

# A Loss and Some Gaps

**Margaret Topham's death earlier this year was a sad loss** to many of us, as the personal tributes in this issue testify. I remember Margaret's magisterial presence at my first-ever family therapy training workshop, a five day event at the (then) Preston Institute of Technology, in 1978. I can see her now, authoritatively working with role-played families, cheerfully bossing her three (male) group leaders around, breaking down in unembarrassed floods of tears at the news of some personal tragedy. I can remember when I was working as 'therapist' with a 'couple', expertly and testingly role-played by two of my fellow group members. I had been completely at a loss as to how to stop their escalating anger, and had turned my back to them as a last resort (to be fair to myself, never, in 25 years of practice, has a real couple so completely disregarded my more respectful efforts to intervene). My group were horrified at such a tactic, and in hindsight, so ought I have been, but Margaret, who had slipped into a back seat with her needlework, exclaimed, 'Hugh, you will make a family therapist!' It was an endorsement that I have never forgotten, although I have often wondered whether or not she was right.

Margaret's enduring impact was as a trainer, so it seems fitting that this issue of our journal contains the annual Directory of Training Courses in Family Therapy in Australia. Two articles in the issue also raise important implications for training. Australia has a responsibility to Niugini and the Solomon Islands, which ought to go beyond profitable mining of their resources, military support against insurgents, and loans on favourable terms. To our north is a large, diverse region with massive social and emotional problems, many of them caused by our own comprehensive working-over of its traditional economy, customs and spiritual beliefs. Surely our responsibility extends to working with Melanesians to find culturally appropriate solutions to their multiplying dilemmas? Jose Orathinkal and Alfons Vansteenwegen's paper challenges all of us in this country to consider what systemic family (and network) therapy might have to offer in this context — and what we, in turn, might learn from traditional Melanesian ways of resolving conflicts between clans (a possibility that is only hinted at in their paper).

Few of our training courses pay much attention to the cultural 'fit' between family therapy and the various non-Western settings into which it may be imported. Applying for an academic position in Hong Kong a few years ago, I

was asked which family therapy model I thought most appropriate to Chinese people. Knowing how greatly the Chinese had traditionally valued family and ancestors, I mentioned Murray Bowen and Ivan Boszormenyi-Nagy's work. Wrong! I was supposed to have plumped for Structural Family Therapy — because my (Cantonese-speaking) interviewees trained their students in this model. Was it simply because they had remained loyal to the paradigm in which they had been trained, during their own graduate study in the US? Or was it that Minuchin's stress on order, hierarchy and boundaries matched Chinese concerns in a deeper way than I had first imagined? These days it would seem that the 'correct' model for Hong Kong is Narrative! (See *The International Journal of Narrative Therapy and Community Work*, No 1, 2004).

In their substantial and enlightening paper on lesbian experiences of parenting, Amaryll Perlesz and Ruth McNair correctly point out that our journal has published just *one* paper specifically devoted to gay/lesbian issues in its entire history. The apparent 'invisibility', until very recent years, of these issues in this, and many other, family therapy journals matches the lack of time accorded in training courses to sensitising future family therapists to these and related concerns. It is with some satisfaction, therefore, that we are able to publish in this issue both Amaryll and Ruth's paper, and Liz Telford's, on working with lesbian couples.

There should have been more. We had been promised two papers on working with lesbians and gay men, one of them already accepted by the assessors, and for a time, hoped for an entire themed issue. However, despite much encouragement and several reminders over a long period, this author was unable to submit his revised papers in time. Meanwhile, your editors discovered an original-sounding research project into emotional dimensions of lesbian relationships, and wrote to its student author, asking her to consider submitting a publication based on it to the *ANZJFT*. However, her senior co-author had already taken the decision to submit their joint paper to a journal specialising in homosexual issues.

If heteronormative attitudes are to be challenged, then authors must be prepared to submit papers to journals like ours, where they will be read by those who most need their perspectives. If they are not, then there is less justification for complaining about invisibility!

Hugh Crago