

## A Mother, a Daughter & Me.

By Michelle Golland, Psy.D.

As I sit in my cranberry colored chair I am intently listening to Carrie her anger is palpable and her pain deep. At forty-one she finds herself next to her Mom, Anne, sitting on my sofa in my therapy office. You see I am the “me” in this story and a psychologist. The mother and daughter are my clients. Their relationship has been difficult and full of conflict but sprinkled with many moments of peace and joy. They were referred to me from Carrie’s individual therapist.

Anne, the mom, sits with her hands crossed in an attempt to protect herself from her daughter’s words. I have seen this so many times, a mother and a daughter attempting and failing to see, hear and acknowledge each others pain. As mothers we hope for connection and friendship with our daughters. To sit and hear your daughter’s sadness and anger can be the most painful thing in your life. So much worse and real then when she skinned her knee or that silly boy broke her precious heart in 7<sup>th</sup> grade.

Carrie, now sits quietly crying, feeling her mother’s dissatisfaction with her. To witness your own Mother’s weaknesses as an adult and acknowledge your own shortcomings as a daughter is a daunting but truly admirable task. Carrie comes from the classically intertwined family where it is difficult to express your thoughts, feelings and opinions if they differ from the families “world view”. This is what professionals call family enmeshment.

Anne, the matriarch, has created a system that is not easy for anyone including herself to break free from. In these families where the fabric is knit so tight that nobody can move much in either direction the ultimate weapon is disconnect. To be left alone and no longer be included is often too frightening of an option that it keeps many mothers and daughters in this painful dance. These families appear very close but when the surface is scratched and there is a disagreement the lack of “honest” connection and communication becomes very clear and very painful.

Carrie is desperately trying to step out of this dance but it is not easy for either of them. Anne is confused, sad, and hurt. So hurt by what she views as her daughter’s rejection of her and the family. Anne doesn’t understand what has changed in Carrie and why she is so “angry” all the time. Carrie is angry, angry at herself and her mother. Angry she didn’t realize her need to be separate from her family and find her own voice a long time ago. Also, deeply sad that her mother has never found her own voice either.

I call this healthy process differentiating. We each as mother, daughter, father and son must honor what it means to connect with each other yet have the strength to be ourselves and yes, even to be different in our families. We must create room for differing opinions and feelings while still staying in relationship. We need not agree on everything to be in the same room but we must be willing to create space for understanding and dialogue.

As a relationship expert I see many “couples” but not just in the classic sense. I have worked with Mother’s and daughters, Siblings & even best friends that were caught in painful situations that they needed an unbiased third party to help them clear up the muck and create peace and understanding.

As Carrie, Anne and I schedule our next meeting I see a nervous smile come across Anne's face. I know they will both come next week even if it is hard and there we will be yet again a mother, a daughter and me.

*Dr. Michelle Golland, is a Clinical Psychologist in Larchmont. Her office is located at 321 N. Larchmont Blvd. Suite 421. She can be reached at (310) 387-4184. Her website is \*\*\*\*\*.*