

Interview with John Kurk

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John Kurk is a Shadow Work® mentor, trainer, facilitator and coach. He has led numerous Shadow Work events and ManKind Project Trainings in the UK, Ireland, France, Germany, Norway, Austria, Holland, the US, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Hungary and Russia and also offers individual and relationship counselling. He has a B.Sc. degree in Physics with Humanities from London University and spent five years at the Centre for Alternative Technology in Wales during its developmental period. He lives in Broadway in the Cotswolds, UK, with his wife, Nicola, and has two grown sons and a grandson.

AB: How did you first encounter Shadow Work?

John: That would have been in July-August 1992, I think, in the latter days of my involvement with a spiritual community called The Emissaries.

Nicola and I were representing our community here in England at a gathering in Colorado, and one of the senior leaders was gripped by a fever of bringing more experientially-based emotional work into the communities. He'd already done the New Warrior weekend and was in touch with Cliff, and arranged for a two-day men's Shadow Work session in Indian Hills in the mountains above Boulder.

We had these two days doing Shadow Work with a group of leaders, and I came away from that completely bowled over. I did a piece of work. I absolutely loved it. It filled all the gaps that were missing for me at the time. I had been engrossed in a lot of personal development work, healing, spiritual aspirational work, intentional community, all of that for a long time. This went, 'Ahh!' It struck another chord in another place, and I thought, I'm going to do that.

I was very impressed with Cliff. He was working on his own with a bit of support from a couple of other guys. He was a full leader in the New Warrior network then, which of course has come to be called the ManKind Project. I came back from that saying to Nicola, "Okay, we're going to bring this to Europe. This is going to happen here." This was in the early days, when Cliff was developing Shadow Work with Mel [Mary Ellen Blandford] and Dmitri Bilgere and Erva Baden.

AB: Can you say more about the kind of growth work you had done before?

John: I had met both Robert Moore and Douglas Gillette. I went to a men's session with Robert Moore that Norm had organised in Texas, outside Dallas I think. We did an experiential session: not individual process work, but small groupings, clusters, groups of three or four, talking about father and family and ploughing the terrain. We had a pretty wild drumming evening, and Moore talked about the archetypes (I've still got some of it recorded).

So by the time I met Shadow Work I was already running men's events here in England. And Nicola and I were doing seminars called The Art of Living in our community. We subtitled that, "For those who want to change the world but can't get it together to do the washing up." I thought that was very accurate. The world was full of personal development, semi-spiritual airheads — still is — so this was very practical. It was good teaching, good experiential stuff, but it lacked the deeper kind of emotional circuitry, because it was more on the uphill side of things.

I had been involved in astrological work and Sufi community earlier than that. I was involved in the alternative energy world, in the dawning of what is now the massive sustainability world. I was at a place called the Centre for Alternative Technology in West Wales, the first place to have a three-bladed windmill in the whole of Europe. It was a real pioneering place. We were exposed to all kinds of weird and wonderful things there, and it had an encounter-group-type atmosphere to it. That wasn't the focus, the focus was teaching the outside world, and I began to realise the focus needed to be a balance between the two for change to occur.

So I wanted to develop other things more internally, and that took me to the Emissary community, amongst other things, where we were very nutritionally conscious and did a lot of intentional community development.

As that community changed from top-down to circle in the late '80s and '90s, we spent a huge amount of time gaining experience with group dynamics of all different kinds, with interventions and handling things. We also used to do a lot of non-touch healing circles, and we understood that kind of circuitry very well, but it was all very uphill, pre-midlife crisis!

And then the midlife crisis appeared for members of the community, as shadows of behaviours that weren't so helpful. The cracks began to show. And then along comes Shadow Work. Perfect timing.

The first Shadow Work session in England and Europe was with Erva and Don Hines.

I think the first Shadow Work facilitator training was also in '93. I wanted to go, was very ready to go, but I couldn't go for practical reasons, so I had to wait for the second one. I came to the BFT [Basic Facilitator Training] in Colorado and the second AFT [Advanced Facilitator Training] in Wisconsin, both in '94. It was the early days!

AB: You were doing almost entirely group-oriented work, unlike many people, myself included, who saw a therapist, read some books, and then showed up at a group event. It helps explain what often strikes me about you, that you're able to put your finger on the pulse of what's happening in the group in a remarkable way.

John: You're right, I've been involved in groups most of my adult life. I haven't done the standard, going-into-business-and-ending-up-seeing-a-therapist route at all. But I have had a huge amount of one-to-one support and counselling over the years.

Nicola and I met in that Emissary community. It was a place of service, and I think our understanding of building community has helped us in all the training work we do now. We joke now when we're doing a facilitator training that we're rebuilding the community again. [Laughs.] And we put a lot of weight into building community and enjoy going the extra mile because there's such a wonderful payoff. That's not what Shadow Work is fundamentally about, yet it does build the strongest community spirit I've ever come across, because we're all seen hitting at rock bottom sometimes. We're both at our best and have seen each other's raw vulnerability. That was the bit that was always missing in other things I was involved in. It was always, Do your best, care for others and there's nothing wrong with me. [Laughs.]

AB: So it didn't take you long to decide you wanted to learn to facilitate?

John: I knew straight away, absolutely. It had my name written all over it.

The community had been a fantastic experience. We'd peaked, and it was time to move on.

Having met Shadow Work and started to do things, I was already steeped in Moore and Gillette's archetypes and was running small men's groups. I was doing archetype days where the centre work meant developing four role players, one to represent each archetype, spatially and on a carpet in terms of proximity, shape, colour, ornament, and messages. That was a profound experience for people in itself, and then they'd step back and look at themselves and make a symbolic change by adjusting the structure of the archetypes to bring greater balance.

Once I'd met Shadow Work I immediately got into wanting to do my own thing, and I couldn't do Shadow Work yet because I was still training.

Cliff said, I know how enthusiastic you are, that's great. You want to learn, and I

know you will, but you need to find someone to lead group sessions with you. And almost synchronistically a woman named Hilary Woolett appeared. She and I did the trainings together, including a three-day Leader Training with Cliff and just the two of us, bless him. [Laughs.] Mel was around some of the time, and it was very short track.

I think Cliff knew I had a huge amount of group experience, that wasn't really the issue. We didn't run a mock seminar as everybody does now. We covered the basic ground. It was Cliff teaching what he used to call the Full Court Press, do you remember that? I believe that's a basketball term, but it meant nothing to me. I had no idea what he was talking about. [Laughs.]

AB: I didn't either. [Laughs.]

John: Well, that makes two of us, that's a relief.

We knew the structure, and we'd seen a weekend session done. The first Shadow Work sessions we ran were at the community. We did probably three or four preparation sessions, and a few months later Cliff came over and certified us. That was 1995. We were lucky, we had a ready-made community to provide the people, plus a few others nearby.

Nicola started training up, and she was certified in 1996 or 1997, so we've been doing Shadow Work here ever since. We still occasionally have contact with Hilary. We would not be where we are now without her involvement all those years ago!

AB: What are your memories of meeting Robert Moore and Doug Gillette?

John: A fondness for both men; I liked them. I met Gillette in an Emissary gathering, really just to double-click on the book they had just put out [*King, Warrior, Magician, Lover: Rediscovering the Archetypes of the Mature Masculine*] which was getting a lot of attention. He was more the academic; he seemed like a wise, nice fella.

I think Moore had more of an impact on me. I enjoyed him and his way of delivery. Some people could describe him as a bit arrogant, maybe, but that didn't bother me because he knows his stuff, and why not? He's at the head of something that's made a massive impact. But he clearly had more to say than Doug Gillette; he seemed to be the driving force of that combo. He was a benign, intelligent, capable, appreciative

man in the focus of things. He didn't run it but he was the focus. He talked about what he knew, and he was proud of it.

That was 21-22 years ago now. I've met him since, once, and his name keeps cropping up other than as co-author of the book.

Every session and training I've done since, both Shadow Work and ManKind Project, I always refer to his work because I think it's been so foundational. And I have no problem even if Cliff and others are taking the archetypes a lot further in many ways. There's no question that the book he and Doug Gillette wrote really opened the door and landed; there was something priceless about it. So I always make a point of mentioning him out of respect for that.

At some point Moore did the New Warrior Training himself, and he did acknowledge the Warriors were doing the right work. I remember saying, I'm going to do that sometime, but I decided to wait for it to come to England because I'd already committed to spending all this money to train in Shadow Work in the States.

The first New Warrior Training in England was in December 1994, and I did go. That had a big impact on me as well, even though I was very arrogant and thought I knew far more about facilitating than the men doing it did! And it was still a great experience, and I have been involved ever since.

AB: How would you say Shadow Work has changed your view of yourself, or of life?

John: I have to put myself back 20 years, really. All I can say is, it impacted me a lot.

Over those formative first few years, I was able, like many, many others, to increasingly fully, wholly accept myself with my wide spectrum of wonderful behaviours, and less desirable behaviours, to downright stupid behaviours. Doing the work opened up a number of areas. I just know that I became more wholesome and more real and more acceptable to myself.

I'd been steeped in, for the sake of a better word, New Age exploration, most of my adult life, beginning right from the time I was 15-16 in London with my friends. We were doing early group explorations, even when we were squatting in London. We used to go to some weird group situation once a week with someone who was experimenting on us with New Age ideas; we were the guinea pigs. [Laughs.] It was pretty strange, and some of it was very interesting.

I was really steeped in a lot of fanciful beliefs, and that had started to simplify. Over the first few years after meeting Shadow Work, probably until about 2000, I suppose, I went through a process of letting go and shedding all of my preconceived beliefs about a lot of things. I began to accept that I'd taken all that as gospel truth, and actually I really didn't know and it really didn't matter. And I went back to a kind of what you could call an archetypally Warrior simplicity, that what I know is enough. I found that really freeing; my life freed up a lot, I think is the fair thing to say. That changed a lot.

Then I also hit a pretty serious depression in the mid- to late '90s. Looking back, I had always been a depressive, but that sort of uphill phase kept it all at bay, so that was part of the unpacking for me. Shadow Work helped me immensely with that, too.

Cliff's attitude of high-level acceptance and being non-shaming and non-judgmental, that impacted me a lot, and that's what we teach now.

AB: What do you say when someone asks you, Can Shadow Work help me with depression? I've come to see depression as multi-faceted, a very difficult system of wounds.

John: I agree completely. It's seriously complicated.

I am asked questions like that, when they want one-to-one coaching work; that's typical of many questions I get. I would never say Shadow Work cures anything. At the same time I can speak to my own experience where it's helped me understand the roots of what's going on. But it's not the only tool I've used to get a handle on depression, and I would recommend other things to people.

For example, I had a client come to me five or six years ago: a professional man, a lawyer from London, knew his stuff. He was about five years older than me, so he would have been around 60 then. He had suffered from depression through a lot of his life and had been to endless professionals in Harley Street in London, which is where all the highly-paid professionals are, and he'd taken various medications, and none of it had really helped him very much.

We contracted, and after about the second or third session spread over a couple of months, he said, Look, I have to say, nobody has ever shown the level of interest that you show in me and my story, ever, among all the highly-paid people he'd been to see.

That to me was a remarkable statement: that this poor man had suffered, and no one had ever listened to him before. [Laughs.] They'd just say, "The problem with you is this," and "Do this," and "Take this." [Laughs.] His story had never been told, and all the deeper issues, none of it had ever been unpacked properly.

So when someone asks me whether Shadow Work can help with depression, I say, "Well, we can have a good look. We can find out what the roots are over a period of time. There's no one-shot deal, there's no silver bullet, and it may not help you, but it has helped a lot of people," That's the kind of thing I would say. And you're absolutely right, and you know from personal and family experience, as do I, that depression is hard. It's not straightforward, and there are many facets.

Fundamentally, archetypally, I believe that at its root depression is very, very low Sovereign. When you get dealt the futility card, that flame is barely burning. You're lying in bed, the phone goes, you cannot even consider answering it and talking to the person. The 'What's the point?' stuff — that I judge is all very low Sovereign quadrant.

So listening, being understood — huge amounts of that begins to redress the balance. Plus, some biochemical work of an appropriate kind, because there's definitely a biochemical element to it, there's no question, the serotonin levels and so on.

AB: I've heard people differentiate between 'situational' and 'non-situational' depression. I have so much less experience than you have, but I've come to the conclusion that it's always situational, and that for many people getting more Sovereign online is simply too risky, and if they can't go there, they're going to remain depressed. That's a very simplistic way of saying it.

John: Yes. There are risks, exactly. There are deep risks to changing.

I don't know, I think there is situational depression. And then I suppose you could say the family of origin environment, the roots growing up, are situational as well, but it's so highly formative. It's a highly influential situational influence that does affect one's biochemistry, I believe, particularly if there are tendencies within the family. If you're the son of a depressive who was the son of a manic-depressive, all of that comes through. Whether it's situational or part of the invisible messaging, or it's even in DNA, I don't know. It's very interesting.

When I look back, my grandfather committed suicide. So he was a happy man. [Laughs.] And my father was a manic-depressive as a result of the situational stuff he grew up around, and many other factors. And I'm a classic depressive, the son of a manic-depressive. It's an interesting area, far more complicated than we're both making it. But I do think that if people are willing to work the risks of facing some things and facing their deeper need, then I do think change can happen.

AB: When you and Nicola started working together, were you living in your house in Broadway?

John: No, we were still living in the house in the village where the community was, five miles up the road. We moved here in 1997.

AB: Did you choose your home because of the building next to it where you now lead workshops and trainings?

John: No, that was a wonderful by-product. That was just a dilapidated garage when we moved here. My mother gave us a bit of money to upgrade it in 2001-2002. We were hiring places, and I said to my mum one day, It would be great if we could just upgrade that room because we could use it so much. And bless her, she put a bit of money up. She said, You might as well have the money now before I die. It was very kind of her.

Before that we were renting places, and I was running around the country doing coaching work in people's houses. It was hard work, it was developing what we have now.

An anecdote. We were invited to do a weekend session in Hungary, in Budapest, in 1996, I think. I went with a lovely woman, named Lene Dupré, who had done the BFT and possibly the AFT. We did one of the weirdest Shadow Work sessions I've done.

We'd been told that the taxi driver would pick us up outside where we were staying, and we'd be driven half an hour across Budapest to the place where we were doing the session, and everything was arranged.

We get in the taxi, and the taxi driver turns around and looks at both of us and goes, "Bubble- ubble-ubble-ubble" in Hungarian, which is complete gobbledygook, and we could tell by his manner that he was asking, "Where do you want to go?" And we knew nothing. [Laughs.] We had nothing in writing, because we had been told everything had been set up. It was one of those awful 'Ah-ha 'moments, and Lene describes my face as going from delight to complete despondency in five seconds as the implications set in.

I don't remember how we got there, I think we must have gone back to the house and knocked on the door. We knew the woman who had arranged it. Everything started late, it took a long time, and I still remember my gut-wrenching realisation. All I knew was, they couldn't start without us. [Laughs.]

So we did the whole setup for Friday night, and then we were told, "That's fine for Friday night, and we're going to another building for Saturday morning." It was insane.

The first session we ever did in Germany, we were invited by a group, a rapid language learning group, DGSL, quite a big organization. They have an annual conference, and we were invited to do a Shadow Work session. I can't remember how they got in touch with us. Hilary and I did the session, and that set the whole ball rolling for a lot of work in Germany. That's where we met Marie-Françoise Rosat, she came to that. That would have been in 1996. John Morrell, who had recently done the New Warrior Training in England, met me at the airport and was a tremendous support throughout the whole event. Another German woman came also who's still a certified coach, Helga Pfetch.

After that Nicola and I went to Germany twice a year probably for seven or eight years at least, mostly hosted by John and Alice Morrell.

AB: How did you begin going to Russia?

John: ALisa Starkweather was the seed there, our lovely ALisa. Either late 2002 or early 2003 she was invited to give a presentation at a conference in Moscow. She went, and she did a break-out session for a small group on Shadow Work. They loved it. I think ALisa did a very lightweight introduction to Shadow Work and demonstrated some processes, that sort of thing.

There was a woman named Larisa Lagutina there, who was a therapist in Moscow, and she spoke really good English. She really liked it a lot and said, "We want you to come back and do more of that." And ALisa said, "Not me; if you want more you need to get in touch with John and Nicola, they're in Europe." So Larisa got in touch with Nicola, and she also started training; she may have come to the UK to do the BFT with her English partner, Dave.

Then an invitation came to Nicola to do a Shadow Work session for a group of therapists on their summer retreat in Riga, Latvia, in July 2003. And dear Nicola went, with Larisa. She was on the phone every day to me for support and ideas as to how deal with all the challenges that were coming her way every day!

Nicola had all sorts of stories: classic Eastern block, things aren't quite what they seem. They didn't have a room to work in, they had to create it out of black plastic in this other massive room. The translator was not good enough and ended up wanting to do a piece of work. It was hard work, and she did a brilliant job amidst all that!

A couple of women there loved it a lot, one of whom was Liya Kineevskaya — now the Queen of Russian Shadow Work. They said, "We want you to come do something in Moscow," And Nicola said, "If you want we'll do a mixed group and I'll bring my husband." So we did a group there in December 2003, and that was the beginning of it. It's been ten years this year.

Since then we've been going virtually every year. I think there was one year we didn't go. And half a dozen of the people who were at that first session are all certified Shadow Work facilitators now.

AB: It must be tremendously satisfying to see that kind of result from the seeds that you sowed, and to know that there will be a certified facilitators gathering in Russia this year.

John: It's extraordinary. The situation is quite extended and evolving rapidly. It is indeed surprising, I do feel very proud of it — and a bit shocked sometimes. We have worked hard. Honestly, you wouldn't believe some of the stuff that happened in those first few sessions. It was really hard, some of it, and that's not including the translation on top of it.

There was no real idea of group privacy. I remember one time, in the first session, this plumber walked right across the carpet while we were processing somebody. Electricians were changing light bulbs and ladies were sweeping the corridors, right alongside where we were processing. There was little concept of the container we were trying to build.

Some of the physical circumstances were grim. But the quality of people and the interest and the celebration of the work were huge. They absolutely loved it. And I think it's going to keep developing if we handle it right. There's a lot of interest and some high-calibre people trained up and delivering.

I think Nicola and I have grown from the experience, too; our own authority has matured, expanded and deepened. Germany had been the focus for a while, and then it became Russia. Many years ago there was a little foray into France, but that didn't go very far. Now that's picking up again, and now there's quite a bit of interest, and we have French trainees coming. There's Gautier Hankenne and the Belgian community. We've recently been invited to do a session in Istanbul that will probably happen next year. The Russians would have us for three months solid if they could — they're that hungry. It's quite a blossoming.

Somewhere, I suppose, in the late noughties, if you know what I mean by that, we'd done the BFT and the AFT in Russia, and we realised we were going to have to see this all the way through. People were going to become certified, and then what was going to happen? We couldn't just walk away. Now we're past that stage. And I have to say, every once in a while there's a part of me that sometimes doesn't want to go any more, because it's hard.

There are some other developments that I can't speak about because they're very early. But there's some quite high-level interest in Shadow Work there. We seem to be hitting it at a completely different level. The doorways that open there would never open here, just not at all in the same way, and I don't know why that is.

AB: It must be so hard to keep the energy in the same spot while you do all the translating back and forth.

John: It does require a very particular focus, but I've been quite used to it. Within Europe as a whole, separate from Russia, I've done quite a lot of training work when there is continuous translation in French or German. I suppose we're a bit more used to that than you are in the States because it's a necessity. However, it's not easy, and at times in Russia it's exhausting.

One facet, of course, is that not all translators are the same, so some are much better than others. In the early years we thought we were being translated well. Then we got an upgrade in translators, and we realised, Oh, this is what proper translation is like, when we knew that every word we were saying was working. Up to that point we had no idea what people heard. [Laughs.] They got the gist of it.

The same thing happened with the first BFT and the first manual that was translated. We discovered that part of the pain of doing the first BFT was that the translation in the manual was not up to scratch. So what we were trying to teach wasn't actually written on the page. [Laughs.]

AB: Oh, no!

John: Try that for size!

AB: Finding just the right words can be such a delicate thing, when someone is feeling shame, or I'm afraid they're going to feel shame. To find a translator who can be equally delicate must be very difficult.

John: We've always required that translators be people who've done some kind of psychological process work, but that hasn't always been the case. Most of them are lovely people - you would really enjoy them. They have great respect for the work and enjoy it.

Our wonderful Lia Kineevskaya has been the key in Russia. She's the one who's pulled us over year after year. She describes us as the two wild horses she's trying to drag across the ocean and the land. She says we're quite hard to get over. And it's true because we've got a full life going here. She's the one who's arranged the translators, and as we've got to know various people, we've said, "We'll have that one again but not that one." So there's a little pool of established translators who have seen the work. Some of them have even started training in Shadow Work; they're that interested. And some of them, after a day or so, just get triggered by the work and have a meltdown. Now, that is hard!

There are also often good English speakers in the group who are participants, and they know very quickly that what we're saying is not what they're being told in Russian, so they start to nitpick and correct the translators, which is hard on the translators' self-esteem and at times painful. It's very hard for the translators, particularly the junior ones, who think they're doing a good job. But the Russians will have no qualms about saying, "No, that's not right." So there is a Russian vampire bite, quite a sting, and that will come through at times like that. There has been a fair bit of that at different times.

AB: I've so enjoyed getting to know Maxim Imass and Marat Sharipov at the North American facilitators gathering.

John: They're very fine. They're both on the lighter end of the spectrum and much more broadly aware. Your average Russian man is a different kettle of fish. They're very reserved. [In a Russian accent] They rarely show their emotions.

In 2004, on our second or third visit to Russia, we started as one mixed group and split into two groups, men and women. We took Marie-Françoise and Phil Cowlshaw with us. A wonderful man; sadly, he's no longer doing Shadow Work.

For three days we did these all-men and all-women groups and then recombined at the end of it.

And in that session I vividly remember the difference between what your average Western European man would say — "I'm so grateful that I've reconnected with that part of myself I've forgotten about." Whereas the average response from a Russian man is, "I have never felt this way in my life before." That circuitry was just not working. That's still happening, I heard that kind of comment just two weeks ago.

With what they've had to suppress, and the collective survival, the men have been required to shut down emotionally. Except when they get drunk, when it all, of course, explodes out dangerously — and of course, that's a huge generalisation.

AB: I'm curious about your work in Germany. I wonder what kind of emotions Germany must be dealing with, even this many years after the World Wars.

John: In Russia the War is huge, too. We've had a lot of generational-type processes where parents, grandparents, great-grandparents stand in lines, that kind of work. And the story is, the War, the War, the War. The impact was colossal right across all of Europe.

In Germany there is this shame that sits there, and it's really uncomfortable for everybody. They don't want to be reminded of it. It comes up. I've heard several German men say, "Look, I'm not my father's generation, I'm not my grandparents' generation." They object to the unfortunate prejudices that get projected onto the German people.

I have to say that the first time I went there, I had some of that, and it soon got swept away. A lot of things happened to my family during the War; my mother was occupied by Germans in Norway. All the stuff we all grew up with, it was awful. They're still dealing with that but it's less and less. "Visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generations," comes to mind!

I find the German men very emotional, very emotionally literate, actually. More so than the British, as a generalisation. And they really love the work, too. They're very beautiful people.

AB: I read the statistic once that for every American who died in World War II, 100 to 120 Russians died. A good friend of mine lost a brother on Iwo Jima, so for every one like her, there would be 100 in Russia.

John: I don't know if that number includes the people whom Stalin put to death. I don't think it does, and he put to death more than the Germans did in killing the Jews. Every process we've ever done in Russia, in every family, there is the pain of a family member who just disappeared in the Stalin era. Never heard of again. So all that pain sits there.

Nowadays, the modern Russian world is just like New York, just like Paris, just like London. They've got bigger range and better quality products in their supermarkets than we have. It's all happening there, Moscow is becoming one of the most expensive cities in the world. And Putin is sitting on the oil gate valves for Europe and China.

So those are outer manifestations, and it's a bit mind-boggling, to be honest. We're going to do another AFT this year, Vicki Woodard is coming. Another wave is coming up through the system, and the same here in the UK. As you know, the Shadow Work world isn't going away, it keeps gently blossoming more and more.

And I again have to give credit to Cliff for his kind of Steady Eddie approach, which has been my approach as well: it's not about big numbers, it's about the quality of the work, and I think that's really paying off now.

AB: What are you most excited about right now? What is making your heart sing?

John: Outside of Shadow Work, it's planting my vegetables for the season. I like gardening.

AB: Another way in which you nurture growth.

John: Yes, and playing music. I've met a couple of musicians I really resonate with, and we're playing a lot right now. So that's driving and nourishing me.

From the Shadow Work point of view, it's a classic burden-and-blessing, it's both — the development of Shadow Work and the opportunities that are opening up here and there right now. But I don't know how we're going to manage. I'm very excited that more people are getting certified, that more Shadow Work sessions are happening, that the NYCFG will become the Euro CFG, and the Russian CFG will happen for the first time in September, and our three hubs will work together. I'm really excited about it, and it almost makes me tearful at times, as long as I don't try to work out and understand how we're going to get there, and beyond. [Laughs.]

Because I just don't understand it. These doors are opening up in Russia, and they're basically saying, “We want a whole lot more of this.” The challenge is to stay with the vision of that and at the same time somehow enable the fostering and nurturing of that, and empowering our other newly certified colleagues on this side of the pond to get up and sing their Shadow Work song. And some of them are beginning to do that, and to enjoy it and see what happens.

Nicola and I did a group session last weekend. It was a small group, and several people were highly capable and professional. We've probably done 100 sessions like that, and they loved it; they went away humming. I still love processing. We've done more weekends than anybody, actually, and I still enjoy it. I enjoy that moment when we stand up and open the carpet and ask, “What do you want to have happen?” And we focus in.

Because that's what I'm good at. I'm not the developer of the model like Cliff. That's his thing, and he's brilliant at that and doing the work and training. I enjoy training, and I really enjoy facilitating, and I know Nicola does as well. So that still chimes my bells and pulls my chain, so to speak. And to see their faces changing at the end of the group session. People's faces radically shift, and you know that that will impact them for quite a long time. It's not the answer to everything, but it will be part of a substantial change.

I suppose I'm more the wounded healer than anything else, I accept that about myself. I think that's my strength.

AB: Where was the wounded part of the healer that I was just hearing?

John: My roots. I know I've been as fucked-up a person as anybody, and found my way through that to a level of management of it, and I still want to bring that healing to other people. That's what I meant.

AB: I think you were a cabinet-maker at one time, is that right?

John: Cabinet-making is how I made money in our community days, and I still love doing all that exacting craftsmanship discipline. It's good therapy for me now; I love it when I can find the time. After some group work or time with a client, it's my favourite thing, to be out in the garden or do something with my hands, to refocus and rebuild myself. Mostly it's about upgrading and maintaining our own house. It's still a part of me, I've still got a workshop and my tools. Sometimes I have a hankering to go back to that, and I took three months off, November, December, January, and I thought I was going to do a lot of that then, but other things happened.

AB: There are so few couples in the Shadow Work world who make their living doing this work.

John: I suppose the only reason we can do it is because of the training. Doing small group sessions, you'd have to do a lot of that to make money at it, or you'd have to raise the bar financially quite a bit, which I think would limit the attendance.

It's a tricky one, unless one is willing to run large groups where people all pay a reasonable amount of money, and knowing that only a few will get to do centre work, and there are inherent problems in that because you have bystanders and people who want to work and can't. So either that, or we charge double or triple for group work, and then it would become exclusive. I don't know the answer to that one, I do think about that quite a bit.

AB: That's a tough one, and every pair of facilitators has to come up with their own answer.

John: It is difficult, and the reason we're able to do it is because of the training work; the week-long programs work well financially. Other people are going to have to run trainings in time, and that's when people will make a bit more money from it.

The coaching I can always foster and develop, I'm not looking for new clients, but I do enjoy it a lot. They turn up but I'm not doing any promotion in that area.

We've been lucky that we had a bit of background support, that in the early years we could give more than we got until it began to balance out. Unlike many people, we had a large extended community of people we could guinea pig on. [Laughs.] The remains of the Emissary community provided a very good ground base for us to get up and running, and the wider European contacts that came with that.

In Russia they seem to be getting on with it and making it work. It's not their sole income, most of them are therapists or doing coaching work, both therapeutically and corporately.

For most people, Shadow Work is still an additional item, and I don't know if that will ever change, but it may over time. I think it's still early days. What do you think?

AB: I think Jung wrote that the conscious part of us is a tiny island in a vast sea of the unconscious. I've come to see the community of people doing this work as a tiny island in a vast sea of people who aren't, and maybe that is an inherent parallel that will never change. But then I remember that 130 years ago no one was even aware of an unconscious, so things certainly do change and grow. In American culture there is much more awareness of parts of the self than there used to be. I think parts have become part of the language in some important ways.

John: I agree, I see the same things happening here. I think the New Warrior Network as it used to be called — the ManKind Project — has had quite a big influence in that way, and the spin-offs from that. Who knows, it's very interesting.

When I was 24 at the Centre for Alternative Technology I saw the first three-bladed windmill in Europe fire up. Now there are thousands all across Europe, part of a huge and expanding industry. Yet we were just a bunch of crazy idealists hidden away in the Welsh hills.

A few years later I was part of an intentional community, like a handful of such communities around the country that hosted groups for self-development and spiritual aspiration from a variety of approaches and disciplines. Now such retreat centres are everywhere and going to such a session has become part of the general consciousness. So what of Shadow Work and its relations in another decade or two? Shine on, all you wonderful Shadow Work facilitators!

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