

others. One example, I learned more about racism in the US from my trips to South Africa and observing their struggles over the past ten years than I ever would have if I had stayed at home. At a broader level the problems we face internally and globally can only be resolved through crosscultural efforts.

Brian: Where do you see the life, energy, creativity, playfulness, and risk-taking in the field of family counselling today?

Bob: I am very worried that it is dying out. In regards to the US, I think we take ourselves, our theories, and the political process too seriously. We are in a very competitive phase where self importance and politics dominate. Getting out of my context into other countries, I have found Brazil, for example, to be very alive much the way the US was in the 1970s. Finland, at another end of the emotional spectrum, is very open to new ideas. The Dutch and Italians are still

playful. I have not been to Australia nor New Zealand so I haven't any opinion about what may or may not be happening in training or the therapy room.

You of course are an Australian man. I have always believed that women pick men, and in your case your decision to listen to and marry a bright, playful Italian woman actually gives me some hope for you yet!

Brian: Bob, I am pleased you have some hope for me, when thousands if not millions had given up on me. The bright, playful Italian woman of whom you speak will enjoy that comment for sure. Thank you for your sharing so reflectively something of your personal growth as a therapist with us. The sparks of growth you fanned in us as students just might ignite students here in Australia! And your ideas about counsellor training and transformation are particularly valuable to all teachers in the field. We would love to see you down under soon! ©

Foreign Correspondent

Letter from Argentina: A Time of National Crisis

Rosalía Bikel and Eduardo Cazabat

As some of you may be aware, Argentina is in the midst of an economic, political and social crisis. Economic activity has been decreasing for the last 50 months, we have had five presidents since December 2001, banks are close to bankruptcy, so people can't cash money from banks, and that brings a considerable increase in unemployment (20%), poverty, delinquency, marginalisation, and insecurity.

In time of crisis, people need to be assured of their basic needs. According to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1962), the two main needs are:

- *Physiological:* Food, clothing, shelter, health, freedom from pain, freedom from abuse, physiological safety, and
- *Safety:* Physical, then psychological. Belief in the future. Freedom from exploitation, abuse, persecution and overwhelming emotions.

As you may guess, both of these are threatened these days. It means that the higher level needs (Love and Belonging, Self-Esteem, Self-Actualisation, and Meaning) have fallen away, since it is the main aim of anyone just to survive. Despite the fact that all of us have been under the pressure of constant stress and uncertainty, that many of us feel drained, the worst part of this is hopelessness. People's mental health is the last thing they can afford to worry about.

So the situation is that many clients have dropped out of treatment, and many others have changed their focus.

We, as therapists, are under a double pressure: the pressure of our own everyday lives, and the fact that the things that happen to our clients are similar to what we, ourselves, are suffering. It means an additional risk of secondary traumatisation, and the consequent difficulty in maintaining 'objectivity' and a meta-position.

As a group, we can't escape this predicament, so our society (ASIBA: Buenos Aires Systemic Psychotherapy Association) as well as our journal (*Sistemas Familiares*) are getting squeezed by the economic crisis, putting their continuity over time at risk.

Apart from hope for the future, one of the main resources to cope with adversity is networking, is human contact. This letter, that allows us to get in contact with you all, sharing our pains and guessing your aims, is a small part of our way of healing ourselves of this nightmare.

Many thanks
Rosalía Bikel and Eduardo Cazabat

Those readers who resonate with the experiences hinted at in this letter from Rosalía and Eduardo may wish to offer their support to our colleagues in Argentina. Eds.

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