

generative scribing

A SOCIAL ART
of the 21st CENTURY

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Cambridge, Massachusetts

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for all who aspire to see

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containers



Around the diamond, the iceberg, and presencing—supporting these states of being and diagnostic methods—are what I’ve already referred to in this book as containers: holding spaces for places, people, and states of the heart.

The weakness or strength of a container determines the likelihood for detrimental or successful conversation, for harmful or loving relations, for destructive or productive environments, for ill- or well-being.

In a way, just as ice forms from and melts back into a pond, containers provide energetic ground for life and death, for growth and decay. We serve as containers for others, and they for us. The stronger a container, the stronger the trust, the stronger the safety, the more that can be nourished, tended, grown, realized.

Here's an example. As my grandmother Margaret Bird was aging, at a point when she could only go outside with a walker and physical assistance, we would occasionally lunch at a local diner in New York City. She would ask me things about my life, about school, about my friends, about my studies, and she would marvel at the complexity of the world in which I lived. (This was 1984, so we can only imagine what she would say about our world today!)

What I recall most poignantly is the way she paid attention, seeming to hang on every word, and the way she made me feel safe and loved—loved no matter what I said, no matter what I had to share. I never felt judged. No matter what she thought about the details of my escapades, she listened closely, looked me in the eye, and continued to pursue an understanding of my life.

She provided a container, a space where I could see myself more clearly and grow as direct result of how she was holding me.

In my work as a scribe, I try to reinforce the container for the group. When a group heats up and fractures, the container needs to strengthen, to better support what wants to come to light. I don't do this by adding a specific line or word to a page, but by enhancing my quality of listening and building the group's trust in my very being. I turn around, and see the group, feel it, open my heart to the individuals, try to put myself in their seats, find human-to-human compassion, soften, expand.

Sometimes the container in the room is so strong that the scribe might be enveloped in its power. Our ability to "show up" increases because the room is holding us, in a way, as my grandmother held me so well, years ago. In this case, I notice the strength, thank the heaven and earth for the quality of the group, and draw with pure joy.

When my grandmother, somewhat hard of hearing and surely with many of her own personal concerns, was able to show up for me so completely, I was completely able to show up for her too. I could be more vulnerable because I felt safe. She brought out the purest part of me by how gracefully she held me in her own heart.

***Love, as a base note, is the ore,
and order, of the container.***