

Zerka T. Moreno



13.6.1917 – 19.9.2016

Zerka Moreno was a pioneer in psychodrama, formulating fundamental psychodramatic theory and embedding it in effective practice. She was a co-founder of the International Association for Group Psychotherapy and she established the Psychodramatic Institute in New York in 1942 with J. L. Moreno. They began producing the journal *Group Psychotherapy* in 1947. She was J. L. Moreno's partner and co-creator for over thirty years until his death in 1974. She continued training and teaching worldwide.

My main memory of Zerka is of the acuity of her mind. Though she was over 90 when I attended a training workshop run by her she was as sharp as a tack and nothing escaped her. She directed as easily as breathing, unperturbed by anything that arose on the stage, with a calm, unruffled and insightful manner. She had an almost regal bearing despite her physical frailties - we called her "the queen" – **Gillian Rose**

She embodied the spirit of spontaneity ... not by abandoning technique and theory ... but by honing those skills and listening with heart. We worked on the original stage, used all the levels including the stairs and balcony. Wonderful hours of expression, impression and play of life.
– **Jo Milne-Home**

The thing I am remembering most is Zerka's incredible capacity to interview for role so thoroughly that she warmed auxiliaries up to a high state of spontaneity and willingness to stretch themselves. Through her I learned to appreciate my mother in a new way which freed me from resentment and a conserved view of the world she lived in. I felt Zerka's passionate interest in all of us as both unique individuals and creative change agents. – **Sara Crane**

I was very aware when I was with her I was filling myself up with content, filling myself up with things that were important for me right now that I could make use of immediately in my life ... [she] told me to go out into the forest on the grounds of Moreno Institute and run. But not run in a straight line, but run sort of googly, run all over the place and throw my arms around... So I did that and I did generate some new experience... I'm sure that the naivety did develop through engaging in a whole lot of different activities.

– **Max Clayton** from *The Living Spirit of the Psychodramatic Method*, pages 32 and 171 to 172.



Letter to Zerka 2016

Dear Zerka

I know when someone dies, regret can arrive unbidden; the letter you didn't send, the 'thank you' you didn't convey, the imagined conversation.

I didn't email you when my thesis was passed. I wish I had. I'd have thanked you for the quotes you sourced and sent and your generous encouragement across the seas. It really kept me plugging away, determined.

I wish I had told you the impact meeting you had for me. Going back through my photo archive, I found a photo of you which I named at the time, "our beautiful queen." In 2005, in the early years of my training, I got inspired and flew across the world to participate in one of your workshops. The workshop was held in the lounge of your home in your retirement village.

I arrived with about a dozen other practitioners and trainees. The first thing that struck me about you was your beauty, your stillness, your straight back, the twinkle in your eye. You took me under your wing and directed me in one of the most profound dramas of my life. The drama was about my relationship with my father, also now passed. I remember there were very few role reversals. The catharsis occurred in your interview for role with me as my father. You stood up from your chair, glided over to me and asked my father such a direct question that I was shocked. Goodness me, I thought, that's pretty direct and frankly, where I come from, nosy! That one question will never leave me and it taught me so much about my social and cultural atom. Years later I did another drama with Max Clayton, where he, capitalising on this warm-up, had me raging against my father with 5 doubles. I can feel those moments as if they were yesterday and they built a softer, more understanding and loving relationship for me with him (not a simple man) in his later years.

That week you were my queen, our queen, gracefully standing, placing yourself in the center of the action with no fuss and then going straight to the heart of the matter.

Darling Zerka it is good to be telling you what a sustaining delight it was to be with you and receive the love of a queen.

With gratitude,

Vanesa

P.S. BTW, I did pass my thesis and then my practical assessment and notice myself more often standing poised in the centre of the action aiming for the heart of the matter.



Vanesa Valentine and Zerka Moreno

Memories by Don Reekie

In 1982, Zerka Moreno circled the world on a Crusade to stop over-enthusiastic doubling aimed at provoking a catharsis of abreaction. Her eighth Rule of Psychodrama says the Director must allow every group member to be as un-spontaneous "as they are". She understood that catharsis of integration is essential to restoration of health, and that abreaction is often valuable but not essential. She visited Australia and New Zealand. PINZ hosted a week-long workshop in Auckland. She worked positively with protagonists and auxiliaries. Her scene development was unusual for group members - appearing to us overly controlled. In her public Psychodrama, in a full Little Maiment Theatre she directed with sensitivity, compassion and passion. The protagonist resolved significant matters. The wide ranging audience left very appreciative of drama so intimate and healing. Being with Zerka was vitalising.

In 1994, many ANZPA Ozzies and Kiwis went to the BPA International Conference in Oxford. Zerka led a session with over seventy participants from around the planet. She asked, "Why did Dr Moreno create Psychodrama?" Fifty or so answers - each seemed insightful. The "correct" answer escaped them all! Zerka pronounced, "Dr Moreno created Psychodrama because he recognised that language was not the high road to the psyche but that movement is." She elaborated with considerable power.

In 1996 as a new TEP, I went to the annual International Trainers Week in upper-state New York. Previously led by Zerka assisted by Leif Tag Blompkvist, it was to be co-led by participants with Tag facilitating the process and Zerka an honoured member. Each member directed a session and the group processed immediately following. The agreement was for Zerka to make her comments at these times. In every drama for half the week at some point she would interrupt with "No! No! No! Dr Moreno would...." The first director - and all subsequent - reminded Zerka of the agreement made and asked her to hold her comment until the processing time. Zerka waited. She sat down graciously accepting each rebuff. On my return home I told Max, he was flabbergasted: "What the Dragon Woman accepted that! She never would have ..." Throughout the week her breadth of wisdom regarding the human condition and Psychodrama's power to strengthen values, heal and promote practical loving washed through me and into me.

On the Beacon Moreno stage at Broughton Place, I was protagonist and Lars Tavon, from Sweden, directed. My first auxiliary ego was Zerka as Gwen. Within a moment she was Gwen and at key moments her spontaneous responses were quite simply Gwen. In a sociodrama on taking our responsibilities Zerka became Hannah Arendt walking into Eichman's cell in Jerusalem. She was truly Arendt as I realised later reading Arendt and then seeing documentaries and news reels. I was not surprised to learn that Zerka had known this woman well. These two experiences of her remarkable abilities as auxiliary have been echoed over the years. She entered the heart and soul of the protagonist and their auxiliary egos. All of us experienced many one to one contacts with her where she was auxiliary to us. In the group she met us lovingly, encouraging our strength and vitality.

I directed towards the end of the week. Two Europeans became dissatisfied. One complained when in role reversals they were not remaining in their chosen "auxiliary role". The other objected when the protagonist moved to a childhood scene - my having noticed the protagonist's movements were no longer those of the adult in his office. I had asked: "How old are you Now?" and "Where are we now?" It was suggested there should have been thorough interview - for scene and then role, I had moved the protagonist too quickly. I reminded them that I was directing and we would review later. Zerka quietly asserted, "Don has his directing in hand and does it in his way." Though no one had accepted Zerka's interjecting in their drama's her quiet words here had resounding authority.

In 1999, Gwen and I attended the ASGPP Philadelphia Conference. We received this same quality of *love*. She engaged with each of us many times with full interest and remembrance. In 1998, she had addressed the IAGP London congress on Ethical Anger. I had acquired the tape and found it of great value. During the ASGPP AGM Gwen and I stood at the back with Ann Hale and Zerka. A young woman responded to the Executive report with an outburst of distress and rage. Zerka brought her away from the explanations and assurances of goodwill. They stood close to us with a small group of sympathisers. Zerka acted as she had advocated in her address: full open listening and generous recognition of feelings and experience. She legitimised these as the woman's own and of great value. She said again and again, "You have every right to be angry." She said, "You must know your experience and your feelings. Know you have your right to recognise your experience and have your anger. It cannot be denied and can never be explained away. It is yours to know and to guide your actions." I saw the woman calm, stand taller and say a

few things that she was committed to in her living. Friends welcomed her statements. Her presence was renewed.

Zerka, with Leif Tag and others, led a sociodrama session in the main hall. It became the cafe society in Vienna after the Great War. This context significant for Jacob Moreno was inhabited by philosophers, scientists, artists and a broad range of Viennese inhabitants. It brought alive a place and time that it is important not to disregard.

I led a session on Role Training. Some thirty crammed a room 12m by 3.5m - high up in the building. I struggled to see how the shape would fit a psychodrama curve. My curve was rather elongated! I set out my purpose, warmed up the group and had a protagonist. The door opened, Zerka came in and took a chair from the stage sat closing off the group into a sausage shape. I asked her to stand so that I could give her a place to the side. She complied. I set her chair in place. There was a small sigh of relief from the group. I set out the contexts of the encounter. The Protagonist in her home, he in his. Zerka spoke: "Don, with telephone conversations we have the actors facing" I cut in, "You are probably going to say what I am about to do. We have also been taught to have actors back to back when in telephone conversations. Thank you for your care Zerka." I continued without interruption. I was practiced in handling Zerka's interventions and I could be confident of her graciousness. However several group member said later they could not have handled it and had seen others lost for how to respond. Zerka has the method and her techniques and processes so embedded and so readily available as a guide and trainer - not to assist is almost, perhaps absolutely, impossible.

I haven't seen Zerka since but her books from love poems to memoirs and especially her book of conversations with Leif Tag on *surplus reality and healing* have guided me to the heart of Psychodrama.

