

**Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association Conference
Halifax, NS, Friday, May 17, 2013 Location: Commonwealth B 10:45 am**

Session Information:

**Giving Voice to the Skeptic: The Journey Continues
With An Introduction to Internal Family System Therapy**

It has been my experience that giving voice to my skepticism about my favoured therapeutic model has enhanced my efforts toward a healthy therapeutic alliance with my clients.

IFS therapy is also known as “parts” therapy; it is considered one of the most innovative psychotherapeutic approaches to emerge in recent years.

The skepticism which has value leads one to further study and investigation and herein lies the spirit of this session. Time will be provided for discussion, to give voice to your skeptic.

Presenter Introduction for Ken Hundert:

Ken Hundert left Toronto in 1980 and worked at the World Trade Centre in Manhattan for 10 years and then in Chicago for 18 years until 2008; he worked in the world of International Logistics. He earned his MA in Psychology in 1999 while fulfilling his duties as a Vice President for the 11th largest shipping country in the world.

Ken became a Certified Canadian Counselor in 2006 and returned to his hometown, Toronto, in 2009. In 2011, he was awarded Volunteer of the Year at Yorktown Family Services, for his work at their Walk-In clinic.

Ken has a private practice and works with individuals and couples who are overwhelmed with feelings and/or thoughts; he has a non-pathologizing orientation and considers his practice to be an “ATM” (Alternative to Medication).

Ken also has a MA in Political Science, Latin American Studies. He thought that earning two MA's would be a novel way to resolve his attachment issue.

Welcome, Bienvenue; Thank you for being here; thank you for your curiosity.

When I was in my early 20's, a relationship had just ended and I decided to drive to Quebec City...from Toronto. At 3 in the morning, I was driving through Trois Rivieres; the highway was empty, the roads wet; I noticed an old barn-like structure to the right with a dim light in the front yard and a sign was posted. It read, "Fresh Pain". I thought to myself, "No thanks, I got enough".

It took me a few minutes to realize it was a bilingual sign for "Fresh Bread".

My presentation will be divided into 5 parts:

1.0 "Towards" an Understanding of Self

2.0 An Introduction to Internal Family Systems (also known as "parts" therapy).

3.0 Reflecting on my Self and Practice in Relation to my Father

4.0 Giving Voice to the Skeptic: The Journey Continues

5.0 Discussion

The goals of my presentation are:

1. To honour the ethical requirement of our profession: ongoing learning.

2. To introduce a relatively new model of therapy, Internal Family Systems

3. To introduce a new metaphor for the mental health practitioner:

The Therapist as Concert Master

I would like to open with a recording of a piano piece called, Peace Piece composed by Bill Evans. Before I start the recording, please take a moment to be more fully present, however you do that-

While the music plays, please notice any feelings and/or thoughts and/or body sensations or any visual representations that are evoked by the music.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r0iZ1j00wSU>

Unresolved melodic tensions abound in Peace Piece; for me the melody is a calming accompaniment, when I am feeling the tension evoked by the unknown...that curious

place between theory and practice.

I closed my last year's presentation with the following:

The relationship with a client often takes us into the unknown. I believe in these moments there is an opportunity to be a "therapist a la concert master" and practice what Keats called "negative capability": Keats defined negative capability as the ability "of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason."

The following day, Dr. Judith Jordan used the same quote within her closing keynote address.

What were the chances that two people in Calgary would be using a quote of Keats from 1817 on consecutive days?

A part of me wanted to stand up and say...Hey, I closed my presentation with that quote! I am "with" you!

The quote seems to be a destination for anyone on a journey to understand the meaning of Self...within and in relation to a client.

This is my journey...

1.0 Towards an Understanding of Self

In 1974, I was awarded a joint scholarship from the Canada Council in cooperation with the Foreign Area Fellowship Programme (sponsored by the Social Science Research Council) for my Masters Degree in Political Science, Latin American Studies. The scholarship provided for my tuition, language training in Guatemala for two months and one month of preliminary research in Peru and then after my course work, 3 months of field research in Peru. My thesis title was, The Peruvian Revolution, A Case Study of the Sugar Cooperatives on the North Coast of Peru. I was intrigued by what was going on in Peru; there had been a military coup in 1968 and one of their first acts was to nationalize the International Petroleum Company which was owned by Rockefeller and that was followed by the nationalization of foreign owned sugar estates. The military proclaimed they were carrying out a "revolution", "ni capitalista, ni comunista". As a student of Latin American Studies, all the acts and proclamations of the military were contradictions of a coup d'etat; a military government usually took over to preserve the status quo which meant protecting the interests of the landed oligarchy, the church and foreign interests. The Peruvian military's main opposition to their "revolution" was a political party, APRA, whose main base of support were the workers on the sugar estates. The Military told these workers, "you don't need unions because you are now the owners". My thesis was to examine the transition from union workers to "owners";

it seemed to me that the transition within the sugar cooperatives could be used as a looking glass into the Peruvian Revolution. I bought a tape recorder; I used it for one interview and never used it again (except to listen to my one cassette, Band on the Run by Paul McCartney and Wings). Upon reflection, this was my first understanding of the notion of safety in interpersonal relations; there was a military government representative on the cooperative and here I was interviewing workers with a tape recorder; the fear of the "cooperative" worker was palpable. This was a profound lesson about the notion of safety, when requesting an expression of feelings.

Peru was part of what was commonly known as the Third World: I recoiled at the term "third world". It served to suggest there were no links to the so called 1st and 2nd worlds. My studies taught me about the importance of external factors. There were external factors determining the development and/or lack of development in South America, particularly in the context of foreign ownership of natural resources. When changes occur within a country, they can have an impact on foreign interests. This is similar to being sensitive to a client's external world and whether there is support for changes. This was also the beginning of my understanding of systemic process.

The writing of my thesis was a marathon filled with anxiety. I developed what was known back then as "writer's block" or "intellectual paralysis". I was given a lot of money to write my thesis; it had to be the best.

I had no problem going to a therapist; I needed help. I was desperate. I remember one day being alone in my apartment with my all my notes, articles, books scattered on the floor and desk; it was raining hard; my only sense of security was physical shelter. Ironically, I was "flooded".

I believe the most important factor which got me past my writer's block was changing the title. I changed it from The Peruvian Revolution: A Case Study of the Sugar Cooperatives on the North Coast of Peru to: **Towards** an Understanding of the Peruvian Revolution: A Case Study of the Sugar Cooperatives on the North Coast of Peru. "**Towards** an Understanding..." seemed to release me from writing the definitive paper on the "revolution". And more relief came from a recognition of inevitable "unanticipated consequences" from the military's actions, which no one could possibly know.

25 years later, in 2001, there was a New York Times letter to the editor, in response to an article about Peru: S. Lopez a Sociologist at the Catholic University of Peru wrote: "It would take all the analytical skills of all the social sciences combined to explain the way Peru acts."

Reading this quote seemed to make me feel less anxious about my capabilities; 25 years earlier I was trying to do the impossible but I didn't know it.

What's SELF got to do with all of this...

There are thousands of books and articles with theories and perspectives about the Self. I have taken the liberty of amending the Lopez's quote about Peru, to make a conclusion about SELF:

It would take all the skills of philosophers, artists of all genres, neuroscientists, psychologists, social workers and others to explain what constitutes the Self.

My clients have expressed their Self as, "trusted source", "soul", "my being", "centre", "core", "healthy ego", "consciousness", "my drop down place", "spirit", "me", "internal self helper".

I believe Bob Dylan had a sense of Self in his song, Forever Young. "May you have a strong foundation when the winds of change blow"; he understood SELF as a "foundation".

Yesterday, in Sylvie's address, she said:

"Only once you have cleaned up your basement, you have access to the foundation."

Despite the complexity of SELF, Richard Schwartz, the founder of the Internal Family Systems model proposes a clear understanding of SELF.

2.0 An Introduction to Internal Family Systems Therapy (also known as "parts" therapy)

In 1999, I completed a MA in Psychology with a Professional Counseling Specialty, at the Illinois School of Professional Psychology (now known as Argosy). The Schwartz and Nichols book on Family Therapy was required reading for the course, Marriage and Family Counselling.

Within this book, the Internal Family Systems model had a relatively small section, along with other integrative models. It was around that time, I learned of an annual IFS conference held at Northwestern University.

I went to the conference; there was an intriguing panel discussion regarding South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission and its approach to both healing the wounds of apartheid and bringing justice to its perpetrators. There was an effort by the panel of which two were from South Africa to demonstrate the parallels of the Commission, with the IFS model. I was particularly interested in the Commission's efforts to hear the stories of the perpetrators. Subsequently, I wanted to learn more about Internal Family Systems.

The Internal Family Systems Model (IFS) has evolved over the past thirty years into a comprehensive approach that includes guidelines for working with individuals, couples, and families. The IFS Model represents a synthesis of two already-existing paradigms: systems thinking and the multiplicity of the mind. It brings concepts and methods from the structural, strategic, narrative and Bowenian schools of family therapy to the world of subpersonalities. This synthesis was the natural outcome which evolved after Schwartz began hearing from his clients about their inner lives. He was able to set aside preconceived notions about therapy and the mind, and began to really listen to what his clients were saying and what he heard repeatedly were descriptions of what they often called their "parts" -- the conflicted subpersonalities that resided within them. He began to see patterns which came to be known as the internal family system.

The following are the words of the Portuguese writer and poet, Fernando Pessoa, 1888 – 1935, who was one of the first 20th century writers to address a sense of multiplicity of self. Power, 2007:

"My soul is a hidden orchestra; I know not what instruments, what fiddlestrings, harps, drums and tambours I sound and clash inside myself. All I hear is the symphony" (Power, 2007, p.187).

Schwartz wrote an article in the family therapist journal, Networker, in 1987 entitled, "Our Multiple Selves". He opened with a quote by Pulitzer Prize Winner: Douglas Hofstadter:

"Which one of the many people who I am, the many inner voices inside of me, will dominate? Who, or how, will I be? Which part of me decides?"

What are "parts"?

Parts are sub-personalities or aspects of our personality that interact internally in sequences and styles that are similar to the ways that people interact

Parts may be experienced in any number of ways: thoughts, feelings, sensations, energy

All parts want something positive for the individual and will use a variety of strategies to gain influence within the internal system.

*This relates to what Ungar said within his keynote address:

"An adaptive coping strategy that works well at one point in time may not be so good later in life."

Parts develop a complex system of interaction among themselves:
polarizations develop as parts try to gain influence within the system

The Internal Family Systems model describes three major groups of subpersonalities – parts- that are common to all individuals: **Exiles, Managers and Firefighters**

Exiled parts

When a person has been hurt, humiliated, frightened, or shamed in the past, he or she will have parts that carry the emotions, memories, and sensations from those experiences. Managers often want to keep these feelings out of consciousness and, consequently, try to keep vulnerable, needy parts locked away; these incarcerated parts are known as exiles. If a part is exiled, it can become increasingly extreme and desperate in an effort to be cared for and get their story told.

In 2000, my first client during my practicum was a woman who was married and had young children. She reported that her husband had come home the other day and said, "I don't love you anymore". She wanted to know what was wrong with him...if he was having a mid-life crisis? After a couple of sessions, I said... I'm curious...where do you hold your feelings? She said, "a butterfly jar", (mason's jar). I asked if she had holes in the top for them to breathe? She replied, "No." I suggested she would likely have some difficult times, if we were to allow her feelings to breathe, if we were to put holes in the top of the jar. She was alright with that. After a couple of weeks of witnessing her feelings, she wanted to duct tape the holes because she was having difficult nights; she wanted to deal with the disturbing feelings, after her kids went to college

I asked her on her last day, where she was now keeping her feelings: she replied, "in a jewelry box". At the very least, she now considered her feelings valuable. She provided me with a wonderful example of "exiled parts" on a journey home.

Managers

Managers are parts that run the day to day life of the individual; they attempt to keep the individual in control of every situation and relationship in an effort to protect parts from feeling any hurt or rejection.

Firefighters

Firefighters are parts that react when exiles are activated; their actions are an effort to control and extinguish exiled feelings. To control and extinguish feelings, a firefighter may employ drugs, alcohol, self mutilation-cutting, binge-eating...

Firefighters have the same goals as managers –to keep exiles away- but have different strategies.

Both Managers and Firefighters can be considered "protectors" or "guardians".

IFS' understanding of Self:

The SELF is a different level of entity than the parts; when differentiated, the SELF is competent, secure, self-assured, relaxed and able to listen and respond to feedback... The IFS model considers everyone has a Self, with inherent qualities including:

Compassion Calm Curiosity Creativity Connectedness Courage Confidence Clarity

I would like to emphasize...

The empowering aspect of the model is that everyone has a Self. Self is not lost due to an early attachment problem or growing up with an alcoholic Father or having an abusive spouse or other experiences of trauma. Like the sun and clouds, the SELF gets obscured but is always there.

I would like to briefly relate a case which demonstrates how a client was able to access her Self to compassionately witness a past trauma (exiled feelings).

A woman in her mid 20's presented with what she described as "social anxiety"; after three sessions, she revealed that she was sexually abused when she was seven.

One major goal of IFS therapy becomes helping the client differentiate the SELF to the point that the protective parts can begin to trust it again. This process could proceed rapidly or could take months.

I was privileged to witness my client visualizing young vulnerable parts (of different ages) taking walks in lush green valleys and along river banks near her Asian town or being in her home, with her Family. Each successive session provided a safe space for her vulnerable parts to gain trust in her Self.

After a few months of deepening trust in our relationship and the growing trust of her protector parts with her SELF, my client witnessed herself as a 7 year old at the door of her bedroom watching her abuse.

This client's experience seemed to confirm IFS's understanding that a person is organized to protect the SELF at all costs. Thus, in the face of trauma or intense emotion, the parts separate the SELF, from sensations of their body. If the fear or pain is strong enough, people report feeling as if their SELF is taken all the way out of their body to protect it from harm.

In other survivor's descriptions, the Self, rather than remaining to observe, is moved to a safe limbo like place where it is oblivious to what is happening. This suggests why people are frequently amnesic to traumatic or highly intense events. The seat of consciousness- the SELF- is elsewhere.

The main point here is that whenever the SELF is not functioning effectively, it is NOT because the SELF is defective, immature, or inadequate, as some other models assume. The IFS SELF has all the necessary qualities for effective leadership., but is constrained by parts that are afraid to differentiate fully from it. It is understood that severe genetic defects or brain injuries can render a person's physiology unable to "house this system" but Schwartz has found they are able to find their parts and relate to them differently.

When the woman who had been abused encountered her 7 year old, she was overwhelmed with feelings...crying for her Mother; drawing on past experiences in our work, when she was overwhelmed by a memory -an exile- she was able to differentiate and be in SELF; she could compassionately be present with her 7 year old's feelings. She did this by focused breathing and channeling her breathe to her chest, where she had reported experiencing the intense memory.

The session was nearing its end; she still seemed overwhelmed, vulnerable. The situation was new for me; I stayed in Self...asking my worried parts to step back, to trust me; I suggested to my client...that if it felt alright with her...to compassionately rest her hands on her chest where she had reported the trauma was being held; she did and after a few minutes, she was calm and reported feeling safe.

On the day we ended six months of collaboration, she gave me a gift of words; she said, "I have more confidence and less fear". To this collaboration, I would add, "me too".

What are the overall goals of IFS therapy?

To achieve balance and harmony within the internal system

To differentiate and elevate the Self so it can be an effective leader in the system

When the Self is in the lead, the parts will provide input to the Self, but will respect the leadership and ultimate decision making of the Self

All parts will exist and lend talents that reflect their non-extreme intention

The importance of "knowing thyself" in IFS terms is "know thy parts" lest they interfere with the therapeutic relationship. As therapists we will get triggered by our client's parts. Disclosure to your client is on a case by case basis. It is important for the therapist to work with triggered parts in consultation with a supervisor and/or peers; triggered parts provide learning and healing potential for the therapist.

The role of therapist in IFS is to facilitate; not to give interpretations, insights, wisdom. Clients have all the wisdom they need inside of themselves.

The IFS model interprets “resistance” as a safety issue for the client. Resistance suggests a protective “part” is not feeling safe.

The two cases demonstrate one of two distinctive IFS therapeutic techniques for working with inner parts: “insight (similar to Jung’s “active imagination”), in which the client’s observing Self is asked to focus on a part and describe “what’s going on”

The other technique is Direct Access whereby the therapist talks directly to one or more parts.

Techniques other than conversation of which I am familiar are authentic movement and when working with children...using drawings, clay, puppets...

3.0 My Father's Influence on my Self and Practice

My Father worked hard; he owned a restaurant called Charlie's Coffee Shop at King and John, in Toronto. He was up every morning six days a week at 5:30 and came home 'round 6:30 except 3:00 on Saturday's. I would often wake up to the smell of a Phillip Morris cigarette which wafted into my bedroom.

I would help out at the restaurant on Sunday's in preparation for the coming week...filling hundreds of take-out coffee cups with one spoonful of sugar; having one spoonful of sugar in a coffee cup would help during the busy noon hour. That's how busy it was...; My Father was the cook; my Mother was the sole waitress from 10 until 3:00 from Monday to Friday. There was a man named Johnny who was the dishwasher and when he didn't show up or was too drunk to work and it was the summer, I was often called to help out.

This following story was written circa 1982; I was 32 and 18 years prior to my MA in Psychology and prior to my training in IFS...

My Father is Driving

My father is driving. I am sitting next to him, with the morning newspaper, on my lap. He is driving me to a friend's home. Every Sunday morning, my father goes to a club for steam and cards. He had offered me a lift, which would take him just a few minutes out of his way. It had been many years, since I'd been in a car, with my father.

We move out of the underground parking and into the sun's glare; fearful memories of my father's driving are conjured. I remember my father tailgated but worse was his reaction to a driver who would cut in front of him. He would become obsessed with getting back at the offender by maneuvering, like a Grand Prix race driver; he'd get in

front of the offender, put on his turn signal, go into the turn and without warning, brake hard. The sound of the offender's breaks seem to pacify him. He would finish the turn and move slowly down the street, glancing at the "bastard", in the rear view mirror. I was too young to know if he was justified for swearing, not to mention putting me in harm's way. We, well...he never had an accident but it is likely he often caused damage, somewhere down the line of traffic.

My father is driving. I remember my first time playing catch with my Dad; kinda like a Rockwell painting albeit with a quiet fear on the boy's face. My father was seemingly not interested in showing me how to throw or catch. He wanted to show me how good he could throw; he would throw hard and powerful curve balls; a few whispered by my forehead. It is good to know life can throw a curve ball or two but is that a lesson to be taught at seven?

My father is driving. I loved hockey as a kid; I couldn't wait until "Hockey Night in Canada" came on the television. I was a serious Leaf fan. When my Dad asked me who won a game, I would excitedly say, "The Leafs"; his response was curious. There seemed to be something else going on. He asked the score. To me, they won; that was enough. I learned much later in life that he wanted to know the score to determine if he had won his bet. Winning the bet was determined by the number of goals by which a team had won.

Being in a car with my Father in my younger days, trying to catch curve balls or my passion for the Leafs and hockey did not bring my Father and I closer. It was the opposite; we were being driven apart.

The streets that morning are Sunday quiet. I had been home for my first time, since moving from Toronto to Manhattan, a year before. My Father did not ask about my life, in Manhattan. I was accustomed to him not asking about my life.

During my few day in Toronto, I visited with old friends and their babies. A last visit with my friend, "Sherm" and then I would take a taxi to the airport. I am looking forward to talking with Sherm. We had been friends in public school; I still remember the pornographic pictures he showed me, when we were twelve. We had lost contact, for many years, until we met in a subway station, during our university days. We went for coffee; a common bond seemed to be the emotional distance we had with our fathers.

My Father is driving; my Father breaks the silence, a few blocks from Sherm's. "Would you come with me to the cemetery, to my Dad's grave?" It was September, the time of year when people of Jewish faith go to the cemetery and remember. My grandfather had died eighteen years earlier, when I was twelve. I remember my Family -my two older brothers, my mother and father and I - arrived early at the funeral home; we were so early that the casket was open. No one had talked to me about death; I was only

told, "Zaide died of poor circulation". My twelve years on the planet had not prepared me for witnessing a dead person. My hysteria was calmed, after the casket was closed.

I turn and look at my father, going over the question in my head, "Would I go with my father to the cemetery, to his father's gravesite?" Time wise, it is logically impossible. Impossible. My friend was expecting me, in a few minutes. I had to get to the airport. I stare at the windshield; I feel stunned. I find myself whispering, "Damn you, Damn you". My voice grows louder, "Damn you, damn you". I begin to hit the dashboard, with the folded newspaper, in sync with the "damn you's". My father slows to the side of the road. My "damn you's" slow too, however they do not stop. My astonishment was similar to that of Butch Cassidy, when the posse kept showing up, after he and Sundance were sure they had lost them. "Who are those guys?", Butch asked. Same kind of wonderment, with me. What are those, "Damn you's" and from where did they come? I swallow hard thinking the cure for "damn you's" might be the same as it is for hiccups. I feel the veins at the side of my head pulsate. I'm thinking, I am too old for my father to hit me. I half turn to my father and plea, "You know I am going to Sherm's for breakfast and my flight is at noon. How can you ask me what you did?" My Father defensively says, "I didn't know your schedule". I think, "Damn you" but with the force of a "damn you", I say, "You did, you did! I told you but you didn't listen. Remember, you asked about taking me to the airport"?

A look of surprise and defeat crosses my father's face. "O.K., so you can't go" and he starts up the car.

There is a strong silence as we finish the drive to Sherm's. I look at the folded paper thinking it is evidence of some kind of crime. We arrive and I take my bags from the back seat. "Thanks, Dad." His response is a wounded look. I find my anger dissolving. "Drive carefully, Dad". Walking away from the car and up to the steps, my legs are like a colt trying to stand for the first time.

Sherm opens the door. When he sees my heavy eyes, he asks, "What happened"? I soberly reply, "My father was driving and we had an accident. It's been coming for years."

This story demonstrates the actions of an "angry part", an extreme angry part which overwhelmed, blended, flooded my internal system; the anger blended/flooded my Self (IFS' understanding).

In IFS language, the anger is the "protector" of exiled feelings: my exiled feelings were disappointment and sadness, a sense of being invisible, in relation to my Father.

In IFS language, I spoke from my anger rather than the preferred "for my angry part".

Postscript to the story...

In my younger days, when my Father was withdrawn for one reason or another, I heard my Mother say, "Oh, the wounded individual".

I returned to New York; there was no contact with my parents for a month or so. I phoned. My Father answered the phone, "Hello". What I said next was not planned; it just came out, "Is this the wounded individual"? There was a silence; my Father asked in a tone which suggested he knew it was me. "Who's calling?" I don't remember the rest of the conversation but it went well.

Reflecting on this phone call, I like to think that I inadvertently was demonstrating compassion, with a whisper of humour, for an exiled part of my Father, a part that had not been witnessed in a manner different than what I felt as my Mother's contempt. That call was the beginning of a new relationship, with my Father; the score of anything no longer mattered.

Compassionate Nudging

On a morning of April of 2001, my Father had a mild stroke. One of his arms was somewhat paralyzed. He went down to the car with my Mother. My Mother helped him with the steering wheel out of the parking lot. They drove to his doctor, who was nearby. The GP told him he should go to the hospital. A couple of days later, I arrived from Chicago; a doctor at the hospital told me that I should expect, "exponential deterioration". I'll never forget those words, "exponential deterioration". I guess that was his way to prepare me for the worst. Earlier, my Father had test after test; he developed a pain in his back. He had never known back pain. The pain was excruciating; it took close to 10 minutes of cajoling to permit the raising of his bed a few inches, so he could drink some water. Every little raise of the bed brought a yelp of pain, which I never heard before. But he needed water.

Some time later, the "pain team" of doctors arrived. They were flummoxed. I remember one of the doctors pricking my Dad's foot with a needle and asking my Dad, "Do you feel this?" My Father replied in a kinda "fuck off" syntax, "Yeh, I feel it".

After the pain team left, I asked my Father if he would try anything? He said, "yes". I had recently finished my IFS training which guided me to understand "extreme parts" believe they are serving to protect. My Mother had suggested that his back pain was likely the result of a body maneuver during one of his tests. Consequently, I thought that his back pain was protecting him from being moved again, moved for another test.

I asked my Father to close his eyes and to envision what was happening in his back. My Dad was not inclined to speaking with metaphors. He said, "It is like a volcano, with lava". I said, "Dad, I believe the volcano and lava are doing a good job of keeping you

still, keeping you from being moved for more tests. I said, "I love you Dad"; I reassured him that no one is going to move him. I felt that the pain was draining all his energy. I asked him if he would thank the volcano for all its work? In a young voice, he said, "thank you volcano". I again reassured my Dad that he wouldn't be moved again; I asked him to respectfully ask the lava to go away. In the same young voice he said, "go away lava". I stayed silent for a couple of minutes. I then asked my Father if he wanted to rest; he said, "o.k." I left the room.

(Aside: Gabor Mate was just completing his book, "When the Body Says, No").

Ten minutes later, I looked in on him. He had rolled over to his side and was sleeping comfortably.

I understand that this was an exceptional and optimal therapeutic moment and relationship; many years before, I inadvertently extended compassion to my Father. In his own way my Dad provided me with some confidence on my journey to become a therapist and some evidence of "protectors" doing what "they" believe is best. With most clients, I am not telling a client what to do with a part (as I did with my Father...directing him to "thank the volcano", to ask the lava "to go away"), I would ask the client what he or she thinks would be best at this uncertain time?

My Father died two days, after he asked the volcano and lava to go away. I feel fortunate that I was able to help my Father have some peace, in his final days.

The transformed relationship with my Father has guided me to believe that one is never too old to learn, to change relationships within and without; there is hope.

4.0 Giving Voice to my Skeptic: The Journey Continues

During my level 1 training in 2000, I found myself to be agitated at times, but not smart enough and patient enough to learn more about this "part" of me. Eventually, I listened to this agitation. My Skeptic part has evolved from defensiveness to being more investigative, more curious; a healthy skepticism.

Initially my skeptic part was evoked by the spiritual aspect of IFS and a missing "part" of the IFS metaphorical orchestra.

In his book, Internal Family Systems, Schwartz uses the metaphor of an orchestra to convey the way parts and Self operate. In Schwartz's orchestra, the individual musicians are analogous to the parts, and the conductor is the Self. (IFS Therapy, p. 39).

While preparing for an IFS workshop which took me to the intersection of philosophy and psychology, I had a dream about a concert master. It was puzzling to me that the concert master was not part of the IFS orchestral metaphor. The dream resulted in my writing a short story, Concert Master Finds a Permanent Home; it is a fictional account of a concert master, written by a fictional music critic for the New Yorker magazine. Within the story, the concert master is offered the conductor's baton on a "blue moon" night but he refused; he lead the orchestra from his concert master seat.

A couple of years after my concert master story, I learned of an orchestra which does not have a conductor. That orchestra is known as Orpheus and resides in Manhattan. In 2006, I was reading the Economist and I was excited to find an article (8/3/06) about Orpheus entitled, "Headless"; the article opened with a quote from an Orpheus musician:

"This part is always screwed up with a conductor, but we've played it perfectly twice," concludes Leon Fleisher during a recent Orpheus Chamber Orchestra rehearsal of Beethoven's "Emperor" Concerto. "This is proof that conductors should just sit down." In the dictatorial world of orchestras- where conductors choose the repertoire, organize rehearsals and tell musicians how to play-Orpheus is fond of proving that it thrives without a baton.

And then a year later, I found a review in the Chicago Tribune 6/8/07 of an Orpheus performance. The following are excerpts:

Who needs a conductor anyway? Since its founding in 1972, the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra has proved that a collective musical mind is perfectly capable of producing as high a performance level as somebody waving a stick.

No doubt about it, playing without a conductor can be a risky proposition for even the most skilled group of musicians. But the unfettered energy of Orpheus is not achieved at the expense of polish, and the sheer personality and wealth of insights these alert musicians bring to their performance triumphantly refute the notion that all musical truth and wisdom flows from a conductor's baton.

Subsequently I learned that Pinkas Zukerman and The National Arts of Canada Orchestra took 4 years to find a concert master.

The role of a concert master is significant (and yet he/she was left out of Schwartz's "orchestra").

In my ongoing synchronicity with the concert master, I learned last year that Martin Short's Mother was the first Concert Master with the Hamilton Philharmonic Orchestra and you might find this hard to believe, I client of mine's Father had been a concert master.

Slowly and after considerable reflection, I was coming to believe the metaphor of a concert master can inform the mental health practitioner.

More support came from an article in the Globe and Mail on Aug. 23 2012 by Anne McIlroy: The article was about a “frontal lobe” conference which meets every 10 years; within the article the following appeared:

The frontal lobes are implicated in a number of disorders, including depression, attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder and schizophrenia. Researchers will report on new approaches to understanding, diagnosing and treating these illnesses.

Dr. Stuss says many researchers once saw the frontal lobes as the boss of the brain, the conductor that orchestrated other parts. But that view is shifting, he says. It is now seen as more like part of a chamber orchestra that works with the rest of the brain to integrate thought, behaviour and emotions.

Ah, scientific support for my intuitive feeling...regarding the concert master therapist.

I'll get back to the concert master as therapist in a few minutes.

I would like to continue with more of my Skeptic's voice in relation to the premises of the model-

No doubt, IFS is a hopeful model of human nature. It is non-pathologizing; no labels. Conflicting perspectives have their source in the “nature/nurture” debate...

In describing qualities of Self, Schwartz writes...:

“ It is that oceanic state that seems so difficult to describe...; As I sifted through various adjectives to capture my observations, I repeatedly came up with words that begin with the letter C, hence the 8 c's of self-leadership.

Anthony Storr, a psychiatrist (in Solitude) expressed limitations on being in Self.

He writes:

Perfect happiness, the oceanic feeling of complete harmony between inner and outer worlds, is only transiently possible. (Anthony Storr, 1988, p. 202).

Schwartz encourages an oceanic state which Anthony Storr suggests is only transiently possible. So, I can say (based on my experiences) IFS and its notion of Self is clinically useful. But...encouraging clients to strive to be in Self (to attain self-leadership) on a daily basis seems to be unrealistic and could be a source of frustration...continually falling short. I think “once in a blue moon” is more of a universal than inherent qualities of Self. Both essentialists and constructivists are right.

Post-modern therapists have trouble accepting Schwartz's meta-theory of the Self (irrespective of the role of his clients in its formation) however they are more accepting of multiplicity. My first experiences as a therapist was at a walk-in clinic. It was there that I was first exposed to "narrative therapy" by a seemingly "missionary" narrative therapist. I felt judged with anything I had to say about IFS.

We had some friendly discussions, which usually left me with the feeling that my approach might be unethical and/or damaging to any client. She was implicitly guiding me to be cautious of the limitations and risks in assuming a meta-narrative like IFS can be or should be generalized and applied across peoples, cultures, situations, or problems. She was suggesting there might be "hidden mechanisms of coercion" and power discrepancies.

Furthermore...assumptions from meta-narratives can inadvertently and convincingly lead us to look for similarities between individuals that create "artificial" categories, types, and classes. They can inhibit our openness to the uniqueness and novelty of each person or group of people and their situation(s), and risk assuming that a perceived likeness is real or valid, depersonalizing the other, missing their specialness, and limiting our and their possibilities.

(After our discussions, I mused that my recorded Skepticism presentations about IFS would provide a defense against being burned at the stake when the revolution brings the "narratives" to power.)

And then, I found an article which left me feeling better...much like that letter I found many years ago which spoke to the complexity of Peru:

The Use of Narrative Therapy and Internal Family Systems with Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse by Bobbi Miller, Jose Cardona and Michael Hardin within the Journal of Feminist Family Therapy.

The article supported integrating both Narrative and an IFS approaches, which heretofore seemed to be problematic.

It seemed to me as time went on...that IFS' notion of Self was more about faith in a Rousseauian human nature (as pointed out by Ruth Hundert, my sister-in-law who has been practicing therapy for over 30 years).

Did I have to ask my "mind to step aside" to be a believer...?
Dick quotes writer Anna Lamott, from her book, Bird by Bird:

"...The rational mind doesn't nourish you... Rationality squeezes out much that is rich and juicy and fascinating".

Well, my Skeptic says, "Gimme a break!" (respectfully, of course).

Philosophic doubt has its wellspring in the rational mind and in contrast to Anna Lamott's assertion, Everett Dean Martin in Thought in Prose enthusiastically asserts:

"...philosophic doubt...is a healthy and cheerful habit. It gives peace of mind." (Richard Beal and Jacob Korg, 1966)

I am not a proponent of the rational over intuition or energy; it seems we evoke a polarization, if we simply suggest one is "richer" or "juicier" than the other. To prove that one or the other is "healthier" or more "cheerful" or provides more "peace of mind" might only require taking the time to find the better quote or look for experiences which supports one or the other.

If we want to find evidence for the efficacy of most models, we can find it. Remember Hegel's observation..."If you want cows to be black, look at them at night". Methodology can determine outcome.

From Schwartz's seemingly anti-rational posture, he suggests that a constraint to working with the IFS model can be "therapists' parts", such as "rational/scientific" parts. Does this position not contradict the assertion that the "non-extreme intention of each part is something positive for the individual"?

Perhaps he should have prefaced "rational scientific parts" with "extreme". In Dick's quest to elevate the heart and body and Self-energy to a healthier place, must the rational be devalued with assertions such as it "...squeezes out much that is rich and juicy and fascinating". Ay, there's the rub!

In the New York Times, 10/ 9/11, Peter Singer reviewed Seven Pinker's book, The Better Angels of our Nature:

He wrote:

"To readers familiar with the literature in evolutionary psychology and its tendency to denigrate the role reason plays in human behaviour, the most striking aspect of Pinker's account is that the last of his "better angels" is reason."

A book by the late Robert Solomon, which has had significant resonance with me was published in 2002. I found it when I was at the intersection of philosophy and psychology, when I was preparing for an IFS workshop. Solomon was a Professor of Philosophy at the University of Texas at Austin; the book is Spirituality for the Skeptic.

Solomon best captures my position:

The idea is to recombine spirituality with science and nature rather than play them off against each other...; spirituality requires not only feeling but thought, and thought requires concepts. Thus spirituality and intelligence go hand in hand. This is not to say that intelligent people are more spiritual, but neither is it to buy into a long tradition of equating spirituality with innocence misconstrued as ignorance..." (Robert Solomon, 2002)

Soul and spirituality find their natural base in...an enlarged and enhanced sense of the compassionate ordinary self. It is our ordinary selves, not some idealized vision of human nature, that naturally seeks community and harmony and embraces the natural world... The most important reason to 'believe' in the soul is not the possibility of life continuing after death but rather the possibility of an essential transformation of the self during life.

Solomon and Schwartz clearly have different views of Self –

Solomon concludes:

"Spirituality, I have come to see, is nothing less than the thoughtful love of life."

Nowhere does the model suggest that it has the "truth" but I am curious about its limits. Healthy skepticism is not anti-thetical to faith ; it is essential to it.

Again Solomon guides correctly,

Rationality, like spirituality, involves the heart as well as the mind (two organs that the Chinese wisely refuse to distinguish and thus treat as a unity, HSIN).

(Robert Solomon, p. 61)

Remember that quote I referenced that Dick used 25 years ago...by the Pulitzer prize winner Hofstadter...who supported "multiple selves"...? Flash forward 20 years later, Hofstadter is again being referenced this time by David Brooks in an article, A Partnership of Minds (NYT 7/20/07) who referenced a new book by Hofstadter, "I Am a Strange Loop" in which he suggests Hofstadter "exposes the fallacy of the New Age narcissists who believe they can find their true authentic self by burrowing down into their inner being. He adds, "*There is no self that exists before society*".

The last statement is wholly anti-thetical to Dick's notion of a universal Self, with inherent qualities which exists, "pre" society.

Richard Schwartz clearly and unabashedly dismisses constructivists, in his article, "Releasing the Soul":

The Self of the IFS model is the inner state that the constructivists claim doesn't exist. In this sense, what I am calling the Self is analogous to the Soul, as described in many different spiritual and religious traditions.

These kind of contradictory articles and statements supported my ongoing questioning.

Back to my introduction of my concert master therapist position:

A concert master traditionally is the first violinist who plays the note by which all other musicians tune their instrument. They are also given solos during the performance and they also perform the role of shop steward (the union negotiator) for the orchestra.

There are many "Conductors" (of therapy models); their (Freud, Jung, Schwartz, Erikson, Rogers, White) experiences and education brought them to their insights. In the interests of being authentic, I find it problematic to simply adopt a model with its own concept of Self; my experience guides me to doubt a notion of Self, which is not my own. A particular notion of Self derived from a model can inform me but seemingly more important is to be with the "note" which captures the wisdom of my experiences and education, in collaboration with the wisdom of many "conductors" and lessons learned from clients and colleagues.

The following quote was "music" to the Self of my Skeptic: it clarified for me why there are so many models...

"In a sense, every human construction, whether mental or material, is a component in a landscape of fear because it exists to contain chaos. Thus children's fairy tales as well as adults' legends, cosmological myths and indeed philosophical systems are shelters built by the mind in which human beings can rest, at least temporarily, from the siege of inchoate experience and of doubt.

Yi-FuTuan, Landscapes of Fear (from Patricia Pearson's, Anxiety, Yours and Mine, 2009)

I have no doubt that IFS therapy helps people "...rest, at least temporarily". Many people coming to therapy are disillusioned; they have lost faith in a significant other, religion or have a general overwhelming sense of loss. In these circumstances, I have found that the IFS model does provide hope and in many cases, healing.

I would like to propose the metaphor of "concert master" to be used as a reminder to be "collaborative" and to value knowledge and experiences which resonate within you, when you are with a client "**and**" with colleagues as well. Consider being a concert master-like therapist; consider being skeptical (in an investigative way) of conductors (the experts). It is the ethical thing to do...to keep on learning.

Irvin Yalom advises, we are all "fellow travellers"; to this I would add, we are also "fellow concert masters".

Closing:

Thank you for your presence; thank you very much for witnessing my efforts to be an ethical therapist.

Back to Peace Piece...

Eventually words were put to the opening piano piece and became the song, "Some Other Time". I hope to meet up with you "some other time".

I invite questions and/or comments (request for bibliography) regarding this presentation. Please e-mail: www.unburden@rogers.com