

# One Thing She Said, One Thing She Did

Carroll Arkema

As a compliant good guy—  
who of course then  
had fathoms  
of denied  
and repressed anger—  
I wanted to be a minister.

I graduated from Princeton Seminary,  
did well there academically,  
as I had also  
in college;  
but that was head-knowledge.  
Afraid of congregational ministry,

I enrolled for nine months  
in a Chaplain Residency  
Training  
Program  
in a General Medical  
Hospital in West Philadelphia.

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I was supervised by Joan—a female  
Chaplain—both individually and  
in a group  
once a week  
to learn from my patient visits  
how to become a Healing Presence.

The structure of the program  
fostered personal as well as  
professional  
self-discovery—  
which meant discerning one’s  
strengths as well as limitations.

At one point during those nine months  
Joan said something which  
changed  
my life:  
I’d been talking in the group  
about a patient and her family,

and Joan, listening, smiled and said,  
“Did you hear yourself use the word  
“fascinating”  
as you were  
talking about the family’s dynamics?”  
I actually had not been aware of this,

but her energy brought me up short;  
whereupon I realized that  
I had been  
talking  
with a kind of intensity  
that revealed my fascination.

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I had come to know and trust Joan  
and her observations about me.  
What she would  
say rang true,  
and came from a stance  
of listening and hearing me, then

highlighting what came from inside out  
of me, rather than prioritizing how well  
I complied  
with her  
or the Program's criteria  
or expectations of a Student Chaplain.

Her comment about my fascination  
helped me notice, know, and  
define  
myself,  
and to begin to trust and build  
an identity around what fascinated me!

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With regard to my repressed anger,  
it began to emerge in the context  
of my trusting  
relationship  
with Joan—as such feelings do  
once it becomes safe to express them.

My anger initially came out  
in a passive-aggressive way:  
I stopped  
preparing  
for individual supervision in  
the required way I had agreed to.

I was half-consciously arriving  
at our supervisory sessions  
without  
verbatim—  
written accounts of my talks  
with patients whom I had visited.

I see now in hindsight that  
I was testing how Joan  
would  
respond  
if I was not the compliant  
good guy I had begun to tire of.

Joan asked me why I was no longer  
bringing in verbatims.  
I actually  
didn't know.  
I was still mostly unconscious of  
my anger about complying with Authorities.

She said she really didn't want to  
take this stance, but that  
until  
I came  
prepared with a verbatim,  
she was suspending supervision.

I felt relief, shame, abandoned by her,  
even though I had broken our  
contractual  
relationship.  
I also felt disoriented;  
but talked about it with a peer,

who loved me into understanding  
the opportunity that lay in this:  
a new me  
emerging!  
She thus reframed it as growth  
and encouraged me to talk with Joan.

I contacted Joan and returned to  
supervision, verbatim in hand,  
uneasy,  
but hopeful.  
Joan agreed that something new  
was emerging, and we laughed.

This nonjudgmental reframing of my anger  
by both Joan and my colleague—  
both of them  
female—  
helped me begin to integrate my  
anger and its energy into my self

as an enlivening and potentially  
empowering feeling which  
I needn't be  
afraid of,  
but could begin to put into words—  
like telling Joan I hated doing verbatims!

Again, we laughed. Joan understood  
how vulnerable I felt exposing  
my pastoral  
conversations  
with patients, and I'd come to  
trust her because she modeled

that she could be ambivalent  
 about being firm, but be  
 assertive  
 and firm  
 nonetheless, thus helping me  
 modify my judgmental superego.

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Thus in that relationship with Joan  
 I began to define myself  
 and become  
 more whole.  
 I learned to notice what fascinates me,  
 and that anger can be constructive energy.

Of course this was just a beginning:  
 I was only twenty-four.  
 It has taken—  
 is continuing  
 to take—all the years since then  
 to refine and actualize what I learned.