

The Elaboration of Developmental Trauma via Reciprocal Storytelling: The Case of Bruce

By Jerrold R. Brandell¹

Abstract

The use of allegories, fables, parables, myths, and legends in the intergenerational transmission of important values and moral precepts has been traced to virtually every culture since the beginning of recorded history, thus underscoring the effectiveness of storytelling as a mode of communication with the young. Imaginative stories, through which children are able to narrate their lives, are intensely personal and often filled with high drama; they are rich with dynamic meaning, important themes and conflicts, and efforts at resolution and adaptation. Like the dreams that are Freud's "royal road to the unconscious," the make-believe stories of children offer the listener an unsurpassed opportunity to enter a domain of childhood usually off-limits to grown-ups. The case I will present illustrates the basic technique of imaginative storytelling. It is from the psychotherapy of a 14-year-old boy who had suffered developmental traumata, and whose intrafamilial adoption had remained a closely guarded family secret at the insistence of his adoptive parents.

¹ Jerrold R. Brandell, Ph.D., BCD, Distinguished Professor, Wayne State University
School of Social Work, Detroit, Michigan (USA)