

# The Calgary Participator



A Family Therapy Newsletter  
Volume 5 Number 2  
Winter 1995

## Soul-Making



*A Garden of Contemplation  
Dr. Sun Yat-Sen Classical Chinese Garden, Vancouver, B.C.*

*Photo by Joanne Schultz Hall*

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# Editorial

Carol Liske  
Editor

Welcome back dear reader! We hope that you experience a journey in *soul-making* from simply reading this issue. The Editorial Committee of *The Calgary Participator* wishes to express profound gratitude for the very special personal "soul-making" sharing from our current contributors—a sharing which has much possibility to transform, fundamentally. Ironically, it is this sort of sharing that mental health professionals often fail to facilitate or even tolerate. Thus, the very knowledge that life itself longs to discuss may be deemed by so-called educated people as trivial or even bogus. Yet, at times, scientific endeavor itself mocks even common sense with its own trivial explanations. We are often led, therefore, to many difficulties in the endeavor of clarifying our

experiences from being imbued within our psycho-socio-political ideologies and domains. Whether we choose to protest or submit to our circumstances depends upon our strength and the beliefs/dogmas/structures which we have chosen, mindfully or not, to adopt. For change to genuinely take place we depend upon the courageous ones, the outspoken ones—those with the courage to protest injustice and inequity.

The matter of having the courage to protest or to speak and act to improve the quality of justice and equity in our lives, appears intermittently throughout this issue of *The Participator*, and emerges as an apparent natural outcome of mindful "soul-making."

In my view, few people have lived their lives with the veracity and integrity

of purpose to speak her own truth, to seek more universal knowledge and to support the well-being of others, particularly women, as has Professor Winnie Tomm. Her peaceful passing, at home, on November 29, 1995, marked a time to open even more to the vitality of her "spirit" and her message of the need for vigorous collaboration towards constructive change.

Winnifred Amy May was born on May 12, 1944, to Dora Mudie and Wally May, in Medicine Hat, Alberta. Winnie grew up in the Cypress Hills of Southern Alberta, the third of four children: she had an older brother, Ed; an older sister, Connie; and a younger brother, Dave. As a young woman she married Karl Tomm, in 1963, and gave life to two daughters; Karma May, in 1967, and Jillian Nita, in

## In Appreciation of and Dedication to Winnie Tomm May 12, 1944 - November 29, 1995



*Sunset*

Photo by Joanne Schultz Hall

1969. Her first career was that of a mother and homemaker. Her second career was academic. Winnie studied nursing, sociology, anthropology, philosophy, and religious studies. She completed a B.A. in 1966, an M.A., in 1980, and a Ph.D., in 1984. She taught at both The University of Calgary and The University of Alberta (in Edmonton). Winnie's teaching and research gradually became increasingly focussed on Women's Studies. This shift was motivated by her passion to help women become more aware of themselves, their potential, and their power to become full and equal "shapers" of our culture. Her last position as Coordinator of Women's Studies, at The University of Alberta, gave her a wonderful opportunity to make some significant contributions towards this end. Unfortunately, the neurological complications of lung cancer brought her promising new career to a premature conclusion. She will continue to live in the memories of many students, colleagues, friends, and relatives as a woman of vitality and enthusiasm for life.

To experience more of Winnie's ideas, watch for her forthcoming book, "Bodied Mindfulness: Women's Spirits, Bodies and Places," published by Wilford Laurier University Press.

In the interview, "Soul-Making" (pp. 3-23), Winnie spoke about her challenges of being contextualized, through her career, within a large bureaucratic institutional structure, and of how the related constrictors altered aspects of her self-presentation and preservation. Winnie leaves us with very important messages; for the future of our selves, for the well-being of our loved ones, and for the outcomes in our society (world culture)-as-a-whole. Let us celebrate life! Let us keep our courage in making it possible for others to also have that experience! In doing so, we truly honor Winnie's, and others', very special sharing with us. To do less may mostly reveal our cynicism and lack of weakness of hope.

Jeff Imbach, Karine Rietjens and Alan Parry also, very eloquently and uniquely, contributed to the synergy exemplified in the "Soul-Making" interview. Although each one of these contributors spoke from novel and diverse perspectives, themes emerged about what important and even necessary considerations one might make and experience, in a well-prepared soul-making endeavor. This latter development of themes or common *avenues of perception*, although hoped for, was relatively unexpected—and was, perhaps in some cases, surprising.

Alan Parry helped out in more ways than one. Thus, he wrote, *Do Families Have Souls?* (pp. 26-27) and *No Expectations: The Soul of Running* (pp. 64-68). The titles invite the reader, appro-

priately.

Joanne Schultz Hall, in writing, *A Place for Spirituality in Family Therapy* (pp. 40-42), offers ideas she has gathered, from a number of people and families, about how to discern and to therapeutically emphasize *core spiritual beliefs*, sufficiently, to enable enduring healing. Joanne also uses Karl Tomm's (1991) concepts of interpersonal patterns (Pathologizing Interpersonal Patterns [PIPS] and Healing Interpersonal Patterns [HIPS]) to clarify her family therapy work.

Three other articles particularly address ethical issues and the conduct of family therapy. Monique Jongerius-Joras, from Holland, discusses in, *Empowerment of the Woman within the System* (pp.30-35), how a recognition and utilization of important knowledges about the traditional and postmodern *roles* women may enact, in families, can be engendered through a family therapy process. Monique leads the reader "to see" that such awareness can result in a greater range of choice, and thereby opportunity, in family-member decision-making. Jon Amundson challenges his readers to consider his response, *Standards, Multiple Relationships and the Job of Therapy and Discipline* (pp. 336-39), to Kathleen Stacey's and Karl Tomm's articles which were published in the last issue of *The Participator* ("Duality: Salient Issue or Red Herring?" and "Commentary on 'Salient issue or Red herring'"—respectively). Colin J. Sanders challenges us to a, "Narrative Imagination in Evoking a Language of Mind" (pp. 44-49), particularly with respect to situating words such as, "psychology," "psychopathology," "psychotherapist," and "therapy"—within an historical context. Through encouraging such reflection, Colin brings to mind the tremendous transitions that the field of mental health conceptualization and treatment has undergone, over time—with an emphasis on the attention given to the respect for and the preservation of human strength and dignity.

Donna Hamer through writing, "Questions of Self - Give it to Within" (p. 29), addresses her own struggles and resolutions in relation to an experience we all must cope with—"self doubt." Donna's daughter, Allanah Marie Barbara Hamer, relates her own deliberations with "inner peers" as she comes to conclusions about what some of her responsibilities to her family are in her poem, "Some Friends" (p. 28). Mary Razzo, in declaring her "I Am" (p. 43) statement, clearly affirms her strengths, her challenges and her courage. In doing so, Mary models for us a very useful way to recognize and integrate our many "selves"—to see our selves as a group of parts which we must somehow fit together to keep going. Similarly, Mary Ann

Fraser, a survivor of breast cancer, speaks to, "Feeding the Soul" (pp. 50-52), and she offers us with a zest for living, "Fifty Ways to Feed and Nurture Your Soul."

Finally, Vincenzo F. Di Nichola shares a most personal experience in being raised without meeting his father, by his mother and his maternal grandmother—and then, after turning forty, of the meeting and getting to know his father and step-family who have lived at least a continent away from Vincenzo, all of Vincenzo's life. Vincenzo reveals his innermost experience as he takes the steps to become familiar with his father in his written story, "Strangers No More: A Family Therapist Meets His Father" (pp. 53-63).

In some ways, this issue of *The Participator* is an experiment. It would be important and interesting if you, the reader, would indicate to the Editorial Committee, the influence on your thinking and feeling that reading this issue may have. Our hope is, that you will find some way of living more mindfully your "Soul-Making" journey. May you make the best of choices!

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# SOUL-MAKING

A Dialogue with Winnie Tomm, Jeff Imbach, Karine Rietjens, and Alan Parry  
January 24, 1995

Moderator: Carol Liske

**Carol:** I would appreciate it if you each introduced yourself.

**Jeff:** I'm Jeff Imbach and I come from a family of seven children, one girl and six boys. I have two daughters. Its great! One daughter is married, and the other daughter is in university, taking saxophone performance. My life has been characterized by a lot of doubt, but awhile ago I ended up saying to somebody that even the doubt was passion [cf., "The love that informs the universe is a storm of longing in which there is constant passion to experience both the uniqueness of personhood and the joy of union. The tension between these two simultaneous realities gives to love its energy and its mystery. It is an unfathomable craving to consume and to be consumed, to stand alone and to be owned." (Imbach, 1992)]. I'm part of a small church and I pastor half-time, if the word pastor is appropriate in that situation. I offer "spiritual accompaniment" and do courses on the side. I like fly-fishing.

**Carol:** I want to add that Jeff's beautiful *soul-searching* book is entitled, "The Recovery of Love: Christian Mysticism and the Addictive Society" (1992), and seemed to me a lot about passion.

Winnie Tomm, Ph.D.  
Jeff Imbach, M.Div.  
Karine Rietjens, M.S.W.  
Alan Parry, Ph.D.  
Carol Liske, Ph.D.

**Winnie:** I'm Winnie Tomm and I know who I am, but where I am . . . I feel like I went out beyond the limits of what I knew as *myself* before I had the lung cancer and then the brain cancer. So, now I feel like I'm reconstructing myself and I think of *myself* as if I am in another life. In fact, I was in the car with Karl, our daughter Jill, and her husband James, at Christmas

uncertainty isn't living with uncertainty in the sense of not being centered. I feel I have a tremendous amount of centeredness that comes from the spiritual journey that I've done, and the spiritual guides that I've received. The *real* uncertainty is what I face now. You know what we always talk about, that everybody lives with uncertainty? I used to translate

*The love that informs the universe is a storm of longing in which there is constant passion to experience both the uniqueness of personhood and the joy of union. - Jeff*

time. Jill had a bad cold, and she was coughing. I was in the front seat and I turned around to the back seat and I started to say, "I remember..." but I didn't say it. I remember in my last life I used to have colds and coughs. I never actually thought of that before, but this time that thought was just there. Then, I thought, "Whoa, I'd better not start saying that or people will wonder." But, I feel like my journey here on this level is one that nearly ended. Now, it's not clear where I'm going but I feel like its going to take awhile to figure out. I feel basically good, but all the time very, very tenuous. That's what I'm living with, just constantly the business of living with uncertainty. I think at the moment, that sort of characterizes my life, or characterizes me, but the living with

Tibetan Buddhist texts and there they are talking all the time about living with uncertainty. Now, I feel like it is my time, this is it for me.

**Alan:** There is that song by the rock group "U2," and the last words of the song are, "Uncertainty can be a guiding light."

**Winnie:** Yes, as you know that is exactly it. I mean I haven't heard the song but I feel like right now instead of fighting cancer, I am *listening* to cancer. It is like listening to how I am feeling all the time. When I overdo it, I get real sick and have to lie down. That's it. The last few days I have been real sick, but now I am starting to get better again and so I feel like *uncertainty can be a real guiding light*.

**Karine:** My name is Karine Rietjens and as you can hear from my Irish accent,

I come from the Netherlands. I immigrated here in 1963 and I still call it one of my better choices in life to come here. You mentioned feeling tenuous and uncertain. Your words, in that regard, reflect my experience as well. I am closer now to growing old and thinking about retirement. I always felt the need in my life to feel more certain and to know what I was going to do. Now, I am getting at this "dignified age" and I am feeling more and more comfortable about not knowing and befriending not knowing—being open for what life has to offer. Is that enough of an introduction? I am the youngest of six children. Maybe coming to Canada was, for me, escaping seven parents! Regardless, I still have a very good relationship with the people in my family, three sisters, who are still alive. My educational background was in social work. I am an active member of the Catholic church.

**Alan:** I am Alan Parry and I am a native Calgarian. I'm from a *list* of two children. I remember in my twenties, I read an autobiographical statement by Paul Tillich called, *On The Boundary*, and I thought I really related to that. It typified my life of being in a consecutive series of boundary situations and learning to enjoy being on the boundary and not having to find some place to land and stay put. I have three adult children that I am very happy with and proud of; and four stepchildren that I am equally happy with and proud of. I've been married twice to

which I believe] doesn't thrive so well amidst certainty and control.

**Carol:** Well, I am Carol Liske and I am the person who "cooked up" the idea of having this discussion. I would also like to give Alan credit as he inspired this idea when he gave me his article

go. Is that okay? When we are talking about soul-making it seems to me that it would be really important to make some sense of what we are thinking about or what we are conceiving of when we talk about *soul*. To start with I like Eckhart's statement, *ground of*

**W**hat struck me was the thought  
of ... the "soil of being." - Alan

**A**"compost heap." - Winnie

(published in this issue) entitled with the question, "Do Families Have Souls?"

**Alan:** I wouldn't call it an article, it was just a series of reflections made one day last summer.

**Carol:** Once I began to think about what might eventually be created within the family therapy context from a consideration of "soul-making," I decided to orient the next *Participant* in that direction. I think that somehow I am just getting closer to a passionate quest I've been on since I was just a little girl and took myself off, all by myself at seven years of age, to Sunday School. Later on, I was doing Yoga in my early teens. Over my adult life, I have continued my spiritual quest to great lengths and depths. Even with the experience of considerable worldly weights, I keep feeling

*our being*. What comes to mind when you consider soul?

### What is Soul?

**Alan:** I look upon soul, or experience soul more as a perspective or an attitude, a way of looking at the world, rather than as an entity, unless in the ancient Hebrew sense of *soul being the whole person*. By that I mean *the whole person with soul as being more*. Meister Eckhart's consideration of *ground of being*, the *territory of soul*, was elaborated by Paul Tillich in the twentieth century. What struck me about that was the thought of the *soul of being*, the *soil of being*, the earth, the dark part of ourselves out of which everything else grows and takes form.

**Winnie:** *A compost heap.*

**Alan:** Yes. That is really good. It implies that it comes from all over the place and takes it away from the idea of being just somehow me.

**Winnie:** Right.

**Karine:** I think for me, I cannot discuss *Soul* in any other way than to bring it into contact with my beliefs, my religious beliefs and experience. I see in a sense that my Soul would be, that part in me that wouldn't die, what is destined and called to communion with God. When I look at this word *soul* in this kind of context, then I think more that it is created by God rather than it is kind of caught or originated in me. I see that in me it will

**I**also think about the Hebrew  
concept of "heart" being the source  
of intellect, emotion and will. - Jeff

two wonderful women. Elke is here observing today and she brings joy to my life. Lately, I have been very interested in chaos and complexity theory, particularly the concept of *life on the edge of chaos*, and so I am really looking forward to this discussion [on *soul-making*, a situation

somehow that whatever I am trying to forge within myself burns very brightly and keeps reaching toward an intuitive something, some integration that seems holistic, powerful and meaningful. This interview may be simply another saga in the journey of a seeker but it seems worthwhile, so here we

last. I don't know what that is going to be like and maybe that is the uncertainty—we don't know what that is going to be. I cannot think about Soul without mentioning our Creator or God in the same context.

**Jeff:** I like the metaphors of *the soil* and *the compost heap*. I would also like to include *seeds* although I don't know how that the seeds are formed that grow in the soil. I guess that there would be some essence or something there. Thomas Merton's connotation of true self helps me a little bit to clarify what I mean by *soul*. I also think about my *essential being*, and

more the Hebrew concept of heart being the source of intellect, emotion and will. I like that and I sense that soul has something to do with *out of which all of these things flow*. I don't think soul is an entity, but I think it has something to do with *connection*. For me, it has something to do with connection between my outer world and the whole of the universe that I touch, at the heart and at the source of who I am.

**Carol:** Are you saying that soul is like a reflexive connection with the *in* and *out* of yourself?

**Jeff:** From myself outward into the world. Therefore, my soul can be influenced, hurt, nurtured by my experience in the world and it connects inward to the divine, to the universe, to the *All*. Maybe soul can be compared to an hour-glass figure, although I don't like the rigidity of that opening in one direction and at the same time, opening into the other direction. For me, the Eastern Orthodox definition of prayer descending with the mind into the heart and there to stand before God, touches me. I bring all of who I am into that centre.

**Carol:** Are you saying that you have to pass all of your experience into the heart for it to become soul?

**Jeff:** Or that it all originates there and

again the reflex back and forth with the outer world. Yes, we can live out of our souls and our life touches our soul, maybe even desouls us at times. I think connection has some important



*Gentle Beauty Offering Soulful Grace.*

*Photo by Mary Ann Fraser*

meaning for me, and that it's not just a *seat belt* of security.

**Karine:** I would identify with all of what you are saying. You put some beautiful words to your thoughts so I can relate to that.

**Winnie:** I want to say something. I don't actually think of soul as a compost heap. That metaphor came to mind. There is something in that idea that suggests a very fertile outcome. That makes sense to me. I think more of soul in terms of the *vital energy*. That connects with how I see all of reality

Then, there has to be some work in terms of regenerating energy, reorganizing it, getting it back so that I am not losing more continuously from the soul through the sockets. And so, the

soul to me is like the central energy focus or station or whatever it is that energizes the heart or the mind or interpersonal relations or anything. Energy energizes the individual. Without a soul, a person doesn't have much energy, and the more that they lose their soul, or parts of their souls along the way, the more de-energized they are and

the less they can connect with themselves or with anyone else. I think of the soul as energy, and as such, the vitalizer of life. Within an individual it becomes a kind of organizing energy. It allows the person to live with that energy, even in the face of drastic soul loss, and to come out from it as well. Soul [yields] a place where one can go into from other people. I think that it is never just self-sustaining like it *is* always. It dies, it atrophies! If it tries to be all for anybody else then it also dies. It doesn't have a place, so

**I think more of soul in terms of "vital energy." That connects with how I see all of reality. - Winnie**

—in terms of energy. I am energy with certain sockets or energy receptors, and for me soul is the vital energy that comes out or into those receptors.

When I have had a traumatic experience, then there is real *soul loss*,

that it has to be with the subjectivity and the inter-subjectivity the two poles of its own experience.

**Alan:** I see in that regard, that it is the capacity for the spirit to really experience the world, to experience others, Out of that capacity to experience the

events of our lives, is created the means by which we connect with others. If we can be in touch with our own pain, our own suffering, our own depth of experience, then that allows us to reach out and connect with others.

**Winnie:** I think it is a two-way thing. I don't think we have to connect with our own pain and that then we can reach out and we can connect. In my own experiences, I find it is when I am within a context of real support and somebody else paying attention that I can really get into my own pain and then get out of it. And so, it is like embracing it before you can leave it. You don't ever leave it. But, if we can get out of stuff by *being* completely in it, I find for me that actually only works in relationship. I don't feel that works when I'm on my own.

**Alan:** That is probably true. Just by oneself, one does not even know what to call one's experience.

**Winnie:** No, you don't know what to do. You don't have a perspective or anything. No, I think that paying attention to the soul is one way of paying attention to inter-relationality because I don't think we know about it otherwise.

**Jeff:** Yes, you have raised the communal question around soul which I think has to be asked. I mean, are we individual units of meaning or are our relationships part of our central beings? I think you are naming it. I think when I am talking about the soul as that way of connecting outside of myself inter- relationally with all things it touches *the all* inside of me. When I am supported in the place of pain [my way of connecting] gets touched.

**Karine:** Yes, I would say that when I see the relation to *the beyond* which I cannot visualize, I can only do that in connection with humanity, with anybody, especially with the people in my immediate surroundings.

**Jeff:** It seems [that through the connec-

tion to humanity we are] touched deeply. I think we do have individual journeys but there seems to be something in Eckhart's own sense of interplay between breaking through into God and being with the world—the person going both directions. They are both relational kinds of experiences.

**Carol:** It seems that what you are saying is that there is a quest to go beyond restrictions such as pain, the body, or being isolated. We seem to be talking about some ideas of where soul is located or how it is expressed either through or between individuals.

**Alan:** I just thought of the idea of soil being a nice play on the word *soul*. That is the domain of experience that precedes the notions of *good* and *bad*. We seem to have the idea that we need to get rid of bad experiences and

right path, then what am I doing having an illness, what is wrong?" I can't acknowledge that in myself so I try to shut out that noise rather than listening to the peculiar kinds of messages that soul delivers to me in its imaginal form.

**Carol:** Are you saying that soul is the part of you that can accept or acknowledge the totality of experience? It's the part that doesn't need to compartmentalize.

**Alan:** It doesn't need to compartmentalize, other than when compartmentalizing is something that we do because it is prudent to do so, to manage in the world. It is not a function of soul. Soul-making is almost the antithesis of that. It is our capacity to experience ourselves and the world without judgment, without categorization.

**Karine:** I am not sure of how I would respond to what you are saying. I think if I would let my soul experience all the *bad* experiences, then I would reflect on how I can benefit or grow in my relationship to God. So, whatever I would experience, if it is all the bad things, the diffi-

cult things, the good things, and the beautiful things, I would [let] my soul absorb these experiences, and then let God do his/her work. I would trust God to incorporate that in me, to make me ready in a sense to meet Him. There would be nothing in life that would not be going in that direction for me. Whatever happens would somehow be used or integrated in my search for God and the beyond.

**Carol:** It seems to me that, Alan and Karine, you are both talking about soul as something beyond the physical, observable world.

**Karine:** Well, I think we are *soul* and *body*. I certainly believe in the resurrection of my soul as what will give shape somehow again to my body. Soul is the only thing for me to give a word to something that you may not be able to give a word to. It is what

## *Paying attention to the soul is one way of paying attention to inter-relationality. - Winnie*

not even acknowledge that we have them. In order to experience ourselves as a whole embodied being, we need to let even what could be conventionally called bad experiences or painful experiences (i.e., depressions or illnesses) speak to us, as you were saying Winnie, as messengers. That is how I think imagination, in one sense, is synonymous with soul. That it is the working of that image-making quality that we have that conveys the message that we are alive. If we don't listen to soul then we experience all these messages as noisy distractions. We try to silence them, deny them and push them away. We often do this even in the name of spirituality, thinking, "No, no, I am a good person, I wouldn't think things like that. I wouldn't do things like that." or "Gee, if I am a healthy person and on the

stays, what remains.

**Jeff:** I think in the Christian tradition, you have underplayed the reality of the resurrection in your statement. I believe in it, because I think that is really crucial to Christian reality of who a human being is, that we are embodied, a source of life. I like the idea of energy. I probably would use the image of *life-energy* or something electrical—that makes sense.

**Karine:** God as life-giving

**Jeff:** Yes, I think that helps. There is something indomitable about soul that rings true for me. I feel there is an indomitable source of *life* in me. I can meet life's experiences. I can embrace them. I don't have to just throw them out or be afraid of them because I can discern at some level whether they nurture life, and whether they hurt life. I think there needs to be some discernment that my life is bigger than these experiences.

**Winnie:** I had an experience where I think I was as close as I have ever come to just plain *soul loss*. I was living without soul as far as I could and still be living. It was when I was in the Intensive Care Unit. I had tubes down and around me everywhere, I was tied to the bed so I couldn't move and I couldn't do anything, except gag. I was by myself because they wouldn't let Karl be in the room overnight. There were all these people like me lined up all around the walls on these beds, in this intensive care unit, and the nurses were in the station surrounded by glass or plastic. We had our monitoring things above us. I didn't have any sense of being an individuated character at all, just none. That was the first time like a log, or just something

there. I had no capacity for reflection, nothing. All I did the whole night was watch the clock, and I didn't even know why. I didn't have any sense of trying to stay alive. I just watched the clock because it was there. And that was it! Now, I think that was the farthest out I've been where I have had

*It sounds like that experience was worsened by a "soul-less" context.*  
- Alan

no sense of any sort of life energy pushing me on. I must have, or I wouldn't have stayed alive but I wasn't able to think about it, at that time. But, once I got out of there and got out of the next step and back into my room, I could actually think that I had been *shaken to the quick*. That sense lasted for about three months after that experience. I just shook, inside of me. I just shook and shook. After that, every night the thought of being alone was just too much. Today is

worsened by a *soulless context* . . .

**Winnie:** Yes, that's for sure. The nurses seemed to have no interest. I don't know whether they had interest or not. Anyway, they didn't ever come and look at me or touch me or do anything personal. They would come check the monitor and do things like that but they would not look at me. I think they thought that if they ever looked at some of these people along the walls, they would have to relate to them. I don't know.

**Alan:** I am reading a novel right now, a wonderful novel about two rather strange people, a doctor and a physiotherapist, in a pediatric ward of desperately afflicted children. The one who is overseeing is going over the young doctor's surgery on one of the girls, a 12-year-old girl who has something terribly wrong with her leg. At one point, the doctor says, "I don't dare look at her face because if I look at her face then I can't do this cutting."

**Winnie:** I think that is the way it is. People can't relate with really sick people.

**Alan:** It also raises the issue that one can try to do good things, but get caught up and do them in a very soulless way. If you are doing good things by merely mechanistic means or purely controlling

kinds of means, you would be doing them in a very soulless way.

**Winnie:** It is a very hurtful thing to lay in the hospital and have somebody come and change your bag or do your



*Alan Parry in 'Soul Bliss.'*

*Photo by Elke Parry*

actually the first day, because Karl is going to Texas today, I will be alone now for these three or four nights. Now, I feel like it's okay, to try it.

**Alan:** It sounds like that experience was



suction machine; somebody who whips in, does that, then whips out and never says, "Hello." never says anything. I think that is a terrible situation that we now have in some of our hospitals.

**Carol:** You experienced the very antithesis to life at the most crucial moment.

tification. As I said before, I felt very much like a log, a *no thing*.

**Carol:** Are you saying that having some way of conceiving oneself in a unique identity is crucial for you in your idea of soul?

**Winnie:** Yes.

**Alan:** A relationship with yourself.

ence, hopefully, that will reflect in me. So, my [anticipation] is very different to what you are saying.

**Carol:** It sounds like you, Karine and Jeff are talking about soul as that which raises or lifts ones sense of life or living.

**Karine:** Yes, perhaps . . .



*Living Soul.*

*Stock Photo*

I was wondering if there was any part of you that had compassion for yourself in that moment?

**Winnie:** I think there must have been compassion for myself because without that I don't think I would have continued to live, I think I would have *pulled the plug* somewhere along the line. There must have been something happening where I felt like I was embracing myself somewhere or maybe it was just a plain stubbornness. I don't know, because I certainly was not able to think about it at that time.

**Carol:** I was wondering in what respect you felt you were soulless.

**Winnie:** That is a good question. I just felt like that. It felt to me like there wasn't anything that I could think of myself as, like there was no *self* iden-

**Winnie:** Yes, a relationship with yourself.

**Carol:** Karine, the idea of endurance and reaching beyond, appears to be strongly in your idea of soul.

**Karine:** Yes, although I have never been in that terrible situation that Winnie is talking about so I cannot relate to that. I have been with many dying people but I haven't . . .

**Winnie:** Been the dying one.

**Karine:** Yes, that is very different, the experience of very sick people. I don't know how to relate to that at all. I experience soul so differently. Maybe the best way to say it is that I feel an envy almost, when I see people who are close to death. I will be in that situation, maybe a "hundred years" from now! I believe that, then, I'll meet God. In a sense, it will be His pres-

**Carol:** I wonder if, Alan, you were suggesting that if you could have compassion for yourself, then the soul might be thought of as *the heart underneath life*. From this perspective, a person would not look to being raised up, but may instead closely attune to all that occurs, in order to respond in the best way possible to support life.

**Alan:** I think the way that I was stating it was that I do understand soul as an undergirding, foundational dimension, out of which spirit grows. I think spirit is more the soaring, or going forth, or reaching-up dimension. Further, I believe that you get to the spirit through the experience of *soulfulness*. We need to come to terms with ourselves and the world in a fully honest way. This is what I meant earlier

when I talked about the need to look and acknowledge the so-called bad. I'm not talking about this in the sense of a 19th century decadent who had to experience everything to the point of even committing a crime. I do mean that one needs to acknowledge that oneself is quite capable of doing that kind of thing: to have no illusions about oneself, to face the dark depths so one can find their source, the energizing source of regeneration out of which grows the spirit.

**Jeff:** Illusions is a good word—letting go of illusions.

**Carol:** Are you saying, Alan, that you don't even need energy for soul?

**Alan:** No, I mean soul is where energy comes from.

**Carol:** You would have to be alive.

**Alan:** We would be in the enlivened domain, the energized domain. It really calls for us to solicit as much of ourselves, as much of the whole person, the embodied nature of our existence, the deep, rich capacities for self-organization that lie beyond conscious awareness, as we are able. I guess that is the *[soil]* we are trying to tap into. There is so much of ourselves that we are not aware of and that is the domain of soul. We can trust that even though some weird things are happening to us, deep down there is something quite amazing going on down beyond the level where we can direct the proceedings.

**Carol:** Now, it seems, Alan, that you have come closer again to Karine and Jeff, in your view of soul.

**Alan:** I don't think it is directed from outside, I think it is directed from within. It is intrinsic to life.

**Karine:** I believe that God lives within me.

**Jeff:** I don't accept a spatial [view of soul] as up or down or in or out.

**Carol:** You are all suggesting some common ground about soul in talking about it as an energizing place.

**Karine:** I see God as *ultimate energy*. I don't think I have energy. I find it

hard to put my ideas in words. The energy comes from *the beyond*, it is not me. Well, it is me, but it doesn't come from me, I don't create it. I can be more or less open to it. I can respond to it. It will guide me to respond to my life situation. How I respond is what is important.

**Jeff:** Yes, I would agree because, in my view, we are not self-contained energy sources. I have a sense of connection to the Infinite or to *the Gaia*. I have the sense that there is more to me, there is more than me at the inside of me, that somewhere I touch the rest of the world, I touch the Trinity. My life flow is part of that

## *I was doing a lot of things and not paying attention to how I really was feeling. - Winnie*

life flow. It is not external to me or somehow secondary to me, it is authentic to me but at the same time it is more than me.

**Karine:** I fully identify with what you are saying. Yes.

**Carol:** I wonder how soul has changed, in your view, from your past life to now.

### Hearing the *Voice of Soul*

**Winnie:** What I think, and I am kind of confused about this, is that it is not a matter of past life and this life. For me, it is not so much that, as it is a way of knowing myself differently and I think it has now more to do with paying attention to some things that I already knew then but wasn't living with in a good way. That has to do with living more with my own compassion for myself. Although I had compassion for myself, in the past, I

think I had always been very egoistic in the sense that I was doing a lot of things and not paying attention to how I really was feeling. I think that characterized more of my past lifestyle. Whereas now, almost all of my energy goes into experiencing myself, which is a different kind of orientation. Whatever else I am doing, well that is what else I am doing. The things I am doing first are my Tai Chi and all my health things. That takes up most of my time. I also feel very calm about all this. I think it might be because I don't have to work and there is that less stress, I think that could be accounted for by not work-

ing [to excess]. The big test will be when I go back to the university and start teaching again. I'll see whether in the middle of all this I can actually maintain some health. I don't know but I do feel like now I have got a different sense of what is important and what is important is how I am feeling and that was never so important

before. I would always do what I had to do and never mind how I was feeling. When I started coughing up blood, for example, last March, I thought, "Oh well, now I am coughing up blood. I've got to get that thing fixed." There wasn't any sense of, "What is the matter with me anyway?" Now, when the slightest thing happens, I think, "Oh, I am going to lie down." And, I lie down until whatever has been bothering me just goes away. Then, I get up and I am feeling better again. So, I think that my orientation now is more geared towards living out the kinds of spirituality [I have been wanting to practice]. But, I am living it out more directly in the sense that I am not so conflicted as to how it is going to seem to my academic work, and all of that. I just do it. What comes of it comes of it. At the moment, how I am managing the academic work isn't my first priority. I think that is a difference, so as far as

the soul part of it is concerned. I think my soul has received such a shaking up that now it is constantly speaking to me. If somebody is getting in the way, well they have to go away because that is just too bad.

**Carol:** Seeing the dangers of your own *soul loss* has led to more honor for yourself.

**Winnie:** Yes, for sure! Without any doubt about that. But, the honor for myself now is basically one of feeling really like *I am*. I remember I was sitting down this morning before I was coming in here and I was reading Sandra Ingerman's book on *soul retrieval*. She had this little exercise about how to know whether you are lying or being honest to yourself. And so, there was this exercise where you sit down, take four breaths and then you say, "I love ..." Then, you say whatever it is you love and you feel how you love. After doing that, you go and do something else for a few minutes. Then, you come back and do the same thing only you say, "I hate ..." (the same thing), and you see how your body is. You see what kind of compatible or incompatible reaction you have in your body to what you are saying. I found that really interesting to do. But now, I am finding it really difficult. Before, I could easily say that I love this or I love that. But now, I can't. One thing I am experiencing now, really passionately, are the sunrises and the sunsets. I always try to go for a walk just before the sun sets because of all the colors in the sky and all of that. Now, these things I really enjoy, I passionately enjoy. Yet, more importantly, now, I think I

am getting a different idea about love. I think that is changing. That is interesting because it is not that I am really excited about this or that. Instead, it is so inside me that I don't say I love something. It is just that I am absorbed into it. So there is a different way of being that I am experiencing now. Although I am not really sure about how it is developing or what it actually is. That's just something I noticed when I went to do the soul-retrieval exercise. It has become really hard now to say, "I



*I Would See My "Soul" as Destined and Called to Communion with God. - Karine Rietjens*

love ..." There is a difference of how I am feeling with myself. It is not just the soul, it is love too which I think the [whole of] soul is really about, the *loving energy*, it is really about that.

**Carol:** Are you feeling that you can't talk about soul without talking about love?

**Winnie:** No, I don't feel so much like that. I feel like soul is the life energy and without soul I wouldn't be able to

*I am not "making my soul," my soul is simply a part of me, and I try to respond. - Karine*

experience the sunrises, the sunsets, the moments that I have listened to music, or whatever I am doing. I don't have to talk about love. There is a difference sense of love now and I am not quite sure what that is all about. I mean even with the people who are really close to me, I have a different sense of how I am with them. I don't know if I went away and came back, I am not quite sure what happened. I don't know quite what to make of it.

**Carol:** You have suggested a very strong transformation of the way you knew the world and how you know it now.

**Alan:** It sounds as if you are really a participant in the world now, and that before you were trying to make the world come to you. Egocentricity is all about trying to make the world come to us. We are the centre of the world all right, but we are not really a participant as such in the ongoing drama.

**Winnie:** Right! We are not engaged.

**Karine:** You mentioned your former times, in your first life. You saw the sun coming up and going down with your eyes but maybe now you see it more with your soul or your heart. I would add to that, for me then, what significance does this experience of the setting and the coming-up sun have? What does it mean to me that God lives in my life every morning and I can somehow rest in him every evening or that the sun comes up on the just and the unjust alike? Whatever would I experience of the sunrise? I think I went through [a similar transforming] experience but in a different way. Now, all that happens has a deeper meaning for me, and so I look at all "happenings" from a different perspective. So, perhaps there is

some similarity with your experience.

## What Does *Soul-Making* Call to Mind?

**Carol:** Given our talk about soul, what does soul-making call to mind, the idea of soul-making?

**Karine:** My first impression was, when I heard that word was, Are you kidding? I [cannot relate to that!] I thought, "I am not *making my soul*, my soul is simply part of me, and I try to respond."

**Alan:** James Hillman uses that expression a lot, and it comes from a letter that Keats wrote in the early 19th century when he said something to the effect that *soul-making* is what life is. For me, that has become almost the opposite of what you are saying, Karine, that in a sense we are not born with a soul, we are born to make a soul. I don't know about *the born to* part, but I imagine it that way. Here we are, here I am born. I am here to make a soul. It is quite possible to go through the whole span of life and not get it not to be about soul-making. I feel that with our propensity for controlling things and ordering the world believing that control and ordering is what it is all about that we have virtually created a soulless society where soul-making gets crowded out.

**Winnie:** There is another way of thinking about that. It is not either that you have a soul and you can't do anything about it—you just live in response to it, or you don't have a soul and you make it. Rather, if you think of soul as energy that is part of the life force you are born with, then you have got that but you have got to do something with it, if you are going to make yourself into something.

**Alan:** Yes, if you use the word indomitable, to describe that *life*

*drive*, which I think probably has massive implications for how we do therapy. I think the whole therapeutic enterprise in the 20th Century has been founded on the notion that life is very fragile, and that if you mistreat a person or say a cross word or lose it momentarily with a child, you have scarred them for life. I think that the evidence from the course of life on this planet is that life is indomitable. It's relentless. It's powerful. It's robust and kind of wild. The challenge is how to shape that life.

**Jeff:** I really like *soul-making* in that sense. My only caution with it in a technological and egocentric society is that somehow, that we [act as if we are ] in charge, and the soul is not. The soul is something to be done to. However, hearing how you explain the word I would agree [to a point], yet . . .

*If you think of soul as  
Energy ... then you have  
got to do something with  
it. - Winnie*

**Karine:** The word is somehow not [sufficient.]

**Jeff:** I think it is plain that we live in a technological society and in a society where we make things. I mean it is productive and in that sense . . .

**Alan:** You can get the latest books on soul-making.

**Jeff:** [On soul-making] as a personal destiny.

**Karine:** I don't make my soul, perhaps I can unmake it. [You can] *dull* your soul. I think maybe that when I am *unmaking it*, that it might be more my doing. If I am *making it*, it might be more God's doing.

**Winnie:** Ah, Karine.

**Jeff:** Yes, I would not make that distinction.

**Winnie:** No, then you don't give yourself any credit.

**Karine:** Yes, yes I do! Because, I am responding to what I think my destiny is. I am definitely responding, but I don't think it is the original power. I don't think I can own that.

**Carol:** It sounds in a way as if we are all talking about taking *blinders* off to life or to wisdom or to possibilities. It sounds like the *loss of ignorance*. Would you agree?

**Jeff:** I don't know. The loss of ignorance, that is interesting.

**Alan:** Very Buddhist.

**Jeff:** That's okay.

**Karine:** What I was thinking about when you mentioned that word is that I think I am trying to respond to the *truth*. If you see God as truth, the only Truth, then I am opening myself or taking the blinders off to see myself in the light of the Truth of God.

**Alan:** If part of *seeing* is *God is truth*, it also suggests you see yourself as quite a mixture.

**Karine:** Yes, that seems to be how God made us.

**Carol:** Do you see a soul-making journey that you could go more and more into?

**Karine:** Well, I am not sure how to put it in the correct theological text, but I think somehow we are called to unity with God. That is not my doing, it is God calling [me] to live towards the destiny of our creation.

**Carol:** So, soul-making for you, Karine is opening to God's calling, and moving toward it or moving in its direction.

**Alan:** You see, I wouldn't call that spiritual. I think in the whole Western tradition there has been confusion, since probably the second or third century, between soul and spirit. I think the church got freaked-out on the issue of spirit because it was explosive, a powerful wind, the wind of God. I think it was somewhere around the second century, when there was the great church father named Tertullian who was a wild, charismatic guy. He got involved in the Montanist sect which was real charismatic heretical sect. I think, that if one of the great church fathers becomes a heretic because he gets caught up too much in a charismatic thing, that [society]

may have [thought it best] to put the brakes on this thing and institutionalize the spirit. I think from that point on, *soul* and *spirit* got really mixed up in the Western tradition because we began to back away from ideas of inner power. We use the two [ideas] interchangeably as if they are the same thing, and I don't think they are.

**Karine:** Well, I think if you would have started talking about spirit, I would have given exactly the same answers. I don't use either word a lot.

**Winnie:** So, would you agree Karine, that this life is a *soul-making gymnasium*?

**Karine:** Soul-making gymnasium, hmm. Yes, I think that is nice. Yes, I like that.

**Winnie:** What do you feel about dying?

**Karine:** Well, in some ways we are dying every day, dying hopefully to selfishness, dying to what is not loving, dying to . . .

**Winnie:** Dying to this world?

**Karine:** Yes. I think it is a whole process.

**Winnie:** I was just thinking about, you planning to go to meet God. It would seem to me that this [life] is a preparation . . .

**Karine:** Yes, and that is a process too. I am meeting God here too as you are talking about all these things. I am enriching my soul, in your terms. I certainly sense something there that is beyond ourselves. I am starting to speak systems theory! I think life is

or thoughts. So, then, there will be the final happening of death. I think it will be very exciting.

**Jeff:** When do you think of it as soul-making, Winnie?

**Winnie:** A man I used to study with, John Hick, used to always talk about this life as a *soul-making gymnasium*. I wouldn't say it like that, you know.

## Would you agree Karine, that this life is a "soul-making gymnasium?" - Winnie

What he was meaning was we are always trying to overcome obstacles and sometimes we just trip and don't get over them. He had the same idea that this life is really a process of moving closer to God, and it is just full of obstacles. Now, that is not mine at all. I don't have that framework. I don't have the *God Framework* so that is not my idea of what we are doing—what I am doing.

**Carol:** Can you say more about your own idea of soul-making?

**Winnie:** For me, I wouldn't even say it like that to start with. It is not my phrase. I think the purpose of my life

to live with ourselves in relationship to others and the ecological system. When we are not doing that, we are not living with the intention with which we were born. I have nothing to prove that, but I base that on the Buddhist cosmology. Things just *are*. Everything in the world *is*. It is neither good nor bad. It is how we view

it. The *reality* or the metaphysics is what is behind the way things are. Reality has this internal force of integration and compatibility—of coming into being and going out of being continuously. We are part of all of that. We can live with that in a way that we can know ourselves, others and things around us, in a way that is conducive to maintaining a balanced life, a sense of integrity and relationship to others. Or, we don't have to. Why we don't do that is that we get so we don't even know how to live with ourselves from a very early age. And so, we have to have therapy. Once you actually live with integrative energy, and you live better when you are living with it (within yourself and among others), then to me that is *the soul-making project*. I think as we go through stages in the soul-making process, we move from a kind of nothing too much as far as knowing ourselves is concerned, to real egocentricity and power plays, then to a kind of knowing about how to live integratively.

**Carol:** A learning process.

**Winnie:** I think that is what *life* is, yes.

**Alan:** Kierkegaard used the expressions *first innocence* and *second innocence*. First innocence was the innocence of the child: and the second innocence is the innocence of a kind of realized spontaneity, a *Zen experience*—it is just there—and the child is just there too, but the child doesn't know he is

## Soul-making gymnasium, hmm. - Karine

being born, living and dying almost on a daily basis, being born to new ideas. You people talking and dialoguing together, I think that is a new birth. That means a new way of looking at things for me, and in that process maybe some other things are dying. Perhaps some of my opinions

is to live with my soul in a way that is "living with integrated energy." I don't believe that there is a thing called *bad energy*. I don't believe that here is God and then there is the Devil. That is not my cosmology. What I believe is that we are born with a tendency to live in relationship:

there

**Carol:** The *old-soul innocence*, then, is the innocence of knowing how you got there.

**Jeff:** Innocence after experience . . . the sounds of innocence, again. I would tend to think similarly, in a sense. I think I would be happier with the phrase *soul-nurturing* or *soul-releas-*

ing or *soul-emerging*, than *soul-making*.

elves. I like soul-making from feeling energy with it, from feeling a positive direction one can take to perhaps enter into this kind of mindful innocence that there is some place of comfort that can come into being from a simple state of awareness.

**Karine:** When you mention the word *energy*, in my way of thinking I

## Facing the World with Soul

**Carol:** Robert Sardello wrote a book called "Facing the World with Soul: The Reimagination of Modern Life," and I was captured by the frame of *facing the world with soul*. I don't know if we would have anything to add by using that frame. Does that change anything for you? How could that make a difference in our lives?

**Karine:** Again in my "translation" it would be facing the world with a view of our destiny and that "certainty" would make a tremendous difference in peoples' lives.

**Carol:** Destiny in the sense of an outcome?

**Karine:** A calling, a calling! What people believe may be what the whole purpose of their lives.

**Carol:** It sounds like the *magic flute*—the *sound of the divine*. You are drawn into something.

**Karine:** I want to [agree], but I don't think that is [my] first thought. I think that [is] how I see the whole "Why?" of creation.

**Carol:** What I meant is, is it some sort of attraction coming into your mind's eye of someplace to go either in the mind or spirit that leads you? You talked about uncertainty, in the beginning that would be a kind of certainty. And, I wondered . . .

**Karine:** Certainty or uncertainty?

**Carol:** If you had the idea of a *magic flute, the sound of the divine*; then, I

## Certainty of faith is beyond human capacity. - Karine

ing or *soul-emerging*, than *soul-making*.

**Alan:** *Soul-creating*.

**Jeff:** I nurture this life, this energy and I find ways for it to be released in the world well or to live well. In that sense it is soul-making.

**Alan:** I think the trick is, if you say soul-making does imply manipulating and controlling but that the only way it happens is through a receptive process. So, there isn't an active process, it is a receiving, a yielding, a surrendering, a suffering.

**Karine:** You talk about the maturing soul, the old soul. I think in a sense too that you have to reverse to become more a child-like soul. Again, you see the openness . . .

**Alan:** Yes, it is like an innocence. Oh yes, [being] open to our experience without splitting it up into good experience to cling onto and bad experience to be rejected or ignored or repressed.

**Winnie:** I think there are some young people who have got *old souls*. I don't think it is all just [the nature of our experience].

**Carol:** I enjoyed the term *soul-making*. There was something about that which is lively and energizing. I think it is the optimizing and potential optimism of attention. I think a lot of what we are talking about is attention. We can choose our attention. If we go into that very deeply we lose our-

would think of God as the only uncreated energy. So, in that sense, I like the word *energy* because I would see God as uncreated energy.

**Carol:** That is a nice term.

**Karine:** That is probably from a book by George Maloney, I think I got that from him. He would call God *uncreated energy* and I like that a lot.

**Carol:** Do you have anything more to add?

**Jeff:** I like the sense that there is some sense of intentionality and optimism that we can be a part of this [dialogue], that we are co-creators in this. I just don't like the technological implications in our society, but we don't have to necessarily live with that

I think Winnie's experience demonstrates what I would say it means to face the world with soul – with the loss of illusions.  
- Jeff

here.

**Alan:** Well, our society certainly isn't a soul-making society.

**Karine:** [It's about] the correct words, isn't it?

**Jeff:** It is an okay word, like a codicil.

was thinking about some place to go, as being implicit in the soul-making concept. But you, Karine, also spoke earlier about facing the world with uncertainty. Winnie you did as well. So, I wondered how you put the aspects of certainty and uncertainty

together.

**Karine:** In factual, everyday situations, there is always uncertainty. When you begin a day you don't know whether you will finish it so, that is uncertainty; you begin a year and you don't know if or how you will finish that year. But, I may be certain in faith, and that is a different certainty.

**Alan:** How can you be certain in faith? I mean the two words . . .

**Karine:** Contradict! That's right! [*Certain* and *faith* are] contradictory. The Christian belief is a faith of contradictions. Human certainty comes from a human context. Certainty of faith is beyond human capacity.

**Alan:** Well, not only that, I don't know why I keep coming back to Tillich, because I haven't read anything by Tillich in thirty years, but he would have always said that uncertainty is absolutely integral to faith—that faith has to have doubt otherwise it isn't faith, it's certainty.

**Karine:** I think that is fascinating, I like that. If you were certain, it wouldn't be faith.

**Jeff:** To me the word *faith* is a buzz word. I mean in a way it is jargony now because "soul" is in again. I mean, [take] Thomas Moore's books on "Care of the Soul," etc. I think Winnie's experience demonstrates what I would say it means to face the world with soul—the loss of illusions. I hear that transforms into an experience. When you were *like a log*, some or all of your ways of *being in the world* were gone—all you had was your essential self. It means facing the world out of [your] core. It means facing the world with authenticity or from [one's own] framework, I start out in the world knowing that God dearly loves me, and so I am right to stand here and to face the world with courage—that kind of thing. I think that's what *facing the world with soul* means. I face the world not out of my illusions or out of how I think the world ought to [to be] to me.

**Alan:** I am all I have.

**Jeff:** Yes, and I like what I have. Does that sort of ring with what you are thinking?

**Alan:** *Face your own soul* . . . it really

speaks [in] a way that is pretty fundamental to my notion of solace. What we talk about as soul is often used by black people in terms of *having soul*, soul-music, soul-food, etc. When relating to public figures, if they are listening to us we say, "They have got soul." If they are not listening to us, "They don't got soul!" What does that

ways— indomitable life that survives all losses. Soul has been one way of getting in touch with life at a very deep level. I don't think loss per se is a virtue, but it is one way [to learn to live].

**Alan:** If you try to create it, then it just becomes a matter of ego, and of course that has always been the temptation.

**Jeff:** But, the black spirituals are soul because [the blacks] lived out of their suffering.

**Karine:** It reminded me of one of my

meetings in Chicago, when I was there, and I attended one of the black meetings with Jessie Jackson. I think it was just after Luther King was murdered and these people were together, thousands of people, and I was one of the very few white people there. He was leading those people [to say], "I am black. I am black. I am beautiful. I am beautiful." And, the intensity of that soul or chorus, or whatever you want to say it was, was something I will never forget. To put it in relation to "soul," I think it was *in community* that each individual soul was strengthened. [It was] a powerful example of how we can be supported by one another.

**Alan:** When you were talking about the *desert fathers*, it reminded me that if ever there was a soulful book, it is Thomas Merton's collection of the stories of the great desert fathers, "The Wisdom of the Desert."

**Carol:** In translating some original desert fathers' works, Benedicta Ward, SLG, wrote the beautiful, "Sayings of the Desert Fathers." I read them all the time. There is something tremendously inspiring about what kind of *soul* the desert fathers lived with, even though they were austere. Similarly, the book you once gave me, Alan, by Clae Waltham, "Genius of the Absurd," offers very simple and practical wisdom (like, "put a stone in your mouth if you are having trouble with what you say to people," etc.). It resonates somewhere

## *It happens through a receptive process ... A yielding, a surrendering, a suffering. - Alan*

mean? Blues music is of course *music with soul*. What I think it means is, facing the world with a capacity to endure, to suffer, to experience the pain of the world as well as [the] joy. I mean we grew out of the tradition of people that knew an awful lot about sorrow and suffering but who, in the midst of that, discovered a lot about joy and about the essentials of what brings joy.

**Jeff:** I really like that. We lose everything and what we have left is soul and we live out of that. It could be a positive, it could be that I have such a transformative, incredible, ecstatic, wonderful experience of life that I live out *the soul* of that. Soul can come to me through wonder as well as [through] deprivation. I think deprivation does [add to soul]. I don't know whether it is just survival. I think the Zen concept of losing the illusions is important here. I think of the desert fathers and mothers. Did they have to do all this? What is the deal here? I was brought up in a very fundamentalist Protestant tradition and it was all about all the things you couldn't do. It was deprivation to the core! Lose your life for God! It was not my life but Christ living in me and all that. It was very shaming because I wasn't worth anything. On the other hand, I saw [other] peoples' souls. I thought of Anthony, the *father* of the Desert Tradition, how he had soul. I wonder how that happened. And [now], I think, [soul is] in some

way deep inside.

**Jeff:** What was projection? I am not willing to put my problems on somebody else, I embody my own life, my own problems, my own. I mean in some sense, to go off by yourself is to say I am not going to blame my wife for my problems, right?

**Carol:** Karine, you were just saying (during our break) about how people here were seeming to express their own opinions quite strongly although we were being very, very polite and that we even may be pushing politeness ethics a little too far. Did you say at the break that the diversity you felt with which the people here brought forth their very strong ideas, helped you grow more than if the ideas were less clear and diverse from your own? I don't know if I am pushing you to talk about a private experience here, but you indicated that something transformed for you coming from a Catholic Christian perspective when you went to Japan and visited a Buddhist temple. I just wondered if you could comment on that.

**Karine:** I first want to say, "Are we polite or are we respectful?" I like to use the word respectful.

**Carol:** I didn't mean to be disrespectful.

**Karine:** No, no, I like the word *respectful* rather than *politeness*. What I am reminded of when I was in several of those monasteries where monks were chanting, is that I couldn't understand anything. But, the reverence and the sense of *the beyond* was so close to how I would experience that in my Catholic liturgies. It was such a profound experience for me! Another experience for me was when I was in one of the Mosques. For some reason, as tourists we were allowed to be there. These men were standing in front of a large empty niche. I remember how we were told the significance and meaning of the "empty niche" was because we cannot imagine who God

is. So, again, I experienced similarity (rather than difference) and a sense of oneness (rather than separateness), in spite of the immense differences between Christian and non-Christian religions. I think that has triggered my interest in interfaith and ecumenical dialogue. It has fascinated me. I think the other part may be how that strengthens one's own faith. You start questioning and praying and reflecting. And so, that became for me, a deepening and strengthening experience in my own faith.

**Carol:** The exposure to a difference was strengthening.

**Karine:** I think that is generally [my experience] with all the people I dialogue with from time-to-time; that the respectfulness and the openness for truth is creating the oneness. I hope or pray or think that maybe, eventually, oneness might be reached or accomplished.

**Carol:** We would join in a common humanity.

**Karine:** A person of the Sikh faith once said, "To the extent we worship *Truth*, to that extent we are one." I found that interesting. I feel that all the dialogue that people have out of respectfulness and openness creates a great sense of oneness.

**Carol:** One other piece of feedback from while we were out on break was that you, Karine, felt that the telling about personal experience added to the meaningfulness of our discussion.

**A person of the Sikh faith once said, "To the extent we worship Truth, to that extent we are one." - Karine**

**Jeff:** For me, soul-making came partly out of deprivation in the sense that I grew up in a very fundamentalist Protestant home which was full of prohibitions. Therefore, I was brought up in a very narrow experience of the world. I lived through and rebelled against that. I realized there was more

to this world and that my parents' truth wasn't the whole truth, but that they had a truth. I had to come to that place too, and acknowledge that they had truth too. That realization forced me to my own spiritual journey and to reconciliation. My wife was diagnosed with cancer eleven years ago, breast cancer. And so, I know something of your journey, Winnie. She has metastatic cancer now. It is in the lymph nodes. So, that is a significant part of my journey letting-go. Again, [I have] a sense of loss. But also, for me, I finally discovered that I could experience deeply. There was something very powerful in that for me, my longing. I remember reading the Christian mystics for awhile, just because I was looking for some place to root myself. It was wonderful for me. I remember being so filled with longing and not knowing what that longing was, feeling like it must be bad for me. I thought I must be somehow doing something wrong because I was so full of longing. It seemed that if it were good for me, I would feel fulfilled. You know that kind of a feeling? I was reading William Shakespeare. He talked about the love of desire and the love of possession [as if] they were both expressions of the same love. My longing and ecstasy were all just different expressions of the same gift. Seeing that was wonderful for me! That was a transformative experience to be able to bring all my longings back home.

**Carol:** It was like you claimed a part of yourself you didn't have to disown

**Jeff:** Yes, it was wonderful for me. Those kinds of experiences were very transformative.

**Carol:** How do you see the soul as contaminated by the psychological attributions of those who embody it? I was wondering about the issue of what we ourselves impose upon soul. What parts of soul can we embrace? How can others impose on it? What does healing the soul mean?

**Alan:** Do you mean like imposing frameworks or opposing preconceptions, rather than letting soul speak [for itself]?



**Carol:** Right, I wondered about the whole issue of whether soul was a composite of parts and to what extent we might see these parts as fragmented. I was thinking that we have many theses about who we are, and also about how dissociated or contaminated these parts might be. What might we do or say to ourselves that could lead us toward either dissociation or integration?

**Jeff:** I think you have raised the question for me of, "What is the *institutional dimension* of soul?" There is a personal way in which I can deflect or fragment my soul, and there are ways that is done to me from the outside. That is often through institutional structures. I think we [need] to look at the issue, "Is there soul here between persons?" I would say, probably there is. The word *soul* may have a benevolent sense to it. I think that there is another sense as well, in the institutional structure, that can be very *desouling*. I think your example, Winnie, in hospital that is such a classic example of that desouling. However good the intention was, the [hospital] structure itself ended up dehumanizing or fragmenting [your] soul.

### Spiritual Experiences and Society

**Winnie:** I would just like to add to that, because I didn't want to leave everybody with the impression that the experience in the hospital was my only experience of *soul speaking to me*. Before I knew I was ill, probably now ten years ago, I started to have what I call *spiritual experiences*. They were so far out in terms of what I thought of as normal that I wouldn't talk about any of them for some years after I had them because I thought that people would think I was crazy. I didn't talk about some of those experiences. I didn't talk about any of them to most people I [knew.] I didn't talk

about them because working in the university, for example, is not a place where [people] are going to sit and listen to you easily about having experiences that even most really religious people would think were kind of crazy-like. I felt very much like I knew something, but I couldn't really talk about it, and I didn't know how to

*Ten years ago, I started to have what I call "spiritual experiences." - Winnie*

fit it into the kind of interpretive framework that I had. I couldn't even give it [real] meaning for myself. Now, I worked through that and I have talked with people who I felt would have some understanding of what I was trying to talk about. I feel really integrated with those [spiritual experiences]. I don't feel fragmented or shut off, anymore. But, I did! That was a very fragmenting time where I had, had these experiences and they were wonderfully empowering. Yet, [I found it oppressive] to tell [about] them to somebody who [would say], What are you talking about now? I wasn't going to do that because I didn't want somebody to throw it back at me and say anything negative. I think it is in some sense institutional, but I think it is [also] cultural. I think we have what I call a *normative consciousness* about what constitutes spiritual or religious experiences. If you go beyond, you are a "nut case." I think its [important to] not only give [spiritual experience] some meaning yourself through dialogue with others who have something to say about it, but also to bring it into academic work, [to] where it is going to get out into the world as a kind of method that you use. I call it *an experiential method* that you use to build theory on. In order to do that, you need to talk about, write about, experiences

that are normally considered abnormal, nonordinary experiences [such as] *Shamanism*. If you get into Shamanism it is all ordinary stuff; but you get out of that framework, then it is all totally nonordinary. It is not just nonordinary, its abnormal. I feel like those were the times where my soul was really speaking to me in major ways and it had very, very profound effects on me. Gradually, that pulled me more and more away from living in a real participatory way [with the] reality where people are not talking about anything very significant from my point of view. It just goes on and on. I just got more and more to a kind of "Y" or crossroads, where I couldn't do that any longer. I couldn't

just keep seeing things one way and acting another way and I got sick. I don't think my sickness was just because of that but I think it was partly because of that. And, I nearly died. I mean that all makes sense to me. So, my sickness is part of this longer process of living at cross-purposes more and more. [This happened] to me, as my soul spoke more clearly. I feel it is not a matter of facing the world with soul; that you can choose to do that or not. I don't feel like you can. I think there is some sense that people chose to or not, but I think basically it comes out of experiences and when you have had experiences that are *soul experiences*, then you face them all the time with a soul. I mean that's what you do. You can't do anything else, [you] do that!

**Alan:** It is as if it isn't a matter of deciding that this soul idea is a really good one—I think I will go with it. It grabs you and takes you where soul wants to go, to what soul wants you to hear.

**Winnie:** Right. And, it doesn't go anywhere does it?

**Alan:** Kind of takes you and shakes you, these kind of soul-shaking experiences that happen. I guess probably the seriousness of soul in the world, and in our lives [is] that if we don't follow its beckoning, the payback is ...

**Winnie:** Devastating.

**Alan:** In my own case, I was going to say, I think I haven't had too many soul-shaking experiences. But probably as far back as I could remember, I always had a sense of being different, not really belonging in my family being quite an oddity in my family. I still am. I feel a fairly shattering experience in my adolescence was a prolonged falling-out with a group of people, a group of friends, that I had. All through the course of my life the big turning-points have been the times I was taken out of familiar experiences, [as] you are suggesting Winnie. Probably a major turning point in my life was going to California, finding myself in Berkeley in the mid 60s and wondering what kind of madhouse I had chosen and descended into. Then, within a few months, finding that ah-ha! I think I understand what this [has been] all about, and [I'm] experiencing that as a tremendous change of direction in my life. All of these experiences were experiences of alienation, of being taken away from a sense of togetherness, [of] finding myself in a situation where there wasn't anyone to talk to or to dare not talk to. We talked earlier, in the first part, about the relationship between soul and love, and soul and connection. There is also a sense in which the soul-shaking experience happens out of an experience of *absolutes of connection* and *despair* that give rise to confusion.

**Karine:** I think more you started with the word *contamination*?

**Carol:** It is a word, I got it out of one of my books on soul.

**Karine:** When I think about contamination, the word *secularism* comes to mind. I would maybe see that as a lack of faith. Secularism would be confined to only what is visible. In my home country right now, there is a great sense of secularism or humanism or whatever you want to call it. People are very good to each other but they are [also] very good at euthanasia. I have heard about elderly people from Holland who came here because they knew they would have been killed if they would have stayed

in Holland, in the nursing homes. These are very powerful messages. So, for me, there are difficult moments when I come home, when I talk with my family. I think of secularism as contaminating soul-making.

**Jeff:** Is it possible that our souls could be sucked out of us? Does that metaphor ring for you?

**Karine:** Yah, I would think you could be made numb. I hope that soul will always be there. There is always openness. There is always the possibility that you may open yourself up to those questions or to the search.

**Jeff:** I am not sure what you meant[, Winnie,] by [saying] you didn't believe in evil. In my cosmology, I would say there is an evil in the world, and that it is often incarnated in structures. I think after Hitler they have looked again at the appalling statements in scripture of principalities in power as being, *beings*—a part of supernatural beings—also tied or embodied in political or family structures. I think that those things *desoul* us. I think they suck the soul out of us, at times. It was so striking to me when you said you sat there and watched the clock. I thought of the millions of people who watch the clock every day so that they can punch out and go home because the

a new narrative.

**Winnie:** Yes, that is for sure!

**Karine:** I still like to say *numbed the soul*.

**Jeff:** Yes, yes. That is okay.

**Carol:** It sounded to me, Winnie, that you had some personal experiences that enlivened you. Then, in the context of everyday society you had to fear the repercussions of being fully honest with what you had experienced.

**Winnie:** Well, actually I didn't. I mean I lived with the knowing that there was a lot of inconsistency between what I knew from the experiences and what the university thought of as rational knowledge. I taught what I knew. That is what I did, but I got sick. There was a lot of tension that I wasn't really paying attention to, and now I will just have to. I will teach what I know, but I will be less energetic about participating in the university, in all the things I was participating in [there]. I will keep more of the energy for myself. I think that is what I will do.

**Karine:** Would it be correct to say then that, that part of the university that you are struggling with, is what I would call *secularism*?

**Winnie:** Oh, for sure! There is more to it than secularism. That's part of it, and maybe the biggest part, but there is also the hierarchical structure about who has the authority to speak on certain things and what is your basis [your] evidential basis for your *nutclaims*. You know, all of this kind of stuff. I got into teaching

late, and so I am half way up the hierarchy in the teaching structure. My age is fifty, so I should be more at the top. I am confusing anyway, within that structure, because I am an older person who is at a younger person's position in the structure. There is that part of it, and then there is the part of having the experiences that almost nobody else has had. It is like, where do you fit? Now, in fact, the universi-

## *Is it possible that our souls could be sucked out of us? - Jeff*

corporation has sucked the soul out of them. If you want to put it in terms of metanarrative, it is an oppressive metanarrative, that the society, the culture, the institution, the educational system has given us [so] that we can only operate within these frameworks or these thoughts or these realities that killed our soul. Somewhere you protest and say we need to write out of our soul experiences and create

ty has been very good to me. In fact, on paper and on my record and everything, it has been very good to me. When I look at it, there isn't anything that I could look through [in] my file and say, "Okay, this is this and [that and is that]!" But, there has been documented a number of things where individuals have really got on my case, and as far as I am concerned, contributed to a not very good environment. There has been enough of that. I think one of the biggest things about getting stressed-out is having your colleagues undermine you or not make you feel good about yourself. I think that part has been in there. But, as far as anybody coming straight out and saying anything to me, no. I always get good comments, good merit increments, all of these kind of things, so it is more the sense of, letting the crazy person be. I don't stay there, you see, I just keep bumping back in. And that's the problem! Now, what I am going to do is not be worried about keeping a program running, because I am not going to do that position anymore. I will just go back and do my teaching and my research and be me, without the rest of the stuff. I will see how it goes. I really think that might work. But, the spiritual experiences that I had before were very empowering experiences. When I write or talk about them, or talk about them at conferences; I find that people all over the place have these experiences, but hardly anybody talks about them. Certainly the people in the upper hierarchy of the university have never had them. Forget that! That is not where you are going to find them. So, there

is just a lot of tension between your own personal spiritual journey and the cultural ideas of what is normal. In the soul-making journey, I think one of the biggest things that we have to contend with is, what is the context that you are actually living in. Is it conducive to that [soul-making journey] or not? In our society you are really lucky if [it is].

**Carol:** What you are suggesting is that you don't necessarily have to change the context, you need to change your own place or your own posture in it.

**Winnie:** Well, I would prefer to change the context so that there weren't so

your soul by not being afraid.

**Winnie:** It wasn't even that I was afraid. I was just doing so many things that were, you may say, contaminating the journey. They weren't supporting it.

**Karine:** I like that word again, somehow.

**Carol:** I got the idea of *soul contamination* out of a book, by Meadow and Rayburn (1985), on the faith journeys of women scholars of religion called "A Time to Weep and A Time to Sing." What I wanted to do in this last bit of time, is to look at the issue of what *healing the soul* might mean, and then to move toward the possibility of mindfulness or willfulness in a

soul journey. I would also like us to consider who might be qualified to precept the endeavor of a soul-making journey.

**Winnie:** What does that mean, who might be qualified?

**Carol:** Well, it could be a type of spiritual guide. The other matter that I wanted to bring in was, spiritual practices,

specific activities such as prayer, meditation, dance, enactment, etc—ways that we try to augment our soul, to enhance life. I thought you particularly, Winnie, might have some ideas on spiritual practice.

**Winnie:** On which one?

**Carol:** Perhaps drumming, which I understand you have done.

**Winnie:** Well, I haven't done any drumming since I had my brain operation because I just don't want to do that yet.

**Carol:** My question is, "What does healing the soul mean?"



*Annie sent me the drum, it wasn't one she made, it was her drum and her drum beater. - Winnie Tomm*

*Photo by Karl Tomm*

many people like that around me. I would prefer that, but I make my money there and you know I like teaching. It is [an important] context for me in which I can do my work.

**Carol:** It sounds as if you are going to make more room for the whole range of your experience.

**Karine:** By doing that you will be sharing your soul.

**Winnie:** Yes, I think that is true. But you see, I don't even care anymore about all that, whether I am doing this or that, I just know what I am planning to do.

**Karine:** And, I think that is more important.

**Winnie:** Yes, that's true.

**Karine:** And then, you can share more of

## What Does Healing the Soul Mean?

**Winnie:** Well, I will start out with the things on healing the soul, since I have had the brain operation, I opted out of doing the whole brain radiation, then I decided that I was on my own because the medical people didn't have another thing to say. All they told me was that I was going to die soon, and that I didn't have a future to worry about as far as side effects or anything as far as the radiation was concerned, I told the man I don't want to listen to this anymore. I am going home. He said, "Yes, well, I can understand that." So then, I decided. Karl and I went home and we both just sat and cried, and wrote out music for my funeral. That's what we did! And then, a friend phoned from Edmonton, after [that]. He was talking about things. He said, "It sounds as if you bought into the whole medical model. And I said, "I haven't heard anything else yet. I know that I just haven't got out of the medical model enough to think about anything else." We had a long talk. After that, a friend, another friend from here came over, and she gave me a list of names of people who she has been getting a lot of healing from. I took those names down and decided who I was going to go to. I was already doing acupuncture and I decided to go and learn how to do Tai Chi. I went to a persons house, individually, and learned that for six weeks. I do Tai Chi now for an hour every day. And then, I went to a naturopath who had her idea of what I should be eating and of all the different naturopathic medications I should be on. Then she referred me to a cranial-sacral physiotherapist who has just done something I would never have believed in. Oh, I would have believed, but I have never experienced this before in my life. She just moves energy around.

She finds out where the energy is blocked, and then she just lays her hand on [whatever] she is working on. She came out to [massage] my body this day and had her hand here because this is where I had the lung removed. As I was lying on the table and she had her hand here, I felt the hand go right into the chest and I said that to her. And she said, she felt it go there too, "I feel like I am in there pushing up against a pillow." And I said, "Well, it feels to me like a little animal burrowing in a little hole." A second or so later, a beaver image came[, into my mind]. Here [was] the beaver and it was swimming underneath the beaver dam through all these pathways. She said she felt like she was doing [that]. Then, [when] she got blocked, she came out of that [pathway] and went into another one

*Then, [when] she got blocked, she came out of that [pathway] and went into another one and cleared it out. - Winnie*

and she cleared [it] out. I had, had pain in that whole chest area since [the previous] April and this was in November. I had been working with her for a few weeks and she cleared out all the pain and I haven't had it since, in the whole chest area. And then, she finished with holding my ears and her hands were so hot by this time, her fingers, especially on the right ear went right through my ear. "You are right through my outer ear," [I said.] and she said, "Yes I can feel that." As she walked away, I said, "Your fingers are still in my ear." And she said, Yah, you really needed that! And so, that is another person that I am going to. I am going to another one who phoned me up just out of the blue and she came over and

I am doing counselling with her. She is a physics professor. She saw and talked to me for awhile. She says I have everything in my nutrition right except [that I] don't have enough iodine. She says, "Get some iodine tincture, put it under the joint in your big toe." I said, "Right." I talked to my family doctor about that and he said, "Yes, that is probably good because your thyroid is down and you need some more "Eltroxin." I did all that but the other woman said that you are leaking from your five bottom *chakras*—these are the energy centers in your body. I found out that she does holistic counselling and she does it with "Aids men," primarily, but [she] has other groups. I have been going with her now and I have got into visualizing. I have been getting rid of things like recurring dreams that have been going on for six years, like I have just been getting rid of the stuff through the visualizing. I meditate on whatever chakra I am meditating on. After a while, stuff starts to happen. I am unloading all sorts of things. I just feel, and then I meditate. That is a very strong part of every day of mine. I bring the energy in

and just bring it in to parts of my body. I am going to do Chi Gong which focuses it all when I want it to. I feel like I am on a journey, that's what I feel like. It is like entering a new life. Its really like being on another path. I didn't know about all these people and what they do. Now, that has become a major part of my life so the meditating and just the coming still. The visualization or whatever happens is a basic way of healing. Now, when I meditate, I call on my *spirit guides* and the basic one is Annie. She is an Inuit Shaman up in northern Canada. I wanted to have a drum and a beater one time, a few years ago. And so, a friend made me the drum. His wife sent a call out to Annie who she knows. I never got

that drum for about a year-and-one-half and when Annie sent me the drum, it wasn't one that she made, it was her drum and her drum beater. It is a really old one she found in her journey. Now, it was time for me to have this drum. Then, I met her through my drumming. [I] have other spirit guides that I met on my journey and in my meditations. These are animal guides, animal powers are always there. When I had my lung operation, there were a whole pack of wolves just licking up these puddles. It looked like water. I don't know what they were doing but [that] was what I saw when I wasn't thinking about anything. They were helping me to clean up the mess, and so, I always have these helpers. I feel, now, like I have done Shamanic training for a few years. I just feel like it is not my power. You are talking about God's power and you. I don't feel like it is my power. I call on these powers and then with them I do my healing. But, it certainly is a spiritual healing in that there is no doubt. It is like I have entered a different understanding of what, for me, spiritual healing is about.

**Carol:** It feels like you might have asked for a good quality research somewhere back there, and got one. (Laughter)

**Winnie:** Actually, I am getting [my] book off this week, to the publisher, and then the next book is about that and it is about connecting that with spiritual women doing spiritual healing in Britain before Christianity. That is what spiritual healing is for me. My guess is that it will just unfold and emerge, and it goes along.

**Carol:** Many of these knowledges are within our community and a large number of people aren't talking about them. Yet, sometimes in confidence, when you get in a very private relation to someone, then they will tell you some very interesting things. I guess I haven't just ever put my mind

to it about how come we don't speak out more on these things together.

**Winnie:** I think [it is] because we think mostly in tune with the medical model. When that doesn't work, we don't think.

**Alan:** In the experience of being apart and different, having unique experiences, that has evolved recently to share those. The thought[s] about what they mean] confirmed in you own self doubts about your [own] sanity, so very tentative, [leads to] who you share with, or whether you share.

**Carol:** I am just curious that we can be so readily silenced about unusual experiences because even if they don't have any truth outside of ourselves, they can still be very important experiences.

**Winnie:** It keeps them as unusual experiences if we don't talk about them.

## *Who should be the teacher of the virtue of one's own experience? - Alan*

**Alan:** I had an experience, at a Buddhist meditation centre in California. We were to spend a week in silence. We could only talk twenty minutes after each meal through the week. The head Lama of the meditation Centre, named Tarthang Tulku, gave us a series of meditative assignments for the week, one of which was to meditate in front of a mechanical prayer wheel that was whirling around, at a 108 rpm, on a great big pillar. To stop the prayer wheel, [you] put on a particular Tibetan letter smack in the middle of this, just pin it on. The Lama provided these. I thought this was reasonable enough and so we went down and did it. When it became time, one's turn in the day, to meditate in front of this thing, it was just a blur . . . it was literally a blur. The trick was, you were to spend 45

minutes just in front of that, not doing anything with it. The second 45 minutes each day, you were to stop the letter and fix it in the centre of your visual field, a total impossibility. We did that everyday for the whole week. After about the fifth day, really strange experiences started to happen. I actually reached the point where, in the midst of meditation, everything slowed down to the point where you actually could see it stopped in full flight, but the process of it was a very curious thing. I had never before or since experienced my consciousness in such a totally detailed way. I experienced the source of images and thoughts as they just formed out of nothing and came up into conscious awareness. It was an awesome experience! At the end of the week, we would have our audience with

Rinpoche and I reported my experience to him. He said, "Wonderful, you are on the right path! [It was] quite the opposite from having your sanity questioned. The experience of being validated in this was oddly exhilarating."

**Winnie:** But, to [your Lama] it wasn't odd. I mean it was odd to the other guy, [the head of some institution.]

**Alan:** That raises the question of who should be the teacher of the virtue of one's own experience—when you are heading in the right direction?

**Jeff:** To me, it isn't quite so much what you do, but the integrated experience of that. So, dance! We have been so disembodied. We need to get back into our bodies. I don't think dance has an inherent value any more than does prayer.

**Winnie:** Well I think it does. I think it loosens you up.

**Jeff:** What I was saying is that dance doesn't have any more value than say *centering prayer* in the sense that [both] can be disintegrating experiences or they can be integrating ones. I think the issue is, how can we integrate ourselves?

**Alan:** I think all of these [soul practices] share in the fact they get you into a

very receptive mode and out of the controlling mode of consciousness.

**Jeff:** I think that is a big issue. You used the word *surrender*, and to me, one of the issues around *soul* is education or *learning to soul* —surrender is a part of that.

**Karine:** A big part!

**Winnie:** I think that is more a part in Christianity than [in] other [practices].

**Karine:** I find Alan's experience fascinating. His teachers asked him to *surrender*.

**Alan:** It was, "I will give you a technique, but it is a technique that will undo any of your doing."

**Karine:** It is a very Christian concept more than [in] any other religions.

**Alan:** It is the doing that is *the not doing*.

**Winnie:** With the Buddhist framework, it is much more like the idea of the sound of one hand clapping. I mean that is right outside our conceptual framework. I think that the intention of it is, to get you so you don't know what you are doing. Once that is all there, then you can see the centre. That is a lot of the Buddhist. I don't think that is *surrender*, so much as [it] is breaking free of imposed conceptual ways of looking at [or feeling] anything. Once you get into a situation where you don't have any control, I don't think you *surrender* to the lack of control. In some sense you do. There is that aspect. But, I think it is much more the breaking loose of the controls that were held on you by your own thinking.

**Jeff:** That is the other side of the same thing.

**Alan:** Yes, it is not that you *surrender*, you don't have any choice in the matter.

**Karine:** I would like to see *surrender*, more as an act of *the will*. He was willing to. He went there for that week, and said, "I am going to enter into this!"

**Alan:** As the craziest, most meaningless experience I have ever done in my life.

**Jeff:** I think [it is a] question of discernment. My experience has been very, I don't know how to say about it, nor-



*The Gift of Sharing the Outdoors.  
- Miriam and Jeff Imbach*

mal. I haven't had a lot of [the] extra-normal. I really respect your experi-

ence. I also know people who have gone almost crazy following every new cure for their relief from cancer. That is very disintegrating. How do

*So, dance! We need to get  
Back into our bodies. -  
Jeff*

you know that was good for you? Should someone else go to five different gurus or teachers or facilitators? [It could] be a very disintegrating experience. How do we know?

**Winnie:** Only the person can know that. That is part of being centered. I do believe that things come to you. That if you are really staying with yourself: that people come, things come, and things happen like the dancing thing, for instance. As I was driving down the road (we live out in the country), I saw this sign saying, "Two-Step Dancing Lessons." I wrote down the whole thing. Karl and I went to our first two-step dancing lesson last Friday night. Because, I feel like I want to dance. I want to jump up and down. So, we started dancing lessons! I think that these things kind of fall into place. And, you begin to see things when you are ready to see them, if you do live within your own energy. Then you see out of that.

**Jeff:** Yes, I have named something important because you can't just say it is up to every individual because some individuals get very disintegrated. There must have been something going on for you prior to these experiences that have made you ready for them.

**Winnie:** Well, yes, I mean that I have had about ten years of really serious spiritual experiences and training. I have done workshops in the thing. For me, this sickness is part of that whole thing. I just have to now listen to it and pay attention.

**Alan:** In this respect, to say the difference of the person who gets torn apart

by looking at alternate cures and so forth, and the experiences that Winnie is describing, [may have to do with the person's own narrative framework]. My own favorite perspective on these things has a lot to do with the value of finding *a story*. The function of the story, in this regard, is [a] kind of creation of the imagination. A narrative framework of some kind is what enables you to see things that you don't see otherwise. It gives you *eyes to see*. It gives you the advertisement for two-step dancing that you would never see otherwise, that you might have passed a thousand times [before]. [It even gives you the attention] to experience the kind of coincidences that say, "Gosh, how come that now that I am thinking of these things, I am seeing these things all over the place?" It is the *story*, the narrative framework, that pulls things together.

**Karine:** Then, I would probably call the coincidence providential.

**Alan:** Yes, well, a good word.

## What Happens When We Share Soul Experiences?

**Carol:** It is interesting that there are some experiences of *soul-making*, if you will forgive me the word, that we just aren't sharing enough of, with one another, in general. If we could share them, there might be more inspiration to move in directions that bring life to us.

**Jeff:** Yes, I think that is good. And, I think that we need to share the ordinary ones, not just the extraordinary ones. Because, we can leave people feeling really guilty [for not having extraordinary ones]. I think it is important to share and validate both kinds of experience.

**Carol:** For sure. Maybe the ordinary one often give us the deepest sense of satisfaction, like the *nvo-step*. You probably two-step differently now, Winnie, with all this difference that you have with yourself.

**Winnie:** I didn't two-step well on Friday night at our first lesson. My head was just pounding, but I wanted to go to the two-step anyway.

**Carol:** Is there something about this experience, now, that has a different kind of meaning for you than it would have had before?

**Winnie:** Oh yes! I mean before I wouldn't have even given it the time of day. I wouldn't have, but now, it is getting the time [to appreciate things] like the sunrises.

**Jeff:** For Miriam to say, "When I don't have pain, it is just so wonderful to get dressed." That is such a delectable

## A narrative framework gives you the "eyes to see." - Alan

experience all of a sudden for her. You live at such a totally different level. You know I did something that is totally contrary to my nature but I actually wrote down four points in my own [narrative] framework, in terms of what would be the ingredients for helping another person nurture soul. One, was to attend and to affirm. That, for me, means to give dignity, to that person, to their soul, and to their inner being. I use the word dignity on purpose. I don't mean fullness, necessarily. You don't have to experience everything [together]. Secondly, [the helping person could encourage the search for] integrative experiences. We have already talked about that. What are the things that [integrate] heart, mind and emotions? What are the things that bring all of those things together? [These considerations are important], for me, because I see people coming to life when those things happen. In my own observation, watching people, when they quit just doing things with one aspect of themselves and actually enter into something as a whole person, that's life-giving to them. I used the word

*surrender*, and that may be my Christian framework, but what I meant by that was that the flow of life is something that I give myself to, I enjoy, I celebrate and I live out. That is a matter [of active] not passive surrender or abnegation. And then, I used the word *resistance*. I struggled with this one. But, I chose to use it anyway. So, you may push me on it. I used the word *resistance*. By that, I meant that somewhere I take some kind of stand. I don't even like this language very well, but I say, "No!" to exploitation and to narcissism which in my sense would be an exploitation of myself. I think [it is]

soul-nurturing to say, "I will not!" "I will be against." or, "I will stand up for not allowing people to exploit one another or to have that happen to me." [I need] to say, "No!" to resist my own tendency to narcissism, to egoism, to

being consumed with myself. What do you think [about that]? I am curious.

**Alan:** I like that idea of saying, "No!" Are you familiar with that liberal Jewish magazine *Tikkun*. Oh, it is a wonderful periodical. [It] comes out every two months. I found it in Vancouver this fall, on a visit there. And the editor of it, apparently [was] a therapist, in a previous incarnation. Now, he is a famous editor and author. At any rate, he wrote an article on the biblical story of Abraham sacrificing [Isaac,] thinking that it was God's will that he sacrifice his son. The editor really revisioned this story in a magnificent way. The climax of it was that the point at which [Abraham] raised [his] knife, he suddenly realized that his obligation was: to say "No!" to killing; to say, "No!" to exploitation; and, to say, "No!" to everything false.

**Carol:** I am mindful that Karine wanted to leave. I wanted to make space for you, Karine, if you want to say anything in general about this whole proceeding.

**Karine:** I think the only thing that comes

to mind is to thank you for initiating this.

**Carol:** I am honored, and you know how pleased I was that you would accept to come.

**Karine:** I think this is one of the few occasions that there [has been] acceptance that I can even mention the word *God*. You are [usually not] allowed to, so you talk about the university setting. Sometimes, it makes me very sad, you know [not to be able to talk about my beliefs]. It is kind of nice to share a little bit what I experience to be the core of my being and the source of my happiness.

**Carol:** I find it sad that you would have to feel so constrained, Karine. That keeps people from knowing some very important parts of who you are, and may even encourage people to see you as a sort of *generic Catholic* person, as though the label was the explanation.

**Karine:** Yes. Well, I am so glad that I can share that with you—what I hope my life is or can be. Thank you very much.

**Carol:** Winnie, were you going to say something?

**Winnie:** Well I don't know now, are we continuing?

**Carol:** We have about ten more minutes.

**Winnie:** It was just that when you, [Jeff], were talking about the resistance. I think [that the] ethics of resistance is central to the liberation of theology. I think it ought to be central to religions everywhere. The whole notion that people with lots of resources can go to church and feel good about being there but do very little about resisting the oppression all around them, in their own families or wherever they are, [is repugnant to me]. I think that is one of the scandals of the churches and the religious institutions.

**Karine:** You open up the topic of a new dialogue. I find this really good! I would like to respond but I think it is almost a whole new topic. It would be very interesting.

**Alan:** I think it is crucial to the issue, if you don't create a boundary then . . .

**Jeff:** Yes, I felt that the idea of resistance [to oppression] was crucial.

**Carol:** I agree that it seems deeply important.

**Karine:** A very crucial question.

**Jeff:** I remember someone saying about the resistance movement in Nazi Germany—that we [joined] not because we thought we could win. We were convinced we couldn't make a difference. But, we did it in order to stay human. There is something about that, [trying] regardless of the productivity.

**Alan:** Yes, sort of like, do it anyway.

**Karine:** That is a whole other thing, in me, being part of that.

**Carol:** There is a whole *ethics of soul*.

**Karine:** That is [also] another topic.

**Jeff:** [There] are horrible stories to tell about this.

**Carol:** There are so many topics. We skimmed really a lot. There is the whole issue of therapy or spiritual accompaniment. I liked your way of putting it, Jeff. I thought that was really nice because it was different than advisory, or even shamanal, though I don't remember what

## *I say, "No!" to exploitation and narcissism. - Jeff*

*shaman* literally means.

**Winnie:** A person who sees in the dark. What it means is not that they go floundering around in the dark, but that they can go on journeys and find the part of the soul that got lost.

**Carol:** This would be such another interesting discussion to know who qualifies and what are the qualifications for being able to bring the soul together. I would have liked to have talked about that.

**Winnie:** Well, I think anybody can do it—[become] qualified.

**Carol:** But, it would be wonderful to precept that and to think about how one could develop those qualifications through therapy. Maybe that is what spiritual practise is.

**Alan:** Here's a question, "Is there a school for soul-making?"

**Winnie:** A retrieval school.

**Jeff:** Not just that is there a curriculum for the soul, but can the soul survive [formal/institutionalized] education?

**Winnie:** I don't know what that would mean—that sort of [soul] curriculum.

**Carol:** I was wondering about the Shaman thing. What does a Shaman see? I want you to know, Winnie, that your coming her for this discussion has been very important, to me (as I know it will become for others). I know you are writing your own book, and I don't want to be an interloper with respect to accessing your experience for our discussion and publishing that.

**Winnie:** I just feel that that whole idea of owning the intellectual knowledge is another soul-destroying activity. I really think that is something we got into. I don't know if it will do any good for [anyone]. I think if you have got something to say, you just say it. My book will be going out to certain people. Your newsletter will be going out to certain people. I don't care if they all went out to the same people, it wouldn't matter to me. So, that is not an issue. I just think the idea that they have lawyers out there [to protect] intellectual property doesn't make sense. Sometimes, I can't even believe that.

**Alan:** [It's] soul destroying!

**Winnie:** It is! I think it is. So, don't worry about any of that for me.

**Carol:** I think this has been a really good start. I can appreciate what a huge area this is now. I thought we might get through this in the first hour, and that then you would all get bored and go home. I have felt so honored that you people would all come. I think it has been a wonderful opportunity.





*Time, Nature, and Soul's Touch.*

Stock Pho

# Do Families Have Souls? A Manifesto of Attitude and Practice

Alan Parry  
Calgary, Canada

Soul refers to the willingness to experience the world not only in its joy, but in its sorrow. To do so demands of us that we radically open ourselves in what T.S. Eliot refers to as, "A condition of complete simplicity/(Costing not less than everything)." Rather than understanding soul, then, as something we are born with I prefer to think of it in the African American way of understanding soul in life and in song, as well as that of other historically marginalized peoples who

have not had the luxury of being free to deny or forget about the sorrows of life. I join also with the ways James Hillman and, more recently, Thomas Moore understand soul as an attitude more than an entity, a way of experiencing more than a possession, a reminder of our mortality more than a

guarantee of immortality. It is a quality or a perspective we take when we embrace

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the world in all its agony and ecstasy: in oneself, in relation to and in others, and wherever life strives to express itself. Keats called it *soul-making*. The resulting soulfulness gets lost when analysis, control or even spirituality are allowed or chosen to dominate our lives.

Soul, in fact, is never to be confused with spirit, the soaring, transcending force in life, which can only truly grow out of the rich soil of soul. Unless we first experience and embrace our own pain

like its opposite for it frequently reveals itself in our weaknesses and fears, when our self-esteem is apt to be at its lowest. Indeed, in the absence of heartfelt soul searching through the chaos of our failings and our fears, the self stands as but a synonym for the conscious ego, and self-esteem a well-intentioned exercise in self-deception. Nor has it to do with the analytical intellect or the controlling will which are better at imposing themselves on the world than experiencing the *pathos*

of the world as it constantly discloses itself to us. Soul-making, then, does not strive to solve or eliminate pain, sorrow and weakness from experience but to listen to these as expressions of unmet longings for deeper and further experiences of connected-



*A Family Christmas.*

Photo by Elka Parry

and weakness spirituality is nothing more than a lofty escape which may do us more harm than good. Jesus had it right: Blessed are the poor in spirit... Indeed the Beatitudes themselves are about the beaten down, those with soul who are blessed by virtue of the greater compassion for self and other alike that reflection upon their suffering can give them. Nor is soul to be confused with self, still less with self-esteem. Often it seems more

ness and love. Soul, in short, is the domain of the imagination, showing us what the heart is and guiding us into the reality of experience.

Thus, if therapy is to be understood to be about *solving* problems and ridding ourselves of pain, sorrow and uncertainty, rather than experiencing these and listening to what they have to tell us about what we are not paying enough attention to about ourselves and our relationship

and attitude toward the world, soulfulness has little to do with therapy. Likewise, if therapy is understood as *eliminating* problems in the interests of having a happy, healthy and satisfied life, rather than staying with our pain and sorrow a while, even embracing them as a friend and teacher who lets us know better where our lives may have wandered astray, then soulfulness has little to do with therapy. Finally, if therapy is understood as *rescuing* people from their problems and their pain rather than remaining with them *through* these, most often without offering solutions, techniques or advice, rather conversing, listening and sharing, until their pain and fear reveals their messages and meanings, then soulfulness has even less to do with therapy.

Instead of such conventional notions of therapy today, soul-making, requires what Thomas Moore refers to as *the care of the soul*. Where it concerns only the individual this might make more obvious sense, but do families have souls? Yes, when they share deeply with one another. A family soul is what a family shares. It may well be, in fact, that soul is not an

individual faculty at all and only emerges out of a we feeling of *shared* joy and sorrow. A family makes a soul for itself as it wrestles less with How can I help you get rid of your problems? than with such basic questions as: What is it like living in this family? What is best about it? What is worst? What is most important to

when it searches for its own depths of meaning and feelings even at the cost of discomfort and pain. Oddly enough, those deepest feelings and connections to one another are often stirred most at those moments when we are furthest from perfection and acknowledge our weaknesses and failings to one another. Understood

in this way, its problems become the anguished, unacknowledged soul of the family crying out on behalf, not just of its so-called problem child, but of all of its members: I want to *feel* loved! Especially when I'm screwing up. For the therapist

the family's soul care may be over when and to the extent that all members of a family can answer affirmatively the questions, "Do you feel it? Do you feel love in your family, no matter what?" Then the family itself can take over its real purpose: soul-making. This includes its relation, not only to the joys and sorrows that its members are able to share with each other, but of its participation in the *pathos* of the world itself.

## *Instead of such conventional notions of therapy today, soul-making, requires ...the care of the soul.*

members of this family? What do you live for? What would you die for? What values, feelings and memories do you share as you each tell family stories? What remains hidden and forbidden? What are your sorrows? What is the family's greatest sorrow? Its joys? Its greatest joy? Its unmet longings? Which of those unmet longings is being expressed through your present pain and confusion? In short, a family engages in soul-making



*"Anima Mundi"  
Sunrise on Monument Valley*

Photo by Alan Parry

## Some Friends

*Some friends say, "The anticipation of death is better than death itself." But I don't know what to believe. Sometimes, I believe death is better than love. But, then again, I believe love is death. [If that were true] that would be worse than hate.*



*By Allannah  
Hamer*

*Some friends say killing  
will make me popular,  
but, I don't know what that means.  
Does that mean killing myself or others?  
Because, if I killed myself  
no one would know me.  
And, if I killed others no one would love  
me and that's worse than death.*

*Some friends say they will only be my  
friend if I do something for them that will  
get me in trouble. These same friends say that I  
don't have to take the crap that goes on at home.  
Considering I have it pretty good compared to some  
kids, the friends that these are, are just some friends  
- not my FRIENDS!*

*Allannah Marie Barbara Hamer  
Age 13*

## *Questions of Self Give it to Within*

*How many time have I asked this of you  
And you remain ignorant and unsupportive  
Where have you been for such a very long time?  
When are you going to come out and play?*

*When there's seconds left in your game,  
Who are you, do you not know you are worth everything?*

*Is there any special reason for your doubt? Can you not see it's time for your recognition from  
your many achievements.*

*Never mind what you couldn't or won't do.*



*Believe these thoughts...  
you are worthy of a great deal of admiration  
you are amazing and powerful  
you attract positive influence  
your kindness defies reason  
you have ability  
you have intelligence  
you could give yourself more credit  
you could believe in who you are  
you could also count your blessings.  
Do you...?*



*Your barrier is your doubt.  
Let your doubt grow in another space, somewhere else, very far away.  
Use your knowledge and your intelligence to bring peace and give it to within.*

*No one ever told you to get on the easy road. If you had told yourself this long ago, you  
would not have had to struggle.*

*Be contented and give it to within.*

*Donna Hamer  
Thursday, January 20, 1994*

# Empowerment of the Woman within the System<sup>1</sup>

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with

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## Summary

"Empowerment" signifies an *attitude* that may be adopted by anyone, and a *strategy* that can be chosen or adopted by a therapist. From this position, the therapist explores each family member's concept of power and the manner in which power is exercised. The family in our society is still rooted in a patriarchal context. To address the issue of *patriarchy* in the family, the therapist makes use of questions which invite reflection on, among other things, socialization based on sex-stereotyping. Then, the therapist uses his/her power to enable the family members, particularly the women in the family, to mobilize their own capabilities and natural resources.

## 1. Introduction

**W**e live in an age of self-determination and this includes liberation of the woman within the family system. There is a growing awareness that the differences between men and women may legitimately be recognized as specific, gender role models and talents that are of equal importance for society.

In actual fact, however, we come up against a great deal of plainly visible, and still more invisible, imbalance of power hidden behind the accepted norms and expectations of social position and role models for

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men and women (Komter, 1990), and for child/parent relationships. These norms and ideas, that have become ingrained over generations, are a source of the abuse of power and of traumatization in the family. Liberation from them begins with recognition of their existence. Reflection on them needs to be done within the family system. The objective is:



*The Angel of Empowerment.*

*Photo by M. Jongerius-Joras*

1. To enable both women and men to become aware of the oppression of women in our society;
2. To awaken the dormant desire for liberation;
3. To create possibilities of actualizing this desire by, for example, drawing out the woman's "repressed knowledge" of herself (Richters, 1991).

Family therapy training offers us instruments that promote this reflection,

namely: circular questioning, second-order cybernetics, and the adoption of a meta-position. The therapist ought to recognize and acknowledge her own experience and expertise as a woman in relationships: in her family, in society and in her role as a therapist. This facilitates reflection and may lead to the choice of empowerment as a therapeutic attitude.

I would like men to become less of a patriarchal presence in the family and women to have a greater opportunity to develop symmetrical [or equitable] relationships. One goal of my work with families is to enable the members of the system to feel their connection to each other, while maintaining and developing their own individual autonomy as far as their own potential allows.

In this article, I explain my choice of empowerment as a therapeutic attitude, after which I describe empowerment as the preferred strategy of my practice. I will present questions that promote reflection of a second-order cybernetic nature, as well as externalization. One or the other will be illustrated by case studies.

## 2. Why I Chose "Empowerment"

"Empowerment" is a term used in human-resource management: it is a concept that is considered essential for organizations (Van Ruiten, 1991). Within organizations ever more importance is being attached to: a. the context that co-determines the meaning of actions; and, b. the individual culture and attitude of the employee, which significantly influences the quality of the product.

In emancipatory thinking, "empowerment" means to make yourself more powerful. It is a growth process in which you first discover your own potential and then take charge of your own life accordingly. It is important for the realization of this

vision that you learn to cope with or overcome behavioural patterns that could sabotage the effort. It is necessary to believe that you can take responsibility for your own life, that you are worthwhile as a woman, and that men and women can be different and still be of

## *To empower means to change a lack of power into strength.*

equal worth. An essential part of this process of emancipation is networking. In this way women can support each other and develop a new way of thinking that opens up their hitherto isolated world of thought. The most difficult part is a change of mentality; not to wait to be freed but to take the initiative to act powerfully, on behalf of oneself.

Family therapy can sometimes be opposed to the concept of emancipation. Hoffman (1988) warns of the hierarchy inherent in the therapeutic relationship. Due to their expertise, therapists can end up in a power position that reflects the existing imbalance of power between husband and wife. Hoffman (1990) posits that the therapist is not the sole possessor of the power of knowledge but that both sides, therapist and family together, each with their own specific knowledge, form a new system. The therapist has to explore the assumptions and prejudices surrounding the description of the problem. In addition, the therapist facilitates the discovery and open discussion of conscious and subconscious gender role concepts held by both the therapist and the members of the family.

It is easier for female therapists to adopt this kind of therapeutic stance. Their own experiences form the basis of knowledge that grows from experience. According to Van Mens-Verhulst (1988), this knowledge covers more than just the experience people have had in a specific area, a specific social position and/or problematic situation. "It presupposes that experiences of powerlessness and pain have been worked through in such a manner that the woman in question has gained an insight into the mechanisms of

social and internalized oppression and that she herself has broken free of her automatic self-defence maneuvers as victim." (I. Foeken) An important criterion is that the therapist can use her experience, selectively, to support the freeing process in her clients. Knowledge based

on experience is not the exclusive property of the professionally-trained therapist. It is found in clients, as well. Recognition of the knowledge based on experience lessens the weight

of professional expertise and legitimizes, for the client as well as for the therapist, the right of the client to contribute to the process.

Personally, I am in favour of more integration of experience-based knowledge of women's welfare and family therapy. Reflection on my image of reality ("map of the world") and on my history as a woman allows me to examine the way I look at things (second order, meta-level). As a therapist, I can become aware of my own socialization, norms, values, cultural and gender related biases. This reflection offers scope for and the possibility of examining and changing the stereotypes of masculinity and femininity. Changing ideas is an important

their own experience to facilitate the recognition by family members of their own possibilities and autonomy to implement solutions to problems. This kind of therapy has important consequences for each family member, for the family as a unit and for society.

### **3. Choosing a Strategy**

Karl Tomm (1988) distinguishes between four therapeutic attitudes: manipulation, confrontation, succorance and empowerment. Each of these attitudes can be effective and gives the therapist different possibilities of interacting with the system. Tomm suggests that therapists have something of each of these attitudes and that they feel more or less drawn towards one of them. The difference between men and women plays a part in this. Therapists with a "masculine attitude" tend to see and describe systems as obstinate, highly resistant and uncooperative. These same therapists are more inclined to be dominant and to prescribe interventions. They circumvent possible resistance, so that the family achieves the change planned by the therapist, often without being aware of it (manipulation).

In addition, "masculine [attitude]" therapists who regard a family as abnormal and pathological [may show] a preference for confrontation and giving advice. Succorance and empowerment, on the other hand, are more "feminine"

## *Succorance and empowerment are more "feminine" attitudes.*

step towards behavioural change. To empower means to change a lack of power into strength. You empower yourself when, after experiencing and living through powerlessness, you recognize, acknowledge, survive, and work-through these experiences. This is a specific knowledge that many women have attained, as have other groups in society that find themselves in positions of subordination. Women therapists can use

attitudes. A therapist with a preference for succorance views the family as blocked and naive: she chooses "caring" interventions that allow the family to grow and develop without their being aware of it. In the strategy of empowerment the therapist regards the system or sub-system as subjugated by the problem; a family oppressed and blocked in its development by the problem.

Interventions are directed towards

opening up new possibilities and inviting a greater awareness of the family's own capacity to counterbalance the power of the problem. The therapist asks questions such as: "How many hours of the day are ruled by the problem?" "How do you manage not to be dominated by the problem during the remaining hours?" The purpose of these questions is to promote awareness of possible choices and preferences.

I believe that every therapist has a strong preference for a specific attitude. It is important, however, to take note of it, talk about it and reflect on it. This reflection allows room for more than one option and helps in the choice of an attitude that suits the therapist. If the choice does not match that of the system, it can mean that the therapist will advise the family to consult another therapist, or that the therapist will request supervision (Haber, 1990). Formulation of a hypothesis stimulates me to reflect on my spontaneous view and on the feelings the family evokes in me. For each family I base the choice of strategy on an examination of which of the four attitudes I personally (or my supervisee) feel most drawn to and why.

### 3.1 An Example of the Tendency towards Manipulation

The Emerald family brought their 6-year-old son, the youngest of three children, to therapy because of his incorrigible behaviour. The supervisee had become desperate after reading the file and, after a series of therapeutic endeavours, the parents also felt that "therapy" couldn't help. The therapist actually felt unable to devise any [effective] strategy and had taken refuge in a manipulative approach. During supervision we discussed her powerlessness. Could her despair be a reflection of the despair felt by the family with regard to the therapy? The therapist asked this question and explored with the family how many and what kind of experiences they had had with therapists. After this discussion, the family seemed able to make a choice as to the manner of dealing with the problem; resistance disappeared and the family felt that its own potential had been recognized. Experiences such as these have taught me to explore "resistance" by inquiring into the previous experiences such families have had with therapy.

### 3.2 An Example of the Tendency towards Confrontation

The Sapphire family had inherited, from past generations, the belief that slapping was an effective method of training children. I experienced the feeling of wanting to reprimand and correct them. During the first interview, however, we explored together to see what led to their opinions about slapping and how this slapping had come to be dominant as a pattern of interaction in the family, although it was not intentional. When the family recognized the tyranny of this pattern, there was room to start thinking about alternative strategies and to start practicing other methods.

### 3.3 An Example of the Tendency towards Succorance

The Jade family came in with an adolescent daughter who mutilated herself and asked for her to be hospitalized. It was decided to work first on an outpatient basis. The positive connotation that the daughter was making it possible for her mother to continue caring for her brought some movement into the system but there



*With Grace.*

*Photo by May Ann Fraser*



was no basic change in the caring interaction. I then put the following questions to the family: "How much are you determined by the idea that a woman must always care for others and want to do so?" and "What influence does this idea have on your daily life and are the family members prepared, little-by-little, to cast off this influence?"

Thus, the family felt they were being taken seriously and became more aware of possible, alternative forms of interaction. Later on, I was able to discuss with different family members the blocks

to further development. We also discussed how they viewed themselves as male or as female.

The foregoing will have made clear my preference for the strategy of empowerment, where necessary in combination with another strategy. This preference has to do with my premise that the "problematic" system-as-a-whole, and/or its members, are oppressed and traumatized. The preference is not tied to any specific symptomatology but, rather, to my belief that every symptom is a signal of oppression and of the inability to tap into and use one's own strengths. I pay special attention to the position of the women: mothers and daughters are often the bearers of the symptoms, signalling that there is something very wrong in the family. An essential question in each case is how and in what area oppression is occurring.

#### 4. Techniques Used to Promote Empowerment

##### 4.1 Questions to Facilitate Reflection

By asking questions designed to encourage reflection, the therapist invites the family to think about meanings, interaction and labelling. Special attention is paid to problematic expectations with regard to male and female role models; the therapist describes these as learned and imposed by a patriarchal culture. By means of questions that lead the family members to express the expectations they have of each other, how they arrived at these expectations, and how great the influence of their personal history is on

their present behaviour and interaction—it can become clear that it is not the members of the family who are the problem but the expectations and images they have of each other. Detaching the problematic views from the person (externalization) creates images and ideas which can be looked at, held up for discussion

***My belief [is] that every symptom is a signal of oppression.***

and possibly changed. If the family members change these images and ideas, they facilitate the possibility of changing behaviour as well, and thereby, also their feelings about one another and about themselves.

Examples of such questions are:

- If you were a man instead of a woman, in what respect would you relate differently to your partner?
- If you were the father instead of the mother, in what way would you change your way of bringing up your children?
- Imagine that your son were a daughter; what profession would he choose? (McCyrill Roberts, 1991)

The purpose is not, in the first instance, to bring about a behavioural change at the first-order cybernetic stage

***Therapists can formulate questions [so] that rigid patterns ... are personified.***

but rather at the second-order stage, on a meta level. The aim here is a change in the way of viewing stereotyped gender roles as a first step towards empowering the woman within the family. Often enough questions that encourage reflection are sufficient to set the above mentioned process in motion, but sometimes it is necessary to practice other behaviour for real change to come about.

#### 4.2 Externalization

The objective of externalization is to bring about change in the manner of solving or coping with problems, such that the family can extricate itself from the problem and mobilize its own powers to develop its potentialities. Therapists can formulate questions in such a way that rigid patterns of thought and expectations with regard to role models are personified. For example, they might depict patriarchal expectations as *tyrants* who dominate the system and/or subsystem. A next step would be to explore situations where the families or family members can escape the tyranny of these concepts regarding gender roles. By personifying ways of thinking, the therapist will make a distinction between a person's ideas and the actual person. The ways of thinking are only concepts that have been learned (Anderson & Goolishian, 1988). The pattern of accusation and feelings of being accused can be interrupted. The (sub-)system gradually revises its norms and values and the members redefine their expectations with regard to one another. After externalizing their old concepts, they can change them and begin to internalize the changes as new concepts. This gives them greater possibilities for making choices. And thus, they enlarge their [capacities for] self-management (Walters, Carter, Papp & Silverstein, 1988).

By externalizing problematic *gender codes*, the therapist accords recognition to the oppression and pain that family members

have suffered as a result of the tyranny of these role expectations found in our society. Talking about their experiences and feelings with regard to the traumatic oppression sets in

motion a process of working things through that they can share with one another. This opens up perspectives and allows the family members to discover that they are able to expand their potential for change (White, 1986).

#### 5. Case Description

### 5.1 First Acquaintance

For a number of years I have been working with an interdisciplinary team. A 45-year-old woman was admitted to our outpatient therapy programme who, from the age of 18, had suffered from severe obsessive-compulsiveness. Over the years, the family had sought therapeutic help many times but there had never been any significant success. For this reason they had a rather negative attitude towards the helping professions. Despite the mother's obsessive behaviour, the family had managed to keep together. Studying the file, we were shaken by the massive threat emanating from the father. Our impression was confirmed during the first interview when he said, "If anyone harms my family, I'll kill them and then I'll kill myself."

There were four children in the family, two boys and two girls, aged between 13 and 20. The mutual bonds were very strong. Together with a great deal of anger, both openly expressed and concealed, the family conveyed an impression of strength. Each one had his or her part to play to survive and continue to function around the mother's problem. All suffered the influence of mother's problem.

### 5.2 Choice of Strategy

The combination of powerlessness and violence radiating from the family aroused my instinct of self-preservation, making me want to "escape." I decided to involve the team and share with them the feelings the family evoked in me. We discussed our impressions of the role and

position of each member of the family and their mutual interaction; we shared our feelings of helplessness and rage, spoke about our desire to confront the father and our tendency to want to care for the family and to lead the mother in the direction of true emancipation. Exploring our own reactions enabled us to take a step back and to recognize how we, ourselves, were dominated by set ideas about family phenomena and gender roles.

We also asked ourselves, "What can we add to the therapy the family and the client have already undergone?" "Have we anything to contribute that would

service of the needs of the individual who has been admitted, without running counter to the reality of that person's family. The individual lives in this reality and the client returns daily from the therapy programme to the family home.

### 5.3 The Therapy

I shared our thoughts and feelings with the family. A trusting relationship began to form in which the father could allow his vulnerability to surface and the mother could show her power in a more direct way. I also discussed with them how we could work conjointly. This co-therapy model works as follows:

Therapist 1 (T1) externalizes and represents the interests of the individual in relation to the family goals; Therapist 2 (T2) externalizes the loyalty of the individual family members in relation to their own goals; Therapist 3 (T3) is the discussion leader who facilitates the dialogue. With therapists present, in the therapy



*We know this: The Earth does not belong to us, we belong to the Earth. Everything is connected with everything; what happens to the Earth, happens to the children of the Earth. - Chief Seattle 1885*

*Photo by M. Jongerius-Joras*

enable them to mobilize their self-healing capacity so that they could lead a happier life?" We decided to regard the family as a professional team around the presenting problem. We wanted to get to know them better in regard to their rhythm of life, the recurring patterns of behaviour with which they coped with the problem, their views and stories regarding the problem and their views on gender roles. We gave them a redefinition of our therapeutic institute (Ausloos, 1980): its task is to put its expertise at the

room, and other therapists observing from behind a one-way mirror, T3 reflects with the family on their views and their stories about their roles and functions and about their choices and the consequences of these choices for each one personally and for the family-as-a-whole (De Voogd, 1986).

In the course of therapy (ten sessions and one follow-up interview six months later), it became evident that the "family resources" had been suppressed by the following concepts, stemming from the

family history of the parents: that to be faithful to your own development, to differentiate yourself and to build up your autonomy means breaking with your loved ones—but that is a masculine view; and that relationship or involvement means to give yourself totally—which is supposed to be feminine. Therefore, the family members eagerly entered into reflection questions such as:

- Suppose that if father did not have the idea that, as head of the family, he had to bear 100 percent of the responsibility, what percentage would mother take upon herself?
- Suppose if mother were not occupied with carrying out her compulsions, which tasks would she want to take over from father?
- The oldest daughter would like to live with her boyfriend but is not allowed to. Imagine that she were a son. What difference would that make?

Fear of direct and indirect violence, among other things, was keeping this family

together. The fear decreased in proportion to the measure of externalization of the internal conflicts of loyalties.

This is the way it happened. In the presence of the family, T1 and T2 talked to each other about inner loyalties. T3 ensured that the two, apparently mutually exclusive, aspects, fidelity to one's own development and fidelity to the family, could be recognized by the family as "two sides of one coin." The family itself determined when the time was ripe to make changes, moving in small steps. Their sense of responsibility for themselves, as individuals and for the family-as-a-whole, determined their choices. The young people saw their parents gradually begin to stand by one another; first in their role as parents, then later they were able to explore their roles as man and wife, and finally to allow room for a more symmetrical relationship.

#### 5.4 Follow-up

Five years after the woman terminated her out-patient treatment, she called in

for an appointment. She mentioned that once-in-a-while she still thought she had to control things but then she would forget to do so because she was engrossed in other things. Two children were away from home studying and the child-parent relations were positive. Her husband had died of a heart attack. She reported that the years after her therapy had been the best of their lives. What had touched her most deeply was that the therapists had acknowledged her husband in his vulnerability and power; and herself in her power and vulnerability. After the therapy, their relationship had become more balanced. Following her husband's death, she had taken up the possibilities and plans for her own development that she had dropped when she married. She was satisfied with life.

## *Fear of direct and indirect violence was keeping the family together.*

#### 6. Conclusion

I regard symptoms as signals of internalized norms that have been forced on us, as well as of the inability to tap and use one's own capacities. Women are often bearers of the symptoms and fulfill a signal function in their families. Families, in their turn, fall victim to oppressive gender codes. From this point of view, it becomes self-evident that the therapist will choose an attitude and strategy of empowerment. The objective is to promote a more symmetrical relationship between women and men. This will naturally influence the way the children are brought up. Ideologies or schools within family therapy are significant only in as far as they take seriously the empowerment of the woman within the family and within society.

It is impossible in this day and age to practice family therapy and give supervision without recognizing sex-stereotyping in the family (Goldner, 1988). To recognize that concepts of masculinity and femininity can play a blocking and sup-

pressing role in the family leaves scope for a second-order change (Hare-Mustin, 1987). From this perspective, it will be possible to work creatively, in the future, towards the development of other forms of systems which allow the individual to come into his or her own as a person with masculine and feminine qualities.

An Irish family therapy team (Colgan McCarthy and O'Reilly-Byrne, 1988) uses the title "Fifth Province" as a metaphor for a neutral area. There, therapist and family members reflect on norms and value systems that "dominate" in the other provinces. Here, traumatic experiences are worked through together and desired changes initiated. It is easier to actualize these if one realizes that the "dominating" images and stories were also once created. They can, therefore, also be changed by the creation of one's own new images through ongoing shared reflection.

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# Standards, Multiple Relationships and the Job of Therapy and Discipline

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The articles by Stacy (1994) and Tomm (1994) were interesting, as well as edifying in bringing light to the current discussions taking place in the field regarding dual or multiple relationships. Challenging narrow definitions which emerge in sanctions or admonitions is necessary and done best when undertaken in dialogue such as Stacey and Tomm provide. In compliment to this dialogue, I hope will be the comments which follow. Emphasis here is upon Stacey's and

our "selves" is allowed to be present, and to what extent. While, as Stacy suggests (pp.48-49), a number of "selves" may pop-out or be invited to attend upon our patients, it behooves the therapy to subordinate certain self's to the operative demands of the role (or self) called family therapist. This is directly in keeping with her admonition to weigh and measure our multiple potentials with clients in the light of getting the job done [i.e., "Does the relationship in any way detract

from, negate, de-emphasize, or threaten progress of the therapeutic work?" (p.49).] This *fulcrum emphasis* upon the work that needs doing, must be the starting point from which each clinician

adjudges what might or might not constitute *improper* multiplicity or what the Psychologists Association of Alberta has called "role confusion." To assist with an understanding of improper multiplicity or role confusion, Stacy, Tomm, and others (Peterson, 1993; Bogard, 1993; Pope and Bauhauts, 1986; O'Connor-Slimp and Burian, 1994; Sonne, 1994), have advanced the idea of exploitation as a key feature. To this, I would add the concept of power (*Canadian Psychologists Association Code of Ethics*, 1993).

How much, with an adolescent, the conscientious wasting of time in a more collateral, friendly role might be necessary to increase influence in the therapeutic role?

How contrariwise, too much friendly banter or rapport/initiation with a couple might alienate one or both?

What the distinction in the minds of a patient or patients, might be between therapist as purveyor of information vs. someone to feel close to, or as someone to be valued by?

And finally, to what degree does democratization of the therapeutic process truly reflect what we think it does and how important is this to the people we treat?

In this last regard, it is imperative to

*It is selves not self that best represent us.*

Tomm's ideas—and, a desire to set them in the light of not only professional conduct but disciplinary procedure.

## Not Every Self is Multiple at Once

While it is axiomatic that, in the words of Carl Sandberg, "I contradicts myself" (i.e., that it is *selves* not *self* that best represents us), it is also true that not every *self* is relevant all of the time. In the light of psychotherapy, codes of ethics and conduct inform us which of

our "selves" is allowed to be present, and to what extent. While, as Stacy suggests (pp.48-49), a number of "selves" may pop-out or be invited to attend upon our patients, it behooves the therapy to subordinate certain self's to the operative demands of the role (or self) called family therapist. This is directly in keeping with her admonition to weigh and measure our multiple potentials with clients in the light of getting the job done [i.e., "Does the relationship in any way detract from, negate, de-emphasize, or threaten progress of the therapeutic work?" (p.49).] This *fulcrum emphasis* upon the work that needs doing, must be the starting point from which each clinician

## Power/Exploitation by Role/Function

Confusion around roles is often the single most determinant feature associated with problems of patient/therapist ethical dilemmas (PAA Symposium, *The Psychologists Association of Alberta*, Vol. 4, #5, January 1, 1990). Role confu-

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remember that no matter how much we abjure power and protect against exploitation, the final outcome is left in the hearts and minds of the people we treat. In fact, Stacy and Tomm advocate (p.

## *The final outcome is left in the hearts and minds of the people we treat.*

52) that we seize upon the resource our clients/patients offer us, as persons who in their own right can define what it is they want from therapy, in general, and the relationship, in particular. While not disparaging this project especially as it might be engineered under the *narrative family therapy* frame of reference, there is already a lot in the literature concerning what serves patients and what they desire in the therapeutic relationship (Bourgeois, et al., 1990; Holtzworth-Munroe, et al., 1989; Pinsof and Catherall, 1986; Stiles, 1980; and, Shapiro, 1974). Not surprisingly, this boils down to two basic elements: support and responsiveness. In therapy, patients want respectful appreciation of the problem and competent sympathy. These desires are best met when the therapist offers the multiple potential of their *self*: however, the variety of ways to interact with patients is governed by the executive role of *the therapeutic self*. How to show the proper respect, the necessary alliance, and demonstrate responsiveness with this or that patient(s) is the central aspect of the whole endeavour of therapy.

While the levelling of therapy and the dismantling of the apparatus of professional mystification—what Stacy (following White and Epston) refers to as making one's therapy transparent (p. 50) is an ethos most of us are embracing (Amundson et al 1993; Amundson 1989); in fact, we must never ask more of an idea or the 'self' it sponsors in therapy, than is its due. Plainly, there are different 'selves' for different folks. For example, the 'selves' useful in dealing with a family addressing normative transitions around

marriage, the arrival of children and new parenting or the negotiation of adolescence may be quite different from the 'selves' evoked when dealing with chronic legal offenders, abused persons or the

patients some call *character disordered*. Again, 'selves' under the direction of the needs or status of the patient and the executive control of the therapeutic role seems the operative mode.

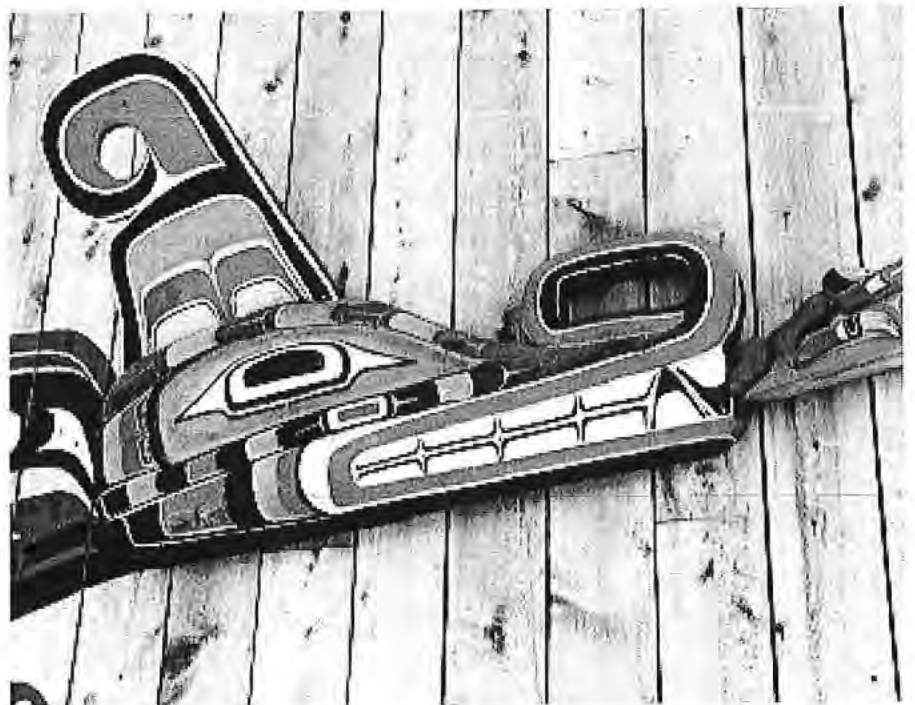
### **FINAL THOUGHTS Self-Directed vs. Other-Focused Discipline**

In recent years, there has been a movement, philosophically and political-

subjectivity but instead sets them within changing contextual circumstance.

In relation to ethics, codes of conduct represent a "mobile metaphor" so to speak, travelling across the history of the discipline (Stewart and Amundson, 1995). Tomm and Stacy both reflect the best of what this can be about, for rather than arriving at once at a fixed point, our practices should arise (and rise again) from lively conversation and reflection on the proper conduct of therapy.

Nonetheless, in our efforts to expand and/or define our relationship with those we treat, let us remember that it is not enough that treatment and relationships look fair at 'local levels' (i.e. in our offices and consulting rooms), but that we also seek to maintain fairness in the eyes of others, those who might look upon our work from the outside. Tomm (p. 52) makes such a distinction and calls for the input of others to help us define relationship terms, primarily through the input of the people we treat. I would add to this, as well, the need to attend to the way we appear to the world at large, including the eyes of our colleagues and



*The Head of the Siskutl (A Mythical Creature of the Sea).*

*Photo by Joanne Schultz Hall*

ly, away from the pursuit of essence toward the development of the means for solidarity (Diggins 1994; Flax 1992 and Bernstein 1992). This does not reject the ideals of theory nor personal rights to

the way we would want the public to conceive of the image of psychotherapist. There is good reason to attend to role, power and exploitation in our conduct of service to the discipline. Each person

who calls their *selves* "family therapist" has a fiduciary (i.e. protective) relationship relative to the on-going status of the field. One of our many roles is the role related to the image of family therapist in the public domain. Therefore, each of us has a protective role, to represent the field through our acts clinically and publicly. This may have a variety of difficult aspects. It entails not only attention to our own work but perhaps at extreme moments involves the need to attend to the work of others. Hence, even in a world of multiple selves, the field may from time-to-time require a critical self which each of us directs back upon not only our own work but that of others.

While as Stacy suggests, and I agree, that "issues of exploitation, therapist responsibility, client respect, demystification of the therapeutic process, egalitarian practice and empowerment (are) highlighted through...the social-constructionist family therapy community more than other training or therapy" (p. 50), I fear we can not assume that this emerging clinical orientation will entirely secure the field, relative to exploitation and power.

In the years that I have been involved with ethics investigation, I have yet to confront a case where the practitioner did not feel they had engaged in an action

time-to-time to impose standards upon others. In an attempt to address just this issue of trying to keep our open, flexible and democratic "selves" at the fore of our practice, the Psychologists Association of

and the means necessary to remedy problem—captures what I believe the best multiple relationships might be about. It neither invites, in complainants, undue investment in the role of victim nor, in

## *Even in a world of multiple selves, the field may require a critical self.*

Alberta has recently embraced an expanded sense of discipline. This is an attempt to bring justice to the complexity of ethical and conduct violation. Its focus is upon negotiated settlement of differences through mediation. It provides an arena within which apparent errors can be corrected through recourse to conversation rather than adjudication.

In instances where a matter is brought to the attention of the association and it appears a discipline hearing is likely, the practitioner, the complainant and the association, in the presence of a third party, can negotiate an outcome consis-

psychologists, a need to defend or pursue adversarial self-promotion. It allows the discipline to introduce standards and limits that both complainant and respondent might appreciate. Further, it is administered through a third party outside of the system, so to speak, whose focus is entirely upon restoring a sense of justice to patient, therapist and the discipline.

This format for dispute resolution is only beginning to be explored. Clearly, there are limitations, such as crass sexual predation or criminal act. Nonetheless, if we are to be seen as multiple selves and if our goal in the prescription of ethics is to maintain or pursue justice in the conduct of our affairs—then pragmatic consideration and innovation may be necessary to integrate our multiple selves in ever-changing, ethical and effective ways.

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## *Ask of patients what they feel conduct should be about.*

that was not justified. This is to suggest that engaging in unusual therapeutic practice, providing less than well-formed professional opinion and (with all deference to Tomm's concerns that dual relationship has been unduly linked to sexual exploitation) sleeping with patients all seem to arise from the 'therapeutic' flexibility associated with the potential freedoms of our discipline (in my case psychology). Therefore, as we situate the acceptable therapeutic self, with its attendant variations, in the confines of codes, ethics and concern for power and exploitation we may be called upon from

tent with the beliefs/needs of all parties. The goal is three-fold:

- To address the concerns of the patient and set those concerns against professional definitions of conduct;
- To, then, arrive at an immediate sense of justice for all parties; and finally,
- To make transparent for all parties the process of discipline-related justice.

To ask of patients what they feel conduct should be about, to place this in juxtaposition with definitions of the discipline and within the context of the practitioner's own sense of their *self*, their craft,

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Mother Earth

Stock Photo

# A Place For Spirituality in Family Therapy<sup>1</sup>

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I would like to share with you some of my thoughts and experiences as a person and therapist who has thought about spirituality and has valued this as an important resource for myself.

Sometimes, in the course of talking about intimate human experiences, both painful as well as joyful, the opportunity presents itself to explore the spiritual values and beliefs of our clients. I would not want to impose this kind of conversation on an individual or family, but I would like to be open to exploring what is most important and relevant for people in their experiences, and thus want to create space for conversations that may include exploration about spiritual matters in some situations.

To begin with, I would like to share with you a few case vignettes:

*A native man told me a story of how he had been chosen to be a keeper of his tribe's wisdom when he was a boy. He told his story in English, interspersed with chanting in his native tongue, of being a chosen one to whom traditions would be passed on. He had attended a boarding school for natives where he described being threatened and terrorized by dorm attendants. I recognized his story as a chosen one, as*

*a potentially powerful resource in his life, in that it could provide an avenue for healing from experienced abuse and cultural victimization.*

*A woman whose husband had died in an accident, leaving her to raise young children on her own, spoke of how her belief in an after-life and that she would see her husband in that afterlife, had*

*her to observe daily. This ritual had helped give this young woman, who was struggling with suicidal thoughts, the courage to continue with her own life and see the value of life and the importance of her connections.*

*Another woman who had been bitter towards her ex-husband for years following their divorce, described a turning-point she reached after she had begun to explore her spirituality. In doing so, she had come to discover she could forgive him and let go of the bitterness that had plagued her for years.*

All of these examples speak to the potential healing that can be accessed through a person's exploration of their spirituality. With emerging professional curiosity about spirituality and its potential for healing in the therapeutic relationship, we have the opportunity to reflect upon how that potential can be accessed.

By spirituality, I will be referring to the inner exploration by which a person attempts to ascribe meaning to life and to place themselves within a context of connectedness to other living things. This can occur both within formal religious structures or outside them.

More common themes among some of the world's religions include those of: mutual respect and tolerance, the ethic of love, equality of human-kind (though this is often stated as man-kind, thereby taking on a different experienced emphasis for many people), the principal of charity, and the alleviation of suffering.

It seems that some people turn to spirituality as a resource to deal with the dilemmas of life with which they are



*A Contemplation Window.*

*Photo by Joanne Schultz Hall*

*helped her cope with her loss. This woman was a Jehovah's Witness, who despite the fact that she did not view herself or her husband as some of the "chosen" who would enter heaven, had found reassurance in her faith.*

*A Moslem woman, who was grieving the death of her mother-in-law, a faithful Moslem herself, shared with me how she gained strength from the ritual of purification through drinking holy water, a ritual her mother-in-law had encouraged*

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struggling to find strength and courage to face difficult issues. However, sometimes a person's spiritual understanding may inadvertently contribute to their engaging in pathologizing interpersonal patterns (PIPs) which further contribute to the dilemmas with which they are struggling. Ironically, these may be the very dilemmas that they were hoping their spirituality might somehow address. Sometimes, as well, their conscious adherence to particular ideas may orient them to engage in patterns of behaviour that clearly have a negative effect on their relationships, though they may not recognize this.

This becomes apparent, for example, in the report of a mother I spoke with, who had been raised within and had been an adult member of a fundamentalist religious group, which she experienced as controlling people through fear and guilt induction. The church had advocated the use of corporal punishment with the belt, including with young children. She had also experienced considerable oppression herself, not only within the church but in her relationship with her husband, in which she described the expectation of wives to be that of passivity or submission. I doubt that she or her husband had fully realized the poisonous effects of the PIP of *male entitlement and presumption of authority* coupled with *female passivity and non-entitlement* on their relationship as spouses. Nor do I imagine that her husband saw the ways that the PIP of *excessive force or punitive parenting efforts* could invite fearfulness and resentment to be experienced by the children—that it could become the seed-bed for rebellion, which in turn could invite more forcefulness and punishment, etc. I believe the mother did see the potentially negative effects of punitive parenting efforts through reflecting on her own prior childhood experiences, though she may have found it difficult to act on her own understanding of this because of the injunction to be passive. Thus, despite what I imagine to be their positive intent to be good parents and spouses, their efforts had some potential-

ly negative repercussions. What, in particular, impressed me about this woman's story, was the way in which she had found the inner strength to free herself from these patterns, which I will elaborate upon a bit further in a few moments.

I do want to comment first on the way that when a person's spirituality becomes embodied within a particular religious tradition, particular ideas and practices may be assumed to be right or true and, therefore, are not necessarily questioned.



*God's Creativity.*

*Photo by Joanne Schultz Hall*

These ideas and practices are often culturally supported as well. Within countries where a particular religious orientation predominates, the culture and religion may interplay in such a way as to mutually support particular ideas and patterns of behaviour.

## **The therapist can identify a core belief.**

I can comment on this by sharing a little of my history. I was raised during the 50s and 60s in California, attending a Lutheran Day School in the Missouri Synod, one of the more conservative branches of the Lutheran church. The church was organized such that women were not allowed to be on the church

council, to be ushers, or to be ministers within that church body. Only within certain circumscribed spheres were women more active — in the women's group and teaching Sunday School, though it is no surprise that the two Sunday School superintendents, I remember, were both men. This larger system PIP of patriarchy seemed to reflect, as well as support, the prevailing hierarchy within families of that era, where it was presumed that men were the heads of the family and women

(were bodies who) had certain limited areas of influence related to care of the children. It also reflected the German cultural underpinnings to Missouri Synod Lutheranism.

Thus, given the interplay between religion and culture, to move from a PIP to a HIP (a healing interpersonal pattern) can be a complex shift to make as the underlying assumptions, both spiritual and cultural, may need to be examined. I would like to comment briefly on how a therapist might generally approach this, and then share a story with you of how the woman I described earlier made this shift for

herself.

In order to shift from a PIP that is influenced by religious beliefs, the therapist can identify a core belief with respect to the client's spirituality, a core belief that is of a higher level of priority than the belief that may be problematically influencing their behaviour. This can be facilitated through inviting the client to recognize that even though, when engaged in a PIP, the intent behind their behaviour may be a positive one, the unintended outcome may be negative. This negative outcome, when looked at in conjunction with a higher priority core belief, creates cognitive dissonance which can provide impetus for change. For example, to counter a PIP of *punitive parenting/children's resentful withdrawal*, a therapist might orient to a client's core belief of understanding children as gifts from God. This core belief could invite them into a HIP of *parents acknowledging their children's accom-*

*plishments and helping children make up for mistakes and correspondingly, children becoming more open about mistakes and taking responsibility for them.*

If I could return to my story of being raised within Missouri Synod Lutheranism, I think the church could have taken a different position than that of support for the existing patriarchal structures. Instead, it could have taken a position of leadership and support in creating a context for more egalitarian relationships among men and women. The church could have chosen to orient to the "power to" by remembering it's roots as a church influenced by a leader who claimed the freedom to think and live by his conscience and to protest. The healing direction of "power to," could have been inspired by the underlying principle of a loving-kindness in relationships, a core belief which underpins Christianity.

I want to finish by telling you a bit more of the story of the woman who had been a member of the church that she experienced in such oppressive ways. She did choose not only to leave her husband, but the church as well. I think what allowed her to do so was her own spirituality that invited her to continue to question what she was told. Thus, she challenged the belief that women were to be

passive and submissive, by choosing to actively question and to become an active participant in decisions in her life. Her own belief in a God who had unconditional love for human beings—her core belief—contrasted with what she experienced as a church-taught God who was punitive and conditional about love. This belief in the unconditional love of God allowed her to love herself and her husband enough to choose to leave a marriage where she felt that each was unable to offer the kind of love the other deserved to receive from a partner. This does not mean separation was the only alternative, but it was a choice that she actively made, given her circumstances. Her core belief in a God of unconditional love also helped her in orienting her parenting efforts in a less punitive direction, towards a more gentle guidance with them. She began to encourage the children to be open about their feelings. Thus, she oriented herself to the "spirit of the law" with respect to the loving guidance of children vs. the "letter of the law" of "spare the rod and spoil the child." Thus, this mother actively took steps to counter an injunction of passivity both in her relationship with her husband and children. She did this through accessing her core belief in a God of unconditional

love.

To summarize, our spiritual beliefs can be a tremendous resource to us, but also can become a liability. As therapists, we have the opportunity to invite our clients into accessing their spirituality as a healing resource in their lives through reflection on the impact of their beliefs on their relationships with others.

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## Notes

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## Editor's Note

Joanne would like to thank her client, who was generous in allowing Joanne to share her story of spiritual growth.



*Beauty.*

Photo by Joanne Schultz Hall

## *"I Am"*

*I am tough*

*I am strong*

*I am woman*

*I am broken*

*I will heal*

*I will take time*

*I will remain undefeated*

*I am a fighter*

*I am a mother*

*As a bear protects her young*

*So will I*

*I am hurting*

*I will heal*

*I am caring*

*I am nurturing*

*I am a problem solver*

*I am shaking in my fear*

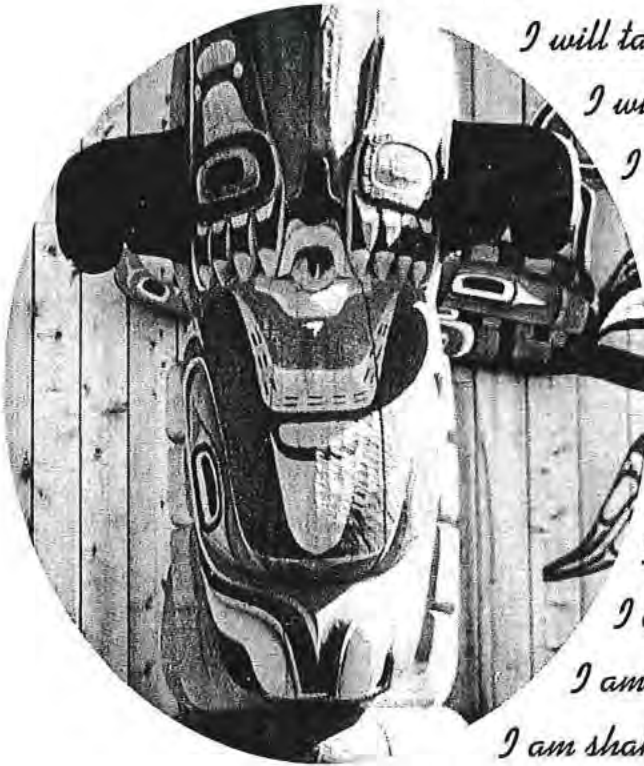
*Of shattered dreams*

*I will build others*

*I will lean on God*

*I will love myself*

*I will survive*



*Mary Razzo*

*Written November 30, 1994*

# Narrative Imagination In Evoking A Language Of Mind<sup>1</sup>

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## Preface

*The psychologists do not know everything. Poets have other insights into man.*

Gaston Bachelard

As a poet, I hold a belief in the significance and import of words. It is important to comprehend the etymological roots and branches of the words we use in the creation of meaning and human understanding. How the accepted meaning of certain words in the theory and practice of therapy changed over time is important. If we are to have knowledge of the original connotation of the words we use in the theory and practice of therapy, we must situate words such as *psychology*, *psychopathology*, *psychotherapist*, and the word *therapy* itself—within an historical context. To do so, becomes illuminating, especially when one realizes how far away from their original meaning the above-mentioned words have come to be understood.

My intention within this paper is to offer reflections upon the ideas and thinking of persons whose theoretical writing has been inspirational to me. As such, this paper wishes to celebrate the work of James Hillman (1975, 1989, 1992), Harlene Anderson and Harry Goolishian (1988), Stephen Tyler (1986), and Deleuze and the late Felix Guattari (1983).

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This paper represents a small contribution to what Hillman (1975) describes as a movement towards re-visioning psychology, a project that includes returning the idea of psyche, or mind, to pathology. As Hillman writes, "Out of psychopathos-logos came the meaning of suffering of the soul, or the soul's suffering of meaning" (1975, p. 71). In my own work, I have discovered that Anderson's and

## Revisoning psychology includes returning the idea of psyche, or mind, to pathology.

Goolishian's idea of *therapeutic conversation* has been liberating as a means of facilitating dialogue with others intent upon understanding the suffering of their lives. Anderson's and Goolishian's reflections upon Maturana's ideas on language, in the creation and construction of meaning, have also been liberating.

Stephen Tyler (1986), a post-modern anthropologist, has given much thought and consideration to the way in which ethnographic texts may become collaborative creations arising from the search for meaning and understanding between the ethnographer and the informants. Through such a collaboration, *local knowledge* becomes ascendant and privileged. Meaning is evoked, not prescribed or represented. This paper finds affinity between these ideas and how they might inform and influence developments within theory in therapy.

Deleuze's and Guattari's writing and thinking illustrates the post-modern challenge to accepted notions within the med-

ical domain, particularly as these notions and concepts apply to the increasing reification of persons created by psychiatric practices within the medical model. Deleuze and Guattari point out that many artists and writers, for example, have literally or figuratively acted upon their desires, and have had journeys through madness have been break-throughs, not break-downs.

Finally, this paper acknowledges the thinking, writing, and practice associated with the work of Michael White and David Epston (1990). For myself, their achievement in gathering ideas from philosophy, literary criticism and theory, anthropology and sociology, and other domains, has been inspirational in returning the idea of the narrative imagination to therapeutic practice and theory.

## Acknowledgements

I wish to thank Gail Marie Boivin and Stephen Patrick Madigan for reading and listening to ideas presented herein. I also wish to acknowledge my parents, Ronald and Noreen, for teaching me to question and create.

## I. Musings on "Wrong Pathologizing" and a Psychology of Fragments.

*Every philosophy also conceals a philosophy; every opinion is also a hideout, every word also a mask.*

Nietzsche

*Tis all in pieces, all coherence gone.*

John Donne

Out of curiosity, I recently examined the Penguin *Dictionary of Psychology* (Reber, 1985) to read how psychology

was defined. Psychology simply cannot be defined: indeed, it cannot, even be easily characterized. Even if one were to do so today; tomorrow would render the effort inadequate. Psychology is what scientists and philosophers of various persuasions have created to try to fulfill the need to understand the minds and behaviors of various organisms from the most primitive to the most complex. Hence, it really is not a thing at all, it is about a thing, or about many things (p. 593). To punctuate this post-modern definition of psychology, it is noteworthy that this dictionary runs to 848 pages! Indeed, psychology is about many things!

## Many journeys through madness have been break-throughs not break-downs.

Thinking about this definition, I was reminded of a question Bateson asked in his text, *Mind And Nature: A Necessary Unity* (1979). "What pattern connects the crab to the lobster, and the orchid to the primrose, and all four of them to me? And me to you? And all the six of us to the amoeba in one direction and to the backward-schizophrenic in another?" (p.8). I was also reminded of one of James Joyce's characters who announces, "I'm thousands. I'm an *in-divide-u-all*."

Bateson's question speaks to the connectedness and inter-connectedness associated with what he referred to as an *ecology of mind* (1972). Joyce's line speaks to the multiplicity of voices contained within us, to our fragmented experience, and our experience of this *experience*. As human creatures, we take bits and pieces of "lived experience" and construct relevance and meaning through a narrative context. This context is woven through language, through words. Heraclitus wrote, "It is not I who speak, it is the Logos." A post-modern therapy can facilitate the re-storying of a person's existence by returning to an understanding of what the words *therapy* and *psychology* originally intended. For James Hillman (1975), "Psychology ideally means giving

soul to language and finding language for soul" (p.216). "Psyche" pertains to mind, or, to soul, while "logos" pertains to word. Hillman, in seeking the Greek etymological significance of the word "psychology," provides us with yet another lens with which to view the work we undertake when we engage in therapy. And what of the word "therapy?" Hillman is, again, instructive. *Therapeia*, in Greek means to "carry, support, hold"; "the therapist is one who carries and takes care as does a servant... He (sic) is also one to lean upon, hold on to, and be supported by, ..." (1989, p.73). Hillman develops this definition further, pointing out that

the concept of therapist as someone who "treats" the soul is absent. "Let us recall here that psychotherapy in accordance with the root meaning of the words *psyche*

and *therapy* means to serve soul, not to treat it" (1975, p.74), emphasis in original). Thus, it is that for Hillman, "The psychotherapist is literally *the attendant of the soul*" (1989, p.73).

How did therapy shift in direction from *an attending to the soul*, and assisting, in *co-authoring a language*, to become a clinical construct the aim of which was the categorization of persons according to a diagnostic code?

Hillman suggests that for some time now, "psychology has been under the hegemony of medical and religious analogies and ...psychology has been unable to approach what are essentially psychological phenomena from a perspective of its own" (1975, p.57). Hillman proposes that we view the medical and religious analogies as "perspectives": "Our aim is to see them, and see through them; as perspectives, while

maintaining another view that differs from theirs and is psychological" (1975, p.57). As an illustration of these analogies, the following example of how persons under the influence of "depression" have been "treated" may be productive. Hillman argues:

*Because Christ resurrects, moments of despair, darkening, and desertion cannot be valid in themselves. Our one model insists on light at the end of the tunnel; one program that moves from Thursday evening to Sunday and the rising of a wholly new day better by far than before. Not only will therapy more or less consciously imitate this program ... but the individual's consciousness is already allegorized by the Christian myth so he (sic) knows what depression is and experiences it according to form ... (1975, p.98).*

On the subject of the religious analogy and psychology, Hillman concludes, "The counterpart of every crucifixion fantasy is a resurrection fantasy" (ibid). He argues that this has been picked up, over time, by the medical community. "Depression is still the Great Enemy. More personal energy is expended in manic defenses against, diversions from, and denials of it than goes into the other supposed psychopathological threats to society..." (ibid)

For Hillman, a truly "psychological" view of depression would involve a quite

## The concept of therapist as someone who "treats" the soul is absent.

different undertaking and understanding: "... through depression we enter depths and in depths find soul. Depression is essential to that tragic sense of life. It moistens the dry soul, and dries the wet. It brings refuse, limitation, focus, gravity, weight, and humble powerlessness. It reminds of death. *The true revolution begins in the individual who can be true to his or her depression*" (ibid, emphasis

in original). This passage, and this psychological viewpoint, may serve to remind of those thought provoking, and awe-inspiring, artists and writers who have entered depths in order to find a language for soul. Gilles Deleuze and the late Felix Guattari (1983) described this process as an achievement of *break-through* and not one of *breakdown*. Deleuze and Guattari mention writers such as: Thomas Hardy, D.H. Lawrence, Malcolm Lowry, Henry Miller, Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac, as persons who were not afraid "to scramble the codes" and "to cause flows to circulate" (p.132), as they articulated in language the multiplicity of voices and desires within their minds. As in Rimbaud's revolutionary poetry and prose, these writers

Russian Revolution we don't know how it started going bad" (1983, p.55).

Like Foucault (1980), Hillman critiques those who seek to exercise power over and against others, based on privileged, expert knowledge. "By carelessly turning over our symptoms to professional therapists, we have reinforced the grip of professionalism upon psychopathology" (1975, p.75). Hillman appears to be suggesting that we, the consumers of therapy, have had a hand in allowing this situation to occur, and to proliferate. Yet, this situation does not have to be accepted.

One of the problems associated with a professionalism of this type is that persons often *become* their diagnoses. Hillman describes this process as being

professional naming" reified persons into the "thing" named. More recently, Bill O'Hanlon (1992) has suggested that therapists may give their clients problems. One of the ways in which this may occur is through utilizing the lens of the DSM III technology. Karl Tomm (1990) has been concerned about the influence of the DSM, its inadvertent pathologizing, and also suggests we question assumptions contained within that text. In terms of the "effects" such a labelling technology has upon persons, the post-modern anthropologist, Stephen Tyler (1986, p.139) has gone as far as to call the DSM, "that terrorist bludgeon of the psychiatrist."

If we accept that the therapist is one who serves *mind* then what is required in the engagement between therapist and client is a therapeutic conversation in which the therapist assists the client in finding a language with which to express mind. There is no "treatment" in this engagement: there is only one human being attending with another human being. *Treatment*, then, becomes the fantasy, often detrimental and subjugating, of the clinical, medical model.

*Hillman asks: How can we take back therapy from the killing asymmetry of professionalism and the political abuses of wrong pathologizing, from a system which must find illness in order to promote health and which, in order to increase the range of its helping, is obliged to extend the area of sickness. Ever deeper pockets of pathology to be analyzed, over earlier traumata: primal, prenatal, into my astral body; ever more people into the ritual: the family, the office force, community mental health, analysis for everyone (1975, p.77).*

Being in therapy need not be an endless endeavour. Unlike versions of the medical model, or certain ideas regarding the phenomenon surrounding the recovery movement, a *reflexive, cybernetic therapy of literary merit* (White and Epston, 1990) assists in the process of giving voice to the voices within all of us. Such a therapy leads to the recollection of what Foucault called, "subjugated knowledges" and hitherto, "disqualified knowledges" within the person's experience (Foucault, 1980, p.82). Such a process may be guided by the kinds of questions asked in therapy. Karl Tomm might ask, "Do you ever wonder if continuing thera-



*Long House of the Siskutl.*

*Photo by Joanne Schultz Hall*

entered their own depths, faced death, and were therefore capable of living life. According to Deleuze and Guattari, "Psychoanalysis ought to be a song of life, or else be worth nothing at all. It ought, *practically*, to teach us to sing life. And, to see how the most defeated, sad song of death emanates from it: *eiapopeia*" (p.331).

Hillman has suggested that, in these days of late capitalism, therapy serves the purposes of the state by helping the individual adjust to the status quo. Therapy becomes an "adjustment" that is *done* to someone. Therapy is not an open exploration through language, it is a closed, prescriptive, enterprise. As Deleuze and Guattari write: "Psychoanalysis is like the

the ultimate outcome of the therapy game.

*By giving pathologizing a clinical name, the professional therapist makes the first move in this therapy game ... as soon as the move is made of professional naming, a distinct entity is created, with literal reality. On the one hand, I am protected from this thing by separation from it; it now has a name. But on the other hand, I now have something, or even am something: an alcoholic, an obsessive neurotic, a depressive (1975, p.75).*

Hillman, writing almost twenty years ago, was one of the psychotherapists to begin to question how this act of "profes-

py might actually interfere with your ability to learn how to find solutions on your own?" (Tomm 1987, p.182). If there is any point at all to "being in therapy," this being in therapy must involve a path toward self-healing and self-liberation.

## II. Multiplicity, Plurality, and Egalitarian Contexts of Change

*I have not read a work of literature for years. My head is full of pebbles and rubbish and broken matches and bits of glass picked up most everywhere. The task I set myself technically in writing a book from eighteen different points of view and in as many styles...*

*James Joyce, in a letter, June 24, 1921.*

*On the other hand, he often agreed with Vico that "Imagination is nothing but the working over of what is remembered," and said to Frank Budgen, "Imagination is memory."*

*In Ellman, James Joyce, 1982, p.512.*

Anderson's and Goolishian's (1988) paper, *Human Systems as Linguistic Systems* was liberating. My reading of their paper proclaimed that the art of therapy involved maintaining an open space, a flowing conversation in which persons engaged in dialogue evolving towards *problem dissolution*; and where the dignity and integrity of each person within the therapeutic context was paramount.

For myself, their speculations upon the primacy of *language* within the therapeutic context suggested that, because human dilemmas are defined within language, these same dilemmas can be dissolved through language. This served to remind me of Laing's text, *Knots*, in which he suggests "knots" were linguistic traps, words tricked us into. As such, though language, these knots could become undone. Thus, knots were human dilemmas, logical outcomes of taking words to their extreme logic.

Korzybinski's statement, often quoted by Bateson, also came to mind: "The map is not the territory, and the word is not the thing named."

The notion of a therapeutic conversation was particularly intriguing to me. As in a painting or construction by Picasso or Braque, or as in a composition by Strauss, the therapeutic conversation offers multiple descriptions of, *a problem*

## **P**sychoanalysis ought, practically, to teach us to sing life.

or *a complaint*; problems and complaints being, merely, *language constructions*. Within the open field of this formulation — therapeutic conversation — there was no correct point of view, no right perspective, no wrong perspective. The dualism of right/wrong that often contributed toward self-blame or blaming others did not have a place within this formulation. Rather, there existed a proliferation of several voices, each with its unique contribution aimed at problem dis-solution arising in polyphony. This language exchange resulted in an engendering of curiosity and interest amongst the participants, not apathy and disinterest: "I didn't know that." "I didn't realize you thought

## **T**he dignity of each person within the therapeutic context was paramount.

that way." "What you said is surprising." "I never heard that story before." Such comments became familiar refrains in the therapy. For Anderson and Goolishian, therapy brings forth the *unsaid*, and the *not-yet-said*. In this collaboration process, what emerges, what is evoked — adds new meanings, new understandings, and new narratives.

As the therapist, the "master" conver-

sationalist, continues asserting the primacy of language, dilemmas dis-solve. In Bateson's words, *news of difference* becomes recognized; relevance becomes contextualized between the participants who find themselves co-evolving new meaning and new understanding within the open field of the therapeutic conversation. Anthropologist Stephen Tyler (1986), has written of "the poet as **thera-**

**pon attendant of the Muse**" (p.134), and, in the therapeutic moment, this role seems quite apt. Poet as therapist, therapist as poet, attending to the soul of others; listening for the words that

deconstruct old stories, attendant to the new possibilities — *news of difference*. I appreciate that Anderson and Goolishian would have us focus closely upon language; how language assists in the problem definition; and, how language assists in deconstructing problems. Together they wrote, "We live with each other, we think with each other, we work with each other, and we love with each other. All this occurs in language ..." (p. 377). They also brought attention to the thinking of Maturana and Varela, to the effect that, "...every human action takes place in language, and also that every act in language brings forth a world created **with others**" (p.377-378, emphasis in original). The poet, John Donne, suggested this long ago when he wrote his famous line, "No man is an island." Today, we would say, "No one is an island." Another poet, a man who loved philosophy, Charles Olson, considered that we inhabit a human universe, and that language is the instrument by which we explore and come to create meaning of that universe. Language is about communication, celebration, the expression of sadness, of joy, the awe of living and the terror associated with intimations of death. Whatever language is *about*, it exists as a medium between persons; it exists for some one. As George Steiner has written, "There is language, there is *art*, because there is *the other*" (1989, p.137). The *other* makes us think, ponder, ruminate; the other involves us, as we involve the other. Yet, in these therapeu-

tic conversations, "the other" is not to blame. No one is to blame. Brad Keeney (1983) writes, "Cybernetic epistemology involves moving away from blaming identified patients or their families for their problems. It sees symptoms as metaphors for a whole ecology, leading one to a state of awareness Bateson depicts as 'humility and loneliness.' This 'loneliness of liberation' as (Allan) Watts ... calls it, arises when there is no longer any gene chemical, individual group, or culture to blame and be angry with" (p.125).

Following Bateson, Watts, Deleuze and Guattari, and others, I encourage the consideration that, it is through language, through our engagement with *the other*, that this loneliness of liberation may become realized and transcended. It is further suggested, following Hillman, that only a "talk therapy" may achieve such an exploration and rediscovery. Hillman writes: "all modern therapies which claim that action is more curative than words ... and which seek techniques other than talk (rather than in addition to it) are repressing the most human of all our faculties—the telling of the tales of our souls" (1975, p.217).

By playing with the meanings and significance offered and evoked by words, a passage into and out of mind may be achieved or realized. As persons talk, they often surprise themselves with new insights and ideas. But talk alone does not necessitate change; talk must be coupled with action.

### III. Musings Upon Evocation, Reverie and Therapy

*It just is, that's all.*

Van Morrison

I find an affinity between the therapeutic practice expounded by Anderson and Goolishian, and Stephen Tyler's description of the post-modern ethnographic text. For Tyler (1986), a post-modern ethnography privileges discourse: discourse, for Tyler is, "the other as us" (p.128). As such, discourse wishes to avoid representation. The form the ethno-

graphic text takes results from the collaboration between "others" (i.e., between ethnographer and the native colleagues).

For Tyler, the *meaning* of the post-modern ethnographic narrative does not abound within the narrative as such, but rather exists as an understanding of the mutually evolved, fragmentary, experiences evoked.

## **T**herapies which claim action is more curative than words ... are repressing —the telling of the tales of our souls.

The project of a post-modern therapy consists, as I see it and think about it, in an acceptance of the fragmentary pieces of experience that are our lived experience, and the lived experience of those presenting in therapy. Deleuze and Guattari state, "We live today in, the age of partial objects, bricks that have been shattered to bits, and leftovers. We no longer believe in the myth of the existence of fragments that, like pieces of an antique statue, are merely waiting for the last one to be turned up, so that they may all be glued back together to create a unity that is precisely the same as the original *unity*. We no longer believe in a primordial totality that once existed, or in a final totality that awaits us at some

## **I**n the postmodern fairy tale, Humpty Dumpty lives with the fragments.

future date" (1983, p.42). In the post-modern fairy tale, Humpty-Dumpty lives with the fragments, because all the kings horses and all the kings men cannot put Humpty-Dumpty back together again. Our prevailing stories, of who we *have been* interweave with other, emergent,

alternate stories of who we *are and can become*. Within the coauthorings involved, in a therapeutic conversation, this will be similar for all involved. Yet, the experiences described or *re-membered* will be in pieces, will be fragmented. Michael White and David Epston (1990) have stressed the role played by imagination in *problem externalization* and have written extensively on the role played by language both in the definition and construction of persons (p.188) within our culture and society. White and Epston have also suggested that openness, curiosity, excitement, and a profound interest in the words being said by those in therapy, create an authentic experience of worthwhileness. The therapist, in their vision, is not objective or neutral; the therapist does not sit back as though merely a reflecting mirror, a representation, of what Stephen Tyler calls a "reality fantasy or fantasy reality."

Recently, in his response to Steve de Shazer (1993), Michael White has written of how his reading of Gaston Bachelard has influenced his own thinking in a particular direction. This new direction, I find intriguing, in offering a further push-to-the-edge of what I would term "the uses of narrative imagination." White writes: "The identification of contradiction with mystery is provocative of imagination, and the use of particular languages of therapy, often picturesque, is evocative of powerful images. At times, in special circumstances, these images

can extend the known limits of culture. Elsewhere ... in following the ideas of Gaston Bachelard, I have speculated that these powerful images 'trigger reverberations' that reach back, in history, to *certain* events or experiences that 'res-

onate' in some way with the image—many experiences of the past, that would not be remembered under ordinary experiences, 'light up' and contribute to alternate story lines" (White, 1993, p.131).

This passage speaks for itself, indicating what I think is a further adventure into the realm of the multiverse offered



by words coupled with the images they may engender. This is fertile territory, territory previously explored by poets, writers and other artists. This is an "imaginal territory," as Hillman might say, available to the domain of therapy.

## Summary

*Nothing is settled; everything can still be altered.*

### Levi-Strauss, *Triste Tropics*

Order, disorder, need not necessarily imply dichotomy. A poet whose words meant much to me, Robert Duncan from San Francisco, wrote a piece entitled, *Fragments of a Disordered Devotion*. Fragments, pieces, instances, moments—

## The experience of "self" and "other" need not be linear and ordered.

that is all we have. In re-collecting those fragments, pieces, instances and moments, we achieve "this drawing together, this reweaving ... what Joyce called re-embodiment" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1983, p.43). Within the domain of therapy, I discover an affinity between what Joyce referred to as re-embodiment, and what Michael White and David Epston refer to as *unique outcomes* (1990). Unique outcomes may have a temporal location, or, they may occur to the person within the therapeutic conversation itself. As such, these "moments" of re-collection imply instances of illumination, realization, and what Joyce termed "epiphanies." Furthermore, these moments of unique outcome, or of epiphany, provide portals and windows—*openings*—into mind. It is language that allows for these openings into mind to occur: it is language that transports us, and allows for the articulation of meaning to become organized and patterned. I have reflected, within this paper, upon ideas and insights provided by a number of persons whose thinking and practice has been inspirational to me. Together,

the emanations of these ideas and insights have suggested the importance of the narrative imagination in evoking a language of mind.

My reading of certain poets allowed me to comprehend that the experience of self and other need not be linear and ordered. Similarly, my reading of Deleuze and Guattari, Laing, and others, provided me with an understanding of how fractured dimensions of one's experience may become whole and embodied through acceptance and discovery. Bateson, Keeney, Tyler, and others, appeared along the adventure. Anderson's and Goolishian's therapeutic conversation appeared to offer the most liberating, egalitarian, context in which to explore and facilitate the discovery of a new history of self. Homage was paid to the

ideas and practice of David Epston and Michael White, and I was further encouraged by White's (1993) recent push into yet another domain, inspired by his

reading of Bachelard. Finally, this paper would not have been created in this form if not for the initial impetus provided by the writings of James Hillman. Hillman often mentions this line by John Keats, and Keats shall have the last words! "Call the world if you please, The vale of Soul-Making? Then you will find out the use of the world."

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## Note

- <sup>1</sup>Paper presented at the International Conference, "Narrative Ideas And Therapeutic Practice," April, 1993, Vancouver, B.C.

## Feeding the Soul

Mary Ann Fraser  
Calgary, Canada

Being at peace and feeding my Soul was something I had not thought too much about when I was in my 20s, but as time passed and I became more dissatisfied with my life, I realized that I was missing out on something but I didn't know what that something was. At 22, I was married and within a few months realized that it had been a mistake. I do not wish to blame my ex-husband's experience of the tragic death of his own father and his subsequent alcoholism, as it took two of us to make our relationship. Alcoholism is a family disease and it affected our whole family. The boys and I tried to find a life outside the home as the home was the place that the disease affected most. As time progressed, I found a support group for spouses of alcoholics. This certainly helped a great deal. The following year, I went back to work. I worked to travel and the boys and I travelled to different places together. For that, I am grateful as we have some wonderful memories of being together. Friendships were so important to me all my life. Thank God, I

continued to nourish these friendships even through the years of being unhappily married. For 30 years we tried to keep our marriage together but the alcoholism progressed to drug addiction and manic depression. Then my husband quit drinking and turned to drugs. This was just as

changes. The chemotherapy was awful. I just can't think of anything worse but the positive side to that was, I quit smoking after 37 years. The surgery and radiation took place from January to May. On September 28, 1992, I went for my one-year checkup and the following day I

filed for divorce. Finally, I was able to make some decisions for myself and stick to them. This was my life and I wanted to live. My soul was starving. My body wasn't, as I was eating to comfort myself.

It took me many years to realize that the human body was not just to be fed with food. For a long time, I felt empty and the well was not filled. I searched



*Feeding One's Own Soul.*

*Photo by Mary-Ann Fraser*

and searched but didn't know what I was searching for. I knew my insides didn't match my "outsides." Pretending to be happy was the way I lived for many years. Stuffing not only food but feelings became a way of life. I stuffed the anger, the bitterness, the resentment and when I became ill with breast cancer, I broke. The search had ended. I finally found what I had been searching for. Within a very short time, I had to focus my energies on getting well, physically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually. The love of friends and family helped me to love myself. My soul is alive today and I have

hard to live with, if not worse. I could not talk to friends anymore. It just seemed so pointless. I did start journaling in 1989 and found this an outlet for my feelings. My whole being started to fade. I could feel myself dying inside and wishing I could just leave this world or wishing my husband would. On October 11, 1991, I discovered a lump in my breast. My first thought was to not say a word and this would be my way out! This was not healthy thinking!! The following week I was diagnosed with breast cancer. Believe it or not, this was the awakening I needed to make some major lifestyle

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Mary Ann Fraser  
Calgary, Alberta  
Canada

never been so *at peace* and so contented because now I am feeding my soul. Life

Some of the activities that have helped me to be at peace are: photogra-



*A "Sheltie" Way to Nurture.*

*Photo by Mary Ann Fraser*

singing in a choir (and in the car), being open with friends and finding humour in the absurdities of life, crafts (knitting and needlepoint), the mountains and hiking, my loving friends, my beautiful Sheltie, and counselling to guide me on having to get rid of the anger, bitterness and resentment. I have been journaling for six years, communicating my feelings with friends, crying, and laughing. I look at my list of, "Fifty Ways to Nurture Your Soul," and pick something that appeals to me such as having breakfast by candlelight, dancing, and just recently celebrating my 55th birthday in a very special way. The turning-point for me happened in October, 1991. It is now March of 1995 and peace and joy are reigning supreme: the soul is burning brightly and I thank God every day for my many blessings. Today, I feel so full of love and I can honestly say that I have not had that feeling for a long time!

is precious, life is a journey and life is for living! Living, loving, and laughing helps to feed the soul.

phy (packaging cards with my photographs and giving them to friends), planting a garden for the first time,

## *Fifty Ways to Feed and Nurture Your Soul*

- 1. Give attention to your breathing as you engage in everyday tasks.*
- 2. Welcome silence.*
- 3. Create a space for solitude, a retreat from interaction.*
- 4. Surround yourself with smells you enjoy, that inspire pleasant emotion.*
- 5. Work with plants; keep plants in your home, work and garden.*
- 6. Wear comfortable clothes in your favorite colors.*
- 7. Take notice of the colors and smells of the changing seasons.*
- 8. Give yourself gifts of flowers in your home and at work.*
- 9. Let your body dance, wherever and however you can bring expression to your soul through authentic movement.*
- 10. Give expression to the sounds of your soul. Howl at the moon.*
- 11. Sing or play a musical instrument; improvise; let your heart sing.*
- 12. Play with your friends.*
- 13. Take time to be with your friends, community, and just hang out.*
- 14. Picnic and potluck.*
- 15. Create time to walk; in the woods, on a beach, in your neighbourhood.*

16. Go to the wilderness; kayak, backpack, or hike.
17. Listen to the sounds of nature.
18. Celebrate your Birthday in a very special way.
19. Take a day off for Creative Selfishness.
20. Read the book you've been wanting to read.
21. Cook a special meal just for yourself. Savour it very slowly.
22. Let candlelight be a part of daily rituals.
23. Let everyone you meet become your teacher.
24. Let your work environment be pleasing to your senses.
25. Write in your journal, or write poetry, or write your autobiography.
26. Laugh, laugh, laugh.
27. Let yourself cry at the movies (whenever you need to).
28. Snuggle by the fire; ask the fire if it has a message for you.
29. Let yourself feel another person's pain or joy.
30. Perform random acts of kindness; senseful acts of beauty.
31. Take time for a leisurely bath.
32. Give your body the gift of body work; massage, reflexology, etc.
33. Spend time playing with children.
34. Find ways to simplify your life.
35. Ask yourself – what do I really want to eat?
36. Ask for help when you need it.
37. Forgive yourself and others.
38. Climb a tree.
39. Establish communication with an animal.
40. Learn to live in another culture.
41. Get rid of what you do not want or need.
42. Enjoy chewing.
43. Explore touch.
44. Rest when you need to, build recuperation into your life.
45. Tell the truth.
46. Explore water—Hot springs, waterfalls, lakes and beaches, and rain.
47. Write a love letter to yourself.
48. Find appropriate ways to release painful emotions.
49. Forgive someone who hurt you.
50. Thank the universe for your life! Celebrate yourself!

# Strangers No More: A Family Therapist Meets His Father<sup>1</sup>

with a Postscript

Vincenzo DiNicola  
Kingston, Canada

*A man is born three times in his life.  
He is born of his mother, he is born  
of his father, and finally he is born  
of his own deep self.*

Guy Corneau

How will I recognize him?" I asked my wife on the way to the international airport in Toronto. After the anguish of deciding to meet him and all the practical preparations—rushing to get Brazilian visas, immunizations for typhoid, vaccinations for yellow fever, prophylaxis against malaria—it dawned on me that I was about to meet my father for the first time in my life. I had kept myself too busy to wonder, "What does he look like, this stranger?" My wife Vicky did not hesitate for a moment, "You'll know each other. He'll be looking for a man and a ten-year-old

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## Author's Note

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Presented to a reflecting team with Dr. Karl Tomm at the Family Therapy Program of The University of Calgary in June, 1995.

Dr. Barry Thorne of the English Department at Queen's University has given the text a detailed and sensitive reading, granting its author an enhanced sense of his own narrative voice.

boy, and you'll be looking for the man in the portrait. Only older."

Much older—more than forty years! Among the few tangible remembrances of my father were some faded photographs of him as a young man in the late 1940s and early 1950s. The portrait my wife referred to was hanging in our living room. It is a photographic double portrait of my father and my mother. They are both in their early twenties. Until now, that portrait represented all I knew and felt about my parents as a couple: presumably seated, they are incomplete, only busts. My mother, on the left, is smiling naturally, looking to the right, past the camera lens; my father, on the

hood that led to the restoration of this portrait and reevaluations of my own family relationships.

On our way to Brazil, my son Carlo is so excited he reminds me of my first voyage to Canada from Italy as a boy of five, when I was called *Cenzino*. In this reconstruction of some journeys of my life, the two trips are fusing. Whenever I had thought about it, I had imagined this as my personal odyssey—Telemachus retracing the steps of his father Odysseus, lost on a voyage of discovery and danger. Just three weeks earlier, on Carlo's tenth birthday, I made my first contact with my father. The only thread we could follow was an old letter from one of my brothers

*My childhood was full of my father's  
absence. My mother's family  
artfully worked around that absence.*

right, is expressionless, his unfocused gaze directed to the left, into the distance somewhere. They are placed side by side, but their bodies are oriented away from each other.

So many clues cluster within this frame: although they are placed together, the portrait is a composite of two separate photographs. The black and white photographs are so retouched that they look like charcoal sketches. The composite lacks a context: its background is just a flat grey wash, without any perspective. But there is much more to the history of this portrait, which tells the story of my parents' strange marriage by proxy, my mother's deep ambivalence about it, and more recently, recollections of my child-

in Brazil. With this information, Vicky worked diligently through the international operators until she found my father's telephone number. She dialed the number, and spoke my father's name. Almost in a trance, I accepted the phone passively, searched Vicky's eyes, placed it next to my left ear, and heard my father's voice for the first time.

As we settle on the plane, Carlo wonders aloud, "It must be strange not knowing your father." It is strange to Carlo, who has always been with me, but it was all I knew. In that first telephone conversation, my father had asked if I wished to meet him. In a dreamlike state, I told him, "Yes, I would." "Bring your family," he said. "We have a large house, there is

room for everyone." Gently, I demurred. It was my journey, I told him. After I hung up, I recalled my first flight to Canada, trying to imagine going alone to Brazil. I had to connect the past to the present: I knew that Carlo could help me do that. Carlo was thrilled. With the support of Vicky and our daughter, Nina Mara, Carlo and I were soon on our way. During the trip, I talk to Carlo about the strange yet familiar gaps in my family. My childhood was full of my father's absence. My mother's family artfully worked around that absence. Sensing my mother's pain, I learned how to avoid bringing attention to it. My imagination, however, was free to roam, taking me to exotic, strange, sometimes wonderful, sometimes alien places.

As a child, I made these vicarious journeys through literature, music and cinema. The long flight to São Paulo allows time for many imaginary journeys. Inspired by the novels of Brazil's Jorge Amado, I reconstruct picaresque adventures on the historic streets of Salvador da Bahia. The music of Tom Jobim transports me to Rio and the girls of Ipanema. Half asleep, both excited and tired, I dream of *Toto*, the little boy in the Italian film, *Cinema Paradiso*, who has grown up to be a filmmaker, returning home for the funeral of Alfredo, the film projectionist who became a father to him.

In my waking life, I am a child psychiatrist and family therapist in my early forties. Recently, I met my Italian father in Brazil where he has lived for many years. People who are close to me, who matter to me, are curious about this experience. After my return, my father wrote to me:

*Figlio, dimmi se possibile qualcosa di te, di Vittoria e dei bambini. Principalmente vorrei sapere qualcosa al tuo rispetto—dopo la venuta qui in Brasile e di conoscere a noi, come ti senti? E stato per te un risultato positivo di conoscermi? Sei riuscito con serenità a superare tutto quello che ti affliggeva il cuore? Io spero di sf, anche perchè il*

*contrario sarebbe più male ...*

(Tell me, son, if you can, something about yourself, Vittoria and the children. Above all, I'd like to know something about you—after coming to Brazil and getting to know us, how do you feel? Was it a positive experience getting to know me? Did you succeed peacefully in overcoming all that was afflicting your heart? I hope so, especially because the opposite would be worse..)

Unlike *Toto*, I am not an artist who can make films or paint or sculpt to con-

## **P**erdonami!" Forgive me! What a burden this man must have carried for forty years.

vey my experience. Instead, I spend my working day listening and talking, struggling with a few, fragmentary pieces of the lives of children and families to help them make a coherent, meaningful story of their lives. So, as a gift to my father—whom I call *pai* in Portuguese—on his sixty-fifth birthday, I am trying to answer his question by doing for him and myself what I do professionally for others. Like my composite portrait of them, I am reconstructing, from the few, fragmentary images I have gleaned, what meeting him and what my parents' brief marriage means to me.

### **The Last Strange Place**

*We are born, so to speak, provisionally, it doesn't matter where. It is only gradually that we compose within ourselves our true place of origin so that we may be born there retrospectively and each day more definitely.*

**Rainer Maria Rilke**

**T**housands of people await the passengers disembarking at Guarulho, the international airport serving São Paulo, a megalopolis of twenty million people. As I leave the controlled area of the airport, with my son Carlo by my side, the first thing that comes into focus

in a sea of people is my father's face. In the few seconds it takes to push our baggage cart in his direction, a guess becomes a certainty. A kindly man with grey hair is hugging me tightly, welcoming me in a gentle, Italian voice. I feel the great warmth of his first word to me—"Figlio!"—"Son!" I surrender to his embrace. Minutes seem to go by, each moment carrying a different tone of feeling, but I am sure it is only seconds later that he says, "Perdonami!" Forgive me! What a burden this man must have carried for forty years. Now that I have recognized my father, I have to find a name for him.

As we relax our embrace, I become aware of my father's family. Waldomira, my father's wife, whom he calls Mira, is a *Brasileira* with a broad, beaming smile. I greet her as *Dona Mira*, Lady Mira, in the courtly Portuguese style of

Brazil, "*Muito prazer em conhecê-la.*" Very pleased to meet you. She welcomes me in Italian softened by a Brazilian lilt. Shortly, I will coin my own name for her, *Mira-Mãe*, mother Mira.

My father's Italian name is *Giuseppe*, remembered by my mother as *Peppino*, but his wife calls him *Nicola*, shortening the family name. I am still thinking about what I will call him, when I meet my youngest brother, Julio, who calls him *pai*. Julio, who could have stepped out of my parents' portrait, is tall and gaunt. Julio speaks English and takes Carlo under his wing, buffering the shock of his first encounter with a different culture.

A tall, striking woman who resembles *Dona Mira* introduces herself in Portuguese as *sua irmã*, your sister, Silvana. I search her face for familiar features but decide she is her mother's daughter, a *Brasileira*. She is the oldest of my father's Brazilian children. As I get to know her, I find similarities of temperament with my father and myself. Next we meet Silvana's daughter Vanessa, who is learning English at secondary school. Even taller than her mother, with a shock of long, wavy red hair, Vanessa is a *garota-mulher*, a precocious woman-child trying to keep her college boyfriend a secret from her mother. She leads me to wonder

what adolescence is like in Brazil.

Later, I will meet another brother, José Carlos (who came after Silvana), his wife Miriam and son Pier Riccardo. Missing, is Luis Eduardo who lives in Milan, Italy, where he has an Italian wife and son. I am sorry that I will not meet Luis as he was the thread that led me to find my father. Over a decade earlier, I received a letter in English from Luis, introducing himself as my brother and expressing a wish to get to know me. Ironically, his letter went to my mother's address in Canada. My mother passed it on in a subdued, almost hushed manner that was unusual for her. Luis' letter reached me in Montréal at another cross-road in my life. I had just started my training in psychiatry and Vicky and I were about to be married.

I brought the letter to a session with my family therapy supervisor, a wise woman with a capacity for listening to the soul. She helped me see Luis' letter as an invitation to enter an unknown past. In spite of this, I did not respond to Luis' letter. At the time, I was not ready, although I have a sense of regret about it. Regret for not responding to Luis' hand reaching over the length of the Americas; regret for not taking my own first step in my father's direction.

Taking that first step, my encounter with my father proves surprisingly easy, flowing comfortably, liberating my thoughts and energy. I had come hoping to close a chapter of my early life. Instead, any questions that were afflicting me, as my father puts it, took on new meanings face-to-face. Instead of closing a chapter, Brazil opened a whole new book: a new language, a new culture, and a more complete and larger sense of family than I had known.

In my cross-cultural work, I have played with the theme of "the strange and the familiar." My father's absence in a distant continent, my mother's family's move to Canada, growing up in a community of immigrants provided a backdrop of strangeness. As soon as the opportunities were available, I chose to travel for my education and my work.

When I graduated from high school, I went away to Montreal to attend McGill University, moving farther than anyone else I knew. After my bachelor's degree, I left Canada altogether for postgraduate studies in London, England. Later, I spent time in Israel, the United States, and Italy for further training. I nurtured a special interest in transcultural psychiatry, in immigrants and refugees. Those people, like me, whom George Steiner calls "extraterritorial," whose personal identities move beyond the borders of their birthplace.

Perhaps this is the most important legacy of my father: that his absence led me to be a searcher (just as he went searching), engendering an ability to set aside my own starting points to enter other people's lives as a family therapist (he designed and built houses), to learn new languages (he learned Spanish and Portuguese as a young man), and to explore new cultures (he lived in Venezuela, Argentina, and Brazil). After all this searching, Brazil was for me the last strange place. Now that I have met my father and been welcomed by him, my emotional vocabulary is shifting from issues of alienation and estrangement to belonging and meaning. I feel

positions, artificial lighting. Turning them around in my mind, I can make them move. Like a silent movie, the talking is muted, distant, in words too old for my young mind. I can hum the music; I can make up the words. Viewing them over and over again, I claim them as my own.

*In Cinema Paradiso, Toto, a fatherless boy, growing up in postwar Sicily, is befriended by the gruff Alfredo, a childless man who is the projectionist at the parish movie theatre. The local priest screens all the movies, making Alfredo cut out all the embraces kisses and signs of affection between men and women before the audience can view the film. Alfredo is supposed to splice these "outtakes" back into the films but somehow they just remain in his booth, long strands of celluloid hanging like black vines, choking the cramped booth. These "outtakes" are a joy for little Toto who sneaks them home, viewing the still-frames against a lantern, recalling the dialogue and the action.*

When I was growing up, my knowledge of my father was based on "outtakes" from other people's lives—scraps of memory, recovered objects. Scraps of memory: what my mother, Nena remembered or chose to tell me about him, stories told in unguarded moments during family gatherings. Recovered objects:

## *When I was growing up, my knowledge of my father was based on "outtakes" from other people's lives—scraps of memory, recovered objects.*

less strange and more at home now. For me, home means a connection to all my family. With all these people in so many places: Italy, Canada, Brazil—my home is spread out, somewhere in the spaces between me and each part of my family.

### "Outtakes"

The recollections of my childhood work like a primitive motion picture projector. A few static images flashed quickly in sequence create the illusion of movement. This is what memory is like: a few still photographs, juxta-

a few photos saved by my mother, grabbed at the last moment and thrown into the bottom of a suitcase on our way out of our home in Italy before setting out for Canada.

One of them was her portrait with my father. My mother's intense ambivalence about him was revealed by her inability to leave the portrait behind and by the way she dealt with it. Taking her shoe, she smashed the frame with her high heel, sending shards of glass flying. My recollection of this is vivid: I had a fever that heightened my awareness and burned

the event into my memory. As I watched, I felt detached from my mother's intense turmoil. Her intentions were not clear to me. Oblivious to the glass fragments, she extended an elegantly gloved hand and pulled out the portrait damaged with a heel mark across my father's chest. For my mother, it was a final, forced leave-taking.

*When Toto grows up, Alfredo vehemently tells him to put this place behind him and never come back. Toto unquestioningly obeys, leaving behind Alfredo, his mother and memories of his first love. Years go by. Toto has become filmmaker in Rome. Whenever his mother calls, there is a new female voice on the telephone: Toto is living the "outtakes" of his childhood. This time, his mother informs him Alfredo has died. Toto leaves immediately for Sicily.*

Until I went to Brazil, these "outtakes" were all I had to splice this man into my life. Brazil—for me this single word stands for a culture, the country where my father lives, a state of mind, a symbol of what is unreachable and what is reached; Brazil suddenly created an opening. Because I did not want to be hurt, I prepared myself to expect nothing. And because I wanted to accept whatever I found, I wanted to be ready for anything. In Brazil, this dizzying openness, a kind of "hunger of memory" in Richard Rodriguez' evocative phrase, was tempered by the impossibility of somehow reliving my childhood with my father, of telescoping forty years into four weeks. Brazilians have a word for this sentiment, *saudade*:

*the evocation of an indefinable longing ... homesickness, nostalgia for happier days, suffering over love lost and dreams squandered, and ultimately, a confrontation with every man's inherent state of solitude (Krich).*

*Saudade* is the feeling that animates *samba*, that uniquely Brazilian musical

beat, a kind of tropical blues.

*After the funeral, Toto receives Alfredo's final gift, a can of celluloid "outtakes" from his childhood spliced together. Alone in his old room, Toto tearfully reviews the home movies of his lost love. In the kitchen with his mother later, he admits, "I've always been afraid to come back. And now ... I thought I was stronger, that I'd forgotten a lot of things. But in fact, I find I'm right back where I was ... as if I'd never been away." Back in Rome, Toto watches the soundless visual legacy that Alfredo has left him. Overwhelmed, Toto cries. Saudade. From beyond the grave, Toto has finally allowed Alfredo to touch him. We sense he is ready to integrate Alfredo (a man without a*

## **I had to be ready to reconstruct my personal myth.**

*child), his mother (a woman without a man), and the "outtakes" of his childhood into his work as a filmmaker and into his life.*

### **Emotional Alchemy**

To this meagre catch of memories and objects, my father has added some significant items: a framed picture of himself at the age of 25 in Brazil where he looks like a dashing Errol Flynn or Kevin Kline (this summons a rush of fantasies vaguely recalled from my childhood: wishing my father to be someone wonderful, imagined in exotic settings, doing heroic things, Telemachus dreaming of Odysseus); the ring of his voice in my ear from our telephone conversations; a 30-year-old fountain pen with his name engraved on it and a bottle of ink he bought at the time; my father's house, which he designed and built; the experience of the two of us alone; walking around his city, meeting

his friends; and our final, intimate conversation in his car on a beautiful, sunny day, our last day together in Brazil.

With these elements, I do a kind of emotional alchemy. Alchemy—the mystical art of transformation, of turning base elements into gold. The base elements are the "outtakes" from my childhood and my meeting with my father. They are all I have. I work and rework these few threads, spinning them into the gold of my life. I have no bitterness about it. This is my gold. This is my chance to take the accidents of my life and make them meaningful.

Conducting therapy, learning a language, entering another culture are activities that require childlike qualities—the ability to see things freshly, to suspend one's disbelief. Meeting my father required that I put aside some of the things I had been taught: basic instincts, habits of the heart, and family myths. I had to be ready to reconstruct my personal

myth. Doing so proved to be much easier than I could have imagined. Not undertaking it earlier was a failure of imagination, an inability to think that my future could take a different shape than the one into which my mother had kneaded our shared past.

My journey took place at midlife, just past the age of Dante's notable walk through life. At the time, I was strolling in an obscure wood of my life. Driven by something I could not give words to, I acted. Looking back on the path that took me to Brazil, I perceive a fork in the woods, cleaving my life. A midlife crisis you will say. A colleague suggested that I made this journey when I had accomplished the tasks of midlife and was now turning inward. True, I could rely on key people to support me: my wife, my friends, and my two children who expressed great curiosity about their unknown grandfather.

As I reread this, it sounds discordant, out of tune. If midlife journeys suggest a kind of retrenchment, it was not true for this one. Yes, I met *Toto* and *Cenzino* (my childhood self) at the forking path. But the reason it flowed so easily, and why I linger through these woods, is that I was ready to make a choice and follow the path. My turn was outward, not



inward. In Brazil, I learned the meaning of my longing: not nostalgia for the past but a wish to be more fully in the present. It was never a temptation to retrieve my childhood. Neither did I want magically to relive it with my father. I wanted to end my childhood. For this, I needed my father's blessing.

*"The days are filled with discoveries," reads an entry in the journal of my trip:*

*Comparing photos. My father is looking at a picture of me, mistaking it for a picture of my brother that Julio gave me yesterday. He was struck by how similar we look.*

*He says that he and his father, Vincenzo (after whom I was named), Julio, and I—look alike. His other children look more like their mother, Mira.*

*Our days are filled with stories and the writing of our family history.*

*My father says to me, "The only thing I can say is 'Forgive me.' There were things beyond my own control, beyond my capacity to cope with them. I suffered a lot. I don't know how I got by, but eventually I found a way." He said he never really told anyone the whole story and finds it painful, even now.*

*He felt that he had to flee his native city in Italy, and his family. Against all odds he did it, and made a success of himself and his life here. I feel that my coming to Brazil has completed something for him, and for the whole family too. He says that if Vicky and Nina Mara come too, the experience will be more complete for me, for him, and for the whole family here. He thinks it will be more complete for my family*

*in Canada too. I think he is right.*

Among the memories of my childhood are things I was not supposed to know. Sightings. "Someone saw a man that looks like his father." Strange telephone calls to our home. My grandmother whispering, "Was it Peppino his father?" *Mira-Mãe* told me my father had many a sad Christmas. She loved him enough to tell him he was free, "Go back to Nena, go meet your son." Is it possible that, when he was despondent, brooding over the past, he had called?

I ask my father. He often resolved to

## **O**ur days are filled with stories and the writing of our family history."

reach out to me, he says. He wanted to call, to come to find me. On two occasions, he came very close. In Niagara Falls, just across the border in the United States, he tried to call my family in Canada. He reached someone who denied any knowledge of my family. I was still a child then.

Years later, during a trip to Europe, my father learned that I was studying in London. He asked an old friend who had lived in Canada to help him find me. His friend said he could not get involved—"They don't want to have anything to do with you." My father eventually discovered that I was in London. He went to London but could not find me in the phone book. I was studying at the University of London and living in a graduate residence in Bloomsbury. As he described his visit to London, I realized that we had been within a mile of each other, maybe closer. He visited the British Museum, a five-minute walk from my residence. He travelled across the world to find me. I was busy losing myself in psychology. I was in my early twenties.

On these occasions, I could have met

my father. It might have changed my life. Unknown to me, I had passed a fork in the path.

### A Night In São Paulo

**M**y sister, Silvana, is a real *Paulistana*, born and bred. Being half-Italian, she fits the ethnic joke about São Paulo: half the *Paulistanos* are Italian, the other half are their children. To welcome me, she arranges a night out in São Paulo. Silvana takes me to a concert to hear a popular group, Chitãozinho and Xororó. Driving through the *bagunça*, the chaotic sprawl of São Paulo to get there is an adventure of its own. A man with a menacing smile waves us into a parking place and offers to guard the car. We are effectively paying him not to steal the car. Arriving late, we learn the concert is sold out. A scalper turns up at my elbow with whom I test my Italian haggling skills.

Once inside, we sit at a table with two sisters and their husbands. They strike up a conversation and in minutes Silvana is telling the sisters about my visit to Brazil and I'm at the bar buying *cachaça* with the two brothers-in-law. Musicians are adored in Brazil. The audience knows every song and sings along enthusiastically. The concert ends at midnight. Exhilarated, having spent the evening with twenty-five hundred intimate friends of Chitãozinho and Xororó, humming songs I just learned, we head for the Bixigo district. With cafés, bookstores and arty boutiques open all night, the Bixigo is just the kind of place for Silvana and me to get to know each other.

We start a nightlong conversation over coffee and dessert. It is slow at first as we lack one really fluent language in common. We watch each other closely, shape the air with our hands for emphasis, mixing a cocktail of Spanish, Italian, and Portuguese. We laugh a lot. In spite of language, we are really communicating. I try to translate Ionesco's words for Silvana: "Not everything is unsayable in words only the living truth." I fail, proving the point.

We move on to a bookstore, where we point out our favourite authors. We get to know each other even better by comparing musical tastes and by our reactions to photographs and paintings at an art gallery. With these new perceptions, we go to a cafe for a light meal. Silvana tells me I have done a good thing for *pai*. She has known about me for a long time. She had always felt there was something missing in him and seems to understand *pai* better than her Brazilian siblings do. As we are talking, she gives me a picture, covering the back with a long dedication in a flowing ornate cursive hand, "*Para o meu amado irmão ... por quem esperei 39 anos para abraçar e conhecer ....*" For my beloved brother ... for whom I waited 39 years to embrace and to know ....

Everywhere here, something is incomplete. "*In my Father's house there are many mansions,*" says the evangelist. My father, who has designed and built so many houses, is repairing the walls of his large home. My sister, too, has been waiting for something. In my search for my father, I had not imagined that I might be a missing character in their family drama. "*Every exit [is] an entrance somewhere else,*" says *The Player* in Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, a play that pushes two bewildered minor characters from Hamlet onto centre stage. When my father left my mother's life, he entered another. In the other life he has built here in Brazil, I became an offstage character. If not quite present at the table, there was nonetheless a place set for me. Coming to this table, in my father's house, I find myself at the centre of a family drama. Moved, shaken, I lose my cue, fall silent.

My father asked for my forgiveness. I do not know how to respond meaningfully in words. I sense in my sister a searching soulfulness. Long into the night, exhilarated, exhausted, words—my old friends, fail me. I decide to stop playing Hamlet, the dithering adolescent, waiting for my cue. Another fork in the path; my chance to become an adult. Another *cafezinho*. We talk about ... what else? The missing pieces of our lives. What

father's absence meant to my mother and me, beckoning me to faraway places. What his presence meant to Silvana and her mother, with parts of his heart and mind in other places. As we talk about our marriages and our children, we wordlessly recognize a family pattern. I begin to understand my father's plaintive invitation to bring my family, and Silvana's wish to meet Vicky. Silvana extends her hand. When I absentmindedly admire a silver bracelet, she places it on my wrist. I'll accept it, I say, for Vicky.

In the morning, I will call home to invite the rest of my family to come to

**L**ong into the night, exhilarated,  
exhausted, words—my old  
friends, fail me.

meet my father and his family. It is my gift to them. Vicky and our daughter, Nina Mara, almost eight, soon join us. We stay a month in all. I am not sure that I have entirely returned to Canada or left Brazil. I'm extraterritorial.

### Syncretism

To the northerner, Brazil is a country of extraordinary contradictions living side-by-side: the primitive Amazon rain forest and the ultramodern capital, Brasilia; Amerindian tribal cultures and the Brazilian intermingling of peoples of *vária cor*, multi-colour, to forge a "Luso-tropical culture"; Portuguese Catholicism, French spiritism, and West African *candomblé*.

Vicky's arrival in São Paulo with Nina Mara is cause for another celebration with the whole family. At the table, there is an intermingling of Italian and Brazilian foods, languages, and families. *Pai* and *Mira-Mãe* are delighted by Vicky and Nina Mara. Both children have now met all of their grandparents. While I rest, Vicky and my father go for a walk during which he tells her of his struggle over how to talk about the past, how to find forgiveness. Vicky encourages me to

lighten his burden. "We still have time," I reply, "Let's linger longer in our own experiences with my father."

Just as important, I want to spend time with Vicky to explore what I have learned from my father and Silvana about the pattern of relationships in my family. So far, it has been fluid and seamless. In Brazil, I have recognized my father and found a name for him, *pai*. At home, I displayed my parents' portrait. That portrait is frozen in time. The opportunity for healing has passed on to another generation: to Silvana, to me, perhaps to the others. My task is to take it into my own life and marriage for healing. So Vicky and I leave the children with my father and his family for a trip to Bahia and Rio de Janeiro.

In Salvador da Bahia in *O Nordeste*, the Northeast, Vicky and I enjoy an immersion into Afro-Brazilian culture. We attend a coming-of-age

ritual, a young man's confirmation of faith in *candomblé*. When he is in a deep trance, covered in the blood of an animal sacrifice, the *orixá* or spirit assigned to him enters his body as he leaps into the air. In the cramped quarters of the *terreiro*, packed with celebrants and visitors, a Belgian student anxiously fends off the experience as improbable. "These celebrants," I whisper in French, "accept your Catholic belief that Jesus enters your body during communion." Religion here is syncretic, layered with the symbols of diverse faiths. The *orixás* of *candomblé* have their counterparts in Christian saints. This is deeply resonant for me, offering powerful confirmation of my hope that we can learn to live with competing claims on our allegiances and our hearts.

Syncretism has an even more profound resonance in my meeting with my father. How could I put together the two different stories I was told about their marriage by my mother and by my father? I felt a terrible conflict of loyalties. Even wanting to meet my father felt like a betrayal of my mother. And yet, I needed to know what my father had to say. To hear his story. When I was

younger, I sought an objective truth: what had really happened. I grew up with my mother's truth. In Brazil, I heard my father's truth. They are stories told and retold, worn smooth like pebbles from constant handling.

A few years ago, before I went to Brazil and many years after my mother and I returned to Italy together for the first time, my mother quietly gave me the portrait of my parents. It had lain in the suitcase my mother brought from Italy. I doubt that she had ever looked at it in Canada. In passing it on to me, she had completed her act of preservation. For me, it was just starting.

The portrait sat in a trunk in my basement for a few years. After working on issues in my family of origin at a practicum in Rome with Maurizio Andolfi, I thought of the portrait again. When Maurizio and his wife Marcella visited us in Canada, I told them the story of the portrait and brought it out. I resolved to have it restored and framed.

When my mother visited us, I asked her to join me in taking the portrait to a photographic restorer. Examining the portrait, he told us that the superficial scratches could be fixed, the whole picture could be cleaned, but he regretted that the emulsion had been badly damaged in one spot. How did that occur, he wondered? I told him the story. He was intrigued. The heel mark had become "part of the story of the picture." He advised us not to repair it. We agreed. After it was restored, I had it beautifully framed. My wife and I agreed to hang it in a prominent living space in our home until I could meet my father. It was a ritual of confirmation; it was a rite of separation. It confirmed my mother's way of responding to my father, simultaneously separating my own possible response. It honors my mother's experience, freeing me to have own.

### "Bye, Bye, Brazil"

**M**y last day in Brazil was momentous. The night before, at a party for Vanessa's sixteenth birthday, all the family and many

of their friends arrive. My youngest brother, Julio, who has been staying with us, is there. Julio has painted a bilingual sign for our timid dog, Sherlock: "Cuidado! Cão Feroz—Beware! Ferocious Dog!" And below that, in English: "Brazil and Canada are brother nations." José Carlos, another brother, joins us with his wife and young son, Pier Riccardo, who has spent much time with our children. Vanessa and her friends taught us to dance the *samba*. It was a unique opportunity to take pictures and videos of the family together.

Each of us has a different picture of the visit. Nina Mara saw Brazil through videos: "My grandpa lives in Brazil. Across the street from his gigantic house, there is a video store!" She marvelled that the videos were available in English. Carlo remembers our travels around Brazil with *avô*, his grandfather, memories shared across three generations.

The next day, my father and I took time to be alone together and talk. We sat in his car overlooking the city from a hill near his home. He was prepared to answer my questions. But he had a wariness about opening the past with me. Now that we had met, it seemed so unnecessary. He did not want to hurt the memory of people I loved. Perhaps he

## *My mother's truth ... my father's truth ... They are stories told and retold, worn smooth like pebbles from constant handling.*

was right. After meeting each other, what did we need to know about other people and the failed connections of the past? I felt I would reach into the past and feel the same worn pebbles I had been handed down from my mother's family, all the sharp edges smoothed down from repeated handling over the years.

Memory serves different needs for my father and me. The waves of recol-

lection have lapped on the shore of his memory, softening and shaping the landscape into a safe harbour. As a character says in Brian Friel's play, *Translations*, "To remember everything is a form of madness."

From this conversation, I began to understand my father and his sense of where he came from. I tried to fit that in with what I knew about my mother's family. I learned about my father's struggle in his own family-of-origin. His bitter self-revelations about his pain and anger as a young man have the ring of truth. He had promised himself that he would leave his family and his town as soon as he could. He was the first one to leave his town in Italy after the war. Like *Toto* in the film, it was a long time before he returned.

What made me sad that day was not what my mother had led me to expect, not some tragic flaw in my father's character or some awful secret. My father told me, "Your mother was the love of my life." Theirs is the story of two young innocents, both dreaming about a different world than the one they knew. My father went to follow his dream in South America, hastily becoming engaged to the sister of his friend, my uncle, before he left. After establishing himself in Caracas, Venezuela, my

father resolved to have his fiancée join him. With his resentment towards his own family, he did not want to return to Italy, so my parents were married by proxy.

Separated by many miles and months, they entrusted their happiness and well-being to the

meddling and invidiousness of family and friends. Each was told malicious stories about the other. Half-true, distorted, or fabricated, the impact of these stories was amplified by their separation. As my father tells it, he decided to confront the truth directly by returning home. My parents were united for a brief time. Still unsure, bewildered, angry, my father left, not yet knowing I was conceived. Neither of them, it seems, could completely decide to take

charge of their lives. Instead, they let themselves be guided by the fears, fantasies and plans of other people. Although they speak warmly of each other, even now, they complain about others, about circumstances.

I faced my father: "With all this love you had in your heart for my mother, why did you listen to other people? Why did you let others poison your mind?" These are all things he has asked himself, it seems. Weary, but anxious to have my understanding, he repeats yet again, "Forgive me. It was beyond my control. I was overwhelmed. You are a doctor; you understand people. You may have made different choices. But, it was a different world. I couldn't see beyond what I knew and the prejudices of the people around me."

Now, I understand that there is a broader truth for me than what my parents can say. It is more profound than the truths that come out in family therapy, which is the truth about the spaces between people, like the silences that shape the sounds of music. My truth is the story I can live with, one that is both believable and meaningful to me. This is neither wholly my mother's story nor my father's. My truth allows me to love my mother for all her pain, her sacrifice and, in the end, her rescue of that parental portrait as my legacy. It allows me to accept my father for who he is and to learn to love him because, to begin with, what he needs from me is forgiveness. Finally, it allows me to tell my story as a complete person. At last, I am a person with a mother and a father. The "outtakes" have been spliced back into the whole life. Although I have always known my mother, now I can see her as a woman. Now that I know what my father looks like, I can see where my face comes from. Now I can do what everyone else seems to have had a chance to do: to let the story of my parents seep deeply into me and to emerge in my own relationships.

Still, with each of them remarried and happy, I do not wish events from so long ago to continue to cast their shad-

ow on our lives. I wanted to tell my father: Go to Mira, who loves you, go to your children and grandchildren who need you. In that moment, I forgave him. I came to understand that to forgive is to live in the present instead of the past. And, I understood that what I wanted was not my childhood but an end of childhood. I wanted to be a man.

This journey ended in a peculiar way. We were travelling in two cars to Guarulho, São Paulo's international airport. Fortunately, my father was following my sister's car closely when it broke down on the highway. We had to shift all the luggage to my father's car and to say our goodbyes hurriedly. I hugged *Mira-Mãe* with real affection. I embraced my soulful sister Silvana and my niece Vanessa with regret. But what could I say to Julio, my brother, whom I may never see again?

At the airport, shortly before boarding, our camera bag with all our films and videos was stolen! With my father busy making a report to the airport police, describing *dois Bolivianos* he suspected, we were again forced to go

*Now, I understand that there is a broader truth for me than what my parents say. ... My truth is the story I can live with.*

through hurried goodbyes to register for boarding. My father, filled with longing and regret for many things, including now the loss of our cameras and films, hugged me one last time, expressing his love for me, his gratitude for coming to him, and asked me yet again to forgive him.

During the flight home, I reflected on the cameras and films. After all these years, to be leaving without a single photograph of my meeting with my father! It was so distressing, so cruel that I had to console myself by making some meaning of their loss. The meaning could not come from the outside or from someone else, it had to be my own.

If my trip was to have any meaning, I could not allow even this loss to wrench away what I had finally found.

In spite of their importance to me, the meaning I gave to the loss of our photographs and videos of my Brazilian family is that one cannot replace forty years with one month. No alchemy of transformation can give me the childhood with my father that I never had. And even the lush tropical *samba* rhythms of Rio's Tom Jobim or Salvador's Gilberto Gil could not assuage the *saudade*—longing—I felt on leaving.

My choice was not a superstitious act, helplessly resigned to a cynical fate like the old men of my village in Italy or governed by some tropical *orixá*, but an act of meaning. Physical images are vulnerable, like my parents' damaged portrait, like the emotional "outtakes" from Toto's films and the stolen record of our trip to Brazil. Once spliced into the context of our lives, given a meaningful ordering of events, however, they are burned into our memories in a way that no one and nothing can remove them.

The loss of the pictures is a reminder that the images that matter are the ones my family and I will always carry in our hearts and minds.

Memory is not a running movie but a series of discrete images, "outtakes" from a life. A few images, carefully chosen or perhaps all that is available, tell our most important stories.

Like my childhood, only a few images remain of my meeting with my father. One that endures is from my first days in Brazil. My sister Silvana and I are in the kitchen of my father's home, conversing in a *minestrone* of languages. We are getting to know each other, describing little things that reveal so much—favourite foods, daily habits, quirks of temperament.

At breakfast, we spoke of relationships, and my father had been a little harsh with her, telling her to get on with her life. He told her she is "difficult." Although I only partly understood the exchange, I felt that Silvana had been hurt. Later, I try to reassure her that,

when it comes to relationships, we are all difficult, we all need to move on. We start talking about our marriages. We talked for some time before we notice that *pai* has entered the kitchen.

*Pai* stirs the language soup, sampling the conversation, translating a phrase here and there, adding spice. When he hears me talking about myself and my difficulties, my father laughs and shrugs knowingly. "*Claro*," he says in Portuguese, "Of course, you're a DiNicola!" Now, that is something I had never heard before. A connection between who I am, how I relate to other people, and these familiar strangers, my father's family.

#### Postscript to "Strangers No More"

*A wood is a garden  
of forking paths.*

*Even when there are not well-trodden paths in a wood, everyone can trace his or her own path, deciding to go to the left or right of a certain tree and making a choice at every tree encountered.*

**Umberto Eco**

Woods" is a metaphor for narratives which Umberto Eco (1994) explores in his work on the construction of texts. Eco takes his root metaphor from a story by Jorge Luis Borges, *The Garden of Forking Paths* (1964). Writing these stories—a memoir about meeting my father and a commentary on how it affected me as a family therapist—transported me back to the woods of my Brazilian experience. With each story I faced a different fork in the path. Each story offers a different point of view to different potential readers. My first wish was to tell the story of my trip from the point of view of the person who made the trip. That person is not a child psychiatrist or family therapist but a man who went to Brazil to meet his father and narrates the memoir. In it, the narrator speaks in different voices: sometimes reflecting on the experience of Brazil after the event, sometimes immersed in it as it occurred, sometimes referring to earlier events in his life. The

narrator is an example of the "saturated self" described by Kenneth Gergen (1991). But the memoir ends hopefully. In simple terms, the narrator sets off for Brazil to try to connect his father's past to his own present, so that he can pass on a coherent story to his family, represented by his son. As discussed in an essay on postmodernism in therapy, "the saturated postmodern self . . . can give way to the relational self richly informed by a pluralistic world of diver-

## The narrator speaks in different voices ... the "saturated self."

sity" (DiNicola, 1993).

At times in the text, the narrator going through the experience and his childhood self are strangers to each other. But most of us are familiar with that kind of strangeness: the remembrance of things past. Truly dislocating for me was my discovery of a different, alternative self, in Brazil. A version of me was constructed by my father and his family in my absence. Silvana most clearly articulated this version of me, for whom she "waited 39 years to embrace and to know." In Brazil, I met another part of my "distributed self" (Bruner, 1990), one who speaks and dreams in Portuguese, who dances *samba*, and who has always known his father and his Brazilian siblings and their mother.

After my trip, I returned to work. Now, I was a family therapist who had gone on an amazing journey to meet my father. I made the resolution to keep myself continually open to the experience, allowing it to resonate in my personal relationships and to enrich my professional life. My experience is multi-layered, syncretic. And the best way to convey that the man who went to Brazil and the family therapist have overlapping and congruent—but different—experiences is to structure the text this way: memoir and postscript. Within

the memoir, the narrator shifts among tenses, places, and states of mind. I cannot smooth these shifts into a simple, linear narrative.

The stories have different potential readers. For family and friends, the memoir is a walk in the woods with someone they know. They respond to the memoir in a very direct and personal way. Some see themselves in the woods I describe, others are reminded of their own walks in the woods. Each reader

took different turns in the Brazilian woods of my memoir.

Nonetheless, they all claimed to know these woods. Each conversation became a mutual story-telling, a shared walk in the woods.

When one story is embedded in another, like the story of *Toto* within my own, literary theorists call this

*intertextuality*. When it happens between people, like the night in São Paulo when my sister and I were (re)writing our shared family drama, we call this *intersubjectivity*, the co-construction of social reality. In discussing my memoir, my readers and I gave one another permission to disclose something about ourselves. I would tell one more story about Brazil, they would forge deeper into their own family woods. As we had discovered by working on our professional "handicaps" at the family therapy practicum with Maurizio Andolfi in Rome, these intimate walks are always about our families.

Professional readers, I expect, are more interested in the impact of the Brazilian experience on me as a family therapist. What does it mean to me as a therapist?

1. *Things take time*. It took seven years to fulfill a promise I made at a family therapy practicum in Rome to meet my father. Personal and interpersonal changes take time. We need to imagine such processes fluidly, over time: a journey, a path, an evolution, an unfinished narrative. In the light of this, what meaning can "outcome" have in the limited

time of most courses of therapy? Perhaps "outcome" in therapy is like the "outtakes" of my memoir—representative selections at best, disembodied snapshots of a life at worst.

2. *We see fragments.* Some of my friends and colleagues have a sense of incompleteness in the memoir, expressing curiosity about the people I have introduced, wanting to know more. But this is not a capsule autobiography, nor even a complete account of my trip to Brazil. How the memoir fits into the whole is something I am still working out. This, too, is like therapy: we view fragments of our clients' lives, we walk along with them for part of the road, and then we let them get on with their journey on their own. It can be difficult to let go. In *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, a family insistently shows up to demand of Luigi Pirandello (1952), the playwright who imagined them, that he finish their story so they can know the meaning of their existence. As I discussed elsewhere (DiNicola, 1994), the families I have seen in therapy sometimes pay me imaginary visits to ask such questions.

The difference between fiction and reality is that fiction has to make sense. The demands of "sense-making" within both fiction and therapy can be usefully provocative. But just to keep yourself humble, try making sense of some part of your own journey by writing it out. It will help you to be open to the unfolding story of your clients and decrease the Procrustean temptation to impose premature closure on their stories.

3. *Desafinado/Out of tune.* How does my personal growth fit in with my professional preparedness? While I was preparing myself to meet my father, was I somehow incomplete as a child psychiatrist and family therapist? Can we do our work with-

out knowing ourselves? These are false notes—*desafinado* in Tom Jobim's song, out of tune. "*Desafinado*" was Jobim's response to Brazilian musical traditionalists, asking why he must be "put down" by those with "perfect pitch" and "privileged ears" (Krich, 1993). We do not come to our work with perfect pitch, healed or totally integrated. For much of our lives, we are all out of tune. What we need is not perfection nor even healing to do our work. We need to nurture the personal capacity to tolerate our own imperfections to do our work. This gives us the patience to

## The difference between fiction and reality is that fiction has to make sense.

view the fragments of a family's life and to take time to understand their experience. Have you ever heard yourself on tape? It is an awful experience; we hear ourselves "out of tune." Have you reviewed your session notes? Are they incomplete, impressionistic, overly detailed, or missing the point? Mine too.

4. "*Science is nothing but the finding of an analogy*," wrote William James. In the Japanese film, *Rashomon* by Akira Kurosawa, different stories emerge from a shared experience. A lot is made of the "Rashomon" effect in family therapy (see Elizur and Minuchin, 1989). This is a very postmodern idea, which I like, the idea of multiple perspectives, but let us not lose sight of the problem. How do you live a coherent life with multiple perspectives? It is one thing for me to see different stories in my parents' portrait, but what I need is a story about my parents that I can live with, a story that generates sense-making in my life. What is

missing in many accounts of post-modernism and in much of family therapy is an understanding of our common need for *making meaning*. In addition to *Rashomon*, I offer family therapists *Cinema Paradiso*, Giuseppe Tornatore's homage to the history of film, a film about parts and wholes (Gergen's "saturated self"), about our scattered selves (Bruner's "distributed self"), about what we leave behind ("outtakes") and what meanings we can reconstruct by splicing them back into our lives (re-editing personal and family myths) and by putting our lives in "order" (narrative).

5. "*To remember everything is a form of madness*," warns a character in Brian Friel's play, *Translations*. The classical notion of memory was of a comprehensive repository of the past. Plato's

metaphor was of an aviary stocked with birds of every sort. Instead, I offer recollection as an active meaning-making process, a "projector" where you load up still images by hand. You place them in the order that the story demands, selecting the dialogue, music and scenery that fit. On their own, sometimes, these images make no sense. By rearranging them or rearranging our lives around them, the sense emerges. We must be active in this process of sense-making, like the meaning I "wrenched" from the loss of my photos. If we take them as they are handed down, "like pebbles worn smooth by handling," they become myths.

When you try to get detailed family histories, do you get confusing and contradictory information? Good: the family members have brought you the "damaged portraits" of their lives. All you have to do is "frame" them and display them as I did. Are you getting a lot of "pebbles" handed to you—well-rehearsed stories

whose function is to preserve the family and its myths? When this happens in therapy, I hope that you will be as curious about how those sharp-edged stones became pebbles, as you are about your own family story.

6. *A shared walk in the woods*. I discovered the releasing power of my memoir as a way to deepen my personal relationships. Self-disclosure

## **I** discovered the releasing power of my memoir as a way to deepen my personal relationships.

is mirrored interpersonally. How can this be used in our therapeutic work? A colleague suggested that I share my memoir with other colleagues and clients. Brief, thoughtfully selected stories can have a powerful impact in therapy. Practice retelling stories from folktales, literature, cinema, opera—whatever offers a mirror to the family. When you are comfortable, tell stories about yourself and people you know. Learn to be aware of your own feelings about them and how other people hear them. Try them out in supervision or with your colleagues. Do not tell stories if you do not want other people to imagine different endings for them.

7. If you are scanning this text for a summary or a conclusion, it is constructed to discourage that. In Eco's terms (quoting Italo Calvino), I want you to linger: to be a reader, not a scanner. We do not listen to music to hear the finale. Having chosen to reveal something of myself, I want you to take a walk in the Brazilian woods of my memoir. Unlike the labyrinth built by that other architect Daedalus to entrap, my father's house, in the Brazilian woods, is open to you. Any conclusion I could draw is embedded in

the structure of the narrative: *To get out of it, you have to get into it.*

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## **T**o get out of it, you have to get into it.

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# No Expectations: The Soul of Running

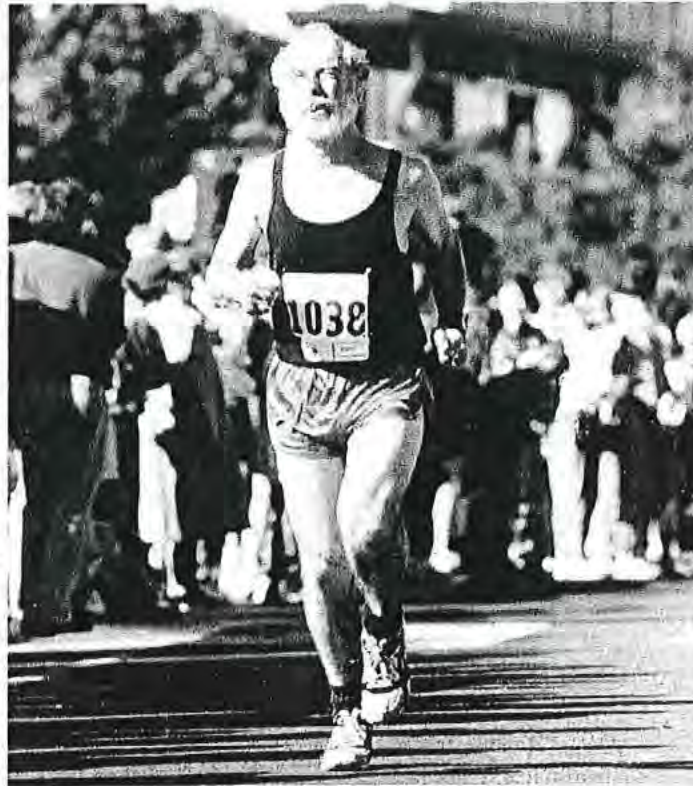
Alan Parry  
Calgary, Canada

*O I say these are not the parts and poems  
of the body only,  
but of the soul,  
O I say now these are the soul!*

Walt Whitman, *I Sing the Body Electric*.

In the last two marathons I had run, both in Victoria, British Columbia, in the years, 1987 and 1988, on the Canadian Thanksgiving weekend; I had experienced extremely painful side-stitches which had persisted and worsened over a lengthy period during the 26 miles and 385 yards, or 42.1 kilometers of this classic distance race. Both times, I had been aiming at breaking the magic three-hour barrier that separates the very good runners from the rest.

The stitches hit in 1987 at about ten miles and did not stop until about 16 miles—the point at which I decided I was going to finish no matter what. Nonetheless they were enough to prevent me from making it in three hours. The next year I made just past the half-way point. By accident I took a drink at one of the watering holes of an electrolyte-fortifying drink instead of my cus-



*Alan's Chariot of Fire*

Photo by Smiles Photography

tomary water. Within about two minutes I began experiencing cramps and side stitches which persisted for the entire duration of the second half of the race. Again, my expected goal eluded me. In both cases, I finished with a very acceptable time of around three hours and eight

ferry and run in the eight-kilometer *fun run* that was run alongside the marathon. Elke, my wife, and I were in Vancouver celebrating Thanksgiving with her four children, three of whom live there. I had gone over to Victoria by myself the year previously, in 1992, wanting to see how

fast I could run on a flat five-mile course at sea level. One of the many wonderful features of the Royal Victoria Marathon has been the sweatshirts that are awarded to everyone who enters the marathon, but not the shorter race. They feature a North-West Native design created by a prominent Kwakiutl artist named Richard Hunt. I had previously received two of these, one each for my runs in 1987 and 88, but they had now become faded and too small. I lusted for one or two more to replace these, the more so because the quality of the shirts had dramatically improved. Mine had been long-sleeved T-shirts. The new ones were of much more substantial knit. I did manage to purchase one of the few leftover shirts from the year before. I had also noticed a young couple switch their race registration at the last minute from the marathon to the fun run, claiming injuries. This had enabled them to keep their marathon sweatshirts yet skip

the arduous run. I thought to myself something to the effect that, I could do that and do it with a relatively clear conscience since I had run the marathon already and would only be seeking a replacement for the shirts I had won at such painful cost a few years back!

minutes. I decided, however, to listen to what it seemed both my body and my wife were telling me: stop running marathons. I had proved whatever I wanted to prove by running six of them, all in good times, two under the magic three hours.

As the fall of 1993 approached I decided, for the second year in a row, that I would hop across to Victoria on the

Accordingly, in the late summer of '93 I obtained the necessary forms and registered for the Royal Victoria

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Marathon. There was a space in which the registrant was asked to estimate his or her finishing time. I calculated that, were I, five years later, to train for the marathon I might finish in a time of three

ing the best pizza in town. The three of us enjoyed our pizza. It lived up to its local reputation and my claim for it. Having eaten, we departed for our hotel intent on retiring for the night. We realized that the

Elke seemed somewhat reassured by my promise that I would not push it, would go slow and would drop out at any point at which I was unduly hurting or just too worn out. She didn't say so at the time, but I thought I knew her well enough to suspect that she probably felt guilty for having innocently dissuaded me from my crass intention of immediately switching registration. I also had to acknowledge to myself that I felt somewhat excited at the prospect of attempting the near-impossible, of entering a marathon with no preparation, other than my habitual running routine of about 32 miles per week, which included a ten mile run every Thursday morning. I also had to admit that I would be able to wear the sweatshirt with a little more pride and a sense that I had earned it.

## *The only race I was registered for and would be eligible to run tomorrow was the marathon.*

hours and twenty minutes. Came the first full weekend in October, and Elke, her daughter and my step-daughter, Karen, drove to Vancouver for Thanksgiving. Elke and Karen had decided to come to Victoria with me this time so we took the ferry on Saturday afternoon, the day before the race.

When we arrived in Victoria we went straight to race headquarters. I obtained my number and the coveted sweatshirt for the race I was not going to run. By good fortune and his personal generosity, the artist himself, Richard Hunt, was present to autograph the racers sweatshirts. Never one to miss such an opportunity, I asked him to autograph mine. "Good luck in the race Alan!" said he pleasantly. My first qualm of conscience hit as I accepted his good wishes. The qualm was not enough to stop me from heading to the registration desk for the eight-kilometer run now that I had my sweatshirt firmly in my grasp. "Don't you think that's a little tacky?" said Elke, "Why don't we come back a little later? Come on, lets go do some shopping." I shrugged and agreed. We looked around that beautiful little city and did a bit of shopping. Before we knew it, it was supper time. Normally, on the eve of a big race I would follow the time-honored custom of having pasta for its vaunted carbohydrate-loading properties. Since I was only going to run eight kilometers there was no need for the full pasta orgy. I settled more modestly for pizza at a wonderful restaurant that I had discovered the year before which had advertised itself as hav-

ing the best pizza in town. The three of us enjoyed our pizza. It lived up to its local reputation and my claim for it. Having eaten, we departed for our hotel intent on retiring for the night. We realized that the

race headquarters were probably closed for the night by this time, but thought little of it. I could change my registration in the morning. I would just have to get there a few minutes earlier. While we were lazing about before heading for bed, Elke was looking through the program for the two races the next morning. Suddenly she exclaimed with mild horror, "Oh no! It says here, No registration on the day of the race. What are you going to do?" The only race I was registered for and would be eligible to run tomorrow was the marathon. I said

We all went to bed. Some time during the night I woke up and had trouble getting back to sleep for at least an hour. F. Scott Fitzgerald once said, "The dark night of the soul is at three o'clock in the morning." I found myself suddenly anxious and thinking that I must be out of my mind to think that I could head out on a 26 mile race with no prior training. The marathon is arduous enough under the best of circumstances. I was being a fool if I was going to entertain fantasies of trying to run such a race. Anything could happen. I could injure myself very easily.

## *I found myself suddenly anxious and thinking I must be out of my mind to think I could head out on a 26-mile race with no prior training.*

that I would just have to go to the start of the marathon and run as far as I could manage. I would run at a modest rate, say an eight-minute per mile pace and see what happened. I felt fairly calm since I had no expectations on myself for the race. I could not imagine finishing, but thought it would sure be nice if I did.

In the spring of that year I had run a half-marathon, 13 miles, and the pads of my feet just behind my toes began to hurt after ten miles and were extremely sore so that I was limping badly as I walked away from the finishing line. How could I think that would not happen again, or that my old nemesis, the side stitches would

return, all the worse for my lack of preparation? I must have fallen back asleep tormented by such anxious thoughts.

In the morning we all got up. Since no one had any illusions about me trying to go all the way, least of all me (though secretly, my sense of fascination with the possibility of completing the run had returned). Nonetheless, I took a 25 cent piece with me along with a tightly folded map of the race course so that, if necessary, I could phone the hotel to leave a message for Elke to come and get me in case I should have to call it quits away out at the furthest extremity of the race course. Elke noted that I was far less agitated than I usually was before a race and we headed for the starting area much more casually than usually, with me doing far fewer of my pre-race rituals. I usually arrive, for instance, at least twenty minutes beforehand and do a slow ten minute jog to loosen up for the race itself. On this occasion, we arrived only about five minutes before.

There are few more exciting places, in my experience, than the start of a marathon. Except for a handful of elite runners, everyone preparing to run is an amateur in every good sense of that word. He or she has practiced for several week or even months, increasing the weekly miles and extending the weekly long-run a mile per week until reaching usually somewhere between 18 (and for some training procedures 30) slow miles per week. Week after week the runner is going through these paces, wondering "Why on earth am I doing this?" The only answer is something to the effect of, "Just to be able to do and to know that I can and have done it makes it all worthwhile." Finally, it is all ready to happen. As you take your place somewhere at the start you know that you are going to be doing nothing but running for upwards of two and one-half, to most of three or four or even five hours. The initial satisfaction will be for the ego. It will do wonders for the self-esteem when and after the runner crosses the finishing line. But it will be the soul that does the running and gets the

runner there. The *self* may take the credit, but the *soul* really makes it happen!

Thus, in the midst of an excitement that would be there in any event, the organizers at a wonderfully well-organized race such as the Royal Victoria are doing everything in their power to help get that excited energy pumped up from apprehension to enthusiasm. As eight o'clock of the morning of Sunday, October 10th got nearer the loudspeaker was blaring out the familiar strains of the theme from "Chariots of Fire." Elke told me later that as soon as she heard that music she thought, with foreboding, "Oh! oh! That music is going to make him want to go all the way!" She was close! I was getting a lump in my throat. Already

***I was running the EDGE OF CHAOS,  
the domain of soul which can only  
trust the body to self organize at the  
level of complexity the situation  
demands.***

I had noted various good omens that seemed to be falling into place that morning, various body functions doing their bit to help the runner feel light and ready. The music added to it, but there then followed one of those amazing coincidences.

The race director, Rob Reid, who was also the one pumping up the runners, is himself an elite runner who formerly lived, worked and ran in Calgary. There is always a large contingent of Calgary runners at the Victoria Marathon and he always seems to delight in this. Thus, as part of his "pumping up" routine he let go with the line, picking the name of a particular person at random to give the race a face, or he perhaps spotted a familiar Calgarian in the crowd as he went on, "Only thirty seconds, Alan Parry, til the race begins!" Now, I am probably as superstitious as any athlete, and have

more of a sense of personal drama than most, so when I heard my name like that I thought to myself, "My, things are adding up aren't they?" Elke said to Karen, "Oh no! Now, for sure, hell try to go all the way! I know Alan!"

Suddenly the starting gun went off and the race was underway. I had resolved to run at a nice agreeable pace. I usually aimed for something under a seven-minute mile, but the advancing years were slowing me down, so for long races I would be content with a bit more than a seven minute mile pace. I had thought previously that an eight-minute mile pace might be manageable. I found right from the start that it was indeed a comfortable pace and, as a kind of bonus,

I found myself among much more relaxed, good-humored runners. It was also a typically beautiful autumn - in - Victoria day, graced additionally with the refreshing coolness of the early morning.

I pressed on at this relaxed pace, knowing that I would not be tested for some time to come. In my usual fashion, during such a lengthy race, I marked off in my mind the one-tenth, the one-fifth, one-quarter, and one-third points. The test would begin once I reached half-way. I figured I could do about fifteen miles. Beyond that, I could drop out with all my dignity intact. Moreover, every step beyond fifteen miles was a step into the unknown. I found I was happy that the distance markers were in kilometers for I received feedback about the distance achieved much more frequently than of old when it was in miles. Somewhere past the half-way point the soles of my feet began to hurt. Being much more careful and attentive to my body's signals, than during any other race I had ever run, I promptly made a correction in the planting of my feet. The beneficial effects became apparent almost immediately. I like to think of *sole* and *soul* as both touching the Earth. When you listen and

respond to the pain of either a better balance becomes possible.

The route of the Victoria Marathon makes it one of the most beautiful marathons in the world as it graces the shoreline for many miles and passes through pleasant neighborhoods of well-cared-for yards filled with trees, bushes and flowers and very encouraging people. It is a deceptive course in many ways, however. Although it has few hills as such, it has many rising grades that subtly take their toll as the miles and kilometers pass by. During my previous two attempts with this race I found these grades very grinding, the more so as I fought not just the course but my anxious side stitches and cramps. This time, utterly without expectations, I found myself amazed to be running a particular grade and scarcely even noticing it. How liberating the absence of expectations!

The elimination of this dreaded burden has been a battle cry of therapists and clients since at least the heyday of Gestalt therapy in the late 60s and 70s. Expectations tend to be a property of the striving ego, more recently elevated in status to the somehow loftier designation of self, as in self-fulfilment or even self-actualization, so that it has almost reached religious significance. Thus, the attainment of high self-esteem has assumed the status of a near-sacred obligation and those with the dreaded low self-esteem are counted among the wretched of the earth. The achievement of a bountiful sense of self, however, makes it exceedingly difficult not to impose high expectations on oneself, hence to catch oneself in the worst catch of all—*Catch-22*. A person can only hope to succeed if she has high self-esteem, the very pursuit of which is an acknowledgment of low self-esteem which is a mark of wretchedness and a predictor of fail-

ure. In other words, any expectation imposed on oneself by oneself gives rise to the anxious uncertainty of the fear of failure, the mere presence of anxiety being sufficient to reduce performance and invite failure to achieve the expected goal.

As I marked off the kilometers while putting all my energy and concentration into this demanding and improbable task, listening to my body, reminding myself that I could stop without shame any time I decided I could not go further, I found myself feeling amazement at how essentially good I was feeling. I was intent and open, but OK about whatever happened. Certainly, I wanted to finish the race, but I found myself in sufficient overall charge of myself that I could put that

*My legs ... are like rubber, just going, going on their own initiative. I doubt I could stop even if I gave them the command.*

hope to one side and not allow it to impose itself on me as an expectation. Although I felt in charge, somehow it was not my *self* that was in charge. Its accoutrements of striving, of seeking constantly to measure up to an image, its propensity for convincing me of what its image wanted to be convinced of, had vanished in the all-consuming demands of grinding out the miles, making sure that I listened, always listened and responded immediately to my body's requirements. In serving my body, in giving everything over to my body, in appreciation and gratitude I was living in the domain of *soul*. I could not afford the indulgent luxury of self-seeking. Engaged as I was in this improbable undertaking for which I was quite unprepared, I was, I suppose, hurled out beyond the self and its preferred ways of

ordering the world. I was running along *the edge of chaos*, the domain of soul which can only trust the capacity of the body to self-organize at the level of complexity the situation demands. Besides, it had been, I now realized, my incessant preoccupation with gratifying my self-image by running a sub-three-hour marathon that had undoubtedly given rise to the painful side-stitches in the first place and, when they appeared, its anxiety that its expectations were less and less likely to be met that had prevented me from meeting my goal. For, at one point, I felt a stitch coming on, and I cued into my body rather than into my self-image with its, "Oh my God, what next?!" alarms, and it soon subsided.

Once I had passed the 15 mile (or 24 kilometer) mark and was, as I have indicated, in new territory, beyond anything my limited training could have prepared me for I began to awaken to the great bane of all marathon runners: the dreaded *Wall*. This is the point at which the

body's glucosides exhaust themselves and the runner finds that he simply has no glucose, no body sugar, with which to energize his running. It is like hitting a wall. He might be able to drag or walk himself to the finish, but any kind of a run is over. I had not even considered this, even during my three a.m. *dark night of the soul* the night before. I would surely hit *the Wall* unless I did something about it. I knew that the electrolyte-replacement drink for this race was *Gatorade*. I was leary because I normally only used water, and the last time I had inadvertently taken a supplement I had cramped up almost immediately. But, that had not been *Gatorade*.

I decided I had to take the risk. Without it, it was *the Wall* and the prospect of not finishing. With it might

come cramps, but that had not prevented me from finishing before, however painful the cramps had been. At the 28-kilometer point I took my first drink of *Gatorade*. After running for a kilometer or so it was apparent there would be no cramps. In fact, I felt stronger. It had been the right decision. What a relief! There would be no wall. I kept on eating up the miles, slowly, at an eight-minute pace. If I found myself going a bit faster than that, I slowed myself down. It was a far cry from the last couple of marathons in

which I had been constantly trying to speed myself up. The tortoise, not the hare, was going to win this race between me and myself. At 32 kilometers I had passed the 20-mile mark. It also meant that the rest of the race could be treated like a 10 K run which I virtually did every day. In a similar manner I attached various meanings to the shrinking distances remaining.

The big one would be 40 kilometers. Only two more to go. Barring a sudden physical collapse I would make it to the end. There could be no complacency, however. In the distance, I heard the wail of an ambulance. I pass a young woman

lying on the pavement wrapped in blankets. So close she came. How sad for her. My legs, meanwhile, are like rubber just going, going on their own initiative. I doubt I could stop even if I gave them the command. In fact, now that I think of it, I haven't stopped since I started. Not

Yet, I feel stronger than at the end of any of the previous six marathons and Elke tells me I look better and seem stronger too. She says she had sent Karen to the hotel to see if there were any messages from me. There were none of course. She knew, then, I was trying to go all the way. She then sent Karen to the first aid tents to see if I had been brought in on a stretcher or if they kept reports of people dropping out. No word. She and Karen just had to go the finishing line and wait it out. I guess I arrived quite a bit sooner than they expected. I must confess that, although I had no

***I like to think of SOLE and SOUL as both touching the Earth. When you listen and respond to the pain of either a better balance becomes possible.***

even for a drink. I don't think I've ever done that in a marathon. One more kilometer to go. I'm going to make it . . .

As I draw toward the finishing line in the last hundred meters I actually have a bit of energy left, so I speed up a bit. At the finish, there is Elke smiling and in tears of relief. When I see her I can't stop my tears either. The irrepressible Karen is shouting, "See this man! See this man! He ran without any training and look at his time!" I see the time clock. Unbelievable! Not only am I finishing, but in under three hours, thirty minutes: 3:29:12 to be exact, 3:28: 54 from the time my feet crossed the starting line.

expectations, I did have a dream. When I calculated that an eight-minute-mile pace would, if pursued consistently, lead to a 3:30 marathon I dreamed of such a time. Even there I was surprised in the end. I had lost track of the time somewhere in the last two or three kilometers and thought I was maybe five minutes over. Imagine my surprise when even that dream came true! Perhaps, this is just where hopes and dreams do come true: *when we find ourselves over our heads, with no room for expectations, at the edge of our own personal chaos, where all we can do is listen with soul—and keep going.*

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