

# Review of the 25th Annual Family Therapy Conference Brisbane: 'Getting it Together: Family Therapy Practice for the Future'

**The conference was very appropriately put together for our 25th anniversary.** We were reminded of our developing chronological and psychological maturity all the way through. We began with an all-day pre-conference workshop by Douglas Breunlin from USA who presented a 30-year retrospective, metaphorically described as a 'tapestry' of family therapy. This fitted in very nicely with the initial keynote address the next morning from Paolo Bertrando, who took us through the development of family therapy from its very roots.

This took us on a journey, which informed us, or reminded us, as the case may be, of our 25-year history. Other equally excellent choices for keynote addresses were Carmel Flaskas, Paul Gibney and Hugh Crago. I could not pick a winner out of this happy mixture of local and international fame.

The workshops I was able to attend included one by Brian Stagoll, which marked the centenary of the death of Gregory Bateson. Brian told us that Bateson died disappointed that his work had not been understood. That is a sad comment on the work of one who has had so much influence on clinicians. It would be nice if he could know that eventually almost all of us have been enriched by his thoughts.

Another workshop I was glad to be able to attend was 'Dangerous Liaisons: Family Therapy in a Multidisciplinary Setting', presented by Fiona McIlwaine and Sue Wells. From what they described, my understanding of the way therapists work in this setting is in some sense 'parallel therapy', challenging as it does the need to accept or understand the different views and therapeutic approaches taken by a diverse set of people. The need for the team to work cooperatively would seem to be a form of ongoing psychotherapy.

There was a clear and explicit presentation from Sarah Flowers which described the way the Family Law Act proposes to protect the interests of children in a situation referred to as 'the presumption of shared caring' following their parents' separation. This new way of considering the best interests of children was spelled out in meticulous detail, and as a 30A for the Family Court, I could not fault it as it stood. However, the difficulty of assessing the capability of

parents to meet the requirements, and the difficulty of any ongoing assessment of their capacity to sustain the standards laid down is quite another question. As it stands, I believe it would be quite difficult for any parents to achieve the ideals put forward, least of all those in the state of grief and anger these parents experience. I doubt the capacity of any of us, as human beings, to manage it.

I must not fail to mention Joel Cullin's presentation, a mixture of intellectual insights and social wisdom. We will be hearing more from Joel, no doubt. As for the rest, I did not go to a single dud.

The food and the company left nothing to be desired. The dinner, I hear, was also great fun — on the Brisbane River, and some people extending their partying ashore when the ferry docked. The only slip-up, I believe, was my own; I was late for my own presentation. But my audience coped and I received no penalty, which I greatly appreciated. Thank you, my audience.

Finally, I must say that successful discussions took place regarding the establishment of a national family therapy association, with all that implies. After 25 years it is time enough. Catherine Sanders reported the announcement that an Australian Family Therapy Association, to represent family therapy in Australia, would be formed with the VAFT secretariat offering to act as interim host. The journal agreed to contribute a minimum of \$2000 to fund the process. It was agreed that Sue Gavan, President of VAFT, Malcolm Robinson, President of TFTASA, and Catherine Sanders, President of *ANZJFT*, would form a national management committee on behalf of the presidents of each state association or their nominees, the president and vice-president of the *ANZJFT* and invited representatives from WA, ACT and NT, to make detailed plans for the association, which could be put before the conference in 2005. Stay tuned.

The 25th Anniversary was properly honoured throughout the conference. Congratulations Brisbane!

**Nancy Wallace**

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