

Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association Conference  
Niagara Falls, Ontario, May 21, 2015

**An Introduction to Internal Family Systems Therapy: An Empowering Framework for Understanding and Treating the Psychological Effects of Trauma**

Location: Great Room C (English – Simultaneous Interpretation) (Intermediate)

Internal Family Systems is a distinctively hopeful model of psychotherapy. Most models consider clients to have deficits or pathology, in response to various kinds of trauma. IFS is different. IFS understands many symptoms of complex trauma are the product of extreme “protective” or “guardian” parts which served the client at the time of the trauma. This perspective reduces the level of fear in both therapists and clients, which in turn reduces extreme symptoms and gives therapist and client more access to Self-leadership; a feeling of safety is enhanced. The model will be introduced in a manner which will encourage reflection on the safe and effective use of self, in relation to the psychological effects of trauma for both the client and practitioner.

Ken Hundert, RP, CCC, MA, Psychology, MA, Political Science, Latin American Studies has a private practice and volunteers at two Toronto walk-in clinics. Ken values humour and healthy skepticism; skepticism which has value leads one to further study and investigation and herein lies the spirit of the presentation

**Presenter Introduction: Ken Hundert**

Ken became a Canadian Certified Counselor in 2006 and a Registered Psychotherapist on April 7<sup>th</sup> of this year.

Ken has two Masters Degrees; an MA in Political Science and an MA in Psychology.

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". I have no fresh bread today; no fresh pain. I hope to provide fresh insights and/or fresh feelings that inspire you to keep on learning and I have a new acronym, IFS.

My presentation will be divided into 4 parts:

1.0 Introduction

2.0 Towards the Safe and Effective Use of Self: Towards an Understanding of Self

3.0 Features of the Internal Family Systems Therapy

4.0 Time for Comments and/or Questions

The goals of my presentation are:

- 1.To honour the ethical requirement of our profession: ongoing learning with reference to the safe and effective use of Self.
2. To introduce a new metaphor for the mental health practitioner: the Concert Master

## 1.0 Introduction

This will not be a powerpoint presentation. I hope the handout will help.

Three years ago in Calgary, the CCPA conference theme was, Reflecting on Self and Practice. My presentation was entitled: Giving Voice to the Skeptic. I closed my 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 practice what the poet 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 –who teaches at the Harvard Medical school-used the same quote of Keats, 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 yesterday! I am *with* you; thanks for giving me a sense of validation. I feel less alone"

The quote of Keats' seems to be a "meeting place" for anyone on a journey to understand the meaning of Self..."within" and "in relation" to a client.

My presentation today includes highlights of my journey.

Back to "negative capability"; at the risk of over-simplifying a complex concept, it means..."Create space for something new". I am respectfully requesting that you-over the next hour- practice negative capability; consider creating space for something new.

The following brief summary of a case at a Walk-In Clinic for Families demonstrates one of IFS's important tenets: "all parts are welcome":

Separated parents brought in their ten year old son Peter, who was often being visited in the night by a frightening creature. I said to Peter that I was curious about the frightening creature and respectfully asked him if he would draw the creature; he went over to a desk to draw.

In the meantime, I spoke with the parents; I respectfully requested that they be curious and compassionate when we engaged the creature in the picture. They were o.k. with that.

Peter brought the picture over; the creature had a striking resemblance to Edward Scissorhands, although Peter had not seen the movie.

Peter spoke on behalf of the monster; I don't remember the details; more important was how each parent seemed to be practicing the notion of "being in Self", with their presence of compassion and their curiosity in the creature.

After some time passed, I said to Peter:

I am curious about how the creature looks now; Peter quickly went to the desk in another part of the room; ten minutes later, he excitedly moved from the desk, picture in hand over his head and exclaimed, "I did surgery"!

The creature lost all its scary parts and the boy felt it would now help him sleep.

Peter seemed to transform his fear after it was witnessed by his parents, from a place of curiosity and compassion. It is likely that his parents' separation might invoke other representations of fear, down the road. For the moment, there was calm and this is often all that we can achieve at a Walk-In clinic.

I would like to play a recording of a piano piece called, Peace Piece composed and played by Bill Evans.

Before playing the music, I would like to invite you to focus on your breath and channel it throughout your body; let your breath be symbolic of your presence, who you are in this moment.

While the music is being played, please notice any feelings and/or thoughts and/or body sensations or any visual representations that are evoked by the music. Safety is most important: If you begin to feel overwhelmed or flooded and there is any fear, please focus on your breathe and be present with the feeling, respectfully telling the feeling or thought or energy that it doesn't need to overwhelm you to be witnessed.

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

I would like to invite a few of you to comment on your experience?

Towards the Safe and Effective Use of Self (SEUS)

Towards an Understanding of Self

SEUS: Registered Psychotherapist (Ontario) but applicable if/when practicing psychotherapy anywhere...

From the Council for Registered Psychotherapists of Ontario:

The Safe and Effective Use of Self in the psychotherapeutic relationship speaks to one of the defining competencies in practicing psychotherapy: the therapist's learned capacity to

understand her/his own subjective context and patterns of interaction as they inform her/ his participation in the therapeutic relationship with the client. It also speaks to the therapist's self-reflective use of her or his personality, insights, perceptions, and judgments in order to optimize interactions with clients in the therapeutic process.

In order to join the College of Registered Psychotherapists, you must have completed a minimum of 30 hours of education and training related to Safe and Effective Use of Self. I hope this session can be counted for one hour.

The foundation for my understanding of Safe and Effective Use of Self was long ago...

In 1974, I was awarded a scholarship from the Canada 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 more months of field research in Peru. My original 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 the military's 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; 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. There was a military government representative on the cooperative and here I was interviewing a worker 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 was disturbed by 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 healthy changes occur within a developing country, it is very likely to 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. My education and experience in Peru 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" or later understood to be, "fear of success". I had no problem going to a therapist; I was feeling 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", with anxiety.

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."

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 bring clarity to complexity beyond my capability.

What's SELF got to do with this...?

There are hundreds of books and articles with theories and perspectives about the Self. I have taken the liberty of amending the Lopez quote about Peru, to make a statement about the meaning of 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".

Perhaps 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 "foundation".

Two years ago at the CCPA conference in Halifax Sylvie Giasson in her keynote, [Depression was not part of my Career Plan](#) said:

*"Only once you have cleaned up your basement, do 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 based on his collaboration with many clients experiencing symptoms of PTSD.

The SELF of the IFS model is –to me-the most significant aspect of the model and during my training it was a source of confusion.

I'll come back to this later on-

## 2.0 An Introduction to Internal Family Systems Therapy

In 1997, I began my Masters in Psychology with a Professional Counseling Specialty, at the Illinois School of Professional Psychology, in Chicago. The Schwartz and Nichols book on Family Therapy was required reading for the course, Marriage and Family Counselling.

Within this book, Richard Schwartz's 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 a 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 curious about the Commission's efforts to hear the stories of the perpetrators of apartheid. Consequently, I wanted to learn more about Internal Family Systems.

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 sub-personalities. 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 sub-personalities that resided within them. He began to see patterns which came to be known as the internal family system.

The Portuguese writer and poet, Fernando Pessoa, 1888 – 1935, was one of the first 20th century writers to address a sense of multiplicity of the mind or in IFS terms, "parts":

*He wrote:*

*"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).*

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.**

**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 seemingly 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 sessions of witnessing her "exiled" feelings, she wanted to duct tape the holes because she was having difficult nights; she wanted to deal with the disturbing feelings but not until her kids went to college. That would be another in about 10 years. Nevertheless we continued albeit ever so more cautiously-**

**This is a good example of how "exiled" feelings can overwhelm the system.**

**I was moving too quickly; I was not respecting her Managers by checking with them if they trusted my client to handle the feelings they had been protecting for years. A valuable reminder.**

**Respect and appropriate pacing has been an ongoing learning experience; we "do" learn from our clients: Recently, a client's protector implicitly suggested that I was moving too quickly; I**

acknowledged his concern and found a way of calming the protector's concern(s) by saying that heretofore we would be taking slow and "sacred steps".

### 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, binge-eating...

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

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

[Plato](#) employed the maxim 'Know Thyself'; Schwartz says to therapists: " Know thy parts", lest they interfere with the therapeutic relationship. Knowing one's parts seems to be pre-requisite for the SEUS

David Pare and Mishka Lysack's paper, Exploring Inner Dialogue in Counsellor Education in the Canadian Journal of Counselling 2006 (vol. 40:3) more or less is guiding students to "know thy parts."

### 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 want to emphasize...

The empowering aspect of the model is the notion 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.

Consequently, one major goal of IFS therapy is 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.

**CASE:**

I would like to briefly speak of 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 had been sexually abused when she was seven.

I witnessed my client internally 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 enhanced a sense of safety, a safe space for protective 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, the protector parts allowed my client to compassionately witness herself as a 7 year old at the door of her bedroom watching the horror of her abuse.

This client's experience seemed to support 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

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 –not trusting- to differentiate fully from it.

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.

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 added, "me too".

### 3.0 My Father and Me: More highlights of my journey to the practice of psychotherapy.

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 wafting into my bedroom.

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

Exercise: when listening to the story, please try to locate the "protector (s)" (manager/firefighter) and consider the exile(s) being protected?

#### 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 brakes seemed 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; very much 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. 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 sharing 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. I had an office on the 29<sup>th</sup> floor of the World Trade Centre with a full view of the Statue of Liberty.

I was working in the field of International Shipping with one of the larger containership companies in the world. I had always wanted to do "something" international. My Father did not ask about my life, in Manhattan. I was accustomed to him not asking about my life.

During my few days 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 twenty 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, "he died of poor circulation". My twelve years of living had not prepared me for witnessing a dead person; my alarm was calmed after the casket was closed.

My Father is driving-

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 logistically impossible. Impossible. My friend was expecting me, in a few minutes. I had to get to the airport. I stare at the windshield; 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 of the "damn you's" 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. 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 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."

Exercise: I'm curious if you can locate the Manager and/or Firefighter; what are the exiled feelings being protected.

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

In IFS language, the anger was acting as a "protector" of exiled feelings:  
I'm curious if anyone would like to comment on the "exiled feelings" which were being protected?

*Upon reflection 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:

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. That call was the beginning of a new relationship, with my Father; the score of anything no longer mattered.

### Compassionate Nudging: about 18 years later...

On a morning in April, 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. My Father developed a pain in his back, in the hospital. - Fresh pain - He had never known back pain. The pain was excruciating; it took close to 10 minutes of cajoling to raise 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 about the pain in his back. 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" tone, "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 Managerial 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 many tests since arriving to the hospital. Consequently, I thought that his extreme 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 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.

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 my clients, I am not telling them 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 later. 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.

Speaking of "hope", Schwartz unabashedly describes himself as a "hope merchant".

More on the Self of the IFS model...

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

He says,

*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.*

Post-modern therapists have trouble accepting Schwartz's meta-theory of the Self (irrespective of the role of his clients in its formation).

My first experiences as a therapist were at a walk-in clinic, in Toronto. It was there when 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 discussions, which usually left me with the feeling that a meta-theory approach might be unethical and/or damaging insofar as there are "hidden mechanisms of coercion" and power discrepancies.

Those with a narrative orientation believe 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.

Postmodern psychotherapists have been likened to "improvisational jazz musicians". IFS therapists are considered similar to a conductor with an orchestra.

I wondered...Could an improvisational jazz musician and a conductor possibly work together?



This question was answered when I found an article within The Journal of Feminist Family Therapy: The Use of Narrative Therapy “ and “ Internal Family Systems with Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse by Bobbi Miller, Jose Cardona and Michael Hardin.

The article supported integrating both Narrative and IFS approaches, which heretofore seemed to be problematic. Aside from the nature/nurture issue, there is the issue of “going to the pain”, to the exiles versus avoiding the stories which do not support the “new” narrative.

Did I have to ask my “mind to step aside” to be a believer...?  
Schwartz 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".*

Au contraire...

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)*

The late Professor Solomon best captures my position in his last book, Spirituality for the Skeptic,

*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.*

These kind of contradictory articles and statements encourage ongoing questioning, investigation.

Where is the concert master?

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. I found it puzzling to me that the concert master was not part of the IFS orchestral metaphor. The dream resulted in my writing a short story; it is a fictional account of a concert master, written by a fictional music critic for the *New Yorker* magazine. Within the story, for the first time, the concert master is offered the conductor's baton on a "blue moon" night but he refused; he led the orchestra from his concert master seat.

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; they also perform the role of shop steward (union negotiator) for the orchestra.

A couple of years after my concert master story, I learned of a chamber orchestra which does not have a conductor. That orchestra is known as Orpheus and resides in Manhattan. And then a couple of years later, 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," This is proof that conductors should just sit down." The article concludes with, "*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.*

A joke from the musicians of Orpheus:

**Q. What is the difference between a symphony orchestra and a freight train?**

**A. The freight train needs a conductor.**

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 was left out of Schwartz's metaphorical "orchestra".

Slowly and after considerable reflection and study, I was coming to believe the metaphor of a concert master can inform and support the mental health practitioner as he/she moves from theory to practice and continuously considers the meaning of Self.

More support came from a 2012 article in the Globe and Mail about a "frontal lobe" conference which meets every 10 years:

*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.*

This was (I interpreted) scientific support for my intuitive feeling about the Self being more like the Orpheus orchestra than an orchestra being led by a conductor.

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. A particular notion of Self derived from a model can inform me but seemingly more important is to be present 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.

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. Consider being a concert master-like therapist; consider being skeptical (in an investigative way) of conductors (the experts).

Irvin Yalom, a psychiatrist and writer of fiction advises, we are all "fellow travellers"; to this I would add, consider being a "fellow concert master therapist".

At this time, I would like to invite questions or comments.

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

**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".**

**Bibliography will be provided upon request: [unburden@rogers.com](mailto:unburden@rogers.com)**

### **Further information (not part of presentation)**

The results from a recent (2013) randomized controlled study, published in the Journal of Rheumatology, show that an IFS-based intervention had positive effects on patients with Rheumatoid Arthritis (RA), reducing pain and depressive symptoms, while improving physical function and self-compassion. The study is the first RC trial to assess the efficacy of IFS on medical patient outcomes.

Quote:

The job of postmodernism is to make us more modest and anxious about our knowledge.

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.

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.

Towards the Safe and Effective Use of Self: Towards an Understanding of Self

In your own words and using "I", please describe how you apply what you know and what you've learned about Safe and Effective Use of Self in your psychotherapy practice. Your response to Part 2 will be evaluated on submission of your application.\*

I did field research in Peru for my MA, Political Science; the experience provided a foundation for ongoing reflection and learning about SEUS in relation to aspects of diversity including race, ethnicity, social class; furthermore, I learned the importance of considering if a client's external world (government, family, friends, workplace, colleagues) is supportive of changes desired by the client.

I completed my practicum (MA, Psychology) and two specific Counselling Skills courses in which I learned about my strengths and weaknesses in relation to SEUS with a diverse population.

Further clarity of SEUS was found within one of my MA, Psychology courses, Professional and Ethical Issues; I concluded my “position” paper with, “Each psychologist supplements but does not violate, the Ethics Code’s values and rules on the basis of guidance drawn from personal values, culture and experience.”

I use the foregoing education and experience to ensure the SEUS in my practice of psychotherapy.