

Separation & Reunion Forum

March 2010

A new decade and the Chinese Year of the Tiger have begun. Looking back to a similar time last year we were excited that Barak Obama had been inaugurated, and worried about the recession. This year the excitement might have settled, but the worry is certainly still here and we now have our own elections to ponder. It seems that this year will be one of sustained struggle. However, Frederick Douglas said "If there is not struggle there is not progress. Those who profess to favour freedom are men who want crops without ploughing up the ground. They want rain without thunder and lightning, they want

ocean without the awful roar of the many waters." We must always bear in mind that without struggle progress cannot be made. I know that SRF is thankful for the continuing support of its members and will with that support continue its good works and provide interesting seminars throughout 2010. I hope that you enjoy this newsletter and your contributions, including your news of upcoming events, will be welcome.

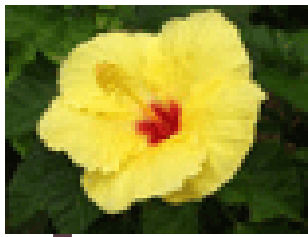
The next SRF Seminar is on 27 March—full details are on page 5.

SRF Volunteers needed

Do you have skills and time that you would like to share? Do you know someone who would like to volunteer their skills and time? We need a fundraiser, administrators and people to contribute to our newsletter. Valuable experience and insight can be gained, your input will be appreciated & your travel expenses reimbursed.

**Please contact Elaine Arnold at
elaine.arnold@lineone.net for further details.**

Leo Slater, Editor—leo.slater@live.co.uk



Separation & Reunion 10th Annual Conference

Parents And Their Relationships With Institutions: What Works To Meet the Needs Of Children?



On 28 November 2009 the Separation and Reunion Forum held its tenth annual conference. Over the years, we have had the support of many other organisations who are also concerned with attachment issues or the development of young people and their families. We continue to have the support of two academic institutions, Goldsmiths (University of London) and London Metropolitan University. Our links are strong with the Caspari Foundation, International Attachment Network and The John Bowlby Centre (formerly CAPP) and Grandparents Plus. At this years conference we were privileged to hear three plenary speakers a sensational performance poet and several workshops. They were all different but all centred around the theme of relationship and attachment.

Hari Sewell began with a moving account of his relationship with his two sons and charted their life together and apart after his separation from his wife. He was determined remain close and accessible to his children, including being involved in their school and social life. From his title it was clear that his sons were of mixed heritage and I assume that he was wary of the difficulties that black boys and boys of colour experience in the education system and this played a part in his decision to remain close. It may be that he is a very 'hands on' dad, born of a hands on dad, as Hari mentioned the values passed on from his parents and the privilege he enjoyed in his upbringing. He mentioned the positive part played by his ex-wife in ensuring contact with the boys to worked well. It is indeed a generous spouse (parent) who helps to facilitate a good relationship with the one who left the family home. More often than not, the residue of the painful split gets in the way and withholding the children is used to punish the partner who left, and as a consequence the children too.

Extract from 'Props for Pops', by Beyonder
www.dcosmic.com

...He used to dare me to cross the line,
Knowing full well it wasn't my time or my place
to be getting brave all up in his face.
"If you think you're a big man you can leave this house."

That's what he always use to be dropping,
As if to say, "are you a man or mouse?"

Its only in all my tomorrows that I can now see Pops' wisdom
But for a lot of the youth today...it's easy to go astray,
They live the high life on borrowed time with borrowed pay.
Cos their pops ain't around he's flown the coop or skipped town
I guess some guys ain't man enough to raise a youth so they play the clown.

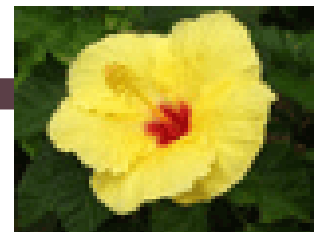
So for all of the things Pops put me through,
He gets nothing but love and respect,
Cos he moulded me into a warrior and a person of intellect,
He taught me the way of the world and he taught me to have respect,
Else I could have been out there, bustin' melons and crackin necks.

Now Pops and all those like him are reaching the age for chillin,
No longer the powerhouses they used to be,
they pass the mantle down to me
And uno young guns - The New Black Dons
Its time to represent, bustin' sparks with lyrical tongues.

Now I walk the streets - one deep,
Steeped in confidence, there's no need for me to creep,
Follow the crowd - not, like a sheep
Cos Pops showed me to stand on my own two feet.

To me Pops - was - is - and always shall be
The Don Dadda - ain't no-one Badda - Super Cat Father
Protect his own like you would do your daughter,
Mac-Daddy - Daddy-Mac - Ebony-Black
Break the backboard like Shaq
No bullshit taking, so you best not answer back
Know your place in his house, else you can walk the streets
Mellowing in his old age, waiting to feel the Ghana heat
Quintessential Black man

And I...
...I just happen to be his son



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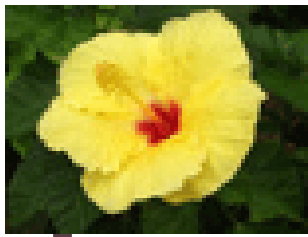
The poetry of Beyonder was sensational, whilst describing his own emotions, evoking them in us. The first poem - 3-Dimensional - about the experience of anxiety, dry mouth, fear and overcoming it with the skill and execution of a gladiator. The second—Props for Pops, part reproduced on the previous page —was about his relationship with his father, first seen as a child then as an adult as his father had aged. This was most moving and spoke to many about their relationship with their dads. We were moved through the full repertoire of emotions culminating in the joy of being entertained.

Professor Geoff Palmer talked about his life and career, coming to North London from Jamaica to join his mother at fourteen in the 1950's. After his mother's departure for the UK, his younger brother and himself were cared for by a much loved aunt and his mother's extended family. (Jean Stogdon from Grandparents Plus who sat close to me leaned over and mouthed, "Good kinship care".) He then talked about the good fortune of working as a lab assistant and being encouraged to do 'A' levels by a boss who recognised abilities, potential and good manners in the teenage Geoff. This took place against the backdrop of race discrimination and 'race riots' in British cities. University entry was difficult because he had not come to the UK on a Commonwealth scholarship, but had entered the country as a resident who would not be returning, but he was successful. Having achieved his degree, he joked that he was unable to find a suitable job, so he peeled potatoes in a restaurant for some time. At the labour exchange on another occasion when asked if he had any qualifications he replied that he had a degree, evoking concern from the counter staff that he was a darkie with a high temperature and obviously delirious with flu.

Later, He completed his PhD at Edinburgh and researched grain and as a consequence of his substantial impact on the industry, he was awarded an OBE for his services to the brewing industry. He was proud of his work in Nigeria where he substituted sorghum, a local grain, for the expensive, imported malted barley. Professor Palmer is a true pioneer in the education system and puts his good fortune to the patronage of generous individuals.

Alice Sawyer posed the interesting question of whether or not Social Workers relationships with parents made children safe. This question is highly pertinent in the light of the recent child death in Haringey, and the ongoing struggle that social services workers have in gaining public confidence. Alice looked at the institutions that parents are most likely to have contact with, schools, nurseries, GPs etc. and the perceptions parents might have of social workers. How the relationships were instigated, whether it was sought by the parents, imposed by case conference or court and whether there were obvious child protection concerns or a need for other resources, seriously affected the nature of the relationship and the degree to which parents would be cooperative, devious or hostile.

Two cases were cited. The mother in the 'Baby P' case, was a cooperative seemingly interested parent who received visits, but whose child was subsequently found to have died with a broken



(SRF Annual Conference ... contd.)



spine. In the other case the aunt of Victoria Climbe was uncooperative and obstructive and her niece was found with multiple injuries sustained over a period of time. There is no correlation between good worker/parent relationship as an indicator of good child protection, as it is highly likely that many of the parents concerned have been manipulated and damaged in relationships themselves. Predicting behaviour on the worker/parent relationship alone is highly risky. Frontline workers would be aware that their relationship with parents could be illusory, might shift and change and is often a bargaining chip. Social Workers need to understand the importance of relying on their ability to process and understand the feelings evoked in them. There is a need to be aware of being manoeuvred by clients into feeling like the cruel authority or parental figure, or the stupid child. Parents who have themselves been abused and have gone through the care system may flip from one position to another. This was a most interesting which we could do with returning to in the future .

Lennox K. Thomas

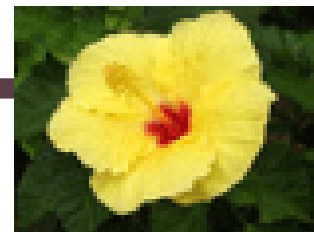
A Short Comment

Aba Oppon presented one of the workshops on the day connected with the Parenting Programme and posed the question, *What do we perceive to be the key concerns with children and young people in our society today?* We split into smaller groups and discussed this questions from the perspective of our particular disciplines and experience and shared our views openly. We came together again and shared the ideas and thoughts discussed in our smaller groups, which included; Out of control behaviour, Relationships, Peer pressure, Single parenting—the difficulty of dealing with 2 separate parents not acting as a team and the criminalisation of youth through negative portrayal in the media.. Aba had invited some young people to answer the question posed so that we could experience a real time answer, which I was really excited about—wondering what they would say to the room . We didn't get to hear from them due to limited time, however I was impressed by Aba's enthusiasm and dedication to her subject and could see how she would support her usual audience.

The mix of personal accounts, creativity and passion permeated this day, so that the overall message was clear. Good relationships are key to success, builds confidence for generations. Good relationships do not just occur, they require directive effort, care and love and like any growing thing will benefit from whatever you contribute. This is true across the spectrum from family and friends to schools and shop assistants. True, sometimes your efforts may fall on fallow ground, but play the odds, I think the benefits outweigh the duds. And with young people and with love you can never try too hard.

It was a full and rewarding day.

Leo Slater



SEPARATION & REUNION FORUM

Saturday 27th March 2010

10.00 a.m. – 2.00 p.m.

SEMINAR: Supporting the Needs of Children and Families within the Wider Community

Keynote Speaker: Aba Oppon currently works for the National Academy of Parenting Practitioners based at the Institute of Psychiatry - King's College London; carrying out research into applied and basic parenting processes and their relationship to child behaviour and literacy outcomes. She was previously involved in the nationwide dissemination of Incredible Years Parenting Programmes across family intervention project sites. She holds various voluntary roles including working as a Literacy Partner at Primary Schools in Lambeth, a Youth Mentor in various Secondary Schools, a Sunday School Teacher, a Trustee and a Youth Worker of a South London based voluntary organisation.

Aim of the Seminar

To discuss and disseminate current findings/thinking about parenting. This seminar gives us a unique opportunity to discuss today's society including the views/thoughts of young people about their experiences. The event will also include a small panel of young people.

VENUE:

Goldsmiths College, (Main Building) Lewisham Way, New Cross, SE14 6NW

Trains from London Bridge to New Cross Gate

Buses from Paddington, Holborn, Victoria, Waterloo: 53, 436, 136, 171, 172, 177, 21, 453.

Please complete application form and return by Friday **19th March 2010**

To elaine.arnold@lineone.net or postal address: SRF, Tempo House, 15 Falcon Road, London, SW 11 2P Tel. No. 020 7801 0135

APPLICATION FORM

Name

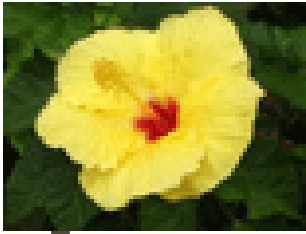
Address

Tel No..... Email.....

Occupation

Registration Fee Payable on the day: £10.00 — Students: £7.00

serefo.info@gmail.com - phone 01372 376894 or 07783700 423



A Man's Story
by Spicy Fingers
(O'Neil Gabbidon)

*I have hated with rage
The women who would place my mind in bondage ...
The man who would make me slave.
I am a man. This is a man's story!*

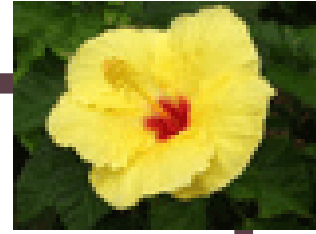
*I was a man before a boy, here's my story as to why ...
Up unto the age of nearly fourteen, I knew not my dad
And though you may think that sad, I am really glad
For the opportunity I had, to practice the art of being a man.
I am a man ... This is a man's story!*

*I've dug deep into the Earth. Tilled the soil
Planted and reaped of the vine of sweet potato
Yam, dashine, banana and coco. A farmer man!
I have mixed the sand and the cement
With bits of broken stones and water to turn it into mortar
Building a house for my old Grand Mama.
Expressions of the actions of a man.
I am a man ... This is a man's story!*

*So going up fourteen, I boarded a jumbo jet, BOAC
One stop England, to meet the Queen.
No not her in the Palace of Buckingham
But the Queen of Birmingham ... My mom
Who from the age of three, I had not set eyes upon.
A man's story!*

*Now you may say "Surely this is sad?"
Again you would be wrong, for I was blessed in that time
With the experience of my Grand Mama's, unconditional love.
Instilling in me the values of Mother Nature's Divine plan.
Values which have molded me, into that which I am ... A man.*

*I am a man! This is a man's story!
I am a man! Born of a woman. Seeded by a man.
I'm a man!!! This is a man's story.*



(A Man's Story... contd)

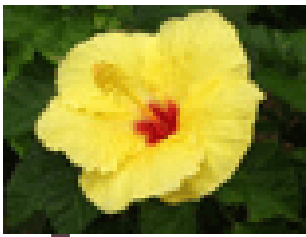
*Coming into England, suffering the humiliation
Of the transformation ... From a man into a boy.
Adapting to a foreign land. Can't tell whites from a Indian.
So many lessons to overstand.
Clattery of dialects, languages, frustration.
I don't understand! Fight against the onset of frustration.
I was once a man!!!*

*Placed in the bottom of the bottom class, with the school Bullies.
Slapped in the face by the headmistress for entering through
The wrong gates.
My rewards for not wanting to be late.
Racial prejudice, what's this? Learn and damn quick!
Damn these alien rule or am I just another unfortunate misfit?
Still, let's stay off that subject
For ... I'm a man! This is still a man's story.*

*I had a few decisions to make and I had to make them quick!
I could lay back and lick my wounds or get up an punch, kick.
A man's story!*

*Now you see, I've always been blessed. My God gave me a very Special gift, my
diplomacy. The ability to communicate
To be everyone's friend,
Whilst at the same time to keep my own council
My Divine fellowship.
So I used my gift and used it well. The traits of a man within youth
I am now able to tell.
I am a man! This is a man's story!*

*And even though I left school with not much formal education.
From the strongest to the weak, boys to teachers, all afforded me Respect.
For they all could see it ... A man! I am a man.
Born of a woman. Seeded by man.
This has been the story of a man! (Part One).*



Haiti: Grief and Loss



On 12th January 2010, Haiti had its worse earthquake for 200 years. Many buildings were reduced to rubble – although, when watching news reports you can literally see one building completely devastated standing next to another virtually intact – and over the ensuing days many people would be dug free. Over 200,000 people have died and a million are now homeless— many bodies have not been recovered. Leogane, at the epicentre of the quakes lost one quarter of its population and 90% of its structures. Two strong aftershocks followed the major quake and there were smaller, brief aftershocks every 15 to 20 minutes. Imagine after losing loved ones, neighbours, colleagues, your street has been re-designed in a moment, that you've lost just about everything you own and your way of life has been rewritten because everything that held it together no longer exists. On top of all that even the ground beneath your feet cannot be trusted. Most Haitians slept outside, too fearful to spend the night in the tenuous shelter of the remaining buildings.

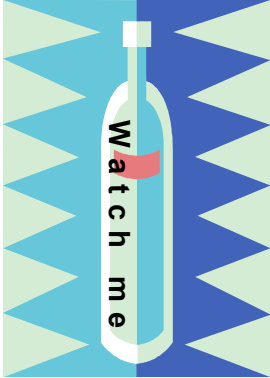
Haitians all over the world were cut off from their families and communities and had to depend upon news to learn what was happening back home. But distance did not free them from suffering. As well as feeling disconnected from their communities, they would likely have felt guilt at not being with their families and now they will be experiencing the grief and loss of their countrymen/women, and country.

Now, 2 months have passed and the continued lack of coordination for humanitarian aid means that substantial donations from all around the world are only trickling through. Those that are alive are still struggling to survive, and must be considering how they will rebuild their lives and homes. The reality of their losses must be a constant playing thought. The trauma and shock of all that they have seen must be indelibly set in their psyche. The guilt that they have survived over those that have died, been permanently injured or are dying must be married to the hunger in their bellies. They must wonder how they can complain about hunger when so many no longer have that bitter luxury. I remember hearing of a 16 year old girl who was found 15 days after the quake (she managed to survive by drinking water in a bath), a few days after the rescue operation had been called off and it struck me that there must be others still alive praying for rescue. This thought must have occurred to everyone who had loved ones missing and their sense of helplessness, their anger at their inability to find them, and despair must have been overwhelming. But they must still appear strong to help those depending on them and cope so as not to be too much of a burden. That sense of hope that any moment that daughter, son, mother, boyfriend, etc would turn up must have long faded. Even though Haiti is poor I have seen from footage a strong sense of community, of peoples pulling together which might go some way to alleviate their sense of fear and uncertainty for the future of their country.

After decades of misrule, Haiti had been taking tiny but significant steps towards self sufficiency with the creation of jobs, less violence on the streets and the glimmer of tourism. This natural disaster has taken a swipe at this progress, but hopefully, the work already done can resume with the rebuilding of Haiti and the issues of trauma addressed in the recovery programme. The mental health of Haiti and Haitians depends upon the recognition of the psychological impact of 12 January and action being taken.



You Wonder?



Blind Side (John Lee Hancock)

As soon as this film begins with a confident narrative of a pivotal football tactic, you will know that you are in sound hands. John Lee Hancock directs this crossroad moment in the life of Michael Oher (Quinton Aaron) a traumatised, homeless black teenager who is plucked from the street in one of those synchronous moments and invited into the home of the affluent Tuohy family. A real feel fantastic movie the action focuses on the positive affects of Oher's rescue, which are profound and many. As soon as this young man - pushed from sofa to sofa until he is sleeping where he can, squeezed out of schools and labelled a dullard – receives support, encouragement and love, he finds the root of his potential and climbs. The performances are firmly seated in the real characters - Sandra Bullock as Leigh-Ann Tuohy gives an uncanny portrayal of the real lady. Quinton Aaron portrays despair

through to confident success from the tilt of his body to the tone of his voice. Jae Head as S J Tuohy is canny and as sweet as any cheeky boy. The only flaw is the skittering away from any of the dark issues that slide in then blink- or-you'll-miss-it out of the story. On general release now.

Beyonder

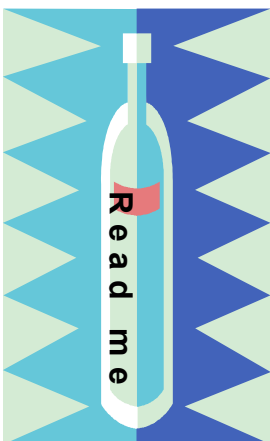
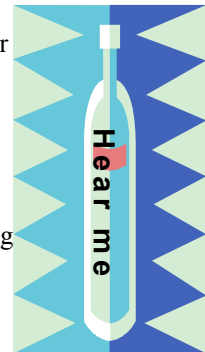
Beyonder moved everyone at the SRF's last conference with his astute performance poetry. Whether you saw him or not you can see him perform Props for Pops at <http://www.dcosmic.com/public/dcosmic/home.html.nocache>.

Dr Maggie Aderin-Pocock

Dr Maggie Aderin-Pocock recently featured on Radio 4's Desert Island disks, but if you missed her you can listen to this enthusiastic space scientist who designs technical optical equipment for satellites. Catch her on YouTube http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4Rmn4_jO-is and explaining the Big Bang for schools at <http://www.science.tv/videos/the-big-bang-maggie-aderin-pocock.html>.

Ali: Me, My Family and Muhammad Ali

Listen again to Deidre Pascall's childhood memories of the greatest boxer the world has ever seen! <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b00rd3wb>



Letters to my Daughter by Maya Angelou

Written for the daughter she never had but sees all around her and I am one of them.

Hallelujah: The Welcome Table by Maya Angelou

Recipes coupled with memories carried on the their signature smells. Just wonderful.

The Long Song by Andrea Levy

A book to remind you to have pride in your slave ancestors— 'If our ancestors survived the slave ships they were strong. If they survived the plantations they were clever.' (unknown)

Peeny Butter Fudge & Little Cloud and Lady Wind by Toni Morrison and Slade Morrison

A collaboration of mother and son with these two delightful children's books.

The Book of the Night Women by Marlon James

Seen in WH Smith. The Night Women are plotting a slave revolt and Lilith may be the key to their plans I understand the language and content are violent (not surprising) and reviews from readers are enthusiastic.