses the elicitation of child and adolescent emotions, while chapter eight focuses on the emotional healing process in hospice care). Throughout these various sections she weaves together a deeply compassionate appreciation for her clients with the therapeutic application of a particular puppet type in an effort to mirror their emotions and/or conditions. Inhibition, withdrawal, or boundary issues, for example, may be represented by a turtle, snail, or hermit crab, all of which can move their heads in and out of their shells. Patients, in identifying with these playful, furry figures, very often feel that their own circumstances are now shared and understood by the puppet, which in turn can become a vehicle through which the patient is able to express acutely repressed or intensely daunting emotions. Other examples include the use of wolf puppets in dealing with issues of vulnerability, the use of lion, shark, and alligator puppets when addressing severe anger, and the adoption of a kangaroo mother and its baby (in her pouch) in response to separation anxiety. All of

A Hand in Healing: The Power of Expressive Puppetry by Marge Schneider

A Book Review by Judson Davis, PhD

(continued)

these figures ultimately serve a most profound purpose, that of “enabling the person to share what lies deep within,” (p. 28). A given puppet thus provides a vital experiential metaphor as an extension of the patient’s inner world.

Marge Schneider’s book represents an important and innovative contribution to the field of expressive arts therapy, and may well serve as a pioneering work that expands the use of this dynamic discipline into mainstream psychotherapeutic practice. More information can be accessed at: www.expressivepuppetry.com

Using the Creative Therapies to Cope with Grief and Loss

by Stephanie L. Brooke, PhD & Dorothy A. Miraglia, PhD (Eds)

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by Wendy L. Miller and Gene D. Cohen

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