

The second point I wish to thank Max for making is that doing therapy can generate intense self doubt. No matter how experienced or dedicated we are as therapists there will always be times in the therapy room where we cannot make sense of the material, and wonder what on earth is the 'right' thing to say. Theory is useful in applying some retrospective order to the chaos, but the intense suffering of others is painful and distressing. Some interviews can be such hard work that we are filled with other people's sense of impotence and despair of things ever changing. Maybe it is important for us to acknowledge how hard this stuff is, how often we question deep down inside what our own personal 'success rate is' and why we might secretly prefer to avoid for example, one way screens or supervision if we can. Maybe Max declaring his own doubt enables us who have not been in the field for 30 years to be more humble, more accepting of ourselves and of our clients—surely a good place to start?

Finally, to consult a therapist can be a most painful and agonising position, one which makes people face the oftentimes shameful thought that they cannot solve their problems alone. Those who find the courage to sit down with a stranger are entrusting us with their vulnerabilities, the shameful parts of themselves, their fears and their doubts about things ever being better. Max's dictum is an ancient one but worth remembering, *first do no harm*. How many of us can say that we have not harmed a client? Is the fact that the 'harm' was unintentional, sufficient excuse?

Therapists joining the field after Max's editorship have missed a particular period in our history although, no doubt, he will remain a figure in our midst. An unusual person, long time editor of this journal and senior in his field, his talk (and article) will give you a small glimpse and feel for this man. He offers us his own eclectic interests, a broad mix of Anglo-Saxon heritage with a deep and abiding respect for those persons marginalised by ignorance, history and language. He is not swayed by flavour of the month theory, yet seems to respect the new, holding on to the existential essence of therapy. Knowing the indefatigable Max Cornwell briefly and in the context of this *Journal* has been a privilege.

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Victorian Correspondent

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Letter from USA

My view of what's currently happening in the family therapy world of the US is shaped by the national family therapy conferences I've been attending this year, as well as by two more local conferences I've participated in recently. So here are my conference impressions, shared with you in a sort of postcard format.

WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Perth was very lucky to have had two high-profile family therapists visit and provide workshops in April–May 1997. Moshe Lang's workshop was sponsored jointly by the APS College of Clinical Psychologists (WA) and the WA Family Therapy Association. His one day workshop, 'The Long Shadow', on working with survivors of trauma, presented a lot of information based on his experiences of working with holocaust survivors. The feedback from those who attended the workshops was very positive, and many comments were made about the role play, wherein Moshe played the therapist, and a workshop participant took the role of one of her clients. It was indeed a moving and memorable experience, where Moshe combined great skill and great warmth to demonstrate his approach to working with trauma survivors.

Moshe's second half day workshop 'The Therapist's Resilience' was again well attended, and focused on an exploration of the resources required by therapists in order to survive the work that they do. It was unfortunate that not everyone had attended the previous day's workshop, as a lot of this material was referred to in the second workshop. Therefore, there was some repetition, and for those who did not attend the first day, there may have been a sense of disjointedness. Nonetheless, it was a valuable experience, and a reminder to all therapists, whether experienced or new, to consider how we develop our own resilience in the face of the traumas we hear about, and the therapeutic relationships we develop.

David Epston was brought to Perth by Centacare's Brief Therapy Service, to conduct a two day workshop on 'Narrative Therapy with Children and Families'. He used videos and transcripts to demonstrate his approach, along with exercises in developing a narrative discourse to assist participants in developing their skills. Feedback from those who attended was very positive, with descriptions of 'inspiring', 'stimulating', 'useful' and 'reassuring'. David's workshop has even provided the stimulus for one agency to develop its own Narrative Therapy Interest Group. It is great to see that with a little prodding, family therapists in Perth are prepared to use their initiative to develop further their knowledge and skills.

March 20–23, 1997

Here I am at the Family Therapy Network Symposium, a national family conference sponsored annually by the *Networker* in Washington, DC. (Some of us call *Networker* 'the People Magazine of family therapy' because it's very slick, great reading for the non-academically

inclined, and circulates much more widely than any of the more scholarly family therapy journals).

According to the program, this year's conference, titled 'The Marvel of Human Complexity', is attended by 2,500 'committed professionals'. It's a big conference, with people packed into the plenary sessions so tight that many are standing, squeezed against the walls of the giant hotel ballroom. I am presenting a workshop on my work with low income women in a community-based free treatment program for survivors of interpersonal violence and abuse. Most of the people attending my workshop seem very eager for practical information. They want to know how to replicate what we have been doing. Some of them are working in corporate health care settings and seem not to be put off by my attitude towards 'Mis-Managed Care'. I don't know whether to be relieved that they're not arguing with me, or worried that they seem so comfortable with what I'm talking about. Don't they understand that I am suggesting a program that is based on principles of social justice, that advocates turning clients into political activists who challenge the for-profit healthcare system?

I attend various plenary events and am very impressed by such speakers as Cornel West and Mary Pipher. Cornel West is a charismatic African American writer and orator. He exhorts us to confront racism and poverty, to be political activists. Mary Pipher, a white Mid-Western writer, tells us that the only way to save the American family is to abstain from the rampant consumerism and TV addiction that the US is famous for. I'm inspired!

But the next night I go out for dinner with friends and they get a lobster dinner for two that costs \$150. I am so stunned by how much money we collectively spend for one meal that I go back to my hotel room and turn on the TV to calm myself down! Contradictions overwhelm me. What are the other conference attendees spending for dinner? Are they also watching TV in their spacious hotel rooms? And how many family therapists, especially those who come from poor communities, couldn't afford to attend this conference?

April 11–13, 1997

I experience something quite unusual. I attend a conference called 'ECOPSYCHOLOGY AND PSYCHOTHERAPY': I'm spending the weekend with 27 other therapists—quite a few of them seasoned family therapists—who want to learn more about how ecology and psychotherapy fit together. We talk about how to understand clients—and ourselves—in relation to the larger ecosystem, not just the family system or the socioeconomic system. We talk about political action projects. We walk together outside in the dark night and silently experience woods, rocks, trees, and a few ticks. We sleep in simple, very comfortable camplike rooms and we eat delicious vegetarian food. We do some Buddhist meditations. We laugh a lot. It's kind of New Age, but it's politically interesting.

My partner Pat Wieland and I begin planning our 'Ecopyschology and Just Therapy' courses. We're intrigued by how we can combine this new area of psy-

chology with our great enthusiasm for the work of the Just Therapy group from New Zealand.

June 18–21, 1997

Here I am, out of the woods and in the hotel culture again. This time I'm at the AFTA (American Family Therapy Academy) annual conference, 'CHALLENGES FOR FAMILY THERAPY IN A CHANGING HEALTH CARE SYSTEM'. The conference is held in Minneapolis, Minnesota. (Many of us who live in the North East never go to the Mid-West unless a conference is held there. We're quite geocentric, making regional jokes about the South and the Mid-West. Minneapolis is a beautiful, very progressive city—I begin to rethink my bi-coastal elitism).

I am giving one of the plenary speeches. The plenary speakers seem generally to represent AFTA's progressive tendencies. Another speaker, Ramon Rojano, talks about community-based therapy in his predominantly Hispanic and African-American community while I describe my work in a poor white rural county of Massachusetts. Another speaker, Dr. Steffie Woolhandler, represents the views of 'Physicians for a National Health Program', an 8,000 member organisation that advocates single payer national health insurance. And at the Awards Banquet, three of the four awards are given to family therapists from non-dominant (i.e. non-White middle class) cultures. There is a Gay and Lesbian networking dinner, a networking meeting for People of Color, an evening Women's Institute attended by almost every woman at the conference, and Interest Groups to discuss such topics as mutually beneficial alliances between AFTA members and community groups developing initiatives on behalf of minorities and the poor.

I feel very much at home here. Most everyone I talk to is very concerned about how family therapy can make contributions to communities of the variously disenfranchised. Perhaps because AFTA's membership consists largely of senior therapists, professors, supervisors, etc., few people at this conference are preoccupied with joining Managed Care panels or developing three-session 'cures'.

June 26–30, 1997

Now I'm at a conference in Burlington, Vermont, titled 'Social Justice and Family Therapy' and featuring New Zealand's Charles Waldegrave, Warihi Campbell, and Luamanuvao Winnie Laban from The Family Centre, Lower Hutt, Aotearoa (New Zealand). The Just Therapy team spends five days sharing with us the work and ideas they have been practising. This is a very exciting learning experience for all of us and a great networking opportunity as well.

I do a lot of talking with my colleagues from Antioch New England about how we can import some of these wonderful principles and practices into our academic community. All 150+ Americans in attendance seem very excited about the work of the New Zealand team and seem to be talking about how to use these ideas to fight the oppressive practices occurring in the US mental health system. I am thrilled when the Just Therapy

team publicly acknowledges my own work, and even more thrilled to be invited to visit them in the coming year!

September 18–21, 1997

Will I attend the 55th annual conference of AAMFT in Atlanta, Georgia? Probably not. And it's not because I don't want to leave the North East to venture into the South. I don't really want to attend the AAMFT because it appears that I will be brought back to the reality of 'essential information for professionals ... with business planning, therapists can begin to develop a proactive posture in the market ...' as promised by one presenter who seems representative of most of the offerings at

this conference. Or maybe I don't want to enter a nostalgia for the Good Old Boy Days as represented by featured speaker Salvador Minuchin. And yet, there *will* be kindred spirits like the Narrative-centred presenters, an advanced seminar offered by Ken Hardy on 'therapy and complexities of race', and a keynote speech by Reverend Jesse Jackson, president of the National Rainbow Coalition. So there will be echo of the progressive visions advanced at the conferences I've already described.

That seems to sum up my reflections on what's hot and what's not. As we say at the end of American post-cards, 'wish you were here'.

DUSTY MILLER
US Correspondent

Report on the South Australian Conference: Part One

'Journeying Together: Out from Behind Closed Doors' was the theme of the recent FT Conference held in Adelaide. The organisers would not have been disappointed since a wide range of plenaries and workshops took up the theme and we discussed it over paper bags at lunch. The opening ceremony seemed just right. So did Uncle Lewis O'Brien who was introduced to us as a member of the Kurna People and who told us some REAL HISTORY of the area and its people. It seems that the Kurna People have been hosting conferences for thousands of years; and that there were certain foods they did not eat. This meant that those foods were available for their guests. We began to wonder what the whites had in store for our morning tea. Then we had lessons in how to play the didgeridoo and what could have been better after all than Bush Tucker or Poppy Seed and Pepper Leaf Damper with Quondong and Native Currant Jam? We were off to a good start!

The selection of workshops was outstanding. There were the stimulating, the encouraging, the interesting, the relaxing, the overcrowded—I suspect naughty New South Welsh turning up without writing their names down—and some were under crowded (one had no attenders at all!)

If Wednesday was about real history, Thursday was about making history. It was something of a privilege to watch the Family Therapy bud flowering before our eyes. I was stunned how two people so many miles apart could be so in tune with what is happening in their field as to be able to articulate a message that was spoken differently and yet be so in tune with each other. Catherine Sanders noticed it when she was speaking and said 'I have not consulted Paul [Gibney] about this.' Each of the speakers was riveting. Each had thought

carefully and spoke significantly about where family therapy is heading in this country now.

There is one workshop that needs a mention. There was an audible buzz at afternoon tea on Friday afternoon and if you think this was caused by people catching up with colleagues before they left the conference, YOU ARE WRONG. They were discussing the Sex Workshop. As far as I can make out, they were practising a technique for getting more out of You Know What by breathing—yes that's correct! Heavy Breathing and gyrating around the floor. Somebody has to have taken photos of the scene of thirty family therapists writing—no, gyrating, they tell me! Please do not think I am critical of the usefulness of all this for our clients. I just wish I'd been there!

For many, the highlight of the Business Meeting was the move taken by the South Australian Association of Family Therapists to support the Wik Finding. The Association has rewritten its constitution to accommodate the rights of indigenous people, in the hope that if community groups adopt them, it will be continually harder for the Federal Government not to do so. A formal apology was made to the indigenous people, and a motion was made from the floor of the conference to support the Wik Judgment. Brian Stagoll on behalf of the Journal announced that he would plan with Max Cornwell a full page advertisement allocated to an expression of the will of the community to endorse native title.

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To be continued next issue!