

# Un-professional hug

Chiara Santin

This brief story was written in May 2017 during a writing retreat in the Lake District led by Gail Simon. I then asked Elaine Holliday, family therapist, artist and friend whether she would complement the story with a picture of a hug. I am enormously grateful to Elaine and would like to acknowledge her unique artistry as well as the depth of her thinking and friendship. After many profound conversations in between the writing and the painting this is the final outcome, which she kindly agreed to publish. I would also like to thank my client for her permission to share this story, which reflects something special in our therapeutic encounter.

I hugged my client. I am horrified even thinking about it... quickly falling into a dark place of shame. My English professional voice is louder and louder: "Not allowed".

My client (adoptive mother) says: "I'm missing my boys' hugs... They are grown up now... How could I let them go when they are still so vulnerable? No longer hugs with my partner either..."

**My embodied self:** "What a painful loss of connection. I feel it."

I tentatively whisper: "What would it be like if I gave you a hug?"

**Client:** "It's not the same"

**My outer voice:** "No it's not the same."

**My inner critical voice:** "How could it be the same? What are you offering? Not professional. Where are your boundaries? Damn I can't take it back I hope nobody has seen this. Keep it secret."

**My outer voice:** "What do you need?"

She replies: "Let them go and come back if they want to and care for them from a distance. Leave the door open".

Client looking at me, saying goodbye; I sense an invitation to get closer. We hugged each other... a long, gentle, tight hug.

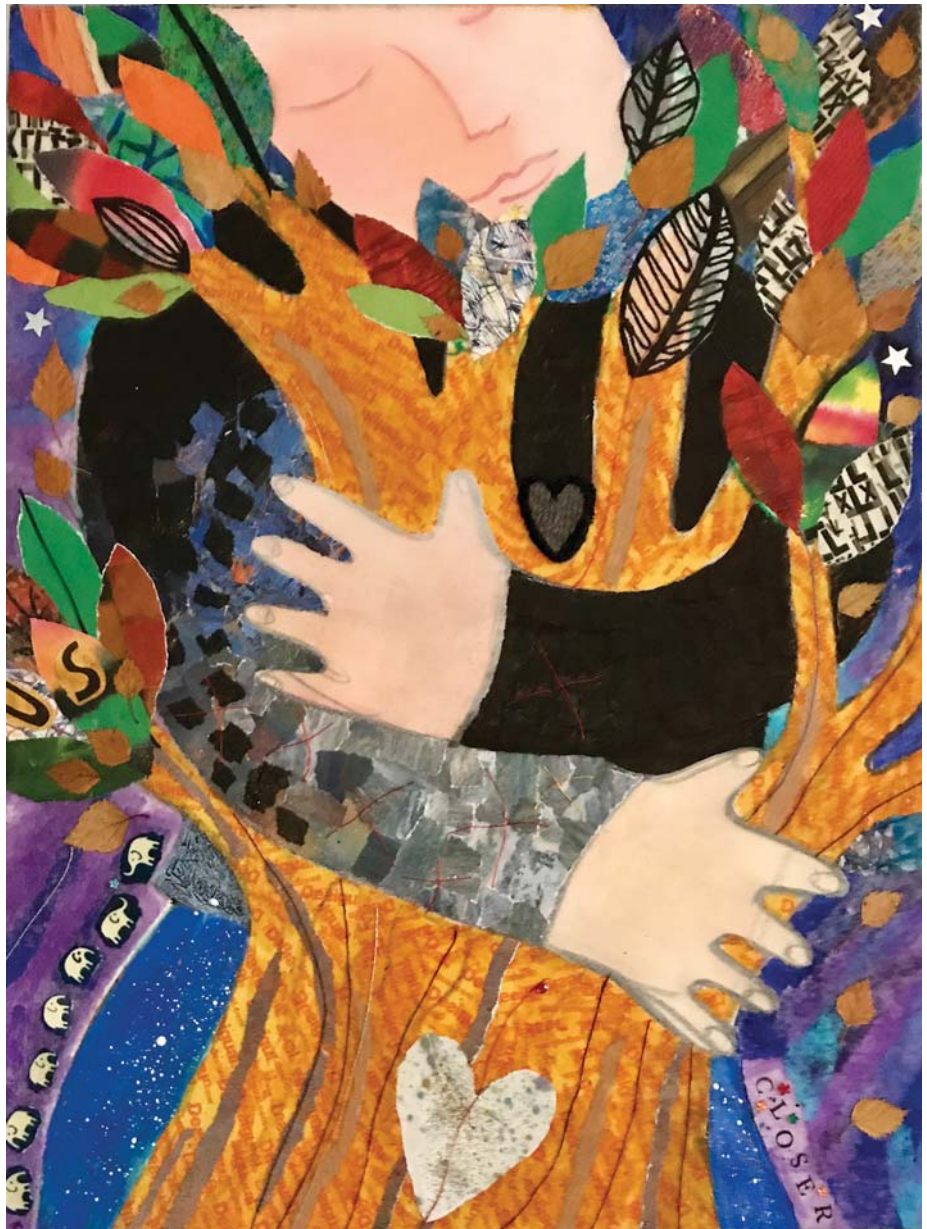
**My sinful voice (a bit like a religious confession):** "What are you doing? This is against the code of conduct. Who gave you permission? Did you check with your mother? With your husband? With her partner? With her boys?:"

**Client:** "My older boy hugged me. It was nice."

**My curious professional voice:** "How did it happen?"

**Client:** "I just knew when he wanted it and I asked for it."

**My shameful professional voice:** "A simple hug. Never heard of a therapeutic hug. Can it make a difference?"



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When words seem so inadequate to describe our human experiences, nature and art can be a way to express beyond language

A therapeutic hug?

Like the water of the lake reaching out to the shore



Like the gentle breeze caressing the leaves of a tree



Chiara is a systemic and family psychotherapist, trainer and supervisor. She is the founder and the director of Rainbow Family therapy Services Ltd, providing a range of therapeutic services to families in Brighton and Sussex. She worked in social care for ten years and she has developed expertise in working with adoptive children and families in the last five years, since becoming fully independent. Chiara is passionate about self-reflexivity and ethical practices in organisations. She loves writing and being creative. Her recent interest is the integration of family therapy and eco-systemic practices using nature as a therapeutic tool. She teaches for the Tavistock on the satellite foundation and intermediate course in Brighton and for Frontline, a social work training organisation and provides tailor-made training for ISP, a fostering agency. Email: chiara.santin@btinternet.com