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Spartacus at the Foot of the Alps: A Metaphor for the Fear of Growth

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An incident from the Spartacus War (73–71 B.C.) is used as a metaphor to explore barriers to change and fear of growth in the relationship of a woman dying of cancer and her daughter. Paradox in family relationships and the use of metaphors in family therapy are explored, as are fear of the unknown, habitual transactional patterns, embedded personal narratives, and the impact of one's support network on positive change. When mother and daughter retreat behind walls created by psychological and emotional defenses, thoughts are offered on ways to overcome these barriers.

KEYWORDS   paradox, metaphor, Spartacus, stories, humanities

(In 73 B.C. the enslaved gladiator Spartacus led a band of fellow gladiators in an escape from bondage in Capua, Italy. Over the next 2 years his followers swelled into the tens of thousands, and his fighting men smashed one Roman legion after another. At one point he and his followers were poised to escape across the Alps to freedom but chose to turn back into Italy. He was killed in battle in the spring of 71 B.C. when his army was finally defeated. The Roman general Crassus crucified some 6,000 captive rebels along the road from Capua to Rome. To this day the Spartacus War is one of the best known of all the world's slave rebellions.)

As a hospice social worker counseling families in crisis, I often find myself immersed in paradox. Sometimes it is the paradox of familial bonds strengthening even as the separation of death nears. Sometimes it is the seemingly contradictory emotions and thoughts that can coexist as if in a single pulsation, fear, and anger coexisting with love and gratitude, hope for a cure coexisting with a readiness for death. One of the most poignant of

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these paradoxes is the way impulses toward relational growth can collide with fears of change. Prior to death, there is often a desire to bring healing and positive change to family relationships, but this desire can be at odds with countervailing (often unconscious) impulses to retreat into entrenched transactional patterns and defenses. This paradox can be conceptualized and approached in a variety of ways, focusing on the structure and dynamics of dyadic and familial relationships, the nature and content of personal and social narratives, levels of insight, and motivation. Although such conceptualizations are useful and important, I have often found it helpful to view paradoxes metaphorically, finding an image or story, often drawn from a family's own words and experience, which reflects the challenges and complexity in creative ways. This can bring new perspective and unlock strategies for resolving such tensions and changing unsatisfactory patterns in favor of personal and relational growth.

Family therapists have long been aware of the value of using metaphors. Minuchin and Fishman (1981), for example, wrote about the wisdom of identifying "from the family's own culture the metaphors that symbolize their narrowed reality" and using these metaphors in ways that "point up the family reality and suggests the direction of change" (p. 227). Many have echoed and expanded on the ways metaphors can be drawn from client and family experiences and used productively within the clinical context (Barker, 1985; Burns; 2001; Kopp, 1995; Lankton & Lankton, 1989; Siegelman, 1990; Yapko, 2003). Others have pointed out the value of metaphorical thinking as a way of conceptualizing the therapeutic process itself (Jung, 1968; May, 1991) and as a teaching tool for clients, families, and professionals (Rosen, 1982).

In the case study of a mother and daughter that follows, I explore the paradox of desire for growth and healing on the one hand versus fear of growth on the other, and the emergence of a metaphor, the mountain, that reflects the daughter's understanding of the painful issues with which they are struggling. An associated metaphor, Spartacus at the foot of the Alps, is then offered to gain a more textured understanding of this paradox.

THE MOUNTAIN

"Let's face it, Mom," Carmen shook her head sadly, "this is a mountain neither of us is willing to climb." Her mother, May, stared angrily into space, saying nothing as she lay in her hospital bed dying of lung cancer, covers pulled up to her chin. The mountain to which Carmen referred was a painful history of trauma, loss of trust between mother and daughter, and an ongoing inability to find ways to communicate. Each wanted to find new ways of relating before May died. Each wanted to heal the anger and defensiveness embedded in their interactions, but each was gun-shy from

failed past attempts. Afraid to lower their guard, intimidated by the amount of work and the risk it would take to get around this mountain, they were digging in their heels.

When she was a child, Carmen had been repeatedly sexually molested by a neighbor. The violence and betrayal had shaken her life to its roots and, as she saw it, "robbed me of my childhood and stolen away my life." Thirty years later she was still struggling with the complicated grief, shattered sense of safety, and the negative impact this trauma continued having on her life and relationships. For a hospice social worker like me, the issues that usually arise have to do with mortality, fear of the future, loss of meaning, life integration, and saying goodbye. When there is a history of severe trauma in the family, though, it can cast a very long shadow. As death approaches and relationships near that point of separation, this shadow can cover everything as it had been doing whenever Carmen and May tried to talk.

Carmen was angry at her mother for not protecting her when she was young. She was angry that, years later, when Carmen mustered up the courage to tell her mother what had happened, May had dismissed the abuse as a thing of the past and encouraged Carmen to get on with her life. Now May was dying. When speaking privately, both had expressed a desire to find a way to heal the wounds in their relationship before time ran out. Whenever the subject came up between them, though, they quickly wound up feeling stuck. The intensity of Carmen's pain and anger would overwhelm May, and she'd wind up retreating into silence. Carmen took silence as lack of concern, and her pain would transform into rage. And there they were. Stuck at the bottom of a craggy mountain they just couldn't seem to get around.

The mountain metaphor, though descriptive, is a potentially difficult one with which to work. Mountains can seem daunting and overwhelming. When approaching them it is easy to get discouraged, impatient, or overly focused on reaching the top. On the other hand, mountains often contain hidden beauties and new things to see. With each height attained, there is a wider perspective and the possibility of taking in more of the big picture. Even in the hardest range, streams of fresh water, patches of berries and wildflowers, and moments of peace sustain us. If we do not pressure ourselves to make the climb in a day, and if we steel ourselves with patience, who knows what passages we might find that might lead us into new possibilities or deliver important messages, insights, and lessons?

Somewhere up this steep mountain might lay forgiveness; there could be hidden meadows where May and Carmen might lower their defenses and connect the way they, in their inmost selves, wanted to connect. Somewhere up that mountain lay perspective, wisdom, and a kind of freedom from the psychological and emotional chains that held them prisoner. If Carmen and May were willing to do their best to make the climb, perhaps there would be

some movement toward healing, however they might understand this; right now they were paralyzed and neither looked likely to budge.

The tension in the room was thick. One of the quirks of being a social worker with a passion for ancient history is that sometimes historical images and analogies will come to mind that seem connected with conversations I am having with families, especially when triggered by metaphors such as Carmen's use of the mountain image. A picture flashed across my mind: Spartacus and his army of escaped gladiators, ex-slaves, and peasants standing at the foot of the Alps contemplating the formidable barrier that stood between them and a new life on the other side, unsure whether to go forward or back.

We know precious little about Spartacus prior to 73 B.C. except that he was a Thracian slave trained as a gladiator in Capua, Italy. In the spring of that year he led a breakout, assembled a rag-tag army, and began smashing hastily recruited legions of Roman foot soldiers. Soon his band of followers had grown to the tens of thousands. By the following year, this band had defeated every Roman legion sent against them and travelled all the way to the foot of the Alps. Even so, staying in Italy would almost certainly mean death. Rome would not rest until the rebels were destroyed and, if need be, the empire would recall battle-hardened troops fighting in Spain and Asia Minor to do the job. Time was running out. Spartacus and his companions had to make it over the mountains.

Across the Alps, Spartacus's army of Celts, Germans, and Thracians could split into smaller bands and make their way to freedom. But in a move that has had historians scratching their heads ever since, the band turned away and went back into Italy. Instead of moving toward freedom, they returned to war and, ultimately, to their own destruction.

FEAR OF HEIGHTS

Perhaps the most obvious explanation for why they turned back is that crossing a barrier as formidable as the Alps, with its jagged terrain and frozen, sky-touching peaks was just too intimidating. Even the allure of freedom may not have been enough motivation for such a journey. Could it have been the same for May and Carmen as they considered the pain, vulnerability, anger, shame, and guilt that might be unearthed during such a journey up their mountain? Such climbing takes much determination. The psychological freedom that goes with moving toward healing and forgiveness often demands endurance and exposure to personal dangers as daunting, in their own way, as any Spartacus's band would have encountered.

It is easy to understand why many would feel unprepared for or be unwilling to expend their energy on, such a journey, whether it be literal or psychological and relational. Spartacus and his band may have worried about

how they would feed themselves away from the towns and fertile soils of Italy. They may have worried about the toll it would take on the women, children, the sick, and injured. They may have wondered how they could withstand the biting cold.

Perhaps May and Carmen also had worries about the climb. Crossing this mountain might mean exposing old wounds or opening new ones. It might mean the anxiety that can come with speaking from the heart when the heart is broken and words don't seem to fit. It could mean taking the risk that speaking honestly would be met with defensiveness or blame. It might mean self-doubt, failure, cold disappointment. Was this what Carmen was thinking about when she spoke about not being "willing to climb" the mountain? Was the passage just too hard? Is this what turns many of us around when we think about the hard work of change, transformation and healing?

THE PUSH OF THE UNKNOWN: THE PULL OF THE FAMILIAR

We cannot truly know how Spartacus and his followers envisioned the other side of the mountain. Freedom, yes, but at what cost? Although Spartacus's camp was composed largely of slaves whose family homeland was in northern and central Europe, historian Barry Strauss (2009) points out that many "of the Celts and Germans had been born in Italy, being the children of prisoners of war from 102 and 101 B.C." (p. 67). They had never seen these family homelands.

Despite the allure of breaking free from Rome, they would be going into the unknown. Might they have wondered about the dangers and challenges that awaited them over those peaks? Might they have felt a twinge of doubt, wondering how they would survive in an unknown, unfamiliar land? Did they wonder how they would be received by the various tribes and peoples there to whom, despite a common lineage, they would be strangers? Italy may have been an oppressive land but at least it was familiar. Sometimes, for better or worse, the unknown can push us away and the familiar can exert a pull even though it is marked by pain and struggle.

Could this have been part of why Carmen and her mother hesitated? Even though they had expressed a desire to cross over the challenging terrain, even though they had a vision of where they wanted to go, it was still uncharted territory. What if they found that, in the attempt to forge a new way, they wound up driving the wedge between them deeper? One of the fears May had expressed privately was that if they really began talking and looking closely into the face of these wounds, Carmen would abandon her as she was dying. Better, perhaps, to stick with the familiar. The tension, anger, and frosty silences could be endured if it meant that at least they were together.

Sometimes I wonder if one of the reasons Spartacus did not cross the Alps was a fear that if he did, any hopes he'd imagined about the other side might be dashed by reality. In a sense, this is what May seemed to be thinking. As long as she and Carmen were still together, there could be some hope for something better. Paradoxically, whenever there was an opening through which they might move toward new possibilities, one of the things that froze her in her tracks was fear that her hopes for reconciliation would be dashed and Carmen would disappear.

Carmen also had such fear. She had admitted she was terrified that, if she took the risk of talking openly with her mother about what was in her heart, she would find that "Mother *really* doesn't care about me." And she worried that "as much as I want to, I won't be able to forgive her."

For Carmen and May, going into the unknown would mean facing these fears. Not going, playing it safe, though it would mean their hopes would never materialize, would at least mean these hopes would not be destroyed by what they found on the other side of the mountain. It can be a mysterious and confusing interplay, this dance between how far we move toward the hope and into the unknown, and how we are pulled by fear back into the familiar.

VENGEANCE AND PLUNDER

Although some today would like to remember Spartacus's band as a noble army of freedom fighters, they were, in truth, as harsh with the people in the towns and countryside as the Romans would be to them. Some historians speculate that the decision to turn around at the Alps was motivated by a thirst for vengeance and plunder. Was the prospect of making their way slowly into freedom simply less appealing than making Rome shake in its boots? In a sense, it's a question which may have bedeviled Carmen and May.

On my second visit with them, before I knew anything about the trauma history, I pulled Carmen aside and gently asked her about the way she seemed to be constantly criticizing and contradicting everything her mother said. She usually did this with a smile under the guise of "just being honest," thereby disarming her mother's ability to object. The anger just beneath the surface was palpable, and Carmen's words often seemed calculated, consciously or unconsciously, to sting.

Carmen's initial response was to try to explain this away or blame her mother. When I pushed she told me about the trauma. "I guess I'm still so angry at her for not caring when I finally told her about it. Maybe there's part of me that is getting back at her, getting revenge, I don't know." Underneath the anger, as she would later see, there was sadness, shame, grief, but on the surface it appeared she was constantly punishing her mother with words and phrases that bit.

May also had a way of hitting where it hurt. When Carmen's emotions worked their way to the surface, whether in the form of tears, anger, or the way she seemed to become easily frustrated, May would accuse her of being a "child" and making too much of "little things" or "spilt milk." Although she did not consciously calibrate her words to hurt in a way that appeared to make light of what her daughter had suffered, evoking the childhood that had been taken from her and dismissing her emotional pain as of little consequence, it is hard to imagine words more apt to strike a painful chord. Although *vengeance* is not the right word for these patterns, it catches the suffering caused by the subtle and not-so-subtle lashing out, the attacks and counterattacks that appeared to be going on between them as defenses, and strong emotions churned.

Plunder is another word that does not fit entirely when comparing the world of Spartacus with that of mother and daughter, but there are ways the analogy applies. Although Spartacus may have been bent on a greed for material plunder, there is another type of grasping that seemed to be going on between Carmen and her mother. Each, it seemed, had a hunger, a grasping if you will, to be seen in a certain light and have the other validate her way of seeing. For May, though she had privately expressed self-doubt and guilt over having not been able to protect her daughter, when she interacted with Carmen she was adamant that she had shown no imperfections as a parent nor would she acknowledge any of Carmen's suffering. It was as though she had forged a surface story about what had happened that insulated her from any personal responsibility or awareness of her daughter's, and her own, pain. She then projected this story outward as though it were some vital possession to which she clung. The fact that she didn't really believe the story in no way lessened her grasp, especially when her armor was up and heart-breaking memories were being stirred.

Carmen also had stories and interpretations on which she kept a tight grip, holding them fast and refusing to let go as though they were objects more valuable than any silver Spartacus's men ever plundered during their raids. Not surprisingly, these stories conflicted with May's. For Carmen, her mother had failed to be there when she needed protection and had been absent, leaving her alone, during the long years when she struggled to heal from a history of predatory violence.

Clinging to narratives is something we all do now and then. When the emotional and existential stakes are high, when the nature of relationships and the energy of one's defenses are involved, such stories can seem indispensable in their ability to shield, justify, motivate, or explain the seemingly unexplainable. If we cling too tightly to stories, though, making them impervious to the light of new perspectives and wisdom (even though they have served us in the past) they may wreak havoc across our lives. If plunder was a driver in Spartacus's decision to retreat from the Alps, this clinging lead to his death and that of most of his followers. To the extent that May and

Carmen were set on demanding that the other accept her version of reality, to the extent that they clung to these stories like valuable possessions refusing to give them up, they were doomed to remain at loggerheads.

LINES OF SUPPORT

Another reason that has been suggested for why Spartacus did not cross the mountains is that he did not have the support of the men and women with him. It is questionable whether he had shared his plans about the crossing with them. Ancient historical sources suggest that, when they reached the Alps, Spartacus's friends simply did not share his vision and refused to follow him up the punishing terrain.

Making such a journey is difficult enough with the support of friends and loved ones sharing the trials and motivating us for the way ahead. Without it the task is doubly difficult. Such was the bind for Carmen and May. Carmen's husband and adult daughter encouraged a narrative about May in which she was an absent, uncaring, and ineffectual parent. They openly expressed resentment that Carmen was "stuck" caring for her after, as Carmen's husband put it, "she let you down year after year."

May's two other children lived out of state. She spoke with them frequently by phone; and from the way she characterized these conversations, it seemed they had joined her in creating a counterstory in which May was a long-suffering innocent, constantly being pricked by the barbs of Carmen's "angry" and "selfish" emotionality. Sides had been chosen, stories, whether fair or not, had been created and solidified, and the camps were divided. Neither mother nor daughter, it seemed, had anyone in their lives able to see a way over the barriers or who was prepared to help them see the possibilities of new ways of being and understanding on the other side of the mountain.

Moreover, maintaining these divisions seemed to have become an important glue in the relationships between Carmen and her husband, as well as for May and her other children. In a sense, these relationships appeared to be strengthened by vilifying and opposing the other, much like Spartacus's men must have affirmed their own bonds by opposing Rome. Not only did these relationships allow little or no support for May and Carmen to make their peace, if the two moved in that direction there was the chance this would have placed some strain on these relationships inasmuch as they were reinforced by justifying and maintaining May and Carmen's ongoing impasse.

It would have taken a herculean will for Spartacus to break off from his supporters and go it alone. In the end, he chose to follow the lines of his strongest support and affirm those relationships that had been forged in hardship, rather than challenging them to follow him into new possibilities.

Such was the case with Carmen and her mother. Neither was prepared to cross the Alps alone.

BUILDING STRONGHOLDS AND COMING OUT

We don't know for sure what Spartacus had in mind once crossing the mountains was off the table. Many believe his strategy was to cross the treacherous strait in southernmost Italy and set up a stronghold on the island of Sicily, a place rich in wheat and a history of slave uprisings where he could have expected many fresh recruits.

Perhaps it is a general human tendency, once the path toward change and psychological freedom has been rejected, to retreat into some type of stronghold. May's silence was such a stronghold, locking Carmen outside. So were her claims that she was the "reasonable" or "sane one"—casting Carmen's intense emotion and focus on "the past" as evidence of her instability.

For Carmen, the surface anger that hid so much pain had formed a wall as sure as any of brick or granite. Combined with what her mother saw as Carmen's "demands" that May acknowledge and take some responsibility for the trauma Carmen had suffered, Carmen had inadvertently erected another wall her mother was too intimidated to approach.

May stared ahead not uttering a sound, her face stoical, stern. Carmen looked exasperated. Then her face flashed anger as she crossed her arms. She glared at her mother as if trying to unnerve her, daring her or perhaps begging her (it was not really clear) to make contact. The doors of the strongholds seemed to have slammed shut.

We sat in silence. That's when Carmen made her comment about this being a mountain neither was willing to climb. Given the intense inward pain each felt, these mountains must have looked as formidable as the Alps did to Spartacus. The fear of the unknown and the risk involved must have been daunting; the appeal of avoiding this risk and settling for the familiar must have been tempting. Ascending the mountain might mean leaving behind stories, even parts of one's perceived identity that were personally important. It might even mean resistance from friends and family invested in keeping things the way they were or who worried about them getting hurt.

The trauma Carmen had survived might have threatened to complicate matters further if she expected her mother to hear details of what had happened. Such disclosures require trust, safety, and a predictable structure where the survivor is in charge of the pace and depth of disclosure, all of which were lacking in her interactions with her mother. Fortunately, we had discussed this privately and Carmen was clear that she had no desire to do this with her mother. "I discussed the details with my therapist," she said, "All I want from mom is to see if we can find a way to make a truce before she dies."

It is tricky, even treacherous ground, this place where fear and possibility, doubt and hope, swirl together, trickier perhaps that the strong currents of the Strait of Messina that ultimately kept Spartacus from reaching Sicily. Spartacus and his band were destroyed on this type of ground after they had retreated from the mountains; now May and Carmen were bogged down here as well.

Carmen's arms were still crossed. May was still staring at the wall. Rather than push them to process what was going on, I decided to try to lower the tension by using a little playfulness and humor. It can be a risky move using humor when the shields are up. I did not want to appear to be taking the situation lightly or to be grossly out of synch with what they were feeling. But I had used humor with them before with positive results, and I have been using it long enough generally to trust that, if the right tone is struck, it can cut tension quickly and be a less potentially threatening way to invite people to take a deeper look at what is going on. I looked at Carmen, crossed my arms and made a serious facial expression. Then I took a very deep breath, expanding my chest as far as it would go, uncrossed my arms, and smiled at her, trying to convey warmth. She frowned and gave me a look that seemed to say *Please don't push me right now*, then she uncrossed her arms and took a deep breath herself.

May, still silent, ignored us, or at least pretended to, as she lay in her hospital bed. I stood up, walked into her line of sight while continuing to stare at the wall to her right. I turned, looked at her, opening my eyes wide in an exaggerated fashion as if surprised to see her there, I smiled. "You are not a well man," she said in a deadpan voice. Then she smiled so I would know she was joking.

"Finally something we can agree on," Carmen said with affected drama, laughing. Their joining in humor broke the tension. I took another deep breath and asked as innocently as I could, "So where do we go from here?" Carmen shook her head. Her face hardened. She said, almost in a whisper, "I'm done. I'm done trying." May swallowed hard; her eyes watered but she remained silent. After a long pause I leaned toward Carmen and told her that it was understandable that in the moment she might feel that way, but I wanted to ask her a few questions to which I hoped, if it felt okay, she would respond.

"Go ahead," she said flatly, "But I may not answer."

"You don't have to. There's no pressure. You decide. You're in charge." I paused. "Carmen, I know there's a part of you, maybe it feels like a big part right now, that is tired and doesn't want to try anymore to go up the mountain, working on mending your relationship with your mom. Is there another part, though, even a very, very tiny part of you that does?" Whenever I ask such a question, I am always prepared for the answer to be no. Once a question is asked, you can't take it back and you have to be ready to follow wherever it leads. Carmen was completely silent for a long time. "A small part," she finally responded. There was another pause. I asked her if she would, if it felt safe to do so, get in touch with this part. She nodded.

"Carmen, what is it that this part of you, this part that still wants to try to make the climb, knows that the other part doesn't?" She began crying, then sobbing. When the wave of emotion subsided, she looked at her mother and said, "This part knows that, in spite of all that has happened." She paused to wipe away fresh tears. "In spite of all the bad stuff, I still need my mommy." The word *mommy* seemed to come from some deep, unexpected, and very young place. May began crying silently. She reached out her hand. The best way to move up a mountain is one step at a time. Who knows how far they would get. In this moment it didn't seem to matter … they were climbing.

CONCLUSION

In his book *Metaphor Therapy: Using client-generated metaphors in psycho-therapy*, Richard Kopp (1995) writes about the ability of metaphors to create a "bridge" from the realm of habitual language, thinking and behaving into the deeper layers of our awareness where we might tap creativity and imagination when facing serious family issues. Often the most effective metaphors for finding this bridge come directly from family members themselves. By exploring, expanding, altering or, when necessary, replacing these metaphors we may assist our client families in finding ways to work together and engage their courage and resilience as they seek safe passage across whatever mountains lay before them.

This discussion attempts to demonstrate that thinking metaphorically can also create bridges for social workers, linking the conventional realms of therapeutic models, standard practice, and intervention with new ways of understanding and exploring the tricky, often paradoxical challenges our client families are facing. Where these metaphors come from depends on the social worker. They will often emerge from personal experience and interests, and the extent to which we have trained ourselves to look for metaphors in everyday life. They may come in the form of stories, pictures, images, music, jokes, or phrases, just to name a few places. They may come, literally, from anywhere, nature, sports, science, memories of childhood, Saturday morning cartoons, or a favorite dessert.

Perhaps it is no surprise that, for me, with a background in the humanities, I have often found myself using metaphors which come from history, philosophy, poetry, and literature. Over the years I have offered clients and client families many stories embedded with metaphor drawn from historical events, characters in literature, and the verse of poets. And I have used them conceptually, as in the case of Carmen and May, to push myself to examine family patterns and narratives in new ways.

Others have written about the value of using the humanities as a source of clinical and conceptual metaphor. Psychiatrist Jonathan Shay, for example, has found Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, classics combining history, mythology

and poetry, indispensable in his counseling work with combat veterans (Shay, 1994, 2002). He points out that "Homer has seen things that we in psychiatry and psychology have more or less missed" (Shay, 1994, p. xiii). In *Existential Psychotherapy*, when considering clinical concepts and theories, Irvin Yalom (1980) is as likely to draw from writers like Dostoevsky and Tolstoy or philosophers such as Heidegger or Kierkegaard as he is from outcome research or best practice protocols. He points out that "great works of literature teach us about ourselves because they are scorchingly honest, as honest as any clinical data." (p. 21)

It is not surprising that the humanities provide such a rich reservoir of stories and images potentially helpful in our field. Family social workers share with great writers and philosophers a common desire to understand the human journey and, ideally, to help those for whom the journey has become difficult. And we share with historians a belief that this journey is important and that we can learn from those who have come before us. And that their stories, and ours, matter.

As for May and Carmen, their story continued to have its struggles and frustrations, but over the last few months of May's life, they were increasingly able to speak and listen from the heart. These moments became reference points marking the footprints of two people doing their best to head up the mountain together. On one of my subsequent visits I witnessed such a moment. Carmen was sitting on the side of her mother's bed and they were holding hands. I used my thumbs and index fingers to form a frame through which to view their clasped hands and commented that it would make a beautiful picture. Carmen jumped up, retrieved a digital camera, and asked me to take a few photographs from various angles.

Weeks later May was dying. As Carmen and I sat beside her I looked up on the wall where Carmen had framed and hung one of the photographs. Wondering if the picture held any power as a metaphor, I asked what the image meant to her. "It means that no matter how painful things were, no matter how much we fought and screamed horrible things at each other," she wiped away tears. "We were always connected. Underneath it all there was always love."

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