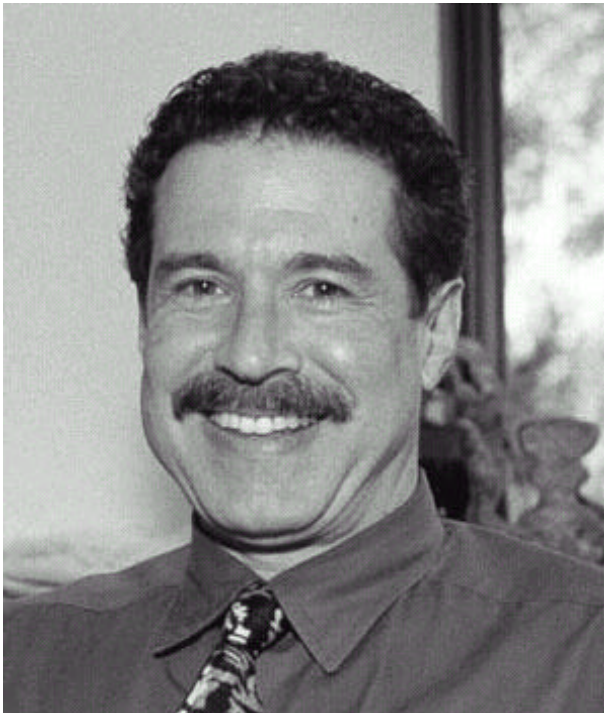


Association of Family Therapists of Northern California

January

2003

Incoming President's Column*



by Robert-Jay Green

For anyone who does not already know our legacy, AFTNC was founded in 1963 and, to our knowledge, is the oldest, longest-running professional association of family therapists in existence. In other words, from the personal perspective of your president, I'm rapidly becoming one of the oldest professionals in one of the oldest professional associations of family therapists in the world! In fact, I joined the association 25 years ago when I moved to the Bay Area to take a job at the Family Therapy Institute of Marin.

At that time, Carlos Sluzki, MD (who was a Senior Research Associate at MRI and a faculty member in the Department of Family Medicine at UCSF) was president of AFTNC, and he warmly introduced me to the local scene. Throughout these 25 years, AFTNC has remained a kind of touchstone for me--connecting me with the local family therapy community, with my early experiences in California,

and with many of my former graduate students. This very personal store of memories, and the chance to "give something back," motivated me to volunteer for the presidency this time. I care deeply about our field and about the unique role of AFTNC in connecting local family therapists. I feel especially honored and lucky to be president during the Association's 40th Anniversary year. We're planning a big AFTNC Birthday Celebration at our annual conference with Monica McGoldrick, on November 15 & 16, 2003.

I think that AFTNC owes its longevity not only to the work of its founders and many leaders since then, but ultimately to the power of an idea that took shape in the mid-1950's. John Weakland, a member of the MRI group that originally formulated the "double bind" concept in 1956, once described the differences between family therapy and all other mental health approaches in terms of its origins in anthropology:

I think it was very important for our work that Gregory Bateson and I were both trained anthropologically.... Psychiatrists, and even psychologists, to a large extent, tend to view the world in terms of pathology. If something looks strange or different, their first thought is that it's some kind of pathology.

Anthropology is different. If you go out into the field in a new society, then every damned thing they do seems strange. You can't get anywhere just by saying "It's all pathological. It's all crazy!" It's your job to make sense out of it, no matter how crazy it looks. This produces a very different slant on the observation of behavior. (Interview with John Weakland, cited in Bassi, 1991, pp. 69-70)

Although family therapy has grown and developed various new schools of thought, I believe that this "anthropological stance" is still the field's single unifying theme, its core idea. Family therapists of all persuasions tend to view problematic behavior as being intelligible and adaptive in the person's primary social contexts. This perspective still tends to set us apart from the mainstream of therapists, who view such behavior from the standpoint of individual

psychopathology as codified in the DSM. This difference has major consequences for how people are perceived and treated. In a chapter on self-fulfilling prophecies, Watzlawick (1984) once quoted Einstein as saying, "It is the theory that determines what we can observe" (p. 101), and then wrote:

The chronic problem that still plagues modern psychiatry is that we have only the vaguest and most general concepts for the definition of mental health, while for the diagnosis of abnormal behavior there exist catalogs perfected to the last detail. (p. 105)

How can therapists possibly see and help clients perceive strengths, solutions, unique outcomes, possibilities, when they are attuned only to problem-saturated ways of perceiving like the DSM?

I believe AFTNC has an important local role to play in this ongoing conflict of perspectives and that we could contribute to the expansion of the contextual view if we were willing to assume more responsibility for mentoring family therapists in the Bay Area. Nowadays, most graduates of our academic programs are forced to take jobs in mainstream mental health care settings. With no support on the job for their interests in family therapy and no supervision to advance their skills, they almost invariably devolve to the mainstream perspective within a few years and lose whatever appreciation of context and narrative they acquired in their family therapy courses.

I would like us to consider expanding the role of AFTNC in providing family therapy training, particularly to professionals in the early stages of their careers. As we all know from personal experience, didactic courses in graduate school are not sufficient for learning to do family therapy (any more than reading a book about swimming is sufficient for learning to swim). Trainees need explicit guidance while they are in the "deep end" of family work or they simply drown. Quality training in family therapy always includes some form of direct observation of the trainee's work over an extended period of time (one year, or more) in the form of reflecting teams, live supervision, videotape/audiotape supervision, or co-therapy with a supervisor in the room. However, over the last 25 years, some of the best family therapy internships locally have retrenched, folded, or become less family oriented because of staff turnover (for example, California Pacific Medical Center's Family Therapy Program closed). There are fewer and fewer excellent sites where one can get ongoing postgraduate supervision ("externships") in couple

and family therapy, and I believe this is a niche that AFTNC would be well suited to fill.

In this regard, I believe that one of AFTNC's main purposes should be to connect the generations of family therapists in the Bay Area, giving the next generation of family therapists a professional home base and the support of more experienced mentors, and giving the older generation of family therapists the gift of self-renewal through "generativity." This is what other senior family therapists (Carol Gammer, Carlos Sluzki) informally provided for me and many other junior members when we started our careers in the Bay Area. I think AFTNC should go about this mentoring more intentionally now.

As possible models, we might look to the Psychotherapy Institute in Berkeley and some of the Psychoanalytic Institutes in San Francisco, which, like AFTNC, are membership organizations that have speaker series and annual conferences. However, they also have postgraduate training programs that enable more experienced members to closely supervise and mentor the newer members, and they organize peer supervision groups too. The exact shape this kind of training might take at AFTNC is a matter for discussion, and we should not underestimate the amount of work involved in such a project. At this point, however, I feel it's an idea worth exploring and hope you will join with me in that discussion.

In closing, I'm very pleased to announce that most members of the Council have accepted the invitation to continue in their previous or new roles: Bart Rubin (as past-president and council member-at-large); Carla Vogel-Stone (as annual conference committee co-chair); Mary Coombs (as videotape librarian); Ryan Kolakoski (as membership committee chair); and Stephanie Brodsky (as Program Committee Chair). I hope that we can all take inspiration from their heroic example over the last several years. Bart and the previous Council reinvigorated our organization and put it on a solid financial footing again. I'm sure that I am expressing the sentiment of the entire organization in giving the previous council members our heartfelt thanks for all of their hard work in keeping AFTNC alive for us.

In addition, several outstanding members have recently accepted our invitation to join the AFTNC council: Anne Bernstein (Newsletter Editor for the next issue); Sam Tabachnik (Treasurer), Robert

"Cam" Cramer (Student Membership Coordinator), and David Celniker (Conference Committee Co-Chair). AFTNC has always depended on the kindness of members to keep the wheels turning, and now is no exception. If you have an interest in being on a particular committee or contributing in any way to the newsletter, please contact me or contact the relevant committee chairs. Mostly the work is fun and does not involve a lot of time, given that we can communicate by email now. Also, from the efforts of Carla Vogel-Stone and her husband Quinn Stone, we will soon have a listserve for members who want to participate in conversations online.

I look forward to seeing you at the upcoming events during this 40th anniversary year and engaging in an ongoing, lively dialogue about what the future of AFTNC should be for the next 40 years!

** references for cited works available on request.*

ROBERT-JAY GREEN, PhD, is in private practice in San Francisco specializing in couples therapy and men's issues. He also is Director of Family/Child Psychology Doctoral Training, California School of Professional Psychology, Alliant International University. TEL: (415) 749-0100, EMAIL: mail@robertjaygreen.com

NEXT AFTNC MEMBERS' MEETING:

"Therapy with families facing catastrophic illness: Building internal and external resources"

*A Sunday Evening with
ELLEN PULLEYBLANK-COFFEY*

Sunday, January 19th, from 7-9 p.m.

Location: 1628 Euclid Ave. Berkeley - located between Cedar and Hilgard (home of Ellen Pulleyblank-Coffey)

In this presentation, Ellen Pulleyblank-Coffey will discuss: (1) the intersection of clinical and spiritual practices when working with families; (2) the usefulness of self-disclosure in working with families facing catastrophic illness; (3) ways of helping families increase their tolerance of pain as they suffer loss and witness the pain of their ill family member; (4) creative adaptations of families including how to

work with extended family members and community groups for support and social action. Ellen is currently seeing a number of families facing catastrophic illness, including children living with the catastrophic illness of their parents. Therapy cases will be presented for discussion.

Ellen Pulleyblank Coffey, PhD, is a family psychologist in private practice in Berkeley and Cummington, MA. She is the co-director of Mental Health Services for the Kosovar Family Professional Education Collaborative in Prishtina, Kosovo. She is an Adjunct Faculty member and Research Fellow at Smith College School for Social Work, Center for Innovative Practice. She is the Co-founder of Sisters, Inc. a program for girls and mentors in Cummington,.

Ellen specializes in community strategies that address family problems. Her current research project is The Community Collaboration for Family Services. Some of her many articles include:

"Sending out the Call: Community as a Source of Healing," Summer 1999.

"Hard Lessons," 1996, The Family Therapy Networker, Vol.20, "No.1.

"You Who You Are: A Community Strategy for Rural Girls," 2000, The Journal of Feminist Family Therapy.

"The Heart of the Matter: The Effects of Managed Care on Family Therapy, Family Process.

"The Symptom is Stillness: Living with and Dying from ALS, A Progressive Neurological Disease" (2001): End of Life Care, Berzoff, J. & Silverman, P (eds.), Columbia University Press.

This event is open to all members and will be hosted by the AFTNC at Ellen's home. For information contact: Stephanie Brodsky at (510) 525-9578.

**AFTNC'S 40th ANNIVERSARY
CONFERENCE**

with
MONICA MCGOLDRICK

NOVEMBER 15 & 16, 2003
(Save these dates!)

October Conference Review

by Sam

Rolland

Recently I attended the most fascinating, educational, and both personally and professionally relevant conference in years, perhaps ever. Dr. Sue Johnson presented her Emotionally Focused Therapy with Couples (EFT) to an audience of perhaps 40 or 50 of the Bay Area's most esteemed family therapists at the AFTNC conference in lovely Half Moon Bay one weekend in October. I came away with a sense of excitement about the practice of couples therapy I had not heretofore known.

For those of you who have not met Sue, she presents in such a disarming, human, easily understandable, and genuinely humorous (not "I am trying so hard to be funny") way that appears natural to her. Moreover, she proclaimed her availability for informal discussion and was true to her word, an experience I have not had at previous conferences given by any other presenter or organization.

Conducting emotionally focused couples therapy, she said, is like "having John Bowlby, Carl Rogers, and Fritz Perls at tea." In such a concise statement, she eloquently formulated for me both a sense of the concepts and techniques, and an understanding of just what I already do in therapy that is very much consonant with EFT, as well.

In the current more psychologically aware/self help/twelve step culture, attachment is often seen as pathological. While a helpful concept to delineate the need for self-care, the word codependency has become so distorted to be used whenever one human being performs a caring, thoughtful, or just plain nice act for another!

Dr. Johnson points out that human beings can cope with and heal from many traumas, but not alone. Isolation kills, both emotionally and physically. Attachment is a biological imperative and the distress of couples presenting for therapy reflects not codependency, but their ineffective ways of seeking attachment from one another.

In her focus on using emotional learning, she presents a very practical application of John Gottman's research, as well as reflecting some similarities with others such as Harville Hendrix, Daniel Wile, and

Daniel Goleman. Furthermore, her research of EFT has garnered some extremely impressive results - a 75% recovery rate (defined as better than significant improvement), with these results maintained at several years follow up.

John Gray is wrong, she says. While a frequent seen marital dynamic may be accurately described using his concept of the man withdrawing to his cave, Dr. Johnson maintains, while men and women may speak two different languages, we do reside on the same planet.

In a marriage, as it were, of experiential and systemic aspects, the therapist seeks to create a safe haven where the couple can try out new patterns of interaction, and learn more secure attachment with their partner. There is no concept of "resistance" in EFT, merely an expression of the need for the therapist to more effectively create a safe environment for both partners in the therapy session.

In a short term (8-20 session) model, she has developed a simple, but not simplistic approach, and identifies six basic emotions of anger, fear, surprise/excitement, sadness, guilt/shame, and joy/love.

EFT is comprised of a very structured three stage, nine-step process of therapy, involving de-escalation of conflict, restructuring the attachment bond, and then consolidation of gains.

In the de-escalation stage, the therapist first assists the couple in identification of the negative cycle and the attachment issues, accessing the underlying attachment emotions (anxious, avoidant, or fearful), and then frames the problem cycle and the attachment needs and fears.

In restructuring the bond, the task is to access and make explicit the implicit needs, fears, and models of self, followed by expanding the dance and promoting the acceptance of the other, and then to structure emotional engagement so each can express their attachment needs to their (now experienced as attentive and caring) other. These bonding events are experienced as the antidote both to the attachment injuries of the past as well as future conflicts.

Finally, in the consolidation phase, the therapist helps the couples to enact new more effective interaction

cycles, which create new stories of problems and repair, and identify new solutions to pragmatic issues. In essence, the therapist empowers the couple to identify their cycle of attack and withdrawal, re-engages the withdrawn partner, helps to establish safety for both partners, softens the attacker, and teaches the couple how to create their own safe haven, developing more effective ways to heighten their own attachment seeking behavior.

During the course of this fascinating conference, I became more and more excited about how using EFT can help maximize the effectiveness of our work with couples. Sue Johnson, Ed.D, can be reached via her website at <http://www.eft.ca>

Farewell Message

*from Bart Rubin
President of AFTNC*

Dear AFTNC Members,

It has been awhile since I've written a letter for the newsletter. So much to say! Since I last wrote, a number of exciting AFTNC functions have occurred. Our October Conference was a smashing success. Sue Johnson was an excellent presenter and she got great reviews from the 54 AFTNC members who came to Half Moon Bay in October. In fact, I can't remember a presenter in the last ten years who received such excellent evaluations. The conference was also a success financially after a few years of "sleep away" conferences that lost money. I think the plan of minimizing expenses (less advertising and having only one night away) worked well.

Other than the October conference, a few other interesting AFTNC events occurred. Prior to the Sue Johnson Conference, 11 AFTNC members met informally at Albany Library to discuss Sue Johnson's work. It was really fun to hang out with old members and discuss "marriage" from the perspective of both our personal lives and our clinical experience. The major focus of the conversation was "How do couples change?" which quickly moved into "How have our marriages changed for the better and how did we bring this about."

In November, about 12 AFTNC members met at Gloria Frazier's beautiful house to view the Sue Johnson training tape. It is really a great training tape and I think we all felt that EFT became much more understandable after viewing the tape. It was also interesting to share our opinions of the work with each other. This evening reminded me of the "old days" when we used to meet at each other's houses.

There are several other events planned in the upcoming months. The meeting in January will be with Ellen Pulleyblank, and she will discuss "Chronic Illness and Family Therapy" (see the article in this issue about the meeting). In February, a panel of newly licensed therapists and I will meet with student members on the topic of "How to Build A Career as a Family Therapist." This AFTNC meeting is designed for student members; however everyone is welcome to attend. Tentative arrangements are for Feb. 9th, Sunday, at 7:00 at Albany Public Library. More information will be in the next newsletter. The Council is presently planning some other events in the spring that will be described in the next newsletter.

I am pleased that Monica McGoldrick will be the next speaker at our Fall Conference. Monica was one of the top two presenters in our last "speaker poll" and accepted our invitation. The date is for November 15th and 16th. We are currently finalizing plans for the conference location but are seriously considering Westerbeke Ranch in Sonoma. I expect this will be a phenomenal conference and will fit nicely with the interests of AFTNC members.

I am also pleased to announce that the Council will have a new President beginning this month. Robert-Jay Green, PhD, has graciously "stepped up to the plate" and will lead the organization for the next few years. Robert is a nationally recognized family therapist, the recipient of two national family therapy research awards (from AFTA and APA), and a leader in our field locally and nationally. He has published extensively in the area of family therapy, including an earlier co-edited book with James Framo, Family Therapy: Major Contributions (1981), and a more recent book co-edited with Joan Laird (Smith College), titled Lesbians and Gays in Families: A Handbook for Therapists (1996), which has quickly become the leading book on this topic in our field. Robert is a Professor and Director of Family/Child Psychology Training at the California School of Professional Psychology (CSPP), Alliant International University and in private practice in San Francisco.

He is my mentor and a person who is well known to AFTNC members. I have no doubt that Robert's dynamic personality and charisma will revitalize AFTNC.

As I step down as President I feel happy to see AFTNC in good shape. We are now in a stable financial position (thanks to the Combs and Freedman Conference), have a full Council of motivated members, have involved students in our organization, and have pulled off two successful conferences, with a great one planned. I am thrilled that Robert has accepted the job of Council President and feel very optimistic about our future as an organization.

In closing, I want to take a final opportunity to thank the past Council for all of their hard work. Carla Vogel-Stone created a great website that has made it easier for all members to access information. Ryan Kolakoski, Mary Coombs, Alexis Green, Shawn Frugé, Stephanie Brodsky, Virginia Choinere and Dedalus Hyde have all kept the organization going despite some rough times. They've given a lot of

themselves for the organization and their work is much appreciated.

Sincerely,
Bart

Farewell from the Editors

Dear AFTNC members,

It has been a pleasure working with you all for the last couple of years. Anne Bernstein will be the Newsletter Editor for the March/April issue, and Roger Lake will become newsletter editor after that. Thus, please send material for the March/April newsletter to Anne Bernstein at EMAIL: anneberns@wrightinst.edu, TEL 510-549-0598. Material for subsequent newsletters should be sent to Roger Lake at EMAIL: RogerLake@aol.com, TEL 415-567-7786.

***Best wishes,
Shawn Frugé & Alexis Green***