

The Deeds of My Father: William L. Moreno

Joseph Moreno

A history of two brothers

In all that has been written about Jacob Moreno, his life and contributions, the significance of his relationship with his brother, William, appears largely overlooked. For example, in Marineau's (1989) otherwise informative biography, in regard to William he states only that "he was the first Levy to emigrate to the United States. A great admirer of his brother Jacob, he helped him financially in Vienna, and then in New York." True enough, but this scant reference tells us little about a life-long association that was complex, and one that had a profound impact on both men's lives, as well as my own.

Jacob and William were born in Bucharest, Romania, Jacob in 1889 and William in 1892. Jacob, as elder brother, was singled out for the best educational opportunities and was supported in his university medical education. William, who certainly had the same potential to excel in higher education, was obliged to enter into the work world from a young age, perhaps as young as twelve years. By the time the family was living in Vienna, in financially precarious circumstances, with a family of three brothers and three sisters and an often absent and irresponsible father, there was great pressure on William to contribute to the household. He told me about his long days in office work as a youth. His adult vocation in business was never a choice he made in life but was rather thrust upon him by these early circumstances. During this time William began the pattern of helping Jacob that extended over their lifetimes; so while Jacob attended university he shared his burgeoning creative ideas with William. His help included staying up long nights typing Jacob's writings after twelve-hour days in the office. Though there was no expectation for this support, it was a labour of love and demonstrated William's early belief in the power and importance of Jacob's ideas. He seemed to be the only member of their family who understood him.



William and Jacob Moreno

All who encountered Jacob would agree that he personified all that he promoted in his work: the primal importance of spontaneity and creativity. He was an excellent role model for his ideas; the man and his work were inseparable. William, while a very different personality in many ways, also possessed those qualities of spontaneity and creativity, though in a less flamboyant style.

William's special spontaneity can be seen in a memorable encounter between William and Jacob. This took place in New York, perhaps in the nineteen-fifties. It was New Year's Eve and the large party in a crowded restaurant included William, Jacob, Zerka, Walter Klavun (an actor who was an early follower of psychodrama in America) and many others. The entire group was becoming increasingly impatient and annoyed at the busy and distracted staff. They were not getting any service and were hungry, and, even after an interminable wait, had not been able to place their order. Finally, Klavun, the actor, who had excellent social skills, managed to engage one of the waiters. While discreetly slipping him a hundred-dollar bill, he began to negotiate for the

desired food and service. As this negotiation continued, the situation remained unchanged: no service, no food. At this point, and without announcement, William got up, walked directly into the restaurant kitchen, filled a large serving tray with food, and brought it back to the table to serve the hungry and appreciative group. J. L.'s response to this was to exclaim, "There's the difference. Klavun is an actor and William is a doer!" In fact, William was a great doer, a man who put food on the table, both literally and figuratively, for those who enlisted his sympathies.

About my father, William

William was my father and naturally I observed him in many situations. I watched him demonstrate the aspects of spontaneity and creativity I would later see in Jacob, and that I now understand as essentially psychodramatic. Jacob is often remembered for his early and formative encounters with children in the parks of Vienna. William also had a great affinity for children. He never missed an opportunity to interact with them, and reached out in playful ways that never failed to engage them. His intention was to communicate, make contact and enter their world, without ever expecting them to enter his. Regina, Jacob's daughter, has recalled how William played wonderful inventive games with her children and played a fatherly role to her as well.

I remember my father's psychodramatic way of meeting adults; he humanised the interaction and dissolved the usual social barriers that serve to distance people from each other. I remember how he related to people in service roles, such as waiters, household helpers, etc. He never stuck to the formal and scripted expectations but encountered people in ways that broke social boundaries and led to real communication. One example of this is that once when he spoke to a waiter in a restaurant in a human way he learned that the surprised waiter was also from Bucharest and so invited him as an honoured guest to our home.

His creative way of encountering others, entering into their worlds and dropping formalities to seek a real tele with the other was an important role model for me. He influenced my own style of interpersonal communication, both in life as well as in my therapeutic work in psychodrama with individuals and groups. Each brother had the capacity to communicate in ways that transcended conventional boundaries; perhaps this intensified the bond that was a link between them in their early years.

Support and exploration

It is known that Nissim Levy, the Moreno patriarch, was a distant and neglectful father. Perhaps this absence of a supportive father figure was an unconscious motivation for Jacob to seek that kind of connection ultimately expressed in his great work "The Words of the Father". However, before the emotional catharsis that led him to write that work, at age thirty-one, there were many formative years. During those years, the emotional support that Jacob might, in a more normal family, have received from his father, seems to have been provided in some measure by his younger brother.

William admired Jacob's innovative creativity, he shared in his successes, and took an active interest in the beginnings of psychodrama in Vienna. He was also a sponsor of Das Stegreiftheater (the first theatre of spontaneity) in Vienna in 1922. One of William's friends in that period was the then completely unknown Hungarian, Peter Lorre. Lorre was basically a beggar at the time that William discovered him on the streets of Vienna, and recognised his potential. He introduced him to his brother and this new world of experimental theatre. This connection eventually opened the door to Lorre's subsequent acting career and success in Europe and America.

William's role as financial supporter of his brother's work is known in a general way. In the beginning, when the psychotherapeutic establishment, in Austria and America largely rejected Jacob's ideas, William's support was critical. In the years that counted most, when Jacob was struggling to establish himself, William was a poor man who made personal financial sacrifices to help his brother. This helped Jacob to develop the first theatre of spontaneity in Vienna, and later, in New York, his offices, theatre and private hospital in Beacon. In the United States, he contributed to the purchase of the Moreno Sanatorium in Beacon, to build the stage at the Park Avenue office that opened in 1941 as well as to the last theatre on west 78th Street. Without these settings in which to practice, develop and publicise his work, it is difficult to imagine his ideas being recognised so soon; so without William, this history might have been very different.

While William provided his support for Jacob, he was also the primary supporter of their mother who now lived in New York, their sister Lotte (who remained in Europe), as well as his own nuclear family that consisted of my mother, Anne and me. William was discreet about his

financial contributions to his brother's work, and, for instance, refused to have his name recognised and included on display plaques.

During the Second World War, William would temporarily borrow funds to inflate his bank account to reflect a needed balance of five thousand dollars. This was the minimum amount expected by the US State Department for Americans who wanted to sponsor the immigration of Jews, into the United States, trying to escape the stranglehold of Hitler's Holocaust. He used these bank statements to convince the authorities that he had sufficient funds to support the immigration of over eighty Austrian Jewish families. He saved them from annihilation in this creative way. As soon as their exit visas were issued he would return the untouched bank loans. He was the "father" of many and yet had no true father of his own.

Perhaps he looked to Jacob to be a symbolic father, but Jacob was too focused on his work to play that role for very long. As he had risen in professional fame and stature he had less time and naturally, he was also involved in his life with Zerka whom he met in 1941. This was the start of a gradual period of distancing between the brothers that was difficult for William. There had always been a bond between them and William valued their special relationship. In their later years, he was disappointed by their relatively infrequent contact. Jacob had become widely recognised and received adulation everywhere. Although he never ceased to appreciate William, he seemed to take his generosity in his stride, and no longer needed his emotional support. However, he did dedicate his *Psychodrama: Volume 1* to William: "Dedicated to my brother William L. Moreno, Sponsor of the first Therapeutic Theatre in Vienna, 1922, and Founder of the New York Theatre for Psychodrama, 1942". I have a personal copy from 1946 in which is also added a handwritten inscription from Jacob, "To William with brotherly greetings".

First encounters – people, music and psychodrama

William was a loving father and a man whom I loved and admired deeply. He was an amateur musician, a self-taught mandolinist; he encouraged me in my own musical development. Thus my musical vocation is partially due to his influence which led to my career in music and music therapy. William also gave me another unique gift that was directly connected to his relationship with his brother, and that also had a profound influence on my life.

As a child I met Jacob when my parents and I occasionally visited Beacon and had a close childhood bond with Regina, Jacob's daughter from his first marriage to Florence. At twenty-one I was a music major at Boston University and focused on my music studies with no thoughts of psychology or related fields. My only connection to Jacob was the general awareness that I had a famous uncle, a renowned psychiatrist. He played little part in my life and was essentially a stranger whom I vaguely remembered from my childhood. While William retained his relationship with his brother, it happened outside the sphere of my existence.

Therefore, it was a surprise when, as a university student at Boston University, I received a friendly letter from this uncle of mine. He wrote of his imminent arrival to Boston to give a psychodrama demonstration at Boston University and expressed the wish that we could meet and get acquainted. I was intrigued and made a point of being at the university psychology department on the planned evening.

As I arrived Jacob was leading a public psychodrama, the first I'd ever seen. Yet it seemed unconsciously familiar to me and I was able to enter the session in an auxiliary role. So, I met my uncle for the first time as an adult in a psychodrama and even before we had been re-introduced. I must have played my role well as I remember later on, after I had introduced myself to J. L., a Boston University professor joined us and complimented me on my ability in the auxiliary role. J. L. replied "Another genius in the Moreno family!" It was fun to hear, although I later learned that he gave such compliments rather freely! I stayed on to have dinner with an impressive group that included J. L., Zerka and Hannah Weiner, a disciple of Moreno's, with whom I was destined to work and got to know quite well.

However, it was J. L. who made the greatest impression on me that evening. I don't recall the specifics of our conversation, but I do recall being inspired by his energy, the creativity of the conversation, and the beginning of my love affair with psychodrama. Somehow a different door had been opened within me. J. L. had an ability to help people see an expanded sense of their own possibilities and while not aware of it at the time, I believe some transformation within me had its roots in that first encounter.

Psychodrama in New York

J. L suggested that we meet when next I was in New York, and so began a series of meetings, just a few and over a brief period of time, which nevertheless had an impact on my life. We spoke of many things, about life in general, and more pragmatically, he guided me through the tribulations of an early love affair. These meetings broadened my life perspective and ignited my love for psychodrama. In fact there was one occasion in which I did a psychodramatic scene with J. L on the stage in the Beacon theatre. J. L played himself and I took the role of my father who was worried about me and had doubts about my choice of a musical career. It was a memorable encounter.

In New York, J. L invited me to attend any of the ongoing public psychodramas taking place several nights a week at the Moreno Institute. They were incredible and always unpredictable public sessions with a fascinating random mix of participants. Though J. L was no longer directing in New York, I became a follower of Hannah Weiner, a wonderful regular director of these sessions. I was by this time studying music therapy and my involvement in the sessions and growing interest in psychodrama stimulated new ideas as to the possibilities of integrating music and psychodrama. Jacob who had also experimented with music and psychodrama supported these ideas. As in a response to any creative challenge, his typical attitude would be "why not?" By the late seventies I started to develop an integrated approach to music and psychodrama, over the years this integrative work became one of my specialities and culminated in the publication of my book "Acting Your Inner Music: Music Therapy and Psychodrama"(1999). There is a thread of connection that goes back to our first meeting in Boston.

Reflections on past relationships and actions

Later I wondered about the invitation to meet in Boston as to why J. L contacted me in the first place. Eventually I was able to put it all together. My father confirmed subsequently that as he had been concerned about my direction, he contacted Jacob and asked him to contact me and see how I was doing and perhaps offer some guidance if needed. J. L took up the request, and in doing so gave something back to William for his past generosity through supporting his brother's son. This turned out to be a propitious encounter.

William had stimulated my earliest involvement in music and Jacob opened up the world of psychodrama. The combination of these two elements formed a big part of my life's work. This focus came not only

from the separate influences of the two brothers but also from their inseparable confluence, which stemmed from their close relationship and enriched my life in many ways, personally and professionally. Even my name is connected to this brotherly relationship. I was named after Joseph of the Old Testament a protagonist who, perhaps not coincidentally, had some issues with his brothers, and my middle name Jacob came directly from my uncle.

In 1974 J. L passed away, two years before my father. I recall his sadness when he visited Jacob in his last days in Beacon. As my father related it they had a warm final exchange. I don't know just what William felt at the time. Naturally there was sadness at the loss of his beloved brother and a clear reminder of his own approaching mortality. I suspect he felt a deep regret that they had not sustained their previously close relationship.

In conclusion

In 1963 William heard the words of a prayer in a dream and sent a copy to his brother. Jacob acknowledged it in a note that read "Dear William: Many thanks for your fine prayer which, with your permission, we may include in a future printing of "The Words of the Father". I don't believe this publication ever came to fruition, but the following is William's heartfelt prayer, a true reflection of the spirit of a very special man.

A Prayer and a Tear

There is a time to live
There is a time to die
There will be a time when we will learn to live with each other
There will be a time when we will love each other
There will be a time of oneness with you, oh father
Oh that the time be now

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About the Author

Joseph Moreno is Professor Emeritus at Maryville University and Director of the Moreno Institute for the Creative Arts Therapies in Saint Louis, Missouri, USA. He has long maintained an interdisciplinary approach to his work and innovated in the areas of music and psychodrama and has also undertaken extensive field research into the indigenous world traditions of music and healing. Author of the book "*Acting Your Inner Music: Music Therapy and Psychodrama*" and numerous journal publications, he is internationally recognised and has presented workshops in more than 50 countries. In 2001 the American Music Therapy Association presented him the National Award in Research and Publications.

