

# CHARLYNE GELT, PH.D.

Encouraging Self-Discovery and Empowerment



## Spotlight on Love Relationships (post pandemic) by Charlyne Gelt, Ph.D.



### (Stranger on a Train)

“He who has overcome his fears will truly be free.” — Aristotle

As we are finally beginning to see light at the end of the pandemic tunnel, many of us—especially if we were alone during that time—are thinking in terms of “relationship” again, perhaps looking for a new partner or investigating online dating services. Others of us, who may already have been partnered during the pandemic, might have had a hard time being cooped up with someone they’ve come to realize isn’t a good match. “*How come I didn’t see that before?*” they ask. “*Why did I make such a bad choice?*” Then, “*How can I avoid that in the future?*”



The pandemic has put a spotlight on “relationship issues” on a mass scale, and has brought up the always interesting and crucial question: *What is behind my choice of a partner?* Many clients seek therapy to sort out and resolve marital conflicts in the hope of avoiding divorce. Others come into therapy because they see that they are repeating similar patterns with each successive relationship: same issues, different partner. *Why is that?*

Disappointment and let-down often follow the initial high of meeting a new possibility and a new sexual experience. So, the question is: “*Why do I continue to feel let down, discouraged? Why do I keep choosing partners with the same issues I thought I’d left behind?*” In my Women’s and Men’s Groups we address just such issues. Participants learn to recognize the buried parts of themselves, how to understand their own patterns in relationships, as well as how to transform them.

### **It Feels Just Like Home**

In so many cases, one is unconsciously drawn to a partner by a familiar pull, which may replicate the family emotional environment or the desire to nurture and care for a wounded “other.” It is not uncommon for someone to unconsciously seek out a partner who forms a perfect psychological fit, bound by a common wound. Until an individual becomes aware of this wound, she/he may continue to pick mates who embody the unconscious, shadow part of the self—such as a partner who expresses the anger and hurt that the other has buried within. Although unhappy, it has become a comfortable old shoe. It is tolerated instead of changed.

The goal of therapy is to bring these unconscious parts into awareness and then to heal. Often, the expectation of a love object is that he/she will soothe these wounded parts. That is an unrealistic expectation that drains the “love” and emotionally drains the partner. Love dies!



### **Healing Love Stories**

Andy, 42, a successful attorney, worked long hours for a large, corporate legal firm. He was advancing quickly, earning the respect of his managing partners. His academic achievement earned parental approval but other than that he felt invisible. His marital relationship at home was a similar story. While he hoped for a partner in a love relationship who would take the time to listen, empathize and give him emotional support—this kind of empathic mirroring can bring the unconscious parts of oneself to awareness and then help heal unconscious wounds—but he didn’t feel enough ego strength to seek it out. Instead, Andy settled for a partner who filled his emptiness with meaningless chatter and pushed him to work harder. He felt pressured to earn her approval by satisfying her insatiable need for acquisition—things. But again, just as with his parents, he sought that approval but still felt invisible. And it was at the sacrifice of the self. Preoccupied meeting the needs of others, Andy did not find the time to define his own needs, or question the meaning of his own life, or discover what really counted—until he was faced with an *early heart attack*. Now, as a result, he searched his soul: “What is my purpose in my life?” he finally asked himself.

### **Self-discovery**

“Who am I?” “Why am I here?”—is often the client’s unspoken agenda in the therapeutic environment. In facing these turning points, films can be a useful therapeutic tool to help clients work through uncomfortable issues like Andy’s. The film *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* is a classic that depicts issues alive in the therapeutic setting: power, greed, shame, inadequacy, sibling rivalry, sex, alcoholism, and death. Lies, money, property, and material wealth are the glue that hold this Southern family together. The “I” of the son, Brick, gets lost in a sea of unmet parental needs, narcissistic injury, shame, and blame. Lack of feeling loved gives way to intense sibling rivalry for the father’s (Big Daddy) estate. Mendacity and entitlement fill the unmet needs for acceptance, love, and belonging.

Like Andy, it is Big Daddy’s life crisis and his recognition of his own mortality that brings a new perspective to his destructive narcissism. The buck stops here! Shame over his core wound gets exposed—emptiness that when his own father died, he left him “nothing but an empty suitcase.” This felt shame is what drives Big Daddy to seek

power, control, and “things.” His cardiac problem, his “heart attack,” symbolizes a breakthrough, which occurs in the basement of the family plantation, a storage area for millions of dollars’ worth of “junk.” In a fit of anger, Brick destroys these family treasures. View this scene as a metaphor for the death to old thinking and birth of a new perspective. It is a “heaven quake,” which opens a dialogue between Brick and Big Daddy about what is really valuable—which is what Brick believes he never received: *love*. In the end, Brick opens Big Daddy’s eyes and the olive branch is extended between father and son. Brick’s put-upon wife, “Maggie the Cat,” is the one who helps bring change, rebirth, and is now the carrier of new life.

### **Identifying Your Invisible Wounds**

1. Get to know our own dark side, so you are not unconsciously drawn into relationships that act-out your shadow part.
2. Learn to identify all aspects of the self, including your shadow.
3. Identity your own wants and needs
4. Write your own personal Story
5. Identify your family of origin attachments and emotional alignments
6. Define your own boundaries then become aware of Red flags that violate those Boundaries in Relationships.

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