

FIRST PERSON

Stellar performance

Self-confessed commitment phobe Andrea Blundell attends a Moving Constellations workshop and role-plays her way to self-understanding

Sprawled on a wooden floor, every inch of my skin felt cold as I became a dead person. Was it a dream? No, just a typical Saturday afternoon at a Moving Constellations workshop.

Developed around 50 years ago by German psychotherapist Bert Hellinger, Constellations is a therapeutic method used to reveal tensions within and between people, often family groups. In a typical session, people act as members of your family to reveal hidden problems. The technique blends elements of spirituality, psychotherapy and African beliefs about the power of ancestors, and operates on a deep, soul level to uncover emotional blockages.

Fresh from ending yet another relationship, I was ready to try anything as I headed towards the studio. Our intimate group was split equally between men and women and we sat barefoot on a circle of chairs, while Nicola Dunn introduced herself as the group leader – the ‘constellator’.

After guided meditation to help us relax, we began. A distraught mother offered to go first, and Nicola asked her to share her problems with the group. Nicola then suggested which family members she needed to work with, and the woman used her instinct to pick the people she wanted to play them. Next, she positioned them around the room, wherever it felt right. This pattern is called a constellation, and it's the basis for the healing work that comes next.

The positioned people were now ‘representatives’, Nicola explained. As she asked each one how they felt, her face softened and she seemed to be connected to some kind of universal force.

One of the representatives said she suddenly felt cold and heavy, and another said her vision was blurred. Nicola said they were channelling the feelings of the real family members they were

playing, but I was torn between thinking they were making it up and worrying they had some strange talent I couldn't emulate.

I was relieved to be watching rather than participating, but then Nicola held out her hand.

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She'd told us earlier she might add to constellations if she felt extra people were needed. ‘You'll be the grandmother,’ she told me.

As soon as I entered the pattern, it was like an invisible force taking over. My mind receded and I was awash with confusion, with heat coursing through my body. What was happening? The sensations changed as Nicola moved me

around the room. I was totally caught up in the moment.

The chance to help someone else felt wonderful. Later, in another constellation, I had my strangest experience of the day, when Nicola asked me to lie on the floor. My body went cold and my head felt stuffy. Only then did she tell me I was representing a group of dead people.

Nicola said that representatives often take on characteristics of the people they're playing. Not only that, but living people being portrayed often experience shifts in their lives soon afterwards.

When it was my turn to share my problems, I started shaking. But as I told Nicola about my commitment issues I felt I was sinking into a vast space. She softly asked, ‘Is your desire to find your home?’ and I found I had tears in my eyes.

Nicola focused on the way my father uprooted his family to take us from England to Canada, only to keep us on the move for seven

years and then desert us. She asked me to pick representatives for my mother, father and myself. Then I set them up in a triangle looking away from each other.

The girl representing me felt cold when asked to face the parents – just how I'd felt in my family, where nothing was talked about. And when the woman playing my mother said she couldn't hear, I got goosebumps. My mother is deaf in one ear!

Nicola told me that I'd judged my itinerant father, and this was the cause of my restlessness – when we judge someone we often link ourselves to them and repeat their behaviour. She asked me to kneel in front of my ‘parents’ and bow, as a symbol of breaking that pattern and moving on.

On the journey home I felt completely exhausted, and I fell asleep on the sofa at 9pm, so it's not a workshop to be done before a big night out.

I forgot that constellations might affect those represented until a week later, when my mother called from Canada to tell me she was thinking about moving back to England. She didn't understand why I was suddenly speechless – so I just told her it was a great idea.

• For information on workshops, see www.movingconstellations.com, call Tor Udall on 07779-787392 or email tor.udall@movingconstellations.com

• For information on training in family constellations, please contact Hari Beaumont at hari.beaumont@csiss.org.uk or visit www.csiss.org.uk



Nicola guides Andrea through her role in a 'constellation'