

The Challenge of Chairing a Special Symposium Plenary

Elizabeth Rohr's presentation of her supervisory work in post civil war Guatemala was widely considered to be remarkable. When I read her paper which detailed the organisation and development of her project I began to understand the extent of the challenge she was facing. My personal experience of being born in a Nazi Ghetto, spending my early childhood in Bergen Belsen Concentration Camp and being part of a totally traumatised community gave me a lifelong personal insight. I had just returned from Poland working with now elderly Holocaust survivors who had survived as children. They and I are still seeking the healing of our wounds 66 years after the liberation.

So why was her presentation so special? My 20 years of work with massive trauma victims has taught me some fundamental lessons. These survivors have finely tuned antennae. They will not trust or engage with a worker if they detect attempted deception. They will detect any conceit and consider it with mistrust. Elizabeth Rohr described the work with simple and complete honesty. She spoke about the survivors, the community and the counsellors and not about herself. She spoke with great humility. When she spoke of herself it was with an openness and honesty that contained no hint of self deception or self congratulation.

The difficulties of the work were presented with not one word of defensive self-protection. The community's trauma was portrayed by the art of Oswaldo Gayasamin. It captured the unspeakable anguish. To have the courage to face the challenges is extraordinary. To possess this courage and yet have such humility marks her out as one of our most remarkable group analysts. It was an honour and a privilege to have chaired her presentation.

Alfred Garwood
