

Talk for Orientation Evening, September 6, 2017

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It's a pleasure to welcome you to a new academic year as I take my leave of the faculty after being involved from its beginnings and for most of my adult life. Impossible to express my gratitude for this good fortune and privilege, for being there at the right time and with the right people.

The right time was the mid 1980's—before some of you were born! The right people met years earlier at the U of T, graduates from out of town, even out of country. Who also sought personal psychotherapy and then, training to practice psychotherapy. Several years later we met to initiate a new training program for psychotherapy, loosely referred to as the Kendal Group. These movers and shakers soon met with other psychotherapists in the city to become the founding faculty of the Centre for Training in Psychotherapy--which opened under that name and registration In September of 1986.

Some of you have trained with that first faculty: with Adam Crabtree, Jim Healy, Grant Goodbrand, Anna Binswanger Healy, Larry Rooney, Philip McKenna, Marion Goodbrand, Joel Whitton, who passed away in July, and me. Peter Dales joined the faculty at the end of its first year.

However, no training program can flourish without the input of its students. They came in considerable numbers, these pioneering students. I name those who most of you know because they eventually became members of the CTP faculty: Gayle Burns, Ken Ludlow, Jackie Herner, Cathleen Hoskins and Bev Witton.

During the planning period leading up to the launching of CTP, the most crucial point of division amongst its planning faculty was whether or not to continue to the Kendal's requirement for a training psychotherapy group for its students. In the end, those voting "Yes" carried the day; because they recognized what a diverse and profound resource their own intensive group experience continued to be in their respective practices of psychotherapy.

In the years since then, Sharon Bedard, Judy Dales, Eric Evans, Susan Wood, Kristin Casady, and now, Alice Jonathan and Janie Kim have become faculty members. All are graduates of CTP or from programs providing comparable training in group therapy.

You have chosen this particular program despite its length. Two reasons for its unusual length are: one, that 4 years in a psychotherapy training group is required. And two, that students begin their practice of psychotherapy- under- supervision while continuing to complete required course work in clinical practice.

These are two of the program's foundational structures: the psychotherapy training group and extensive conversational learning throughout the program.

Working in groups contributes mightily to learning that transforms us. Students' work with each other is, at the same time, work in depth with themselves. Originally, we required 3 years in group; we have since learned a more realistic respect for how long deep change demands.

Also transformative is the extent to which learning through conversation is present in other courses: in lectures and their seminars, study groups for oral exams, clinical applications, seminars and concentrations, and in supervision seminars.

By beginning to practice psychotherapy under supervision while staying in the program, students continue to strengthen capacity for learning and change. And for the collegial habits and connections that psychotherapists cannot do without.

CTP graduates earn a substantial head start in their collegial practice.

I have been assuring you of the continuity from their beginning of these two foundational structures. They prove now to be more than ever exquisitely suited to our present needs. For psychotherapy practice and training within the past 10 to 12 years have undergone unprecedented change, and from many quarters. Unavoidable, of course, because our province and country and world is contending with a global enormity of change.

A most important change is that the practice of psychotherapy and therefore its training has been regulated in Ontario since April of 2015. No one may hold themselves out as practicing psychotherapy unless they have met the training requirements set by the College of Registered Psychotherapists.

This has made for untallied hours and years of alteration on the part of the faculty, in particular Susan Wood our Registrar. And it is here to stay. A huge step from running a program ourselves to answering to a huge overseer. A veritable sea change.

We also find during this period increasing diversity among applicants to CTP. A reflection of what has been occurring in our city and country, and therefore among people seeking psychotherapy. We are grateful that this is happening. We are also aware of the challenge it brings for all of us.

Change is inevitable in human life. It has many faces: it renews us, gifts us, stretches us into wider worlds. It also takes away, can be bruising even brutal, destabilizes, brings us sorrow.

Training programs ask for transformative change from their students. So that they can bring healing, that is, (I quote here the Scope of Practice), "delivered through a psychotherapeutic relationship based primarily on verbal or non-verbal communication." Conversation, that is!

The College definitely addresses the need for diversity. The first competencies it sets forth as to what knowledge psychotherapists must integrate goes on in stupefying detail. Part (c) for instance requires “knowledge of the psychological significance of spiritual, moral, social, emotional, cognitive, behavioural, sexual, gender, and biological development.”

A few years ago when I was lecturing on Carl Jung, I put the above list on the board because it included a newcomer, ‘spiritual’, in its list. I said that Jung had confronted psychology and later psychoanalysis for excluding spirituality from its studies into human experience, despite its importance from the dawn of time.

One of the students, it was Ted Foy, said, “Philip McKenna wrote that.” I told him I didn’t think that was accurate. Later I told Philip McKenna about this and he said, “Yeah, I wrote it.” So I had to relay this exchange to the next lecture!

By the way, for those of you who may not know, Philip was on the Transitional Council that set up the College of Registered Psychotherapists over the course of 6 years. He had therefore to distance himself from the faculty of his own training program to avoid conflict of interest.

Many people nowadays say that they are ‘spiritual’ (‘though not religious!’). Spirituality has come out of its cramped and phobic quarters, and into the vastness and dimensionality that identifies it, and to what we ourselves mean by the word; in so doing, bringing about a kind of deliverance.

I want to end by telling you what happened last Sunday on the last day of our vacation at Thornbury. I was going through emails and came upon a saying written in the second century by Irenaeus, bishop of Lyons. It is often cited: “The glory of God is the human being fully alive.”

A little while later I walked out on the pier leading into Georgian Bay for a farewell look at its beauty. People were on the beach with their cars and children. While I was coming back a group of kids running and jostling and giggling came onto the pier. And behind them came their little brother running in the sort of drunken way toddlers do. He seemed to me to be between 2 and 3 years old. He was dressed in a Superman outfit, cape included. I can still see his small face—he was talking, smiling hugely, right in there where it was all happening. Blissful! His parents were behind him bringing up the rear.

I thought of people who would say they were fostering an illusion in their little boy. Then I thought, Well, this little boy wouldn’t be acting this way if he was all alone, or among strangers, would he? So he seemed to know something very important. As for me, I felt I was glimpsing a small and unique self coming alive.

Oh, I didn’t mention the title of this talk! It is, “How to explain to your friends why it will take you 6 years to learn how to get a good conversation going.” I hope you have found this helpful.