

Inside *Out*

No. 98. Autumn 2022. €7.00

The Irish Journal for Humanistic
and Integrative Psychotherapy

**We are on the same
journey, being human**
A question of soul

**Community is
the new Buddha**
The times they are a-changing

**Letting go can create
space for new growth**
The breath of congruence

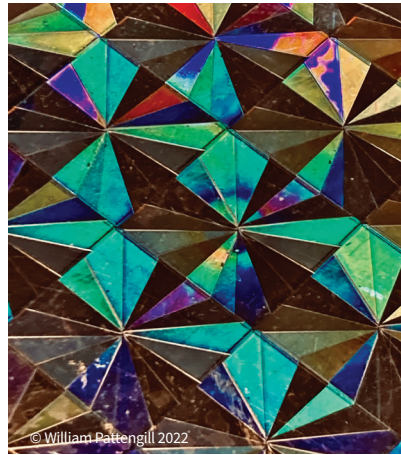
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IAHIP



Irish Association of Humanistic
and Integrative Psychotherapy

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EDITORIAL

In this issue we mark the occasion of the 30th anniversary year of IAHIP. An anniversary is a time to celebrate and to be thankful, to reflect on our beginnings and our journey, where we are now, what we do, our identity and where we are going to. Tony Rice touches all of these bases in his *Message from the chairperson* and he invites us to stay involved or get involved with our Association.

We are fortunate that some of our founding members and those who were at or near the beginning of our Association have offered contributions for this special issue. Ger Murphy traces the development of humanistic and integrative psychotherapy in Ireland, seeing three phases unfold: initiation, consolidation and application. Ger challenges us to look beyond the focus on the individual and invites us to recognise that our own mental health depends on our community's health. Complementing this article is the *Conversation between Susan Lindsay and Shirley Ward*, who provide fascinating insights into the beginnings of IAHIP and their own personal journeys. Sarah Kay looks back on her 30 years as a therapist and reflects on the importance of relationship in therapy and she asks some searching questions about the challenges of our world today. Kay Conroy describes her own 'turning point' and existential moment and how it led her to becoming a therapist and founding an institute. Margaret Brady, our much-esteemed former colleague, writes affectionately of her eight years on the Editorial Board of this journal.

Apart from the anniversary theme we have also a number of articles on different aspects of therapy which offer hope in the midst of major difficulty. John McLeod focuses our minds on psychotherapy at a time of social and political change and crisis, stating that psychotherapy has not sufficiently considered "active citizenship, solidarity, generativity, mutual aid, truth-telling and wisdom as intended outcomes of therapy". Helpfully, he outlines a number of scenarios in which psychotherapy might contribute to creating a more sustainable and just world. Mike Moss in his reflection, *A question of soul*, uses the image of a kaleidoscope to explore the different parts of ourselves which connect with the other, the world and our soul. He recounts a touching story of a client who finds some of the lost parts of her self. Robin Shohet reflects on the Hawaiian process of forgiveness called *ho'oponopono*. William Pattengill interviews Barbara Devaney, a marriage and family therapist, who specialises in using the expressive arts to work with trauma and special needs. Paul Daly explores five ways of handling conflict. Mick Devine gives us the second part of his exploration of the challenges of the therapist who is an adult child of an alcoholic.

It seems appropriate that this special issue celebrating three decades of humanistic and integrative psychotherapy contains Christopher Murray's article on his way of knowing when and how to end a 47 - year career as a therapist and supervisor. He writes of exploring all aspects of the self from the perspective of head, heart and gut, describes movingly his last weeks in the therapist role, and is reminded by a friend that letting go can also create space for new growth. We would like to wish Christopher a very happy and fulfilling life ahead.

JOURNAL ETHOS

Inside Out is the journal of the membership of the Irish Association of Humanistic and Integrative Psychotherapy. Our journal is devoted to inspiring the sharing of ideas amongst those within and around the psychotherapy community. We invite submissions that articulate and explore the profession and heart of psychotherapy. Our aim is to embody the humanistic value of developing authentic relationships. *Inside Out* supports diversity and welcomes into dialogue all cultural, religious, social, racial and gender identities. Our aspiration is to inform, inspire, open dialogue and widen debate. In giving readers space for their voices, we aim to facilitate diverse strands of thought and feeling that might open, develop, unfold and intertwine.

IAHIP 30th Anniversary: A message from the chairperson

by *Tony Rice, Chairperson of IAHIP Governing Body*



Happy anniversary to us all! At one of the recent free CPD workshops in our anniversary series I was standing in the queue for coffee and a former Governing Body chairperson introduced me to another member she was chatting to in the queue. It was a wonderful opportunity for me to acknowledge that the work this current Governing Body and all committees are doing today is possible due to the mix of skills and energy we bring ourselves along with the hard work and passion of so many of our predecessors over the past 30 years.

This particular anniversary workshop on *Gender Variance and Diversity* was the first I was able to attend myself. Listening to the sharing of the members present I was reminded in a fresh way of the variety and diversity of the healing work so many of us do on a daily basis. I was struck by the honest sharing of knowledge and questions, of openness and heart. It was no shock, of course, but the desire of our members to be more skilled and authentically available to our clients who might be struggling with or celebrating their emerging and evolving identities was humbling and so encouraging. This is us, humanistic and integrative psychotherapists, at our best.

This is why, to my mind, IAHIP matters so much. Not only for the opportunities for us to gather and learn together as colleagues, but for us to support, challenge and encourage each other, as professionals and friends. We do this, embracing the intersectionality of our membership – the experienced practitioners, the newly qualified and the students, the younger and the older, the queers and the cishets, the various national, cultural, religious and spiritual identities; the range of clinical practice and areas of special interest; those who have been on many committees already and those who have recently volunteered. Whatever way you look at it, being part of IAHIP is good for us as therapists and gives great confidence to our clients and the public.

Much continues to be done by the Governing Body to refocus the Association towards members. The office team is very professional and strives to improve our administrative systems and services. Our committees work so hard to make membership achievable and a badge of honour and indisputable quality. A number of our ongoing projects, not least engagement with CORU, digital marketing and recruitment of a Regional Development Officer, seek to consolidate and promote our presence today and also prepare for and shape our future as a family (of sorts) of psychotherapists upholding the highest standards of training, ethical practice and mutual support.

I offer my heartfelt thanks to those who had the vision and courage to form the Association 30 years ago, to those who have moulded and reformed it since as guardians and advocates, and to those who currently hold positions of responsibility. This Association is ours, we have a history to be proud of and a future to be enthusiastic about. Get involved or stay involved to make our next 30 years as rich and exciting as the last. Your Association needs you! Here's to the next 30 years!



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The times they are a-changing: Reflections on the development of humanistic and integrative psychotherapy in Ireland

by Ger Murphy

It was 1991. The end of training year dinner at the Institute of Creative Counselling and Psychotherapy (ICCP) was in flow and a conversation began about the value that a journal for Humanistic and Integrative psychotherapy in Ireland could offer. It was an exciting time in the emergent profession of psychotherapy in Ireland. The Strasburg Declaration had been agreed the previous year where organisations from across the EU had come together under the banner of the European Association for Psychotherapy to declare psychotherapy as a stand-alone profession. Structures were being set up across the continent to regulate and boundary the new profession.

In Ireland, the Irish Council for Psychotherapy was begun with 5 distinct sections of psychoanalytic, constructivist, family systems, cognitive-behavioural, and humanistic and integrative coming together to form under the umbrella body of the Irish Council for Psychotherapy (ICP). This possibility emerged from a conversation at St Vincent's hospital in Dublin one night between Michael Fitzgerald (psychoanalyst) and myself. We had just heard that a group from Holland were planning to come to Dublin to propose a psychotherapy model which was to be based solely on a core profession model. This would have meant that only those with a prior qualification in medicine, psychology or social work could qualify for entry to the new profession. We wanted to resist this as being too restrictive.

Each section was defining itself and developing structures of training and accreditation as appropriate to each modality. The designation of "humanistic and integrative" was only emerging, coming as it did from UK based delineation discussions in the previous years. ICCP had affiliated itself to UK based psychotherapy groups (there being as yet no such body in Ireland).

It must be remembered that humanistic training had only started in 1984 in Ireland when Susan Lindsay launched the first training at Creative Counselling Centre, Dun Laoghaire, as ICCP was then known.

The outcome of that dinner conversation in 1991 was to be the beginning of the journal, *Inside Out*. I, along with two trainees at our training, Aveen Murray, Marjorie Sachs, and a graduate, Mary Montaut, along with Mavis Arnold, a graduate of Dublin Counselling Centre, agreed to form the first editorial board. Our vision was a simple one: to spread the word of our newly emerging and growing profession of humanistic and integrative psychotherapy.

I see the development of humanistic and integrative psychotherapy in Ireland and the parallel development of *Inside Out*, as having three main phases over the 30 years since its inception. These phases can be seen as, initiation, consolidation and application. *Inside Out* has been deeply connected to and a valued partner of the development of humanistic and integrative psychotherapy here.



Initiation

The first phase can be seen as one of developing a sound and boundaried container for the growth of the profession and the wider sense of initiation of related practices and procedures. The years of the 90s were busy with developing criteria for trainings and accreditation of psychotherapists and later, of supervisors. The Ethical and Complaint codes were developed to offer safeguarding to clients and professionals. Overall, this can be viewed as the time when humanistic and integrative psychotherapy was placed on the map here in Ireland.

It must be remembered that psychotherapy itself was very new in Ireland in the 1990s. Its arrival was in many ways paralleled with the systemic shifts that were happening in the country at that time. The social life of the country was being changed fundamentally and rapidly in that decade. For example, divorce was legislated for in Ireland in the mid 90s (whereas only one constituency in the country had voted in favor of divorce in the previous referendum in 1986). The social influence of the Catholic Church diminished greatly in this decade. Finally, with the outpouring of abuse allegations that emerged in the late 90s from clerical and institutional settings, the need for a response to trauma was urgent. Peter Levine's wonderful book, *Waking the Tiger* (1997), had emerged, and it argued convincingly that the body is a healer, and that the psychological effects of trauma are reversible, but only if we listen to the voices of the body. This brought focus to body psychotherapy, which had been within the canon of humanistic and integrative psychotherapy in the form of Reichian bodywork and the Bioenergetics of Alexander Lowen. These novel approaches to working with the body offered useful tools for healing the emergent trauma being revealed in Ireland.

Consolidation

The second phase following Initiation, concerned the developing of practice and theoretical maps, and can be seen as one of Consolidation.

The developments within neuroscience were emerging with the first arrival on these shores of Daniel Siegel et al in early 2000 (Siegel & Solomon, 2003). This brought a new understanding of the human mind. Pat Ogden's (Ogden, Minton & Pain, 2006) visit brought trauma - informed practice. Both were landmarks in the development of humanistic and integrative practice.

The original values and insights of humanistic psychology, as clearly articulated in early articles of *Inside Out* and elsewhere by John Rowan (1996, 2016) were being merged with practices informed by neuroscience and a trauma-informed perspective. The arrival of mindfulness from the work of Jon Kabat Zinn, (2012) Ram Dass, (2010), and Jack Kornfield (2002) further developed the awareness-based and trauma-informed approaches which deeply enriched the humanistic and integrative practices of the early new century.

This enrichment of the humanistic and integrative perspective and practice was covered well in many *Inside Out* articles and interviews. These developments were paralleled with developments in the structures of IAHIP in the early 2000s where training courses were beginning to be recognised and supervisors were being accredited. It also was the time when courses began to seek alliances with universities to allow them to offer academic degrees. This move is ongoing as psychotherapy seeks to be recognised in the Health Service and beyond. This is a development towards which I have held some ambivalence. The search for academic recognition can make trainings in psychotherapy more rigorous but it can run the risk of downgrading the personal development aspect of training which is difficult to assess in an academic context. For this and other reasons our own Institute of Creative Counselling and Psychotherapy training decided not to seek academic recognition. We eventually decided to cease training in 2010 after 25 years of training provision. While it can be difficult to keep the soulful aspect alive in academic training, it is, nevertheless, an important quest.

Application

The third phase of development can be seen as one of Application wherein, humanistic and integrative psychotherapy has matured to the extent of practitioners being employed in the Health Service and elsewhere. The population is now much more psychologically informed, and the tools of psychological

mindedness and particular application of humanistic and integrative practices are spreading much more widely. The call to living an emotionally attuned, embodied life is stronger. The self-responsibility for each individual's mental, emotional and spiritual life is being taken on actively by more and more of us. This of course is also in the context of a counter force developing also, whereby individuals are moving to a more virtual and representational life where screens, signalling and disembodied relating are also growing rapidly, and where professionalisation can be in danger of disempowering the individual in deference to the 'expert'. Now perhaps, the challenge is about maintaining the wild heart of the founding spirit of the work. In the words of my poem below which was published in *Inside Out* (Autumn 2012).

What Now

*The dank waters of despair sit in stillness on the dark lake of early morning,
The acid rain cries across the valley,
And I face what we have done,
squandered our inheritance.*

*Almost too breathtaking to look upon this scene of stale water, stunted growth and strange
colour, unfamiliar to the land*

*Almost unbearable, too overwhelming even to cry out...
But cry we must, to break the spell, the spell of ignoring,
And cry, cry, cry the waste ...the waste, until tears start the flow, first from deep inside, slowly
rising to cleanse me of my shame,
opening me in humility,
This, a bud of pure love offered in faith that some little thing is possible.*

And the tear? The tear, the first offering of clear water that begins to cleanse the land.

In this ongoing phase of application, how can the practice be used to meet the critical issues of our time such as climate change, among other significant challenges where building emotional resilience and fostering a kind of soulful living is needed?

So many are overwhelmed in these times where we may be called to dance what psychotherapist Jennifer Wellwood calls the "wild dance of no hope" (Wellwood, n.d.).

Wellwood (n.d.) says in her poem *The Dakini Speaks*:

*My friends, let's grow up,
Let's stop pretending we don't know the deal here.
Or if we truly haven't noticed, let's wake up and notice.
Look: Everything that can be lost, will be lost.
It's simple-how could we have missed it for so long?
Let's grieve our losses like ripe human beings,
But please, let's not be shocked by them,
Let's not act so betrayed.*

I believe we need practices, rituals and ceremony that build community and offer support and coping strategies to meet the singular challenges of these times as referred to by Wellwood.

The Dalai Lama is quoted as saying that “community is the new Buddha” (Dalai Lama, 2009). This idea may challenge us to look beyond the focus on the individual and the search for individual well-being, as we come to see that our own mental health depends on our community’s health. Perhaps like no other time we see that the cult of individualism has strong limitations, and that we are in this together.

Practices

In our attempt to build resilience I see practices as occupying a vital role. Practices serve many functions. Perhaps most importantly they underline the fact that we are responsible for our own wellbeing, growth and maturation. Practices can take many forms, dancing, meditation, singing, writing, etc. across to spending time on Twitter or on the internet. Our choice - Our life.

We all engage in repetitive practice. Discernment regarding what supports our life force is vital. As the alchemists of old said, “healthy practices keep the inner material warm” (Roob, 1997) keeping us in touch with our inner life. They keep us rooted on the ground and on the land, and offer psychic containment. They deepen our relation to source through an engagement with the mystery of life, when done with devotion and constancy. Finally, practices provide a context for revelation where fresh ideas, feelings and insights can be received and often the marginalised voices from within ourselves can be heard. These are challenging times, in which, as the Spanish poet Federico Garcia Lorca said, “we are baptised by dark water” (Lorca, 1933) and as psychotherapist Francis Weller (2015) says, “we are washed by our own tears and reunited with the realm of the sacred.”

Ritual and ceremony are usually collective practices, repeatedly undertaken, which, alongside our individual and collective practices, open us to mystery, the sacred and our interdependence. A simple ritual I have employed for many years in my practice room has been lighting a candle as the session begins. Clients sometimes ask the purpose of this ritual and I speak of how the candle for me symbolises the third element in the room, the other, the mystery, the sacred. John O’Donohue the Irish poet and philosopher, spoke of meeting the unknown and mysterious with a sense of reverence, an invitation which I value and see as relevant to our days, and relevant in a practice setting (O’Donohue 2002).

Humanistic and integrative psychotherapy has roots in cherishing authenticity and emergence in the individual. It has many processes and procedures that are soundly applicable to meeting the challenges of these times. The work of Joanna Macy (2012) in her groundbreaking approach to the climate issues is a good example of how humanistic and integrative psychotherapy has influenced practices in a wider context.

Our learnings should not be used to foster narcissism and the cult of the individual. We may be living in times where the real is in danger of being lost to the representational and where the digital and the imaginary are given precedence over nature. This may be a symptom of the terror of our times and the refusal to meet it squarely. We may be terrified of death and our avoidance and refusals are rampant. (See the work of Stephen Jenkinson (2015) for further discussion on this theme.)

Humanistic and integrative psychotherapy can have a real contribution in these times, with its valuing of the body, grief and soul. 30 years after it was founded, I see this kind of psychotherapy and its journal here in Ireland, *Inside Out*, as valuable, accessible and relevant for this new time.

It may be time for humanistic and integrative psychotherapy to move beyond the consulting rooms. This form of psychotherapy has always been based on empowerment and self-actualisation rather than merely symptom relief and so does not fit too well into a reductionistic medicalised model of

illness and cure, but in the wider paradigm of human potential. As such, I think it is relevant to the wider population given that the anxiety and distress of our times cannot be fully addressed in an individual context alone. Of course, we need to do individual personal work including shadow work where we look at elements of ourselves which we have banished (often the inferior qualities) and work to reclaim them, making room for shame, depression and grief among other aspects. Beyond this we also need witnessing. Our ability to find (or refine) communal ritual and ceremony is now vital and our particular form of psychotherapy can assist us in this task. We may dance, sing, speak poetry and mirror each other in deeply healing ways with practices from our therapeutic toolkit as we continue to make an important contribution to our collective context and its healing.

Reflections

I see our current Western Society as having failed us in some ways, while also bringing wonderful benefits. I am concerned that there may be some failure in the area of our maturation. We may be caught in the grip of the Hero Archetype. Charles Eisenstein (2022) writes insightfully on our need for a new archetype in moving beyond the Hero model which may now be coming to an end of its usefulness as an abiding life-map.

The focus on mastery and progress has been stunning in its benefits but may also have left so many of us without real growth in our ability to hold suffering, face death and know our soulful place in the order of nature. Do we need to move beyond a lifelong adolescence and find ways to deepen into our fuller mature life? Have we found ourselves living more remotely from the circle of life that an immersion in nature can give us? Without the rites of passage held sacred by many indigenous peoples we have not faced the trials and opportunities that these rituals could give us. We are left frightened of death, loss and our shadow parts. We may need these practices, as we face possible futures as Jem Bendell (2021) outlines, in his book *Deep Adaptation: Navigating the Realities of Climate Chaos*. These futures call for a deeply resilient mature adult aware of their activation and traumatic responding, able to self soothe, seek support, develop community, engage in life affirming ritual and ceremony and at peace with death. Our psychotherapy is now of age and can help greatly in this task.

Humanistic and integrative psychotherapy grew out of humanistic psychology and the human potential movement. I wonder if we have a great deal to offer in returning to the wider lens of facilitation of human potential in addition to our contribution to healing pathology and dysfunction. If we do so we might find ourselves focusing much more on work in group and community contexts as I have outlined above.

I wonder if we narrowed our focus to serving the individual and away from working in larger contexts, in part to gain recognition at the psychotherapy table from other sections, and from government and wider society? Our perspectives and practices have so many creative and valuable offerings to what is now needed that we would do well to remember our roots and value our contribution. I am thinking here of the Bioenergetics class run for many years at The Institute of Creative Counselling, a weekly class where people could come and safely discharge pent up emotional energy in a group context. Such opportunities, sorely needed now, may have been placed solely within the walls of the psychotherapeutic relationship.

I also remember here that my own therapeutic journey started over 40 years ago with Reevaluation Co-Counselling, a remarkable structure developed by Harvey Jackins (1978). Jackins taught basic skills for use within a peer-based model of shared therapeutic time. It is important to know when

a skilled professional is needed and to be able to access such a service. It is also important to know when a peer-based model may be more egalitarian and empowering. Therapeutic development is necessary for all and it is important not to corral the practice too restrictively, a development akin to fencing in the commons as has happened in our societies over recent centuries. Have we got too safe and overcontained? Our attention to boundaries and therapeutic holding has great merit but also has a shadow. Different interventions are required for different needs.

Another situation where the application phase is visible is the development of short term counselling within the Primary Health care setting. I wrote here in *Inside Out* in 2011 how we at the Institute of Creative Counselling and Psychotherapy had developed a model of short-term psychotherapy based on three aspects, Capacity Building, Presence, and Release. This allowed us to offer a brief, correctly targeted and effective intervention to clients seeking help in the community. This work was based on the pilot project which had been funded for us by the HSE from 2006. The service was also piloted in HSE North-East at the same time. It was then rolled out nationwide in 2014 but may have become bogged down by the avalanche of chronic need that it was met with. Can a brief therapeutic intervention be of significant use when there are such structural issues of inequality and poverty? Therapeutic skills are not the property of the few but the requirement of all, and the population may need to re-own them for themselves. It is complex to repurpose therapeutic interventions for a wider community application. How psychotherapy gets delivered in a medical context while continuing to value self-responsibility and self-actualisation is challenging, however this is a real question for our time.

Let's use all we have. This will help us to face the future with real and active hope, love for our world and compassion for all. This sense of Active Hope is defined well by Macy and Johnstone (2012):

Active Hope is not wishful thinking. Active Hope is not waiting to be rescued by the Lone Ranger or some savior. Active Hope is waking up to the beauty of life on whose behalf we can act. We belong to this world. The web of life is calling us forth at this time. We've come a long way and are here to play our part. With Active Hope we realise that there are adventures in store, strengths to discover and comrades to link arms with. Active Hope is a readiness to engage. Active Hope is a readiness to discover the strengths in ourselves and in others, a readiness to discover the reasons for hope and the occasions for love. A readiness to discover the size and strength of our hearts, our quickness of mind, our steadiness of purpose, our own authority, our love of life, the liveliness of our curiosity, the unsuspected deep well of patience and diligence, the keenness of our senses and our capacity to lead.

I am very grateful to *Inside Out* for the request of an article on the occasion of the 30th year anniversary of IAHIP. When I look back on the 30 years of IAHIP and my own 40 year journey with psychotherapy, I feel delighted to have been involved in this great adventure. I think it is important to value what has been created and to be vigilant that we continue to reflect on our profession's and society's shadow material emerging as it always will. Psychotherapy has an important contribution to make, but only when it is seen as part of a much wider change in society, to meet the challenges of our times.

A final question for me for our profession as well as for our society is: Are we being good ancestors?



Ger Murphy has worked as a psychotherapist for 35 years, was a founder of *Inside Out* and ICP and IAHIP, ran a psychotherapy training at the Institute of Creative Counselling and Psychotherapy for 25 years, and continues to practice, and offer company to those seeking development individually and in groups. He can be contacted at germurphyster@gmail.com.

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Reflections on therapy

by Sarah Kay



Relationships are all we have...

As I look back on my time as a therapist and what 'humanistic' means to me, I can only reflect with a western perspective on what I've experienced in the last 30 years working with clients. I worked mostly in long-term relationships with clients and can unequivocally attest to the importance of the 'relationship' being at the core for both parties to gain insight, learning, trust and growth.

Three areas of concern, which for the most part inhabited the therapeutic space, were: the fear of death and dying, the search for a purpose for living including relationships, and dealing with loss and grief. For all these concerns, the humanistic principles of respect, empathy and belief in the possibility of growth and change apply and I endorse them all.

However, these principles also apply to other modalities and philosophies so I've instinctively shed (or integrated) labels such as humanistic, integrative, dynamic, and gestalt, amongst others, partly because I am not a purist and have added other strings to the gestalt bow and partly because therapy has evolved in leaps and bounds since the 60s, when the term humanistic became a movement of expansion in a time of possibility. This was in response to people throwing off the shackles that bound them and searching for purpose and meaning. Over time the growth and potential movements have evolved into a humanistic, integrative and dynamic force.

But the world since the 60s has changed and at great speed. We are now living in different times with different challenges. Is 'growth' the only answer to 'potential'? Economists still think so, but environmentalists are focusing on sustainability and resilience in a desperate effort to stop the further destruction of the earth. We have a plethora of knowledge which now has to be sifted out from 'fake' news and conspiracy theories. Everything, every emotion, every opinion, every sound bite is out there, on media platforms 24/7 and not only is it overwhelming but it also risks getting cancelled! No wonder people are hyper stressed and anxious.

So, my observations are not just questions for the future of therapy but also for the survival of the planet, for unless we do something very soon about carbon emissions many things other than survival, including therapy, will seem unimportant.

So, with the reality of a climate emergency – how do we face this existential threat to our planet and all who live on it and keep the pressure on our governments to do something about it?

There is a rise in malignant narcissism, sense of entitlement and naked aggression (just look at the current global leadership, states at war and inequalities around the world) – has our work towards self-actualisation been too individualistic without enough thought for society and communities?

Attachment theory talks about the importance of attunement in the development of a child and his/her primary caregiver and it's bearing on future relationships. We now have a third party involved in this early stage of development: the screen (mobile phones, etc.) Will this have a bearing on attachment theory and future relationships? In relation to screens, many of us will have conducted therapy sessions during the pandemic through a screen. Does this way of working have a bearing on the relationship between therapist and client?

How has the use of social media affected society and our mental health? Can and should social media be controlled? If so, then, by whom?

Therapies evolved on the margins of society in an effort to liberate people from unnecessary suffering and were part of the feminist and anti-racist movements towards equality. As well as the continuing evidence of misogyny and racism, the biggest problem now is financial inequality in western societies where we have poverty rising with food banks and homelessness (due to high rents, basic salaries not in line with inflation and lack of housing). The wealth of the world is in the hands of a very few who get away with paying minimal tax. Ironically but not surprisingly, there is now a very lucrative global 'wellness' industry flourishing. Does this industry exploit vulnerable people? Can ordinary people afford therapy? Does our 'wellness' training model, which leads to an in-house pyramid of employment, in any way contribute to therapy not being accessible to everyone?

Humanistic philosophy countered organised religion with good reason at the time. However, a spiritual search and hunger for something 'more than' entered my practice on a regular basis over the years and needs addressing. I was quite shocked at the humanist wedding of one of my sons when the celebrant refused to say the word God in a well-known prayer the couple wanted included in the ceremony.

Do all systems in the end develop their own dogmas and protect their own interests?

In therapy we do try to deal with reality over fantasy and despair. Reality at present is tough and I swing between despair and optimism. What keeps me grounded and grateful are my many varied and loving relationships. These relationships include a love of nature, animal life and everything that grows so profusely on this earth. What else is there?



Sarah Kay is a retired Gestalt therapist who served on the Editorial Board of Inside Out.

Conversation: The beginnings of IAHIP

Susan Lindsay in conversation with Shirley Ward

This, slightly adapted, conversation was first published in the Spring 2013 edition of *Inside Out* and is republished here with Susan's and Shirley's permission.

Shirley: Well, where do we start, Susan? We both seem to have been around the psychotherapy world forever over the last thirty years!

Susan: Yes! You were saying that a lot of people may not know about the early beginnings, so maybe I'll start there with my own story.

Shirley: That sounds like a good idea. I understand that you have now retired from working as a psychotherapist and have exciting new creative projects in hand for the future. You were one of the pioneers of psychotherapy in Ireland, so if you start with some of those early beginnings and the part you have played in this, then we can talk about the present and what the future holds for you personally.

Susan: I went to a very liberal kind of school in Dublin and that is relevant to my life now. It was heavily influenced by the educational philosophy of A.S. Neill, the founder of Summerhill School and so individual autonomy and democracy was fostered there.

Shirley: He was very much a forward-looking thinker! I think he opened Summerhill in Lyme Regis in England in about 1923 and it was the original alternative free school where the school should be made to fit the child. Is that right?

Susan: The main thing is an emphasis on children as capable of being responsible in a supportive democratic environment. We had a school council with members elected from every class and a weekly school meeting with a constitution that decided a lot. This is where I learned about proper procedures for conducting and chairing meetings – one of the most useful things I learned in school and useful in IAHIP too! I found out later that Neill was also a disciple of Wilhelm Reich and there is a book published of their correspondence. This provided a link between earlier and later influences in my work.

Shirley: Did you ever meet A.S. Neill?

Susan: I did! Amazing, isn't it? I value that memory. He spent part of a day with a group of fellow pupils and staff from my school on a weekend outing of fifth and sixth formers in a cottage in County Wicklow in 1967. I am presently co-editing a poetry newspaper and it has brought me right back to when I was in fifth year in school producing a school magazine. It was done using a Gestetner hand-printer – a lot of ink and mess. There was no digital then!

Shirley: We were very lucky to be living through those early years when some of the great pioneers were doing their work and we were able to meet them.

Susan: Yes, that's true. I went on to do social work in Trinity and qualified in 1975, having also married in 1972. I wanted to develop my skills in group work and that led me to meeting Len Goodman from

Canada.

Shirley: Who was he?

Susan: He was a Canadian teacher who had spent time in the Canadian Navy and had been in a group or groups with Fritz Perls. He also had experience in Bioenergetics and he ran encounter groups with us.

Shirley: So all this was going on in the late 1970s?

Susan: Yes. That was really the beginning of my interest in therapy and also growth groups. I was a member of the Eastern Regional committee of the Irish Association of Social Workers with Barbara Kohnstamm, who also became a psychotherapist, and we wanted to offer training workshops – both in group work and family therapy – to our members. So we also brought over Fed Labelle, a family therapist who had done training with Virginia Satir. Barbara met Len (later known as Somen) when he visited the agency she was working in and she also knew of Fred Labelle. Both did a significant amount of training here. Sometime during 1975-76 Len Goodman and Barbara Kohnstamm (who by then had become his partner) got together with Ray Cadwell and Tom Mannion and expanded the Dublin Growth Centre. I attended several years of groups there – including groups I co-facilitated as a trainee after they had set up an apprenticeship training programme. I loved group work from early on in my career and focussed more on this from then on and less on family therapy. Years later when I went to a group with Carl Rogers in Dun Laoghaire, he and the team came over to Ireland, but this was a long time later. It was very familiar work in many ways. I had initially known about Person-Centered Therapy and Theory from my days in social work anyway, but I learned about his Communications Research and Encounter groups first hand.

The most important thing for me after college in the '70s was therapy and the experience of Zen-influenced awareness. The books of Alan Watts are still among my favourites and he is mentioned by Paula Meehan on the back cover of my recent poetry book. A lot of people may not realise that Fritz Perls was an analyst who had been trained and involved in Zen Awareness and he developed Gestalt Therapy out of that. Now looking back – and I know you have been very conscious of this in your time – and to see all the discoveries in neuropsychology, biology and mindfulness research that confirm and modify the work we were doing over 20 years ago is both fascinating and satisfying. We were working a lot of the time out of experiential learning and learning things from our own internal consciousness in a truly phenomenological way. But what we learned has become accessible to far more people as it has become confirmed by mainstream research, even if the application of the information is limited sometimes by the lack of an integrated understanding of it.

Shirley: It was such an exciting time and I feel truly privileged to have also shared my journey through the experiential. It seems to have been a very creative and enlightening time for you.

Susan: Yes. It has been a great journey and I think it is no surprise today that I am learning to write poetry from the inside out. I like learning by doing; it has opened up a much greater understanding of poetry now that I have some idea of how it comes about in the first place. I find it a relief now to be doing this, rather than to be actively engaging with people all the time and have to be continually consciously self-aware. Although some habits die hard!

Shirley: It must also have been around that time your children were born?

Susan: Ben was born in 1979 and Emma in 1983. Ben came on a week-long summer group with me which people still remind me of occasionally. Emma was conceived along with the Creative Counselling Centre.

Shirley: Which is when we first met and when Alison Hunter opened Amethyst in 1982, thirty years ago!

Susan: Yes. I left St. Vincent's Hospital where I was working as a psychiatric social worker and doing some group and family therapy when I was pregnant with Emma. I became the first social worker in Ireland to become self-employed. It was seen as entering into 'private practice' and hence as controversial – not that it stopped social workers coming as clients and sending along their family, so that was more encouraging. We began the first Creative Counselling Centre (CCC) training course in a year after Emma was born and it was a two-year course. The CCC was my idea and I founded it along with Una Maguire and Angela Walsh. Una was at the birth of both, as founding partner of the centre, and assisting midwife for Emma's birth at home!

Shirley: Names from the past and, of course, sadly Una has just recently died. I was at her 70th birthday in Belfast in 2010 and Olive Bourke, Chair of IAHIP at the time, had written a lovely letter to her on behalf of the Association, thanking her for her contribution to psychotherapy and IAHIP over the years. Although the Alzheimer's had taken hold it was clear that Una did understand what was being said to her.

Susan: Una played a critical role in the development of humanistic psychotherapy in Ireland. She wasn't always out front but she was a founding member of the CCC, the Institute of Creative Counselling and Psychotherapy (ICCP), that grew out of it – and IAHIP. She was there from the very beginning and she was one of the longest serving directors of the Institute of Creative Counselling (if you include its precursor, the CCC) and a member of the training team there throughout most of the trainings. She also contributed to the development of IAHIP in many forums, particularly in relation to training and training standards. We weren't as close after I left the Creative Counselling Centre, but it was good to hear and see how engaged most of the members of her ritual group remained when I was at her funeral. Mary Condren, the feminist theologian, performed the Celtic ceremony very beautifully. Una was very happy with her partner Margaret McKenna who took care of her so wonderfully when she was ill in the last few years. Margaret has my very heartfelt condolences – along with the rest of her family, who it was good to see again.

Angela Walsh was also a social worker who had become a family therapist. In the early 1980's she joined myself and Una to start the CCC, but she decided within the first year to leave us as she really wanted to focus on family therapy in the company of others doing the same thing. She had gone abroad to train, but we had met at the first Irish training courses and were founding members of the Irish Family Therapy Network before it became formalised. Actually, I remember chairing the meeting that decided the Association would become more formal before I left. Virginia Satir herself had been over and we had some lovely workshops with her. We had therapists over from many approaches, including Salvador Minuchin, but Satir was the family therapy grandparent who was the most humanistic with her emphasis on communication, congruence and self-esteem. It was all very exciting and a wonderful way to begin. It was happening in the States and we were already getting the follow-on. We had Brief Therapy specialists over too. People might be interested to recall that Bandler and Grinder based their first books on NLP (Neuro Linguistic Programming), *The Structure of Magic*, on their analysis of

observations they made on the work of Satir, Perls and Erickson – brief therapist and grandfather of modern hypnotism. Len Goodman ran a course for us on the book. I think it was a supervision course, although I'd forgotten that when I was trying to remember if I'd ever done a supervision course. Later I remembered that one and courses I'd done as a social worker too, but they had been long forgotten – that's part and parcel of nearing the end of a career you began early in your working life.

Shirley: So right from the beginning you were doing humanistic therapy?

Susan: Yes, humanistic psychotherapy. We began a facilitated training course based on the Rogerian Person-Centered Research on Education which I was particularly interested in from my own school experiences. I was really inspired to do something in experiential learning and education. In those early days the Creative Counselling Centre was based in Templeogue, so the first course was there. This was pre-Dun Laoghaire. Una practised there full-time and I went there for groups. I saw my individual clients at home with a young family in Stillorgan. At that time of the start of the training, I went over to England and met John Rowan who had been chair of the Association of Humanistic Psychology (AHP) in England and also, I think, chair of the AHP in America at one stage.

Shirley: John has certainly been a leading light in the humanistic movement in Europe and America.

Susan: He has certainly written extensively about humanistic psychology and psychotherapy.

Shirley: You know he is still writing about it, travelling and lecturing in Eastern Europe and America at the age of 86. He completed his PhD when he was 81!

Susan: We asked him to be our consultant and he visited us annually. The course needed an 'external examiner' with a true understanding of the humanistic approach. He taught us Humanistic Research methods too. Una had been a Loreto Sister and also Principal of a school in Mauritius. She was now a lay person but she had that educational background too and supported me to go ahead and do the course with John Rowan as our consultant. He suggested I go over to the Rugby Conference in London. I reckoned that to establish ourselves somewhere we needed someone well experienced in the work and a source of information. When I went to the Rugby Conference I thought I'd be out of my depth, but didn't find that at all.

Shirley: Were they basically all counsellors?

Susan: No, they were the beginning of the psychotherapy movement consisting of people from many faculties including Transactional Analysis, Psychosynthesis, Group Analysis, the Grubb Institute, the Jungians and so on. It was very interesting to observe and be part of the dynamics of all that. However, the British Association of Counsellors had initiated the original conference - I think they hosted it.

Susan: Well, in terms of the Creative Counselling Centre and the course, Ger Murphy completed the training course he was doing at the Minster Centre in the UK and was considering returning to Ireland, so I invited him to join us. We needed someone else to help us with the trainings and on the second training in 1987 Ger and I were the main facilitators. It was still a facilitated course. However, Una was always a major trainer on the course as she was in the Institute of Creative Counselling and Psychotherapy that grew out of it. Once the course was begun we felt there would be a need for a professional organisation that could represent psychotherapy in Ireland. If students were going to be trained they, or their course, would need to be accredited by some organisation other than one set up

for those who worked in psychology, medicine or teaching. We didn't want therapists to be regulated by those professions so a separate professional organisation was needed.

Shirley: Was this the beginning of IAHIP?

Susan: Yes.

Shirley: Was the ICP set up before IAHIP?

Susan: Oh no! That came much later. I remember at this time I had just left St. Vincent's Hospital, Elm Park, where I worked on the psychiatric unit as social worker and doing some therapy. Cormac Gallagher, a psychologist who was also a Jesuit and trained as a Lacanian analyst, also worked on the unit. He began the first psychotherapy training in UCD. It was based in the hospital unit. My advert for the training in the Creative Counselling Centre and his advert for the training in UCD happened within a couple of months of each other in 1984. When Ger joined us for the course in 1986, Una, Ger, myself and Ed Boyne, who had been one of our first students, held a meeting to discuss a more formal organisation. We invited others and had a first wider meeting and a precursor to the first formal AGM in 1988.

Shirley: I remember attending that.

Susan: Yes. You and Alison Hunter, mentioned earlier, who founded the Amethyst Resource for Human Development in 1982. Alison's name recurs in the many overlapping strands that came together at the first meetings of IAHIP. They can be followed up in a 1996 issue of *Inside Out* that was dedicated to the "*The Development of Humanistic Psychotherapy in Ireland*" (Lindsay, 1996, p.4).

Miceal O'Regan brought us Psychosynthesis. Mary Paula Walsh came from Re-Evaluation Co-Counselling initially and went on in time to found Turning Point with Kay Conroy. Jim O'Donoghue founded the Dundalk Counselling Centre that was a precursor to the Dublin Counselling & Therapy Centre. Joan O'Leary and Hank O'Mahoney were offering comprehensive Gestalt Training Courses. In Cork there was Brendan O'Carroll with his Gestalt Awareness Training, and Frank Dorr, Eileen Lynch and then Fiona Devlin. We saw "the importance of the Health Education Programme for Post Primary Schools in 1974 which involved experiential learning exercises and this spread from the children on to involve the teachers as well" (Montaut, 1996, p.11). Nicola Quinn was there too; there was also a psychodrama group and the visits, over decades, of Paul Rebillot from the Esalen Institute in the USA were of further significance. We were all surprised to find so many others.

As regards IAHIP, we had a first official meeting where John Rowan was invited as a guest speaker and it was set up formally. At that meeting we decided to make the organisation primarily humanistic and also integrative. That was an important distinction – it could have been equally humanistic and integrative but that was the way the vote went – it was one of the first major decisions of the more formalised organisation. Then we began to set up the grandparenting criteria, which meant we could begin accrediting both each other and other people practising psychotherapy according to agreed criteria. That was the beginnings of IAHIP!

I left the Creative Counselling Centre after four years. My then husband, John Lindsay, was also a partner, as well as Ger, Barbara Kohnstamm and Una. Barbara had been to the USA in the meantime, and when she came back we invited her to join us. A year later John and I decided to leave the Creative

Counselling Centre. I was burned out from minding two young children who didn't sleep most of the time, from the training work, but also from the challenges of setting up an organisation with all the attendant teething problems that arise in a new management team. John and I set up Connect Associates in Avoca Avenue in Blackrock; other people rented from us there and it was a collaboration rather than a partnership. Within a couple of years I went back to what was then the ICCP, as a visiting member of the training team alongside Patrick Nolan. By then there were also additional partners in the Institute, including Eilis O'Donoghue who had been a student on the first course.

Shirley: That must have been around 1992 after all the processing years. I remember John Rowan being the speaker at the first AGM in 1992 as it was also Alison's 60th birthday! John was also a patron of Amethyst and we celebrated her birthday later with him.

Susan: Was it? It took a few years with the initial meetings, the formal structure, and then the Association and, of course, later the formation of a formal company. Ger was the first chair.

Shirley: You were then the second chair elected at the AGM in 1994 and served for two years. I looked that one up!

Susan: Yes, I chaired the first accreditation committee before that. I also served later as the IAHIP representative on the Irish Council of Psychotherapy as it was being set up. These were the early days of ICP with Michael Fitzgerald who was a child psychiatrist from Ballymun. He was a great proponent of the European Association of Psychotherapy, and the Irish representative pulling all the strings together. He was a child analyst and, of course, it is his wife Frances Fitzgerald who is now the Minister for Children.

Shirley: Oh, I hadn't connected the two!

Susan: Yes.

Shirley: So what was happening in the 1990s for you?

Susan: In 1995 I had a book published by Marino Press called *The Love Crucible*. There isn't space here for everything but I did some training with Ian Ratcliff over several years in Bioenergetics and I attended a week-long course with Stan Grof in early 1982 that was significant. I also did some Primal Therapy with Alison Hunter. In the 1990s I became involved in deep imagery work with Margaret Vasington and then did a good few years of deep imagery training with her called 'The Personal Totem Pole Process'. We then developed a lively Irish community of people working with the process. By the end of the 1990s I wanted to go back to the heart of what humanistic psychotherapy was all about. I felt the core work I believed in was getting lost and I was getting lost in that. I got the support I needed to do it from Louise Holman who was the secretary in Connect Associates and from Tom Templeton from Derry, and Germaine Morrissey – both of whom I met through the imagery work – who agreed to assist me in setting up what became the 'Dancing The Spiral' community workshops. This started around 2000/2001. I wrote a letter to therapists who I thought were primarily keen on using a humanistic approach and others I thought would be interested. Some were former students and others I knew. They were not all therapists. Some had done the animal imaging process or other things.

Shirley: Did you do this because you thought psychotherapy in general was losing its way?

Susan: I felt humanistic psychotherapy was losing its way; that it was losing its humanistic core. But

also I was losing the core – and I wanted to get in touch with it. I wanted to build a community of people who wanted to support themselves with this.

Shirley: And did it work?

Susan: It did. It was a very interesting experiment. It was to be a community, a facilitated workshop that would include ritual and play. I would facilitate it but the other half would be facilitated from the group itself. We set up a model for that.

Shirley: Where did you hold the groups?

Susan: We held them in the Burren before I moved to Galway in 2004. John and I had gone our separate ways some years earlier. The group met for six days in the summer then it moved on to include two three-day weekends in the year as well. We met every year for those twelve days a year. Not everyone stayed. I was having requests to join it from other people too. So I set up another group which I co-led with Tom Templeton. This time it was a more tightly-held community. So we had two groups going, then we ended up with a third group. Laura Hatton and Marianne Klopp helped out with that one. I never intended to have three groups, it just evolved. We amalgamated the two to keep the community going – there were 25 in that combined workshop at first.

Shirley: There was obviously a great need for them.

Susan: There was great interest anyway. We liked doing it! It contained ritual which was a very important part of holding the community's centre. The groups carried on even when I left as we managed to come up with a structure to keep it going. More were interested. If I'd kept going I think it would have grown. It was a very nurturing experience for people and deep work ended up being done within the workshops. My time as a therapist came to an end. I realised to my own shock and surprise that I couldn't go on doing it. Firstly with group work and later with my individual clients. My time seemed to be up as I was running out of energy too quickly. It was very powerful to be running groups at that depth and I suddenly realised that I just couldn't do it anymore. I had kept up with some individual work after I came to Galway in 2004. I didn't want too much work and had started a small practice in Galway city which I later moved home. So that was fine. I gave up the groups and kept going with a small practice. Five years ago I went by chance for a mammogram, and discovered I had pre-cancerous tissue which led to a minor operation and radiotherapy. I was completely cleared of that for three years, and feeling fine and very optimistic when I had my regular mammogram eighteen months ago which discovered a very small amount of cancer in my other breast. Sufficient to have me go through the whole process again. During the second process I realised I needed to finish my therapy work. I'd had a sense of that for a while that I was disregarding because I liked it too much. But my time for working with clients was up.

Shirley: I am very shocked at what you have been going through, Susan. Sometimes our life journeys can be so tough. Where are you with all this at the moment?

Susan: Well, in the meantime I had been going to poetry writing classes from 2004 in the Galway Arts Centre with Kevin Higgins. I loved that and I think that was the time when I discovered I needed a new language. David Whyte had re-introduced me to poetry, bridging it with humanistic psychology at the International Transpersonal Conference when it was held in Killarney. Then I kept hearing Paul Durcan on the radio and loved his contributions – the humanity of his writing reminded me of how in groups

when someone speaks their deepest truth, the other members are riveted because it speaks for them too. I had written a kind of myth before and I found the language I needed in poetry and in that. I find it very rich as it allows for work at a transpersonal level in a different way. I can write at many levels at one time, both consciously and unconsciously and in different ways and it keeps me in touch with my deeper self. I have found that terrific. I found both journeys in hospital transformational. Living through and dealing with the challenges of being on my own for the first time and finding myself in hospital and undergoing radiotherapy involved very new experiences. Also, my children growing up and leaving was still at a fairly new stage. But then came the pleasure of grandchildren, Ben's two children are a great joy to me.

Shirley: Did you tell anyone?

Susan: My neighbours knew. I did tell my clients I wasn't well but I don't think the details in a therapeutic relationship are wise. That would have also been hard to handle, maybe on both sides.

Shirley: But you got through?

Susan: Yes, I got through very well and learned loads and I have a very good prognosis. I meditated a lot and it's amazing the way things arrive as you need them if you are open to that. I live in a great neighbourhood community and the poetry community in Galway is also good company.

Shirley: Illness certainly brings us closer to the meaning of life and the sacredness of it all.

Susan: I was interested recently to hear Marion Woodman, in a film about her, talk about the need to learn to surrender. I could identify with a lot of what she said including her thoughts on the degree of addiction present in society today. I am learning to surrender to the Tao or God or however one cares to describe the mystery of our being (the ambiguous term Taoist Christian is the best I can manage to describe my religious orientation, if one is needed) to an increasingly greater extent and finding great riches and support in that.

Shirley: Marion Woodman also had cancer some years ago and speaks of her own journey too.

Susan: Surrender was the gift of the second challenge. I have learned to further embrace being alone and the challenges that come. I like it a lot more than I had realised, I can be quite reclusive! More people seem to arrive as I let go but I think I'm meeting them in a slightly different way. Both events brought me into meditation and another level of consciousness. I found it quite shamanic in a way. I found a lovely art therapist in County Galway, an Anam Cara who has been great support. She provided a sacred space for me and I feel very protective of it. I think I have been making artifacts more than art and that suits me.

Shirley: You sound so positive about everything Susan. So much creativity coming from you in so many different ways – you are being hugely creative.

Susan: I see myself going back to being more of an educative facilitator – doing things in relation to creativity and flow – if I run courses in future.

Shirley: Maybe this is where your poetry writing is leading you?

Susan: Well, I had a book of poetry published in March 2011. It's called *Whispering the Secrets* and is

published by Doire Press. I was then formally invited to read at the Poetry Ireland Introduction Series. And there is a possibility of another book in the next year or so.

Shirley: So, your new career is well and truly becoming established! The Editorial Board suggested that I let you flow – rather than having a list of questions to ask you! You have certainly done that! Is there anything else you would like to add as you continue on your sacred and spiritual journey?

Susan: I am in active transition and that makes it hard to say where I am exactly, but maybe that's how it always is really. I am in a period of relief, having left the work, and also grieving that loss. It is hard to say goodbye to people you have been engaged with on long journeys and long periods of time with parts of their lives that are very, very sacred, rich things to be involved in.

Shirley: As people read your story Susan I am sure they will be very much with you as you reach this period of transition in your life. Thank you for being truly honest and genuine in your life and for sharing yourself with me in our conversation. On behalf of our readers I wish you well with your future ventures and look forward to reading your poems that are still being created within and outside of you!

Susan: Thank you.



Susan Lindsay worked as a psychotherapist, facilitator and occasional consultant to organisations for over thirty years. Three books of her poetry have been published by Doire Press.



Shirley Ward (Amethyst) has been a psychotherapist, educator and healer for over 50 years, nationally and internationally, documenting her research on global healing through Humanistic and Integrative psychotherapy in her recently published books.

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Child of Nature

by *Paul Daly*

Sweetness muffled in a jumper
Invites to tea and supper
Friendship cold and sober,
Slipping into something warmer.

Love so soft as feather light
Tickles temper to such a pitch,
Sloping down on gentle ditch,
Dizzy heights collapse in spite.

Such ecstasy each taste
Mouth begs mouth for more,
Promising tongue delivers
Posting in door with haste.

Delighted loves company
To cheer up her lonely nights,
Chaste breath by candle light,
Eyes dance so as bees bumble

Until hearts so filled with peace,
Smoothed with moist and simple fill,
Lie as a river through a hill
Drifting with such artless ease

As a sleepy float on a canal,
Tender holding water's mouth,
Washing in and washing out,
Against slippery bank propels

Simple open mouthed wonder,
Blowing fringed curtain of hair
To one side to let in air,
Light, sun, wind, fun, surf, wet, care,

Whiling away days, spilling nights
Into sleep's soft encased spool,
Winding up threads of thought as wool
Through fingers running willing

Into gentle cog, soft bundle
Being trussed by Time as a gift,
A fresh seed in an egg shrift
Springs up to grow in wonder's

Surprise, peering at surroundings,
Pale wine pours in a glass darkly,
Head and legs getting giddy
As soft parachute plummeting

Up and up and up pulling,
Small mouth kisses the moon
Then bounces back down again
Against time's cord relaxing

Till release in stretched living.


Birthday candle's already lit
In the beginning.
Must wait for celebration.
Bridal beauty stoops to sit.

Such a delicate head's eye,
A dew drop on a frail grass blade
(Bending on each sweet breath made
In Mother's Temple like the sigh

Of Hope's Goddess once worshipped
In Spring with fragrant lily
White purity of soul,
Breasts issuing a sea of milk)

Dimly sees, such a tiny ear,
Muffled in a blanket of sound
(A horn blessing with wind blowing
With cheer the news of the year,

Springs into simple life and good,
Jumps with somersaulting ease
To autumn's harvest falling trees,
Pending winter's humour to ski abroad)



Cocked in cottoned time can hear,
So matchless nostrils may sniff
Humorously at home such stuff
To stoke with lung's air heart's fire,

Legs using clay's silent claim,
Head a friend to air, apparent,
Eyes flame in bowelled delight,
Mouth washes through to other end.

Small mouth to such gentle goodness
On breast's aproned lap tight
(A strawberry on cream delight)
Might smile at coming happiness.

Short gate opens, pain still slim,
Out of this gate aeons will slip,
Upside down tumble, sideways trip,
From limbo slide buttered limbs

On to bread-white sheet sandwich,
Wrap around, fold neatly,
Free presence press on belly,
Mother's mouth-watering thought.

Treasured seed's become a pearl
More precious than any bought,
Jewel of a million years sought
Peeps from eyes of tiny girl.

Breasts prepare for holding mouth,
Body ready to shudder,
Pain soothed by a bright picture
Of the girl when she comes out,

Communion dress patched on the back,
Rosary beads stick from pocket,
Short journey up the aisle starts,
Genuflecting to receive the host.



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The Breath of Congruence: Knowing when and how to end a career as a psychotherapist/supervisor

by *Christopher Murray*

Stepping into the field of the future starts with the opening of a crack from within. Following that crack requires us to let go of the old and 'let grow' something that we can sense but that we cannot fully know before we see it emerging. This moment can feel like jumping across an abyss. At the moment we leap, we have no idea whether we will make it across.

(Scharmer, 2014)



It is usual in our profession for clients to bring work to an end. When I decided in December 2021 to retire as a psychotherapist in private practice, I realised that as a sole practitioner there wasn't a pathway to follow towards retirement. Undaunted, I began to create my own and to write about the experience. What follows is a personal memoir of the last six months of my working career, as I stepped into the unknown.

My decision to stop working after 47 years in a variety of practice settings, had its origins six years ago when a recurring paraumbilical hernia stopped me in my tracks. Up to then I had relied on my body's ability to keep going but after my surgeries I was barely able to turn over in bed. My consultant suggested the weakness in my gut may have been there since birth and I wondered if working experientially for the past twenty years may have contributed to the rupture.

During recovery I assessed the impact of work on my general health and decided to reduce my working week, intending to take better care of myself holistically, paying more attention to my body and soul. I committed to hiking more often in the Mourne and the Glens of Antrim, engage in Reiki, yoga and tai chi, take longer and more frequent holidays, as well as introduce extra supervision from a somatic perspective.

I was surprised that the notion of retiring came to my mind as I imagined carrying on working until I was found dead in my chair. Psychologically I felt fine to continue, but it was in my heart and gut where I felt the pressure to stop. As a way of making sense of conflicting experiences I entered a period of self-reflection and dialogue with trusted people. I was afraid of retiring my 'working self,' unsure how I might begin to express that part of me after ending. I recalled watching others unprepared for retirement looking lost and full of regret. I did not want to follow that path.

The question I repeatedly asked myself was: 'How will I know when the time is right?'

The answer: 'I won't know, until I know.'



The conflict left me feeling uneasy and so I utilised a process I'd developed in working with clients who experienced similar difficulties. The work involved exploring all aspects of the self from the perspective of head, heart and gut. When resolved, I watched clients emit a sigh of relief, relax their posture, and smile. I named the process the 'Breath of Congruence.'

Working online during the Covid-19 lockdown came at an opportune time for me to experience what it might be like to be home more. I used the extra time to give a voice to all aspects of myself, hoping for resolution. I hadn't expected the surge of creative energy I expressed through journaling, creative writing, painting, baking and even dressmaking. I turned the journaling into a podcast called 'A Psychotherapist Marking Time' (Murray, 2020) with a summarised version published in the IAHIP journal, *Inside Out* (Murray, 2020). I realised the breathing space of lockdown helped me find ways of expressing my 'retiring self' through newly found creativity.

That experience through Covid-19 and the four weeks break during winter 2021 helped me to answer the question I asked a few years ago: 'How will I know when the time is right?' The answer and my 'Breath of Congruence' moment came as I relished not returning to work for several weeks. My gut was particularly pleased, and I heard it say, 'at last.' The end was in sight, and I decided to work until June 2022, before hanging up my 'core conditions'.

In January I announced my decision to finish my practice in six months, leaving time to work through our ending. People were understanding when they heard my decision whilst also expressing surprise. I decided to focus on the needs of the clients until my supervisor reminded me that it was also my ending, a career spanning almost half a century.

Her words left me wondering how I would manage my ending as well as that of the clients. It occurred to me that if I had been employed for 47 years the path would be clear, I would have a leaving do, receive cards and gifts, hear kind words, share food and drink. I would go home with an engraved memento, hopefully.

It would be up to me to create my own pathway through a series of rituals over the coming months that would acknowledge and celebrate my working life. I did not want to have unfinished business.

I set out a timetable for the practical task of dismantling my business, including removing furniture and personal items from my office; closing my website, stopping insurance and professional membership; managing client information through GDPR. Whilst creating the timetable, I felt inspired to write unsent letters to all clients, then in June conduct a fire ceremony at home when I would ritually burn the letters.

For many years I collected objects to use in creative work with clients. It occurred to me that I could return small stones and shells to land and water. During a walk with a friend to the Blue Lough in the shadow of Slieve Binian, I dropped some into the lough. I felt a slight panic as if I was letting go my life's work, until my friend said that letting go can also create space for new growth.

As we walked and talked, I recalled people who had a positive influence on my personal and professional development and on returning home I created a timeline of my working life from 1975 to the present day. I enjoyed the process of celebrating those who saw qualities in me that I hadn't recognised before. As I remembered each person, I felt a deep gratitude for their influence and guidance in my journey to become a psychotherapist. I also remembered one supervisor who helped to develop my practice as a psychotherapist. After several years he announced out of the blue that our work would need to end as he was reducing his caseload. I was as shocked then as my clients must have been in January. I turned this energy into an article for *Inside Out*, called *My supervisor is breaking up with me* (Murray, 2015). This reflection helped me to see it from my clients' perspective, with whom I was 'breaking up.'

It is hard for me to find the words to describe the richness of experience I had with clients over the final six months; how we came to appreciate our work together; didn't run from the difficult emotions; were open and engaged. For that I am grateful. In the final weeks, clients offered gifts and cards in gratitude. I wondered about reciprocating, unsure at the protocol for therapists giving gifts. My heart and gut directed me to pass on items in the office that some clients had shown an interest in.

On the night of the summer solstice, I vacated my office, removing therapy chairs and personal possessions. Part way through I realised my keys were locked in the boot of the car. What was planned as a simple exercise at 7pm turned into a three-hour marathon, as it took nearly three hours to locate my spare key. At 9:45pm I pulled up at home with my office packed into my car. The longest day in more ways than one.

In the penultimate week, the two members of my peer supervision group and I travelled for a walk in Glenariff Glen on the Antrim coast. We sat in the forest to reminisce, share our hopes for the future and say our goodbyes. It was hard for each of us to end the relationship because of the level of support we had given and received over the past 12 years.

On the evening of 28th of June, friends arrived at our home for eats and the fire ceremony. Later we gathered outside, where I burned each letter, saying a few words, watching each turn to ash and the smoke drift into the atmosphere. I woke up the next morning with a spring in my step.

In July I attended a Shamanic Breathwork Journey at Body Conscious Studio in Belfast to work through any residual thoughts and feelings associated with my ending. What I didn't expect was to connect with my sister, who died suddenly over 19 years ago. We didn't say goodbye. The session allowed me to let go of unfinished business I had and to say my goodbyes to my sister, Carol. That eased my heart.

Having achieved my breath of congruence moment earlier, I was surprised at the strength of my feelings when it came time to delete my website. I tended my website as my online presence for over 22 years. At the press of a button, it was gone and for a little while I felt bereft. The following week I experienced another wave of emotion when I realised, I was about to have my final session as a psychotherapist and that my IAHIP accreditation was coming to an end.

Since finishing, I decided to become an IAHIP member (retired) allowing me to stay in touch with the profession. Life is good, full of energy and creative ventures. I am happy at home and enjoy living day to day. I have come to appreciate the freedom that comes from not having to prepare myself to go to work and then recover from being at work.

When I look at the engraved rolling pin memento presented by my wife, I know what a privilege it has been to work in this field. I was always passionate about my work so giving it up was never going to be easy, as I hope I have described in this article.

I want to say a special thank you to my wife Anne who encouraged me to write this piece, reminded me of the importance of editing when I wanted to give up, and sustained me with intelligence and love.



Christopher Murray MIAHIP (retired), began his career as a counsellor in Birmingham in the mid 70's and ended it back in his home town of Belfast 47 years later. He loved every moment of it.

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On being a Bridie: My time with *Inside Out*

by Margaret Brady



It feels odd to be writing for *Inside Out*, rather than receiving and helping to shape other people's work as part of the Editorial Board. This is the first issue in more than eight years that I'll be opening with a sense of... not anticipation, because there was always anticipation, but surprise, not having any idea of the contents. I look forward to it.

I first came to *Inside Out* in Spring 2014, having acquired both an accreditation certificate and a second baby in the preceding months. With a new baby and an active three-year-old, I had decided to take an extended break from client work but was nervous at the thought of losing touch with the field and the community I had begun to develop. When my supervisor at the time kindly contacted me to suggest joining the Editorial Board (EB), it seemed like an excellent way to keep my hand in for a year or two. I certainly didn't imagine I would remain for eight years, and eventually even serve as the Chair of the Board.

I remember turning up for my first meeting, bearing biscuits, hoping that chocolate would help ensure a warm welcome from a group that seemed terribly senior and experienced. I needn't have worried:

I was greeted with open arms into the tight circle of the EB, and within the first ten minutes was fully immersed in communal crisis management – *we're past deadline and we don't have nearly enough material!* Somehow, I went home having committed to writing a lengthy article by the following weekend; over the coming years, I would become adept at persuading others to do the same. It was great fun, being part of this group – the Bridies, as they jokingly referred to themselves (due to the Christmas night out inevitably being deferred at least until St Brigid's Day in February). There was always a lot of work to do, and the work was taken seriously, but there were also great laughs and a wonderful sense of community.

Through my work with *Inside Out*, I met so many interesting people – both fellow editors and all those wonderful authors whose work enabled each issue to go ahead. Our authors ranged from experienced or even professional writers to beginners, but all shared a passion for their chosen profession that was engaging and infectious. During the time when I was on sabbatical from client work, and afterwards, I learned so much from all these people about different ways of working, and different ways of being as a therapist. And often, when I would meet them later at trainings or networking events, it felt as if I already knew them. Over time, I developed a real sense of being part of the IAHIP and psychotherapy community. Similarly, each of the EB members that came or went during those years contributed their expertise, creativity, good humour, hospitality, hard work and camaraderie. And we all learned an awful lot about APA referencing and the Oxford comma.

One of the proudest achievements that stands out from my time with *Inside Out* is the redesign of the journal in 2017. We talked about this for a long time before we were finally able to make it happen with the help of the wonderful design team at Opus Print. I still remember the excitement of moving from a black and white format where even to include one picture was quite a big deal, to a slick full colour format where we could have as many images as we wanted (*ah go on, I think we can fit in another picture! Maybe even another one!*).

It was difficult to make the decision to leave *Inside Out*, and I do miss it. Still, as my life became busier with other commitments, I knew it was time to bow out, and it was clear to me that the journal (*it's not a magazine, Margaret, it's a journal!*) would continue in excellent hands. I remain grateful for all the learning and good experiences, and look forward to being pleasantly surprised by future issues as they arrive. Thanks for the memories, Bridies past and present!



Margaret Brady MIAHIP is a psychotherapist, spiritual companion and workshop facilitator based in Dublin 6. She served on the Editorial Board of *Inside Out* from 2014 to 2022. For more information on Margaret's work see www.margaretbrady.ie

A road travelled

by *Kay Conroy*



There was a time, and it was a long time ago, when those who were lost, without meaning, those searching for a way forward emotionally and psychologically, outside medication and medical assessment, had nowhere to go professionally, or no one objective to speak to.

There was a time when I was young and was not so interested in the area of psychotherapy and counselling.

There was a time when I didn't know what it was or how it could move emotional mountains.

There was of course a time, and it became my time, for my beginning, in this world of human opening up.

One evening when I was eighteen, I saw an advertisement in a magazine: Come see the world in the Q.A's (The Queen Alexandra's Royal Army Nurse Corps). And I did. My journey to train as nurse began in Surrey. I learned how to march, salute, spit and polish my shoes, lay out and wear my uniforms, parade on all occasions, and most importantly train as a nurse. I travelled the world. Scotland to Singapore. Singapore to the jungles of Northern Malaya. Across the Far East, on to Saudi Arabia and finally back to London.

Some years later, back in London, as a well-trained and travelled nurse, I was sitting in my office in the top of a building I had leased, which I was running as a nursing home for the elderly. I had also opened a private nursing for terminally ill patients, and I was busy administering, running and being matron to both of the homes.

I was looking out the window. I remember the season. It was autumn. The leaves were falling, and so too was my personal sense of meaning and purpose. I felt redundant. It was an extraordinary feeling, considering my work, my team, my nursing care and function. All was going so well. Everybody was doing their job so well. What was the real need for me? Or my guidance? Or my opinion? In what way was I really necessary?

On that November day watching the London rain beat on the office window I met myself. That was a meeting with a crisis of meaning. But it was a spiritual meeting with myself. A meeting that resulted in a renewed search to at least get to know myself.

Know yourself before you travel and guide another

Sometime later I went to a psychosynthesis workshop at the Institute of Psychosynthesis in London and thus began my training and journey in psychotherapy. A world opened for me. A world which for me, at that time, was untapped, but which offered huge new light. It was personally momentous.

Suddenly, the person or self I thought I had known was not the person I was at all. There was shock and there was joy. How exciting to be getting to know somebody new. Myself. And what to do with that new somebody? Carry on.

I had read a lot about Dr Elizabeth Kübler-Ross around death and dying due to my initial and continuing work with the elderly and the terminally ill. Kübler-Ross came to London. I went to her workshop. I went with my nursing background and with my new knowledge of self through psychosynthesis and psychotherapy. I listened with an eager ear. I listened with a new vision and a renewed mind. I can use the word 'inspire' with ease as that is what I took away from the workshop. Inspiration.

I said to Kübler-Ross 'You must take your work to Ireland'.

She said 'There is an Irish woman here who thinks the same. You must meet her.'

That person was Mary Paula Walsh.

I moved to Dublin in 1982 and with Mary Paula Walsh we founded a Bereavement and Cancer Support Centre, which would help to train nurses and social workers and was to be a supportive centre for those working within the health services. As a counselling centre we also supported people in the early stages of bereavement, cancer, and terminal illness. There was a dual aspect to all our work our training and our therapy.

Within psychotherapy in those early days many counsellors were practising and supporting people in need, but there was no validating body in existence. A group came together. A group from all works and walks of life. But all from the world of social work, medicine, education, nursing, and teaching. They were the early visionaries of IAHIP. Their purpose was to ensure that high standards of training needed to be sought, recognised, and validated in Ireland. Thus, IAHIP as a professional membership organisation for psychotherapists was founded. 30 years later IAHIP still holds the vision, the quality, and the national and European standards, ensuring that training of potential psychotherapists always remains professional. All IAHIP's committees are staffed by volunteers from our membership. This is an educational and social achievement and deserves great praise and pride from us all.

Back to my continuing journey in the world of self-knowledge, growth and development. One of the greatest influences on that development road was Mary Paula Walsh. Mary Paula Walsh was a social worker. With the mind and the walk of a giant. She was artistic and articulate with a deep patriotism for all that was Irish. Her family had been rooted in history, arts and activism. She was a seeker of the meaning of life. That is where she placed all that she did. She shared all those qualities with me personally and brought them to her work with clients and her students in training. In one way it was a sacred meeting at that workshop in London. In another she became a life-long friend and partner.

She shared with me the vision that had begun with Elizabeth Kübler-Ross. She understood what service to others really meant. She knew that was where you would find the best in yourself. She filled in the space that had caused my emotional redundancy at the window of my office in London. Together we had an affinity. To go forward with our personal history, our knowledge, and our experience and with our belief in the idea of human needs, human searches, human guidance and always through psychotherapy, the possibility of human healing. That was the sole companionship we shared. That experience, our empathy and our energy came together in our founding of Turning Point in 1982.

When we opened Turning Point it was not just for clinical practice. We brought Kübler-Ross to Ireland

and there were not enough seats in the Mansion House. We trained as facilitators to work with her in prisons in the UK, USA and in Ireland. We developed residential workshops for AIDS at a time when it was very controversial. We ran men's workshops. We ran residential workshops for women who had been abused and we ran workshops for bereavement. The demand for our services grew. And the demand for training and our courses grew even more.

After 38 years of Turning Point's journey from a group around a table in our living room, seeing and feeling the need for something to be done to service and contribute to the needs of human beings, Turning Point has grown into a respected national and international training college for psychotherapists. Its MSc in Counselling and Psychotherapy is validated by UCC. UCC and Turning Point are a unique collaboration. It combines what UCC stands for as a university through the disciplines of knowledge, learning and understanding with Turning Point's focus on the education of emotions, knowledge of self and human balance, through the study of counselling and psychotherapy. This ensures highly validated and academically educated and clinically trained professional graduates who then go on to sustain the lives of others whom they counsel. The MSc is also validated by IAHIP. Their standards and the standards of UCC parallel each other. Indeed, the standards set by IAHIP greatly contributed to the endorsement and the validation of Turning Point's MSc by UCC and continues to do so.

If I was asked 'and what of your journey now?' my answer would result in many, many questions. Has technology become our God? Are we zoomed beyond recognition? Is the very core of psychotherapeutic counselling which is the relationship between two human beings being eroded to a camera and an email? Is my sense of the redundancy felt at my window in London here again but this time in another form; technical?

My own experience is that we are now more alone than ever. The government recently commissioned a million-euro study on loneliness. I wonder if there are any psychotherapists involved in this piece of research. I hope so. I see loneliness daily in my small café. I have met it in myself as we all faced Covid. If I was being acute, I could tell the Government exactly what the study will say. Human beings need human beings. Lots of them. Plugging something in won't help you to become. Voice, your voice is tantamount to expressing who you are. If technology and going on, and being on, and learning online is the future, looking out the window from my desk seems a pretty good option, despite the weather. I'll end with a translation by Paul Muldoon of a Medieval Poem:

Each day brings the same three talking points.

The first is knowing I'll soon depart.

The second not knowing when I'll start.

The third (the cause of my greatest heartache)

Not knowing which route I'll take.



I would not change one step on the route I took. My road travelled has taught me to find, and to open, and to honour the personal treasure chest that we all hold within us.

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Psychotherapy at a time of social and political change and crisis: Where do we stand? What do we have to offer?

Presentation delivered at conference/fundraiser: Psychotherapy & Counselling's Contribution to Global Peace, Justice, and Wellbeing: What Difference Can We Make? An Emergency Summit, 26th March 2022.

by John McLeod

The global community is already struggling to engage with challenges arising from climate change, pollution and loss of biodiversity. The Russian invasion of Ukraine, and its possible implications, add a further layer of uncertainty, dread and despair about what the future will bring. As in Palestine, Syria, Kurdistan, Afghanistan, Somalia, Libya and many other places, cruel and destructive military violence is being used to prevent individuals, families and communities from being able to control and live their own lives with dignity and respect. For many people across Europe, what is happening in Ukraine is so geographically close, and has so many implications for our everyday lives, that it carries enormous emotional resonance. This has resulted in the emergence of a critical moment and turning point, that makes visible many of the most destructive and dehumanising aspects of contemporary society.

For those of us in Britain, this moment of collective awakening also invites recognition of our own history of colonialism, slavery, brutality, murder, biosphere destruction and cultural obliteration in America, Africa, India, Australia and China, and closer to home in Ireland and Scotland. Such awareness also draws attention to the complacency and privilege through which the reality of these events has been airbrushed from history. The foundations of the wealth and prosperity of the UK are built on the kind of military action and racist rationales currently employed by Russian armies in Ukraine.

As citizens of an interconnected world, all of us have responsibility, and opportunity, to do what we can to support victims of war, and create more just and ecologically sustainable ways of living together. Working alongside like-minded disciplines, occupational groups and social movements, the counselling and psychotherapy profession has its own distinctive contribution to make. A crucial aspect of a psychological and psychotherapeutic response to war is to provide therapy for refugees who have lost their homes and identities, and for all those affected by trauma. Other speakers at this conference will talk about these vital and urgent forms of human service.

In addition to the vital task of providing emotional and psychological support to those affected by war and dislocation, we also need to look honestly at ourselves. Although psychotherapy has developed many valuable strategies for helping people to handle everyday concerns and the consequences of adverse life events, it has largely ignored the ways that clients and patients may also be troubled by social and political structures and crises. Psychotherapy theory, research and practice has not sufficiently considered active citizenship, solidarity, generativity, mutual aid, truth-telling and wisdom as intended outcomes of therapy. It has focused too much on self-contained individualism and entitlement, and not enough on building communities and tending the more than human world. Psychotherapy has functioned – not entirely, but for the most part – as a form of practice whose purpose

has been to help individuals in prosperous societies to make the most of the life opportunities afforded by membership of dominant social groups at a time of historically high levels of material plenty. Issues associated with such matters as violence, slavery, militarism, consumerism, corrosion of social capital and political discourse, and destruction of the living earth, have been addressed only at the margins of therapy. The timescales of events discussed in therapy sessions is typically short-term: typically there are few opportunities to consider the relevance of historical and intergenerational processes, or the future world that will be inherited by our children, grandchildren and later generations.

I believe that an appropriate response to the invasion of Ukraine, and all that it represents, would be to acknowledge the part that over-individualised and narrowly-focused forms of psychotherapy have played in allowing such a thing to happen. Such a response would entail committing ourselves to developing a therapy that can be used by individuals, families and communities not only to handle depression, anxiety, loss, trauma and relationship difficulties, but also as a space for working on dilemmas, choices and capabilities around what kind of society we want, and what we can do to achieve it.

The main public-facing external stone wall of the Scottish Parliament Building in Edinburgh, opened in 2004, carries engravings of sayings chosen to reflect its spirit and values. For many people, the most meaningful of these has been the statement “work as if you live in the early days of a better nation” taken from a poem by Canadian poet Dennis Lee, and later popularised by the Scottish artist and novelist Alasdair Gray. After the many terrible injustices and tragedies inflicted on them during the 20th century, the people of Ukraine were very much living in the early days of a better nation.

At least 5% of the population of Britain and similarly affluent countries make use of some form of psychotherapy or counselling in any single year. At least one-third of the adult population have had therapy at least once in their life. The overwhelming majority of those who have received therapy, experience it as valuable. In addition, psychotherapeutic ideas and narratives permeate many aspects of media and culture, and shape the ways that people make sense of who they are and what matters in life. Is it possible to redirect the immensely powerful resource represented in contemporary psychotherapy, so that it supports not only personal well-being, functioning and recovery, but can also offer a space within which clients learn to work as if living in the early days of a better nation?

There are many steps that the counselling and psychotherapy profession can make in order make a meaningful shift in such a direction:

- emphasising, promoting, re-defining and re-visioning therapy as a place where clients can engage in open dialogue about social as well as personal concerns, and their political self as well as their private and personal self. How many therapist and therapy service websites indicate that this is even a possibility?;
- training and preparing practitioners to actively engage with difference, diversity, moral injury and injustice;
- constructing and disseminating healing narratives (i.e., therapy theories) that help people to make sense of how their quality of life, and experience of suffering, are shaped by historical, social, political and ecological factors;
- publicly supporting and standing alongside those who are in the front line of social change;

- actively building and populating a cultural space for therapy practice that sits alongside, but separate from, discourses of health;
- conducting research that evaluates the effectiveness of therapy in terms of the enhancement of social action, citizenship, courage and wisdom, rather than anxiety and depression; and, documenting cases and telling the stories of people who have used psychotherapy in these ways;
- making therapy skills and knowledge available in other settings, for instance, helping politicians to learn how to listen, how to speak authentically from the heart, and how to find meaningful points of connection across different backgrounds, histories and agendas.

These themes, values and possibilities have always existed within the psychotherapy profession. For me, crucial sources of inspiration have included narrative therapy and community work (Denborough, 2019; Waldegrave, 2009), the open dialogue approach (Seikkula and Olson, 2003), the writings of Erich Fromm (Rasmussen and Salhani, 2008; Thomson, 2009) and Frantz Fanon (Turner and Neville, 2020), network-based therapy (Goodman et al., 2016), the recovery perspective (Klevan et al., 2021), the concept of critical consciousness (Choi et al., 2015; Diemer et al., 2017), the writings of Miraj Desi (2018), and the final two chapters of Cushman (1995). There is much, much more (see, for example, LiVecchi and Obasaju, 2018, and the collections of papers in Proctor et al. (2006) and Totton (2006)).

However, I believe that it would be fair to say that these concepts and forms of practice have not been widely influential. For the most part, the training of therapists, and theoretical and research literature, do not address social and political issues in any kind of systematic manner. Recent studies that have surveyed or interviewed therapists on their experience and attitudes to exploring social and political issues with clients have found that the majority of practitioners are uncertain and hesitant about engaging in such dialogues, and generally avoid talking about such topics (Garrity, 2011; Gözl, 2019; Jordan and Seponski, 2018; Winter, 2021).

I would like to be clear that politically-informed therapy is not about using the therapy relationship to manipulate emotionally vulnerable clients to sign up for Greenpeace or join a left-wing political party. What it means, instead, is being responsive to concerns and dilemmas that clients are already feeling and are unable to explore in a satisfactory manner within their everyday relationships. Scenarios in which psychotherapy might contribute to building a more just and sustainable world include:

- a client enters therapy because she has been married for 12 months and troubled by some of her relationships with members of her new extended family with whom she is in frequent contact. She is vegan and strongly committed to women's rights. They are not, and make jokes at her expense. In therapy, alongside exploring deep-rooted personal issues around self-worth, she develops strategies for explaining her values to other members of the family, and recruiting her husband in these initiatives. Over time, she develops a portfolio of information that she then becomes able to use in other situations such as her work, and a blog, and makes speeches in campaigns;
- a climate crisis action group holds regular meetings and events in their region, particularly focused on lobbying for change around specific, highly-visible issues such as air pollution in areas around schools, greater use of public transport, and water quality. Few of these activities produce tangible results, and the organisation has had a history of low morale and loss of members. Some local therapists get together to make free individual counselling, and group sessions, available to the action group, to help build emotional support and resilience;

- a client enters therapy because he realises that there is a fundamental contradiction between his political beliefs and values, and his lifestyle. He believes that it is essential to live with less, and make sacrifices around consumption of goods and services. However, his sense of his own worth, long-ingrained habits, use of leisure time, and relationships, are all associated, in various ways, with creating pollution and exploitation of people and the environment in far-away less prosperous countries;
- inspired by the example of Frederick Douglass, a group of political activists decide to hold a series of events where refugees who have escaped from political oppression and genocide can tell their stories in face-to-face situations where their audience can directly experience what they have to say. From the start, and during and after each event, psychotherapists are involved in order to help make sure that what is happening takes place in a context of respect and mutual support, for example by facilitating break-out groups and being available for individual consultation;
- a local community counselling agency, that works with a large number of clients each year, develops a simple report form through which counsellors document social and political dimensions of issues presented by clients. This information is reviewed on a six-monthly basis by a group in the organisation, leading to a range of possible further actions – reaching out to look at possibilities for collaboration with other organisations, such as foodbanks and housing agencies; training events for counsellors around how to work with clients around issues such as overcoming social anxiety barriers to participating in political action, or on personal awareness of white fragility; calling out, and acting as a witness to oppression, by drawing attention to topics (e.g., impact of fuel poverty) through events and publications;
- a client who comes into therapy uncertain of who he is, and what he wants from life, gradually realises the extent to which his world-view has been shaped by the experiences of his grandparents in China during the time of Mao's cultural revolution, their single-minded pursuit of professional success and status since immigrating to the UK, and the effects of these events on his mum and dad and himself. An important strand of therapy, for both client and therapist, consisted of learning about what took place in China, gently asking his grandparents to talk about what they had seen, and making contact with others in a similar life position.

A useful example of interwoven political and personal concerns is a study by Budziszewska and Jonsson (2021, 2022) that interviewed clients who chose to use therapy to talk through their deep fears around the climate crisis.

My own sense is that movement in a more socially and politically-oriented therapy practice will not primarily be driven from within the current counselling and psychotherapy mainstream establishment - but instead will come from colleagues in immigrant, refugee, indigenous, and other oppressed communities. A major challenge, and urgent need, is to create structures, spaces, opportunities, funding and an overarching manifesto that will enable these new ideas, practices and voices to flourish.

Earlier in this paper, I suggested that the awful events in Ukraine had created a moment at which many people were able to grasp, for the first time, the corruption, destructiveness, short-sightedness and inhumanity of the system of government and international relations that exists in the world today. It may be valuable to consider this from a wider perspective. There seems to be good evidence that, throughout human history, there have been two contrasting structures or patterns of human society (Graeber and Wengrow, 2021; Scott, 2008). One pattern has comprised groups of people, sometimes

quite large groups, who have managed their affairs in a largely egalitarian and peaceful manner. The other pattern has consisted of hierarchical societies, dominated by a ruler, dynasty or ideology, that uses violence and slavery to impose its will on the lives of ordinary people. What is happening in Ukraine can be understood in these terms – a clash between incompatible and competing visions of society.

Psychotherapy as we know it has evolved and thrived in the relatively benign and stable social democratic and economic conditions and (relatively) egalitarian way of life that has existed since the 1950s (Mason, 2015; Piketty, 2014). We are possibly moving into a quite different socio-political environment, whose characteristics are dramatically and forcefully demonstrated by what is happening in Ukraine and elsewhere. We need to decide where we stand, and what we have to offer. Therapy cannot function, at least in the way we understand it, in totalitarian societies (see, for example, Cocks, 2018).

There is great urgency. To implement these shifts soon enough to make a difference, we need to work together, alongside those from different professions and occupations, and across different approaches to therapy. This is not a situation in which rivalries between different models of therapy is appropriate or helpful. What needs to be done stretches far beyond the scope of any single approach to therapy – and beyond the remit of therapy as a discipline and body of knowledge. The journal *Psychotherapy and Politics International* and the Pluralistic Practice Network (pluralisticpractice.com) are two – of many – arenas that already exist to enable counsellors and psychotherapists of different approaches to exchange ideas that are relevant to the overarching project of transition to a more just society. We live in an era of crowdfunding, wikis and social media in which it has become much easier for those working in the frontline and at the grass roots to find each other and find strength through collective action. There are many therapists and therapy organisations that are already implementing politically-informed therapy – in big ways and little ways, and in accordance with local needs, opportunities and circumstances. There is much that can be achieved in being open to learning from each other.



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Human Lockdown

As perceived by the animals of the world

by Shirley Ward



A terrible event happened in the year 2020
Humans were dying at a phenomenal rate.
We watched and were helpless all around the planet
As a virus so deadly could hardly be stopped.

It swept through the countries, as from human to human it hopped.
With no vaccine the only hope for humans to cope
Was to vanish indoors and bolt all the doors.
In Lockdown they called it – and waited in hope.

They locked all their cars and stayed away from each other
No cars on the roads, no planes in the sky.
All industry stopped and machinery halted
And nature took over where humanity faulted.

Miraculously blue skies and clean air began to appear,
With them all in their arks, and us in the parks
We had space and the freedom to reclaim the planet
And show them that they don't own it!

The lambs in the playground meant for the kids
Jumped on the roundabouts, in for the spin.

The deer in East London reclined in the parks
And told us how good it was for humans to be in their arks!
Just sunshine, cool breezes and space inexhaustible
To wander and nuzzle and find peace with each other.

The goats in Wales are taking over Llandudno
Jumping on walls and padding round gardens,
Foraging food from bushes and flowers,
And no-one is shouting - as they are all in their towers!

In California the sea lions flap up from the harbour
And sunbathe in lines where space is no bother.
The penguins in Cape Town have the streets to themselves
And waddle and wait for the moon to caress them!

Our animal chat back is telling us all that the fish in Italy
Are having a ball! Swimming in clean water, detoxing them all!

In Adelaide Australia, the wallabies bounce, along clean wet streets,
Enjoying the freedom and space to embrace
The clean air and oxygen they are able to face.

In the Terai Lowlands in Nepal the rhinos can't believe their luck,
As they chase the few humans left in the 'muck'
Disobeying the rules to stay safe and lock up!

In Mumbai India the branches are swaying,
As the monkeys stay home and enjoy playing
In the hotel swimming pools left silent and still,
For them to play hooky at their will!

The lemurs in Merino Bay hover and gather in stillness and peace
To play, away from Humanity and take over the lease.
Whilst they have vanished from sight and into the night.

On the streets of India here come the elephants, trumping and screaming.
Lumbering along to find food at their leisure,
Along dusty roads in safety at last
What pleasure! What Joy! No harpoons or guns as in the past.

Here come the ostriches strutting and prancing
Like ladies delirious with their own dancing.
Let's have a party and reclaim all that we've lost...
They won't take any clatter, and will soon turn and batter
The ones who disagree with their ideas and chatter!

Animal markets, they scare us. Our colleagues despair.
You have no need to catch us, and kill us, and eat us so rare.
The cages you build for us fill us with horror.
The trauma it causes us leads to sheer terror.
We ask for compassion, that our freedom comes first.

But wait what is happening to the people inside?
They are singing and dancing obeying the rules.
Like social distancing until a vaccine is found.
They are clapping each other for the love, care and attention
All over the world. That must have a mention.

A new way of living, and loving too
That could be performed by humankind and us to.
We are sorry that so many are dying
But grateful for the cessation of flying.

The vision may be that Mother Nature is showing
We can live side by side, in a world strangely different, where no-one can hide.

Where abnormal becomes normal and living creatures together
Appreciate beauty and love for each other.
That for joy and for life we can truly strive
To respect life and the planet, and the special bees in their hive.

To breathe and be happy, for this is our call
That joy and life
Is truly there for us all.

On behalf of the animals of the world. Easter 2021.

Conversation: When the words won't come

Barbara Devaney in conversation with husband William Pattengill

William: You are able to use the arts to help your clients access their feelings in addition to the verbal exchanges of traditional talk therapy. Can you share how you first encountered this way of working and what led you to adopt it in your practice?

Barbara: Years before my formal training began as a therapist in California, in my late 20's, I enrolled in a sculpture class after a challenging life transition. Through making art and journaling I found a way to new insights into my healing process and a potential transformation.

A few years later I had the opportunity to facilitate an art group for the inmates transitioning back to the community from federal prison. The goal was to help them, mostly 'white-collar criminals', prepare for a return to society by offering access to the arts to express themselves and process whatever was coming up for them at a challenging time. Once again, I was inspired by how the arts could help people find ways of communicating without words. This job led to another similar position for the same organisation that helped mothers who had birthed their babies while in federal custody, using the arts in the same way.

William: So, you already had experience in working this way before you began your education as a therapist. Did that influence your choice of your graduate program?

Barbara: Living in San Francisco at the time, I was fortunate in being able to attend the California Institute of Integral Studies (CIIS) which has a faculty with a wide range of experience in different modalities, some being pioneers in their fields. Among them were Natalie Rogers for person-centered approach, and Gabor Maté for working with trauma.

Before graduation I served as a program director for Independent Living Network, a small nonprofit dedicated to help women with disabilities live independently with access to supports as needed, as opposed to life in a group home. Here I was also able to incorporate art into the programme.

William: Were you able to use art therapy soon after graduation from CIIS?

Barbara: In order to accumulate the 3,000 hours of clinical experience towards licensing in the State of California, I successfully applied for a job at a San Francisco Community Mental Health Clinic. My master's degree practicum consisted of work with severely mentally ill clients, who were well suited to benefit from alternative methods to talk therapy. I organised a gardening group, and was also able to use the arts with this population.

I later became programme director for adult women clients with comorbid developmental disabilities and mental health diagnoses. So often clinicians are unsure how to work with this population, but I found the arts and other non-verbal approaches are a perfect fit in their case. During my tenure at the county clinic, I was responsible for hiring and supervising other clinicians who were also working towards licensing.

After four years of internships, I became licensed in 2006 and began my private practice, incorporating as “Explore and Express Family Counseling” because that phrase describes the process that can enable clients to work through life challenges when words don’t come easily.

William: Please say something about the range of clients you have worked with since beginning your private practice.

Barbara: It has been an interesting mix of high functioning individuals and people with special needs, including those on the autism spectrum, with cerebral palsy, Down’s syndrome, seizure disorder, and intellectual disabilities. I work with families as well.

William: What are some of the methods you are using?

Barbara: I use painting, drawing, clay, symbolic cards, and even coloured scarves to engage the client in a playful manner. I have used sandplay therapy as a way for clients to express past and present issues by choosing personally significant objects from my large and diverse collection. They then arrange them within the safe confines of the sand tray. Some clients much prefer this indirect way of expressing emotions that may arise from difficult life situations. I later photograph their arrangements for my case files.

In cases involving traumatic memories and PTSD, I sometimes use EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitisation and Reprogramming) therapy which uses somatic sensations in conjunction with a limited amount of dialogue. It can be effective when people struggle to talk about buried feelings and memories, and it can also benefit those with complex childhood trauma, as well as single experience trauma.

William: Have you observed better outcomes with these methods for your clients who had little success with talk therapy?

Barbara: Most definitely. It is a psychotherapeutic process that engages both left and right sides of the brain which some people respond to much better than activating just the left or logical side.

William: When you relocated to Ireland in 2019 you became an early adopter of working online, with what we now know as telehealth. You no longer had a shared space for working with art materials, so how did that affect your way of working in that realm?

Barbara: It wasn’t as difficult a transition as it seemed at first. I just asked the clients who liked working in the arts to provide their own materials and make art at home instead of at my office.

William: In May of this year (2022) the Regulation of Social Care Professionals known as CORU launched a five-year Statement of Strategy. Do you have an opinion on the tightening of standards in your profession?

Barbara: Having the experience of working through a long and rigorous licensing process in California, I can appreciate both the challenges to therapists to comply and the benefits to our clients over the long run, when everyone has a more even playing field.



Barbara Devaney, MIACP, is a marriage and family therapist in private practice working both remotely, internationally and in clinic in Cork. She is a graduate of the California Institute of Integral Studies with a Master of Arts in Counseling Psychology and in 2020 received the Kennedy-Shriver Award for excellence in the treatment of people with special needs presented by the University of San Francisco School of Medicine. Her speciality in practice is using the expressive arts to work with trauma and special needs. She is also certified in EMDR in Europe and the U.S.



William Pattengill is a member of the editorial board and occasional contributor to *Inside Out*. After retiring from the home renovation field, he has enjoyed the opportunity to return to his roots as a journalist.

A question of soul: The importance of being in the therapeutic relationship

by *Mike Moss*



He was in the waiting room. I noticed he dropped something from his bag and I wanted to step back to let him pick it up but then it rolled towards me, something moving back and forth. I was drawn to it and it seemed to be drawn to me and it landed softly at my feet. I picked it up and looked through the end. I was curious. I had an immediate flashback to my childhood. I was holding a kaleidoscope. I gazed through the aperture and saw a child inside a star looking through an aperture at a man outside looking through an aperture at a world of many different shapes and colours.

We then found ourselves sitting opposite each other in another room. Just the two of us with the kaleidoscope back in his bag. This was our first therapy session. I knew we had chosen to be in this moment and trusted there had been a deep calling in us that brought us here. And in all our struggles and hopes and dreams we were now sharing the possibility of there being something else in our meeting, something larger. We did our best to recognise the space between us and invited all the possibilities of change and growth and healing. A candle was lit and we acknowledged the uniqueness of the moment. This wasn't about fixing, it was about caring. Caring for ourselves and caring for the other and caring for the world. And then we listened. We listened deeply with our hearts and began to offer each other hope. "Who are you?", "Who am I?", "Why are we here?" These questions seemed to disappear as we found acceptance of our being in the presence of a stranger acknowledging we were not alone. Client and therapist as two travellers, soul companions on our way home. Meeting at depth on many different levels in one moment, a kaleidoscope of fragments of light and shade, of love and fear, reflecting stories inside and outside of us, longing to be connected to the story of the world.

Psychotherapy may be an opportunity to access the essence of ourselves. Not just by being encouraged by our developing skills and theories of therapy, and our openness and search for healing, but through the lived, felt experience of our being. Exploring what connects client and therapist in terms of our being human and beyond, may find us in the territory of the soul.

When it comes to trying to understand any therapeutic relationship in depth, recognising what we all have in common feels like a good starting point. I wonder if the client and therapist can ever be separated when relating at depth. The story of each therapeutic relationship is unique and yet may offer the paradox of there being commonality and the possibility we are on the same journey, being human. If so, I believe we have the potential to connect to each other from the core of our being human in therapy. Even though one may be an observer at times to the other's experience, if we turn this around, like a kaleidoscope, we may see that we are both the experiencer and the observer at the same time. If we turn it around even more, we may look deeper and see images that connect all the different parts of ourselves with the other, with the world and with the soul.

Mia Leijssen, professor of person-centred/experiential/existential psychotherapy at the University of Leuven in Belgium, believes therapy is a spiritual practice and observes that the *soul* or *life force* (Leijssen, 2009) is a quality of experiencing life which can deepen, enrich and also potentially transform us in therapy. Leijssen (2008) quotes Eugene Gendlin in acknowledging what he calls a *felt sense* where 'the human body plays a remarkable role in developing an awareness of spirit' and that by attending to this *felt sense*, we may capture the process of the soul.

Leijssen also identifies *soul moments* in psychotherapy, which she sees as becoming part of the healing process, and understands there are different dimensions of our physical, social, psychological and spiritual life. She believes these different dimensions can "become integrated in one felt process, evolving from moment to moment in therapy" and that they inspire us and can connect to our bodily felt resources (Leijssen, 2009). She also makes reference to ways of nourishing the soul in therapy where there can be communication through images, symbols and actions without, what she terms, *over-explanation*. I agree there are times where explanation is not needed in therapy, and there is just a being with what emerges, letting moments fill with what is becoming. I have also experienced this as an intuitive communication in clinical supervision where somehow I connect intuitively to the client by imagining space for the healing the client may be seeking. And if we consider the kaleidoscope image I used earlier, different aspects of our being may somehow be linked to how we experience the

therapeutic and supervisory relationships. Where something happens that can appear one moment as a thought or a feeling or an image which seems incredibly important and may offer so much more at the time or in reflection, depending on how we look at it.

For instance, I looked up the origin of the word 'kaleidoscope' online. According to Etmonline (2019) it comes from the Greek words *kalos* which means 'beautiful' and *eidos* which means 'shape'. I liked the idea of finding something more and looked further and checked out the word 'scope' and learned it means to 'observe'. So I then looked up the origin of the word 'observe' and found it was described as "a sense of distance the mind can reach" (Etmonline, 2019). I really like this description. I think these words have a lot of power. And by digging deeper I may have discovered something at the root of the word 'kaleidoscope' which for me seems to describe the territory of the soul. For example, I wonder if as well as there being a felt sense, the soul may also appear like a beautiful shape in my imagination, that can travel a sense of distance the mind can reach.

And of course, we can only imagine these things, yet in our imagining perhaps we can actually connect to something more, something deeper, inside and outside of us. Jung (2009) in *The Red Book*, considers this inner and outer world. And as we become part of what he refers to as the "manifold essence of the world" through our bodies, we also become part of the manifold essence of the inner world through our soul, and he believes that this inner world is truly infinite.

Bernie Neville (1938-2021), who had been professor of holistic counselling at the Phoenix Institute of Higher Education in Australia shared Rogers' belief of an *actualising tendency* that when the conditions in the therapeutic relationship permit, we are not only involved in an event, but "we are tapping into a tendency which permeates all organic life" (Neville, 2012 p.76).

I find this possibility inspiring, and have written about it before, where I considered there is something which intrinsically moves us towards self-actualisation and asked if we can experience its presence. I also find the question of the soul takes us further into the actualising tendency, which may be represented as our being part of a universe, as well as our potential for growth and change and healing, deep within our being (Moss, 2018; Moss, 2019).

Neville also poses a view from Alfred North Whitehead, an English mathematician and philosopher that when we observe the therapeutic relationship we see two individuals who make up the relationship: however, we may have this back to front. He states that "in each moment of experience it is the relationship which holds the two experiencing subjects into being, not two individuals who make a relationship happen" (Neville, 2012 p.76) and that they are directly connected as aspects of a single cosmic moment of experience. He goes on to suggest "the universe is not made of people or chemicals or atoms. It is made of relationships which bring people and atoms and chemicals into being" (Neville, 2012).

I find this view compelling and I wonder if the soul can be described in this way as that which brings us into being. Kaitlyn Steele, a person-centred spiritual accompanier and pastoral supervisor, also shares Rogers' view of the actualising tendency and believes that when he spoke of our *organismic nature* or our *transcendental core* he was essentially talking about the soul, and that where there is meaningful encounter in the therapeutic relationship it is as if "one soul reaches out and touches the soul of the other" (Steele, 2015 p. 148).

I once worked with a client (aged 16) who told me she saw the cosmos when she closed her eyes

at night and felt really connected somehow to the stars and planets. Janet (not her real name) had never spoken about this before, and had felt hesitant about sharing this with me. She wondered if I would think her strange or going crazy: of course, I didn't think that. When clients start to tell me something and say things like *You might think this is really weird, or you may think me crazy*, I find myself moving towards them that little bit closer as I am particularly interested in what they might say. In my experience what they talk about are usually matters of the soul; and by being hesitant of revealing such things to another person may be their protection of something in them that feels close to the core of their being.

Janet was experiencing an incredible loneliness in her life. She had clearly been hurt. The physical part of her had healed she said, but there was a deep scar inside her that wouldn't heal. It had destroyed her sense of believing in herself and believing in her safety in the world. I noticed early on she seemed to be holding something in her body by the way she sat with her arms crossed over her lap as if covering a wound. Janet had been raped when she was 14 years old. She seemed to find some relief and even some comfort in just sharing her story. At the end of our work together over some months she said she experienced me as being kind and that having been listened to was so important for her. It also seemed during our time together she had found kindness for herself too.

I think as therapists we can only ever come close to understanding the client's story and, similarly, only ever come close to understanding the soul. There may always be a distance, even when we feel that we connect. But it feels so important that we are able to respond from a deep place inside us when listening for the soul in the other, sharing and being in close relationship and imagining matters of the soul as they emerge.

In shamanic practice, there is a belief that parts of the soul may leave the body at times of trauma and can only be retrieved by the help of a shamanic practitioner who visits the world of spirit on the client's behalf (Ingerman, 1991). I have limited knowledge of this; however, I do accept the possibility and I am attracted by the imagery. I can imagine many clients I have worked with, having reconnected to parts of themselves in their healing and in discovering new ways of being. I also believe that where there is suffering in a person, it may be the soul's process of seeking healing and parts of the soul trying to reconnect. Perhaps, even in therapy, there is a way of calling these fragmented parts of the soul back home.

Janet's life had been a struggle since she had been raped. She had been self-harming and taking risks with alcohol and sex and had believed she was of no value. She also thought no one cared for her as she had lost a sense of caring for herself. She also acknowledged that something felt like it had been taken away from her. I believe that having an image of a lost part of Janet helped her imagine where it might have gone and what it looked like and if it might ever come back. Over time she was able to experience some of the qualities of the lost part of herself and, rather like the shamanic view, she believed something of her essence had indeed been returned and was able to manage her life better and had gained more confidence in herself.

Whatever questions we may have of the soul, I think it is important we accept there may be an enabling of life we have at our core that stays with us through life. And that part of our journey in life may be further empowered in a healing relationship by someone accompanying us towards our dark places and to find what has been lost.

Hearing the *healing* in the client's story feels important as it may be a story of the soul, which is also

our story and the story of the world. I believe that in the therapeutic relationship, we may discover we have the power to enliven life with a thought, awareness, a reflection and maybe even an intention or intuition, where the outer world connects to our inner world. And we may choose to turn the kaleidoscope and see we are part of something larger and connected to all life, and indeed this awareness may be the awakening of the question of the soul.

This article was first published in the BACP Thresholds Journal in January 2020.



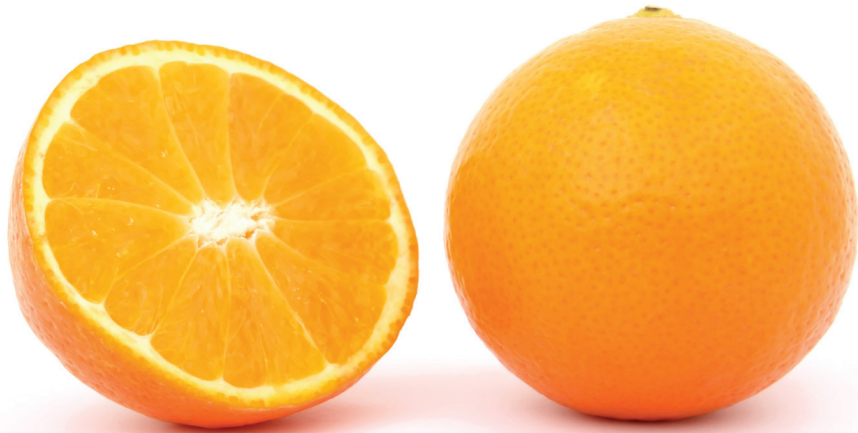
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Five ways to handle conflict

by *Paul Daly*



Two children are in a kitchen. Each wants the last orange. What do they do?

Most people, in my experience, say halve the orange, and that is what the children decided. The first child took one half, ate the fruit and threw away the peel while the other child threw away the fruit and used the peel from the second half to flavour a cake. They each ended up with half an orange. But they could have effectively ended up with a whole orange if they had asked each other what they wanted it for.

The story is recounted by Fisher, Ury and Patton (2011, p. 57) to illustrate the difference between positions and interests and the authors argue that many arguments are conflicts of position and result in impasses because the interests of both people are not explored.

Another story the authors use to illustrate a similar point is of two men quarrelling in a library. One wants the window closed and the other wants it open. They cannot agree on any of the options: closed, open a crack, halfway, three quarters, fully open. How can this be resolved?

The librarian enters and asks one of the men why he wants the window open and the answer is “To get some fresh air”. She asks the other man why he wants the window closed and he says “To avoid a draught”. She thinks for a minute and then opens wide a window in the next room, which brings in fresh air without a draught (Fisher, Ury and Patton, 2011 p. 40).

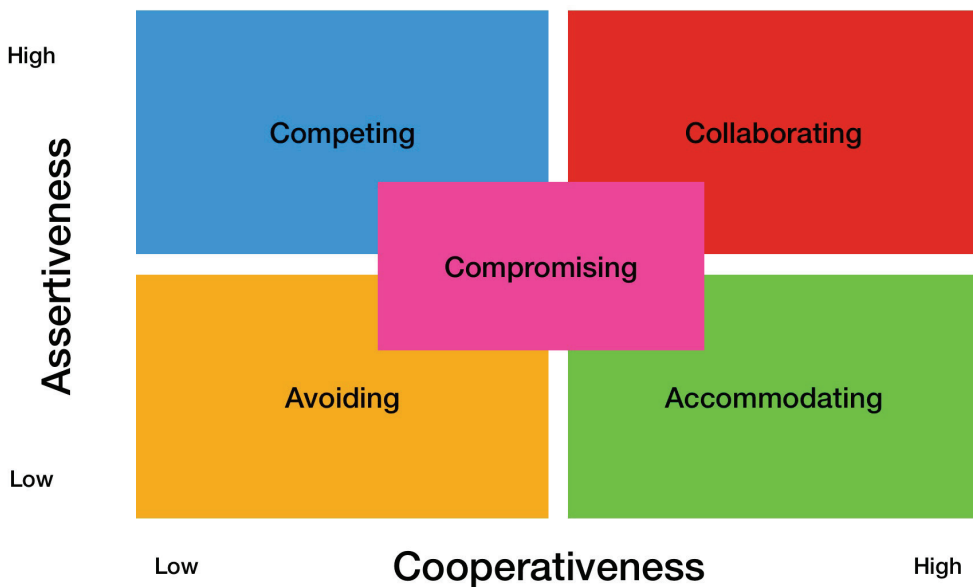
Conflict is inevitable in life because at times people have incompatible needs, feelings, values, interests, goals, attitudes and perceptions. Sometimes these differences lead to serious and protracted disagreements.

None of us are novices when it comes to conflict. Since childhood we all have developed skills and strategies to deal with it. We may not be aware of how and why we are succeeding or failing. Some of these strategies are reactive and automatic. Some are counter-productive. Others are a form of denial. They may have worked in the past for us but may need now to be reflected on and updated and a range of other possible options considered.

Conflict resolution theory offers a number of perspectives that can widen our understanding. Conflict can be complex. For example, *The Handbook of Conflict Resolution* (Coleman, Deutsch, & Marcus, 2014) explores, among many others, the following themes in conflict: inequalities of power, social justice, trust, effective communication, the role of language, emotions that facilitate constructive outcomes, judgemental biases, self-regulation, conflictual styles of personality, forgiveness and reconciliation, and mediation.

In this short article I am going to outline just one model: the popular and influential Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (TKI) (Thomas and Kilmann, 1974; Kilmann, n.d.) which posits five conflict handling modes.

The conflict modes are competing, accommodating, compromising, avoiding and collaborating. How these five modes are defined by the authors can be seen in the diagram below which is adapted from their original graph (Thomas and Kilmann, 2008). On the vertical axis is assertiveness - “satisfying your own concerns”; on the horizontal axis is cooperativeness - “satisfying the other person’s concerns” (Thomas and Kilmann, 2008). You can be high or low or half way on either of these and the result are five different conflict handling styles.



Looking at this diagram and remembering the stories of the orange and the window above, it might be thought that *collaborating* (high cooperativeness and high assertiveness) is the only appropriate conflict-handling mode and that all the others are always to be avoided. However, that is not the case. According to this model each of the conflict modes have strengths in certain circumstances and these are outlined by Thomas and Kilmann (2008):

Competing (high assertiveness and low cooperativeness). You might opt for this approach when urgent decisive action is needed, for example, in an emergency, or when unpopular actions such as cost-cutting require implementation.

Accommodating (low assertiveness and high cooperativeness). You might use this mode when the issue is much more important to the other person than it is to you, when you realise that you are wrong, or when there is a particular need to preserve harmony and avoid disruption.

Compromising (intermediate assertiveness and intermediate cooperativeness). You might adopt this approach when you and the person you are in conflict with are strongly committed to mutually exclusive goals.

Avoiding (low assertiveness and low cooperativeness). You might avoid or withdraw from conflict when you perceive an issue as unimportant, when the damage due to conflict outweighs its benefits, when others can resolve the issue more effectively, or when you need to let people cool down.

Collaborating (high assertiveness and high cooperativeness). You might choose to collaborate when you need to find an integrative consensual long-term solution where the concerns of both parties are fully expressed and hard feelings are worked through.

To see the range of conflict responses mapped out so clearly is in itself beneficial. Reflecting on one's experience in the light of this model indicates whether one is overusing or underusing some of the conflict handling behaviours and expands one's repertoire of responses. (Thomas and Kilmann, 2008). For example, someone who is constantly bickering over relatively unimportant matters may explore why this is so and realise that there are other options, such as not engaging with the conflict or accommodating the other person's perspective or compromising. Someone else may be conflict-averse and allow others to walk all over them and may find encouragement in this model to take tentative steps toward asserting themselves in small ways to begin with. People who habitually compromise may be surprised to learn that both their own concerns and those of others can be satisfied to a greater extent following dialogue and the search for creative solutions. The model does not posit the reasons why people take on a particular conflict handling mode or avoid other modes but it holds out the possibility of change through awareness and practice (Kilmann Diagnostics, 2014).

Kilmann (Kilmann Diagnostics, 2014) emphasises that there are a number of different ways of enacting the five modes, some better than others. With competing, for example, you might speak in a dominating manner or alternatively you might share persuasively why it is so important to you to do something in a particular way. With avoiding you might abruptly leave a conversation and walk away or alternatively you might say that you need some more time to think about the issue. It is important to enact each mode with "care, sensitivity and respect" (Kilmann Diagnostics, 2014).

There is a charge to take the TKI assessment online but there is ample material on the model freely available on the Kilmann Diagnostics website, <https://kilmandiagnostics.com/>.

In conflict resolution training there is a rich literature on collaborating - the win-win option - with descriptions of active listening, empathy, appropriate assertiveness, the unconscious dimensions of the "iceberg of conflict", the body's "fight, flight, freeze and flow" responses, 'I' statements, attacking the problem rather than the person, and willingness to resolve (Cornelius and Faire, 2007; Cloke and Goldsmith, 2000). Each of these topics deserves an article of its own. The focus here has been on one helpful framework that illustrates the possibilities of different conflict responses.



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Ongoing Recovery for the Adult Child of an Alcoholic (ACoA) Therapist: Part 2

by *Mick Devine*



This article seeks to continue where the first article in the 2022 Summer edition of *Inside Out* left off (Devine, 2022). Having referred to the ‘symbiosis’ and ‘differentiation’ subphases of Margaret Mahler’s individuation process for the young child in that article, I will reflect on the ‘practising’ and ‘rapprochement’ subphases in this article. To remind the reader, my purpose for doing so is to support therapists in their work with clients who may be the adult child of an alcoholic (ACoA or ACA) by reflecting on how each subphase may have been impacted by a parent and how the other parent was also impacted by this alcoholism. I am particularly interested in supporting therapists with this client group who are themselves an adult child of an alcoholic, being one myself. This support might take the form of prompting the therapist to consider how being an adult child of an alcoholic is impacting your work with them and influencing how they present themselves as a client in your service and

how understanding the presenting issues might be helped by being aware of the ACoA framework suggested in this article. This is referred to as “ACoA trauma syndrome” (Dayton, 2012, p.20). From among the legion of contributors to this topic I will seek guidance again from Margaret Mahler, Louise J Kaplan, AH Almaas, Tian Dayton and Stephanie Brown.

Practising Subphase

The ‘Separation Individuation’ process contains the simultaneous processes of the child separating from the mother while developing an individual identity (Mahler et al., 2000). The success of this process will depend on the quality of the attachment with the mother in the first place so that the child is secure enough to venture out into the world and back to the mother. The trust the child has in the mother is the trust he will have in the environment and in himself.

The ‘practising’ is practising separation from the mother. It is gradual and based on trial and error. Mahler’s ‘second birth’ of the ‘differentiation’ subphase is needed because the child is so attached to the mother that there is a ‘dual unity’. The success of this subphase is dependent on the quality of the attachment in the earlier phases.

There would be no need for a second birth if the infant’s total neediness and appetite for human attachment had not bound him into oneness with his mother in the first place.

(Kaplan, 1978, p.104)

Central to this practising period getting underway is the mother’s admiring eyes and celebrating the achievements of walking, getting stuff for mum, showing mum all that can be done. The mother is attuned to the child’s development. She is admiring and proud. This is communicated to the child and is essential encouragement to his continuing spirit of exploration.

The mother and father give the child their blessing. Their celebrating eyes exude confidence in the baby’s ability to make it out there: “look at you, my spectacular walking-away baby”. The baby gets the message and makes the most of his love affair with the world.

(Kaplan, 1978, p.162)

Mothers assist the toddler to walk alone. The view of the world is different, standing on their own feet, seeing a cat, toys, and a couch. The world looks very different to the child when she is on her feet. She can go away, transport herself independently. The world becomes her oyster. The child can climb on furniture and ascend to heights, get access to what was out of reach, get different perspectives on the world.

In the exhilaration of using his leg, chest, back and shoulder muscles all-out, the toddler is unconcerned about the numerous falls and bumps that are the unavoidable mishaps of an adventure.

(Kaplan, 1978, p.163)

The child knows elation. It is not an elation based on reality. The parents toddler-proof the house. Sharp objects are removed, pitfalls anticipated, stair gates and child locks installed, all the dangerous stuff and the valuable stuff is relocated at a height. The toddler is not aware that pitfalls are so plentiful and has no built-in sense of danger. He is not yet aware how precarious his elation is. The child still senses mum’s presence and has not got a sense that mum is separate. The idealism of his view of the world is an illusion and it depends on mum for it to be maintained. The mum, and dad, become

stagehands. They make the dangerous environment safe for the child's exploration and practising. There is an 'optimal distance' from the mother. At this distance the child can explore and function. If the distance is too short the child is not thriving and developing separation and independence. If the distance is too great the child's confidence fails. The child is still dependent on the mother's presence and while he is venturing away this is still in the environment of an ever-present mother that the child has not yet separated from.

If the mother is alcoholic, or co-dependent on an alcoholic, she may not be sufficiently attuned to this stage in the child's development. If the admiring looks are not coming, the child's courage fails him. If the mother's absences are prolonged, the child's developing sense of self will be stymied. The child needs the mother's lap for emotional refuelling. If it is not reliably available, the child's practising spirit will droop. If the environment is not made safe the child may have mishaps that dent pride in achievements. If the child's exuberance is too stressful for the alcoholic or co-dependent, its environment may be too limited for a proper spirit of adventure to be satisfied.

Due to the anxiety and stress being caused by the parental addiction a spirit of adventure in the child is not facilitated. It is easier to exert control on the child and limit its opportunities for mishaps. Unfortunately, this also limits the scope for exploration and delight in developing new capacities. Even to learn from avoidable mishaps is valuable for the child's learning about the environment and how to navigate it and to learn about their own developing capacities. The child gets the message that he is not 'number one' in the family. The environment is primarily set up to facilitate the needs of the alcoholic, not the needs of the child. If the mother does not return or is not available for emotional refuelling due to drunkenness, hangover, or preoccupied by a partner's drinking, the child is left to their own devices to sustain a still fragile and emerging sense of self. This is demoralising and depressing for the child. For the child to enjoy at least partial success in the developmental task of separation from the parents, his needs and the response to them must be central to the task of being a family. In the alcoholic family this is not the case.

The alcoholic family is organised around the dominance and centrality of the parent's needs - the alcoholic's growing need for alcohol and the non-alcoholic's need to control the alcoholic. Both parents are frequently overwhelmed by their own anxiety and need, and therefore, inattentive or marginally available to focus on the needs of the children. There is a chronic underlying fear held by all that things are, or soon will be, out of control.

(Brown,1988, p.139)

The child's boundless energy can be inexhaustible and can wear mum and dad out in what is an already tired and stressed system. This may lead to frustration being vented on the child. Anger may be expressed if the child will not go to bed, go to sleep, sit still, not do risky things like climb on things or go beyond a boundary.

In the alcoholic family the alcohol is the central organising principle around which the family forms. As such the child can at best enjoy only partial success in this separation process.

The Impact of the Practising Subphase on Current Functioning and Relationships

So, the successful navigation of the developmental tasks to be tackled in this subphase will imprint the character for the lifespan. Reflective questions that evoke relevant traits might include the following: What is your spirit of adventure like? Do you seek out new things to do or do you do the same old things again and again? Do you like to learn? Do you like to go to new places? Do you like to meet

new people and develop new friendships? Do you seek new jobs, careers, promotions, positions of leadership? How important is support from others for you to develop some of this? Can you go it alone or do you need the support of others? Do you have the support of others in your life?

Where a parent was alcohol dependent it is reasonable to expect the following shortcomings in the child's developing personality. The development of self-confidence is impaired and the courage to explore and develop natural capacities stay dormant. The effects can be lasting. A courageous and confident sense of adventure may be lacking throughout the lifespan. The willingness to volunteer, put the self forward, take risks, be assertive, go into the unknown with curiosity may be lacking. There may be excessive caution and fear. There may be mistrust that people are unreliable, don't have your back and are not there for you. This may lead to a spirit that is dampened down, and a sense that you are on your own and unsupported in life tasks. That it's all up to you. There may be built in limitations to what you will explore or experience affecting you that you are not even aware of.

Tian Dayton speaks knowingly of this territory:

When a substance or compulsive behaviour rules family dynamics, family gravity gets thrown off kilter: ...Kids learn to manoeuvre in and out of the parents' moods which rule the atmosphere... they have to develop a premature independence... they can feel helpless and despondent, unable to do anything that can really lead to their family getting better, happier, or safer... they develop a sixth sense of when to hide, when to run, when to hurl themselves into the breach... They become little soldiers of fortune...

(Dayton, 2012, p.43)

In a primary relationship it might be worth wondering whether your relationships retained a spirit of doing new things or are they more characterised by boredom, repetition, monotony? Is it the same conversations, pastimes and hobbies, going to the pub, out for a meal, away for a weekend, TV programmes? Is what you say to each other and how you relate dominated by a set pattern and unexamined assumptions and beliefs about the other person or the relationship itself? Is intimacy still new and risky or are you afraid to show up in new and surprising ways? Do you put it all on the line? Is there loneliness and isolation in the relationships and a sense of emptiness and a vacuum?

Maybe in your parenting you might, or might not, still be patient and tolerant of mistakes and failures, even if it means you have to bear the cost, foot the bill or bail someone out.

What about you as a therapist? Was there a spirit of trying out new things on your therapy training programme? How important was your practising new skills? Was it monitored and scrutinised? Was it important that you had opportunities to learn in real life situations? Were you supported in trial and error, encouraged to take risks, make mistakes? Do you play safe in the therapy room? How open can you be about prizing your client and showing support and care and concern for their disasters and failures? Do you support the client to be at the edge trying new things and going out on a limb? Does your supervisor get excited about your ideas, desires and dreams?

Rapprochement Subphase

In this phase of development, the child goes back and forward. He leaves the mother's lap to explore. He returns for emotional refuelling. Curiosity drives him out to explore. Fear drives him back to the lap. Over time, from 15 to 36 months, he will work out with his mum that he is separate from her and an individual in his own right. Mother is crucial in this. She is separating also. She is losing the dual unity

too and the precious bonding that goes with parenting an infant. Her attunement to the child and his needs is crucial to the child's freedom to succeed in the developmental task.

Up to now, in the child's experience, mother did not have her own distinct presence. Mother was everywhere, she was the world. Now mother is being experienced as a person. The love affair between the two becomes more distinct. The child is aware of the mother. If she is there, he is fine. If she is not there, he is anxious at her loss. He relates to the mum. He can woo her. He can say 'hi' and 'bye'. She plays along and is devoted to being relational. If she can't be wooed, he can be dejected.

The circle of safety which once gave the child rein to measure his place in the world has lost its protective magic. Safety and wholeness now have more to do with the perplexing intangible space between the inner images of the self and the inner images of the mother than with the actual physical distance that separated them.

(Kaplan, 1978, p.192)

There will be wilfulness. There will be 'No!' There will be temper tantrums. This can be challenging for the parents. The child can be easily hurt and dejected and the temper is a way of fuming and fighting against desolation and restoring an inner balance. Mum and dad need to be tuned in to facilitate this. This wilfulness allows the child establish autonomy and his own power. It is important the will is not squashed. At the same time, it does not serve the child to always get its own way. The mother will also be saying 'no'. She asserts herself and establishes her space. She may be acting on behalf of a younger sibling. The parents must demonstrate reasonableness. It is not good if the child feels it is all or nothing in its battles. The child establishes an inner psychological optimal distance. If the child emerges from this always having got its own way, there will be a feeling of fear of losing identity if he can't control relationships. If he loses these battles the child will easily feel humiliated and self-doubting as an adult.

Where alcohol is the central organising principle around which the family forms, the stakes can be higher again with regard to expression of anger.

Anger is often the focal point around which issues of control, feelings, and the all-or-nothing frame are crystallised. For many ACAs, anger is dangerous... feeling it and expressing it will result in destroying the very individuals you would like to rely on;... anger threatens to repudiate denial of one's own overwhelming deep neediness.

(Brown, 1988, p.121)

For this process to succeed for the child, the child's growth and development must be the priority for the family. If there is addiction and denial, then the addiction is the priority and not the child.

The back and forth of rapprochement will manifest in daily experiences of clinging and pushing away. The child will try to coerce the mother and get its own way. If the mother gives in too much, the child will fear the loss of itself and its immersion in the mother. If the mother resists the coercion, the child will feel left alone and abandoned. Over the course of the 20 months or so of this developmental process the child, on balance, will emerge with a cohesive sense of self. The constancy of the mother is crucial to this success. If there is alcoholism, the child is not the priority. This leaves the child with a precarious sense of self that is not based on self-worth and lacks a solid sense of its integrity with a realistic sense of will, power and ability to act in the world in a way that is seen to be effective and admirable.

This phase becomes a conflict. The child wants to go back and forward between the intimacy of the cuddle on the lap and the autonomy of independence, adventure and exploration. The child approaches the mother and the child avoids the mother. He wants the cuddle but he does not want to get stuck with the mother, needing her to the point that he can't do without her. This threatens his emerging sense of self. Yet, if he avoids her for too long his grandiose sense of self gets deflated. The child finds an 'optimal distance' from mum. It's not a resolution of the conflict, it is more a compromise that allows the child to function in the world and continue to develop a coherent sense of self.

Where this flexibility does not occur and compromise is not possible, as may well be the case in the alcoholic family, the child may emerge with a sense of, what Brown calls "dichotomous all-or-none thinking" (Brown, 1988, p.60). If there are no grey areas allowed the child must perceive the situation in a way that minimises ambiguity:

Within the dichotomous frame, individuals must cling relentlessly to their belief in themselves as bad in order to hold onto the illusion of attachment.

(Brown, 1988, p.109)

This is where the other parent starts to be a facilitative figure in this development. The father can be a bridge for the child into the world away from mum. They can go 'outside' together and explore the world away from mum in a safe way. The child can be on the dad's shoulders and feel princely surveying the world. This emboldens the child in his adventure away from mum. The dad's role in meeting the child's 'no' helps the child navigate autonomy from mum. The intimacy with mum can be protected if it is the dad the child has the conflict with. Navigating the 'no' with dad is good preparation for life in the world. The separation is primarily from mum but there is separation from dad too. If dad is not available due to alcoholism or mum's alcoholism, then he is not tuned into the child's need. The child's development is not the family priority. If the dad's will is collapsed, or if his will is hard or macho, then the child is not served in his quest for his own will. If dad cannot handle temper tantrums and gives in to the child, the child has a grandiose sense of his power. If the child meets a stern and inflexible will from dad then the child's will suffers.

The Impact of the Rapprochement Subphase on Current Functioning and Relationships

We emerge from the rapprochement subphase of this psychodynamic process with a more or less cohesive sense of our self, of our identity. It is this self we take into our life and into our relationships. This process will play a big part in determining the scope for satisfaction and contentment with ourself and our life. If our formation in this family of origin was influenced by alcoholism and its denial, then the impacts are significant and lasting and limiting:

The denial of alcoholism is a major organising principle structuring the family's attachments, level of cognitive structural development, perceptions about reality, and related affect and the development of one's personal identity.

(Brown, 1978, p.171)

Does your sense of your own identity allow you move back and forward in your relationships between autonomy and intimacy or do you have a preference? Do you get overwhelmed with intimacy and feel swallowed up and lost when you get close, or are close for longer than you want, feeling suffocated, frustrated and merged in the other's identity in a negative way? Do you prefer autonomy and independence to the point where you might become isolated and alienated and you remain in contact with others or stay connected with them too long?

When it comes to you as a parent, how has this identity formation impacted how you have parented children? The following from Brown may be true for you as a child, and perhaps even more so if there was alcoholism in your family, and may have some truth about the family you subsequently formed:

... the child constructs a personal identity that confirms beliefs about the self and others necessary to maintain attachment, facilitate identification, and maintain the family story, often all contrary to reality.

(Brown, 1978, p.169)

How is, or was, your parenting in relation to this rapprochement phase as the mum or as the dad? What factors established the optimal distance for your child to resolve or not resolve conflicts with you over anger, sadness or wilful power struggles? How well did this optimal distance allow the child to function and establish their own sense of cohesion? How constant a presence were you to facilitate their development of a cohesive sense of self? Where were the deficits and how do you see the lasting effects in your child's personality today?

In your practice as a therapist, do you allow yourself become a distinct and idiosyncratic individual to your clients? What is the quality of your presence as the client experiments with ways of being? How are you in power struggles with client and supervisors? Do you have them, allow them, encourage them, seek them out? Are you scared of them, what might be risked or lost in terms of clients and income and supervisors and being alone and seen as 'difficult'? Can you tolerate and allow a client's sadness and despair and defeat and hopelessness and failure or do they trigger uncomfortable states in you of controlling and wanting to 'fix'?

How does Recovery from this look?

Recovery from this begins with a recognition that such a reflection as is offered here touches a chord within the reader or contains a grain of truth (either for the reader themselves or their clients). Furthermore, there is a recognition that this formation still influences how the person accommodates herself to her current reality, and that her personality may have been formed to some extent by the family system she was part of then. Also there may be limitations built into the personal identity. This may be uncomfortable and unsettling. But there may also be curiosity to find out more or a desire to follow a thread that is being picked up. There can be recognition that the identity formation limits autonomy and individuation and is based on an incomplete separation from the parental figures and the family system:

Normally each individual has established a certain degree of separation as part of his ego structure. Experiences of more separation become a pressure and demand on his capacity to be separate. This will bring up old unresolved conflicts about separation, or simply exert a new but greater demand on his already existing capacity. Simply put, it will stretch his capacity for separation.

(Almaas, 1988, p.218)

Recovery might be a useful guiding principle; that something may have happened to me that I can recover from. Brown articulates this process in terms similar to those of Almaas and using the recovery metaphor:

ACAs realise they are still emotionally attached to their families of origin in self-destructive ways. They are bound by denial and by the beliefs about the family and themselves constructed to preserve these bonds. To change as adults, they must challenge the premises on which their core

sense of identity has been constructed. Implicit in the entire process of recovery is the ultimate emotional separation from parents, whether alive or dead.

(Brown, 1978, p.263)

Tian Dayton (2012) quotes research by El-Geubaly et al. that accurately sets out the task for the ACoA:

ACAs inability to express their needs and feelings are based on ingrained patterns of distrust, secretiveness and fear of intimacy and abandonment and that the interpersonal difficulties of ACAs are reflective of the relational patterns in the alcoholic family of origin. Over time these patterns become the foundation for negative expectations about establishing and maintaining secure relationships.

(El-Geubaly et al., 1993, p.1410)

Following on from this then is the search for an environment where the exquisitely sensitive work of revisiting these phases of identity formation can happen, so as to gain insight and awareness. Can a trusting and supportive atmosphere be created where this formation process can be revisited? Can we experiment with *dual unity, differentiation, practicing and rapprochement* dimensions of our identity formation in a way that allows us to revisit these phases in a way that allows a crucible to form that is like a melting pot? What melts is the structures of our personality and core self-beliefs that form our identity. Perhaps that dissolution of personality will allow a greater degree of freedom and feeling more comfortable in our own skin. Something like what Dayton suggests here:

A special and protective space where we can not only be more than our ordinary selves, – generous, forgiving and high-minded – but less as well, where we can be vulnerable and shaky, stumbling over our faults and fears and have a hand outstretched as we ask for help in hoisting ourselves back up again.

(Dayton, 2012, p.236)

Conclusion

The work of personal growth can be precarious for all of us at the best of times and a stretch is needed to continue separation from unconscious attachments. This stretch is all the more painful for those of us who had to contend with significant adverse events in childhood. This article has sought to continue on the work presented here previously (Devine, 2022). I have tried to look at the process of identity formation as outlined by Margaret Mahler's work in the separation individuation process and how this process could be impacted by parental alcoholism. In addition to this, I have sought to prompt the reader to reflect on how these dynamics may be impacting experience today. I have invited the reader to engage with the material as a practitioner personally impacted by these dynamics in childhood and as a practitioner whose clients have been influenced by these dynamics.



Mick Devine is a clinician working in addiction treatment for over 25 years with Tabor Group Addiction Treatment services in Cork. He is an accredited counsellor and supervisor with Addiction Counsellors of Ireland. He is particularly interested these days in the limitations imposed by the terrors of living with addiction in childhood and the development beyond them for himself and others. He is also interested in the spiritual dimensions of human development and is a student of the Ridhwan School. He encourages readers to get in touch at mick.devine@hotmail.com and to visit *Silent Voices* pages of Alcohol Action Ireland.

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Ho'oponopono: Releasing ourselves through forgiveness

by *Robin Shohet*

In this short article I would like to share some of my thoughts on forgiveness. I came to the topic almost by accident as I had originally intended to write a book on revenge. After researching this topic, I came to realise that it was a complete dead end. Like a boomerang, it hurt the person who acted it out. Or in the words of a Chinese proverb – he who plots revenge should dig two graves.

I confess to having had a prejudice against the word forgiveness. It smacked of moral superiority – you have hurt me, but I will forgive you being, the holy person I am. I was also very aware of the danger of what could be called a spiritual bypass. Rather than face my rage, I will rise above what has happened, and as my religion tells me to do, forgive. Another danger could be called premature forgiveness i.e. not working through the feelings of loss, betrayal, rage, hurt. There was also the idea that we are letting the other person get away with what they have done.

What I have learnt is that forgiveness has nothing to do with the other person. We do it for ourselves. Whilst we are still focusing on the other person, we are not centred – we are wanting them to be punished, own up, apologise, whatever. In the words of the spiritual teacher Byron Katie, we are not at home.

One of the ways is a form of inquiry pioneered by the teacher Byron Katie whom I have mentioned above. She asks us to put down on paper who we are angry with, disappointed by, hurt by. And then she skilfully shows us that how we are attached to a story that does not serve us. Not so much forgiveness, but a process of letting go of our attachment to the stories that keep us prisoner of our own thinking.

My stepson realised this intuitively. He came home to find his room ransacked by a so-called friend who presumably had been looking for money. He was consumed with rage and feelings of betrayal until he realised that the so-called friend would be hundreds of miles away and not even thinking about him. A feeling of peace came over him and he just got on with tidying his room. He did not forgive, or not forgive. He worked out that obsessing about the other was not serving him.

I organised two international conferences on forgiveness at the Findhorn Foundation, a spiritual community in the north of Scotland. One of the early speakers was a woman whose daughter had been killed. For eight years she was consumed with hatred and a desire for revenge until one day she realised what it was doing to her, and let go. Not only did she have a peace she had not had in eight years, but she was free enough to go and visit her daughter's killer on death row and advocate for him against the death penalty.

Here I am going to take a detour, the relevance of which will become clear later. Twenty-five years ago I wrote an article, *How Green is Your Mind?* (Shohet,2020). In it I suggested the reader imagined they were a car and their brain/mind was an exhaust pipe. Every time they had a negative thought, any negative thought, they would be letting out exhaust fumes and polluting the planet. In other words, I was suggesting that negative thinking was a major polluter and that we need to do our internal work if we are to save the planet. Climate activists can polarise with those who don't share their views. I

am suggesting we consider that if we polarise, and make people ‘other’, we are engaging in a form of pollution because of our negative thinking about them. Or in the words of the Chinese philosopher Chuang Tzu (Merton, 1969) and put more eloquently:

*When the heart is right
“For” and “against” are forgotten.*

What has this to do with forgiveness?

As part of my research into forgiveness, I came across a Hawaiian process of forgiveness called ho’oponopono. It consists of four sentences. I love you, I am sorry, please forgive me, thank you. This is very much my version and if you want to know more, you can google it.

Imagine John has stolen my bicycle and I am furious and gossip about him. I say to myself (not him):

John, I love you.

If love is who we are, how could I not?

John, I’m sorry.

I have been having bad thoughts about you and talking behind your back.

John, please forgive me.

For not seeing your essence but only focusing on your behaviour.

John thank you.

For showing me how much unforgiveness is still in my being.

It is totally counterintuitive to ask for forgiveness when you have been on the receiving end of a “wrong”, but I like the way it challenges me to take responsibility for my thinking through four simple sentences. And now you may see the connection with *How Green is Your Mind?* If we are to serve humanity, I believe we need to start with our thinking. Our capacity to make others wrong, to blame, is perhaps one of the greatest addictions of human beings. And investigating our thinking can help undo some of the projections to which we can all succumb.

Here are two examples which illustrate my use of ho’oponopono.

I had been really angry with my stepson. The feeling was mutual and we would both talk to my wife about what the other had done. I realised this could not go on and decided to repeat the four sentences from ho’oponopono. I would do this walking down the street (with some resistance) for a few weeks, and then one day as I was returning from a boat trip I heard myself say, “It’s over.” What I meant is that I had had a sudden dramatic change of perception. My grievances with my stepson were in the past. They were not happening now. I did not forgive him or not forgive him. I saw what had happened between us was not the truth of our relationship. I had been so attached to the need to prove I was right, and this was the problem, not him. Nothing external had changed, but the whole situation was viewed differently. The sentence “It’s over” was a form of grace, but ho’oponopono which required me to ask for forgiveness had perhaps paved the way.

The second example was on the underground at 5:00 am on the way to catching an early train. A man got on the almost empty carriage and sat close to me. He started muttering and this muttering got louder and louder and I got increasingly uncomfortable. Should I get off, risk missing my train, or move carriage? He got louder and then said, “And they take your f...ing jobs” and looked at me. The four sentences came into my mind and I repeated them to myself. X, I love you. X, I’m sorry (for my fearful,

hostile thoughts). X, please forgive me (for not seeing who you really are) and X thank you (for carrying my angry male energy and showing me how much work I still have to do). After a couple of rounds of my doing this he calmed down completely.

The four sentences have helped me to undo my self-righteous thinking in that I ask for forgiveness for attacking the other with my thoughts. I believe that humanity is addicted to the need to be right because of a deep belief in our wrongness, which the *Course in Miracles* (Foundation for Inner Peace, 1996) attributes to our mistaken belief in separation. Ho'oponopono helps me to undo that belief system and to recognise how we are all interconnected. I suggested we did this around Putin and people were indignant. I asked how would it contribute to peace if we made him bad. This does not mean I condone his behaviour. Rather, I have to find the bit in me that has abused power. Is there anyone who has not done this?

There are several ways in which we can pave the way – e.g. writing a letter to the person whom we feel has wronged us which we do not send, and then replying as them; imagining holding on to our wound and feeling vengeful and looking at the impact on our bodies, and then imagining releasing ourselves and noticing how that feels. There needs to be a readiness and a willingness to do this, but the beauty is that we are not dependent on anyone else for our release. It is very counter-cultural to think forgiveness has nothing to do with the other, and even more so to ask for forgiveness for our thinking. I repeat, this can only be done when there is a readiness as we humans can tyrannise ourselves with techniques, the need for self-improvement and guilt. But we can pave the way if we are willing to question some of our deeply cherished beliefs. Ho'oponopono offers us an opportunity to do this.

This article is dedicated to the late Ben Fuchs, a dear colleague who collaborated with Robin in organising two conferences on forgiveness.



Robin Shohet (robin.shohet@cstd.co.uk) is a long time student of *A Course in Miracles* which advocates we teach only love for that is who we are. He has written extensively on supervision and sees it as a form of spiritual practice.

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Notes:

A series of 25 horizontal dotted lines for taking notes.



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The Space...

Silence

Earth, together with Her expression as Nature, forms the greatest of all vessels of true Silence, and thus of true listening. Earth and Nature also speak, but in such a manner that the Silence always exists in the foreground.

Sardello R. (2015). *Heartfulness*. Goldenston Press.

Quotation and reference kindly provided by Ursula Somerville, MIAHIP.



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ISSN 0791-7325



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