If We Meet the Shadow:
One Family’s Interruption of Bullying and Blame

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This presentation would offer one road to healing the schisms caused by our
general and culturally applauded tendencies to project our wounds onto others, even
within our own families. Carl Jung coined the term shadow to indicate the feelings which
frighten and disgust us to the extent they are put in unconscious compartments where--
though we might fantasize being rid of them--they fester and ultimately explode or turn
into the demonizing of another against whom we justify hatred and blame.

In standards that include odes to perfectionism and competitiveness we often are
deprived--and then deprive others--of appreciating that it is our imperfection, willingness
to own vulnerability and getting help in recuperating from hurts and mistakes, that makes
love and evolving in relationships possible.

In an atmosphere of widespread attention to student bullying, it can be effective to
look at context which includes the undigested violence left to the side of our awareness
and responsibility or as part of our entertainment. Here attention is paid to one family, in
which a 10 year old girl was originally dubbed the bully, the sole source of terror.

In this family as in many, the demands were to prove competency and “decency”
by producing conforming behavior of the children. The parents initially tried to (in the
father’s words) get Maria, a baby so highly sensitive, to become someone she wasn’t.”
Years of crying without comfort, threats, and punishments that ended with parental guilt
left this girl without trust, with compartments for the whole of her functioning as well as
her own lust for revenge and humiliation of her parents and brothers.

This is the story of how we struggled together to get to know Maria, and
ultimately the parents’ role in the continuing over-focus on her instead of their own
implications that kept going. In addition it is the story of our working together to recover
from our own excesses, giving me as well an opportunity to experience the falling down
and getting up necessary for any change or real growth.

The humility about context and implication, and genuine respect for the words
and feelings of any child are necessary ingredients to healing instead of scapegoating,
even in our current widespread preoccupation with school and internet bullying. This
shift isn’t easy, particularly when children are for the most part still precious
“possessions” rather than being worthy of dignity for their own developmental needs and
contributors towards intimacy within our world.

In general as in the case of Maria and her family, dignity for all children and
respect for their complexity, requires we address our own shadow lands so we don’t
demean or minimize their humanity. The bouts of violence, confusion, hate, and
beginnings of light will be shared during the presentation, with space for digestion and
discussion.