

Survival, War and Peace

Avoiding burnout, stress and breakdown is a key theme of Sally Young's lead paper, 'How to Survive as a Family Therapist', in this issue. When Sally's paper was accepted, we could not have known how much 'survival' would be on all our minds in March 2003.

In late January, Avigail Abarbanel, a contributor to this issue, wrote from Canberra, 'Good friends of ours from Chapman (ironically they are Palestinians who thought that they would be safe in Australia!) have lost their house and everything they owned. They were lucky to escape with their lives. It was a nightmarish scenario — fireballs, hot gusts of wind, houses going up in flames in a manner of minutes. Canberra seems to be still in a state of shock.' As far as we can tell, our subscribers are safe. But many of us will know bushfire victims, or those who were under threat, and will be sharing in the distress of very many nationwide. Our severe drought is also causing intense suffering in rural Australia.

We are thankful that the fires in Sydney got no closer than 400 metres to our Subscription Manager's home office. Our Treasurer, Linda Mackay, had her car packed for evacuation, but her home was safe. Here in the Blue Mountains, where your Editors live, fire is factored into people's way of life, and we had been exchanging news all spring about when Blackheath Glen (which our short street overlooks) was going to be back burned, to reduce the fuel load accumulating since the fire of 1957. Well, the Journal Shed is still here, but the view over Blackheath Glen is very scorched, after the fire of 5–9 December. We are deeply grateful for the army of firemen, the decrease in wind velocity, and the providential wind shift to the south after a volunteer fireman said 'You're for it in an hour!' (You should know that our evacuation kit contained not only the family photo albums, but also the zip drive containing all the *ANZJFT* backup files, including the March issue!)

The devastation and heartbreak of bushfire reminds us of organised violence — terrorism and war, a subject of reflection in this issue both in the interview with Moshe Talmon and in the paper by Avigail Abarbanel. Jürgen Hargens gives strong voice to many people's fervent wish for peace in his Letter from Germany.

Yet, while it is easy for therapists to call for peace in the political arena, it seems much harder for us to achieve it in our own professional domain. After all, a civilised war is fought in staffrooms, lecture rooms, and in journals, a war designed to show that one particular way of doing therapy is the right or best way. No wonder we cannot influence our politicians to negotiate! Blessed are the peacemakers and bridge-builders!

Henry B. Andrews, referring to Jensen, Bergin & Greaves' finding (1990) that in their sample, 68% of therapists described themselves as eclectic, suggests that this is an underestimate. He believes that '... it is a relatively rare practitioner that practises solely within one system' (Andrews, 2001: 113). Oddly, although in client sessions everywhere therapists dare to integrate approaches, often in an ad hoc way, the precise details of this mixing and matching are seldom disclosed. People become so attached to their models that it can seem treasonous when someone experiments with combining two. Michael Griffin's paper in this issue describes some bridge-building of his own, integrating CBT and Narrative. Very aptly, our Web Page discussion over the holiday break focused on Carmel Flaskas' argument about the way that over-zealous devotion to theoretical models can sometimes falsify the experience of clinical practice.

Also in this issue, Paolo Bertrando and Dario Toffanetti address the criticism that hypothesising — a fundamental plank of Milan systemic therapy — is oppressive to clients. Bertrando and Toffanetti conclude that all therapists inevitably hypothesise, and that it is better to be aware of one's own hypothesising process than to pretend it doesn't exist. In an important Education Update, David Campbell surveys the history of Milan therapy, tracing the way that Milan ideas have undergone transformations and surfaced in some quite unexpected places.

In a second ground-breaking Education Update, Anne Sved-Williams' paper on family therapy and infant mental health is the story of a field which, like a tiny child, is developing at a tremendous rate. Another author might have taken a more adversarial line, and firmly defined Infant Mental Health as a field separate from ours. Anne chooses to describe it as a sub-specialty of family therapy. She points to the need for more evidence of the kind that is going to convince funding bodies. Ingeborg Stiefel, Philomena Renner and Denise Riordan from the Royal Alexandra Hospital for Children, Westmead, Sydney, enter into the discussion with Alistair Campbell about how a family therapist can usefully research and build the kind of 'evidence' that will make a case for the survival of family therapy as a powerful, specialised and efficacious treatment model.

References

- Andrews, Henry B., 2001. Back to Basics: Psychotherapy is an Interpersonal Issue, *Australian Psychologist*, 36, 2: 107–114.
- Jensen, J. P., Bergin, A. E. & Greaves, D. W., 1990. The Meaning of Eclecticism: New Survey and Analysis of Components, *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, 21: 124–130.

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