

Dena Psychodrama, age 33. Suicidal impulse personified Dena described herself as **excited and apprehensive**. She thought she might be going home today but she wasn't sure. If protagonist she'd work on her relationship with her father, she said.

1) We opened with a role reversed interview with Dena as her father. We learned he is 74, in good health, 6' tall, weighs 208 pounds, and was employed as an electronic engineer for aero-space program. For fun he watches stars, birds, plays the cello and sings bass. He has taken operatic roles with a local company. He is a widower, whose wife, Dena's mother, died seven years ago. Dena was the 8th of 11 children. The younger ones are a boy a year younger and a girl six years younger. The wife had been employed as a coordinator of volunteers at a local museum. The parents are both college graduates and Roman Catholics. Father is a sensitive person, who cries readily. He dined with Dena yesterday here at our facility.

Dad: Your sisters send their love. We want you to concentrate on getting well instead of worrying about Christmas.

Dena: But I am worried. I want to make the family happy, but I want to be part of the celebration too.

Dad: You put so much stress on yourself, you won't be able to handle it. You're not as well as you should be. You hear voices.

Dena: But I can get well. I'll ignore the voices.

Director: Dena, where do the voices come from?

Dena: From inside me. I hear them from within me. I'm hearing them now.

2) I cut the scene with which we'd begun, and had Dena choose a double, to represent the voices. I had Dena role reverse with the voices so that we could hear what they were saying to her. She confessed that this was frightening to her. I reassured her, saying that she doesn't have to face the voices alone. We'll face them with her.

Voices: Kill yourself now.

Dena: I don't want to do that. I'm not going to.

Voices: You're an evil person. Mad! You don't deserve to live.

Dena: Yes, I do. I deserve very much to live.

Director: I'm glad to hear you say you deserve to live. I agree!

Are these men's voices or women's voices?

Dena: There is a man's voice and a woman's voice, and about 15 other voices in the background.

A woman's voice: You can do it (kill yourself) now, and no one would worry about it.

Dena: Not true. I have family that love me.

Director: Let's bring them up on stage to stand behind you.

I addressed the auxiliaries playing all these supportive roles, directing them to comment on the voices they've heard so far in the psychodrama today:

A sister says: Don't let voices bother you. **To (the auxiliary representing) the voices:** Get out of Dena's life. Stop trying to destroy her.

A brother adds: Get out of her life. We love her and want her around. **To the protagonist:** It's OK. The meds will help. Don't worry.

Another sister says to her: The voices aren't real. They're just a figment of your imagination.

To the voices: Leave her alone. Others love her and want her to be around.

A third sister, to the voices: Leave her alone. Go away! She doesn't need to be bothered by you.

To Dena: It's OK. We love you and we'll protect you.

Director: It's obvious that you don't have to face the voices alone. Put them in their place. Think of them as loud thoughts. Take control and possession of them.

Dena to the voices: Get the hell out of my life. Leave me alone! **Director:** Do those voices sound like anyone you've ever known.

Dena: Not personally. She sounds like Marilyn Monroe, the seductive type, sinister but gentle.

To that voice: Go away from me. Stop trying to destroy me.

The voice: I'm a part of you that wants to be heard.

Dena: I don't want you.

Voice: I'm trying to get your attention. There are things in your life you haven't taken care of.

Dena: I'm dealing with my issues.

Voice: I'm forcing you to take care of yourself.

Dena: No, you're forcing me to destroy myself.

Director: Add this, Dena, "If I listen to you, I'll destroy me too."

Voice: No, I wouldn't. I'd go on into other persons' bodies.

Dena to director: I believe that. They're not necessarily thoughts.

Director: What does the voice get out of it? What's the payoff for the voice?

Dena: Her ultimate goal is to destroy me.

[I verified the impression she thought she was demonically possessed. So I sought for an affirmative core to her religion]

Director: Surely the demonic does not remain unopposed. Does God help you?

Dena: Jesus Christ is an effective opposition to this.

Director: Do you believe he lives? (She nods) So he's here.

Dena: Yes.

Director: Let's imagine that Jesus occupies this chair. He could, couldn't he? Now you take the chair, and present what he'd be saying if he spoke aloud as we do.

Jesus to the voices: Get out in the name of Jesus. Go and wander. You have no authority over Dena.

Exit female voice. (We turned our attention to the male voice).

Male voice: Do it now. Destroy yourself now.

Director: What's he like?

Dena: He's in his 50's, like my uncle who was an alcoholic, and had a bad influence on my life.

Director: Respond to the male voice.

Dena: I don't want to kill myself ever. I have a loving family who cares about me.

Jesus: Get out in the name of Jesus. Go and wander. You have no authority over Dena.

The male voice exits, and the family embrace Dena.

Closure: we return to the scene with Dad.

3) **Dad to Dena:** Can you look away from me? Your eyes are drilling a hole in my head. (So Dena looks away, but he still feels burning in his head from her eyes)

Director: You mentioned the fixed stare. Has there been any talk about an 'evil eye'?

Dena: Dad refers to me like that, but he hasn't accused me. (I prompted Deri to speak directly with dad): If you want to know how I'm feeling, ask me. (He does). I'm feeling anxious and apprehensive and a little leery about my coming home. I feel you're pushing me away. You don't love me anymore. Your attitude toward my sister is different from your attitude toward me.

Dad: Whatever makes you think that?

Dena: You knock on her bedroom door, but you just walk right in on mine.

Dad: I hadn't realized that bothered you.

Dena: You treat my sister with more respect.

Dad: You don't need the respect I give her.

Dena: Yes, I do. It happened that I was half dressed when you came in. You excused yourself and left, but I was embarrassed at the invasion of my privacy. Now I'm very insecure and worried you'll barge in again.

4) We went to a pool game they played together on the adult unit. Dad made jokes about her medications. He won the game.

Dad: It was unfair of me to win, because you're on so many meds.

Dena: Shut up, dad. (She agreed he thought he'd taken unfair advantage of her). I lost the game, even though I played to the best of my ability. Sometimes I wish you wouldn't treat me like an invalid. Just because I hear voices doesn't mean that I'm an invalid. I'll overcome these, and I won't kill myself.

Dad, putting his hands on top her head: The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make his face to shine on you and be gracious unto you. The Lord lift up his countenance on you and give you peace.

Dena: I like that part of it. He doesn't treat the others like that.

Director: Why did you want to work on dad?

Dena: He's treating me like an invalid. I want a chance to speak openly and to talk to him more about feelings.

Director: It's easy to be overlooked in a large family. To get sick is one way to be noticed. Did he seem scared of you?

Dena: He's afraid I'll hurt someone.

Director: Speak to dad directly.

Dena: Are you afraid of you? What do I do that's so frightening?

Dad: You talk about killing yourself.

Dena: I'll get help first. The voices never take me by surprise.

Director: There's strength in that. To get help will save you.

Dena: Don't worry. I'll get help.

Dad: Suppose you're wrong.

Dena: I'll pay the consequences.

Director: This would be a big loss for him. Imagine how he'd feel at Dena's suicide:

5) **Dad:** I'm afraid for you and others when you're in a suicidal rage.

Dena: I get overwhelmingly angry, and want to hurt myself.

Dad: Why?

Dena: I'm not a good person.

Dad: Yes you are.

Dena: I don't know if you believe what you say. You think I'm weaker than the others (siblings).

Director: And therefore more deserving of credit for keeping yourself under control. (I cited the current Sunday paper, the Calvin and Hobbs comic strip, as illustrative of my logic). In a real crisis you'd cope, whereas others may be taken by surprise.

Dena: I'm getting stronger each time it happens. Far from being weak, I'm one of the strong ones. Dad, you don't need to be afraid. When you're afraid, sometimes I get afraid. **(To audience):** His fear feeds into mine.

Director: If your dad were not afraid, what would he say to you?

Dena: I can't imagine that.

Director: What do you want to say to him?

Dena: I love you. You are a special, sensitive man, and you've been a wonderful father. I'm going to help you get over your fear of me.

Director to Dena: When was the last time you had rages?

Dena: The first time I was hospitalized, about a year ago. I was 32 then. All this has happened in the past year.

Director: Have you had any long term love relationships?

Dena: I had a relationship which lasted 1 year, 9 months, and 28 days. but the man I was in love with was murdered here in this city. The perpetrators were caught, tried and are serving time. They were strangers to him, and they killed him in the course of robbing him.

6) I put her in the role reversed position as him, and interviewed.

He was 19 when she was 21. They met at a New Year's Eve party. He was a sociology major at the state university, whose father worked in construction. Dena didn't know what his mother did. His family liked Dena.

Dena to him: I miss you. I still love you very much. I wish I'd been there when you were killed. Either to help you or to die with you. Sometimes even now....

Him: Don't worry about that. I'm preparing a place for you, but I want you to have as long a life as possible. You wouldn't be with me if you killed yourself, for God doesn't forgive those people. Stay alive and healthy. Continue to help yourself and get the help you need. Why don't you have a boyfriend?

She (laughing): I have three.

Him: I'm surprised you're not married.

Her: My relationships aren't good enough. They don't last too long.

Director: Recall your good times together.

Her: We had those long walks to Center City and to the Museum. You liked the country and I hated it. I loved the city. I miss your clowning around. You put snow down my back. I miss the fun and the camaraderie.

Him: I want you to have it now with someone else.

Dena: I feel more independent. I can handle myself better.....I will take your love, and make it a permanent part of me. (They embraced)

Sharing and Comments

Peers and staff shared on a meaningful level with regard to losses, in particular loss through murder. I interpreted the rage part of her experience as a likely reaction to the violence with which she'd lost the love of her life. "You're still angry with those who took him from you, and now you turn it on yourself from time to time. You don't deserve to be a target. They do, and they're paying for it." I said.

Her peers thought she'd shown a lot of courage and had done a good psychodrama and said so. Two of her peers had heard voices too, but were no longer hearing them. I'll comment on similarities and differences, together with treatment strategy, after we do the Anne psychodramas in the next chapter. Anne is a "multiple personality."