

BOOK REVIEW

The Imprinters: Surviving the Unlived Life of Our Parents. Eileen Walkenstein. Phoenix, AZ: Perfect Printers, 2008, 372 pp., \$39.95 (softcover).

INTRODUCTION BY PETER R. BREGGIN

This book review begins with my introduction because I wished to share and to celebrate what I know about the incredible career of my friend and colleague Eileen Walkenstein, but I felt that the actual book review should be written by someone like Adrienne Johnson, who did not personally know her.

I first met psychiatrist Eileen Walkenstein in the early 1970s when I was breaking into the arena of politics and psychiatric reform by organizing an international campaign to stop the resurgence of lobotomy and psychosurgery (International Center for the Study of Psychology and Psychiatry, 2009). Initially, I was almost entirely isolated within the mental health professional, but gradually a few courageous souls came to support my efforts to stop this barbaric psychiatric assault on the brain. Eileen was one of the first psychiatrists—if not the very first—to dare to stand up with me against the psychiatric and neurosurgical establishment. She became an early board member of the Center for the Study of Psychiatry (CSP), and so she has a direct connection to this journal, which CSP sponsors. I was deeply grateful for her backing and soon grew in admiration for her friendship, courage, and devotion to providing genuine help to suffering individuals. She continued for many years to lend support to CSP's reform work. She was at the time a psychiatrist with a busy practice in Philadelphia.

Eileen graduated medical school and entered psychiatric when few women dared to or had the opportunity to break down the walls surrounding medical and psychiatric patriarchy. It is impossible to imagine the courage and self-determination that this required. As a resident, she already knew that electroconvulsive therapy was bad for the brain, and she found a way to avoid participating in the routine use of the "treatment."

Eileen stood up for integrity and honesty in the field of mental health when there were as yet no other psychiatrists anywhere in the world openly taking a stand against toxic drugs, shock treatments, lobotomy, and the like. There wasn't even a humanistic psychology movement when she was daring to be among the first humanistic psychiatrists.

In a personal communication to me, Eileen described herself as being "passionate" about her work and "equally passionate in my vociferous struggles against the vicious, 'acceptable' racism in my medical school, where I also witnessed a brutal, transorbital lobotomy performed on an 18-year-old" (Walkenstein, personal communication, 2010). She described these experiences in her first book, *Beyond the Couch* (1975), which author and feminist reformer Lucy Freeman endorsed as "a brave, daring, swinging book guaranteed to make us all fight for our psychic freedoms." In her book *Don't Shrink to Fit!*, Eileen

decried—and offered alternatives to—what she called psychiatry’s “craze to brand people with psychiatric diagnoses.”

Eileen recently wrote to me about her initial insights into psychology: “With a large, comfortable practice in the United States, I woke up one morning and realized I was no longer comfortable with my comfort. I had to do something more. I needed my work to have more relevance to the massive suffering I was encountering, and I decided to go in search of—what? Something that turned out to be as elusive as the unicorn.” Her odyssey would take her to England, France, and finally Italy, where she discovered “the nucleus.”

Eileen explained to me, “The presence of the ‘nucleus’ illuminates why family relationships are often so deadly, why even with the best of intentions we are betrayed by and continue to betray those nearest to us. In Italy, when I realized we had uncovered a vital entity, I began taking detailed notes on all facets and events surrounding this ‘nucleus.’ I brought the concept to Paris, where the sophisticated members of my workshop were blown away, shocked, amazed, and also moved by the revelations of what they were harboring, even after many years of study and analysis.”

Four decades ago, Eileen was among the first to defy behavioral, biologic and even classical psychoanalytic approaches. She always believed, as she expressed to me, that “therapy heals us only when it heals our parents within us. So the best therapy is that which treats not our petty peccadilloes and idiosyncrasies but the grand crimes of our parents against us. That is our job, and what we were born in order to accomplish.”

Some aspects of her dramatic, theatrical interventions are reminiscent of J. L. Moreno (1947), the inventor of psychodrama who is mentioned in Dr. Johnson’s review here. I saw Moreno work shortly before his death in 1974, and there is a big difference. Watching Moreno, I got the sense that the therapy was really all about him. The poor state hospital inmate who had been pushed on the stage looked docile by the end, but Moreno looked exhilarated. Unlike so many other innovative therapists, Eileen Walkenstein has always been all about the those who suffer and seek our help.

BOOK REVIEW BY ADRIANNE L. JOHNSON

The Imprinters details the journey of a group of women led by Dr. Eileen Walkenstein as they explored the impacts of their parents on themselves. Bit by bit, Walkenstein reveals the steps that the group took toward realizing what would eventually become her “nucleus concept.”

Walkenstein narrates the start of her own journey with reflection on the dissatisfaction in her profession despite innumerable accolades and prestige. She listens to her inner self and transforms her dissatisfaction into a powerful voyage—one that evolves and culminates in Florence, Italy, where she assembles a group of six women to embark with her on a journey to understand themselves as mirror reflections of their parents and how, through a phenomenal depth of self- and other-exploration and discovery, to be reborn as themselves, ready to embrace their own un-lived lives.

The book revolves primarily around the story of her Florence therapy group. The character of each person is brought to life by detailed descriptions of their personalities but also by a very raw accounting of their slow and powerful self-realizations. Each person runs the full breadth of her emotional spectrum in these chapters as each awakens to realizations of the true impact of a parent’s discontent, trauma, and influence on the development of the child’s nucleus.