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In the Beginning...

On a Personal Note:

The Australian Journal of Transpersonal Psychology

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Thora, NSW, Australia

*All in the golden afternoon
Full leisurely we glide...*

— Lewis Carroll (1865)
Alice's Adventures in Wonderland

THE DAY before yesterday — just hours ago — my friend Sharon and I were sitting in the shallows of the Bellinger River. We talked of many things. It was a hot humid day. There were banks of dark clouds overhead and the promise of storm rain. A few metres away, the odd eel lazed about looking sinister. A school of small fish dashed by, perhaps as the phalanx of an elite hunting party. Cattle browsed the grassy banks. Birds flew. Thunder rolled. The canoe rested on an island and Old Henry Dog rested pantingly in its shade.

I should explain that I live in the bush, in the forest and on the river, near the small country town of Bellingen in north-eastern New South Wales. Not that it matters where I am — but I have a strong sense of place and I also feel privileged to live on the river and be part of its life. I asked after colleagues associated with the Sydney-based journal *Consciousness*. What news of A? Is B still writing? That sort of thing. And I was startled to learn that both parties had apparently moved on and that a new group of people were responsible for writing and publishing. And so on. History had already been made. By the time anyone may read *this*, much more history will have presented itself, as it were; but will it be adequately recorded so our descendants may have the pleasure of interpreting it? Last week I completed writing a novel of the Second Anglo-Boer War, set largely in Mozambique and Natal in 1900. It's

entertainment, really, although its apparent form suggests "spy-thriller" and its undercover structure is nothing more than an expression of holism. Given, also, that the story is a heady blend of historical fact and fiction based on a secret treaty of 1899, you can imagine what fun I've had writing it. I was even cheeky enough to write Jan Smuts into the story — he was, after all, the man who wrote *Holism and Evolution*, and was also a 30 year-old general in the Boer War...

History, you see, may be presented either as fact or fiction, or as a fusion of both. Come to think of it, history always begins in someone's present; a moment later that's in the past — and then it's history, the past brought into the present once again. History is what you're reading now.

Two points here, if I may, dear reader: history unfolds before our eyes in many remarkable ways regardless of whether or not we actually see it and become aware of it; and recorded history is also not much more than interpretation — that of the historian, and then that of the reader. Today, for example, I picked up a copy of the current brochure (fairly recent history) of the Bellingen Adult Education Centre. One of the evening courses now being offered is Transpersonal Psychology. The Outline reads:

What is a human being? Certainly more than a body & a brain, more than feelings & thoughts. This course will look into — states

of consciousness, the aura & the meaning of colours, your dream body, astral travel, out of body & near-death experiences & psychic powers.

Does this push your interpretative button? And how close is that description, I wonder, to the definitions of transpersonal psychology proposed all those years ago by Sutich et al.? Not that it matters, because everything changes. Constantly. And wouldn't it be interesting, if not useful, to measure the how and when of changing descriptions and definitions? Now imagine, if you will, how *you* might describe a contemporary six-session course in 1998 called Transpersonal Psychology — imagine, too, how differently a number of other transpersonal psychologists or transpersonalists might interpret that notion. I suspect there would be an impressive range of differences in the descriptions or interpretations. And why not? Our varied interpretations will all be history. Truth is many-sided. Some with training in psychology would insist that psychology equates with behavior; and others would argue that it more properly addresses consciousness, or mind. And doesn't psyche have something to do with breath, with soul, with life? The meanings of those words will also lead us into interpretation...

We are all historians, in our fashion. If the boss tells you to write a report of today's meeting or conference — you'll be recording history; *you* will be the historian. Such responsibility! However, there is a way to overcome some of the difficulties: choose your materials selectively. That implies interpretation. To salve your conscience about so heinous a crime, comfort yourself with the thought that everyone else in your organisation would do the same, consciously or unconsciously, and there would be 100 different historical reports written by 100 different contemporary report writers — each of them describing the same phenomenon. Clerks and professors and record-keepers are all historians.

You might think that anyone drafting a *history* of transpersonal psychology might have a fairly easy time of it. Long past, short history. Perhaps; however, surely it would be even

easier writing a history of transpersonalism or the transpersonalistic (freed from the tentacles of contemporary psychology). Short past, short history. And writing a history of any journal describing that which is transpersonal might seem relatively easy. After all, one has only to trawl through listed authors and titles and consider some of the materials — “objectively,” of course, whatever that might mean.

I have not found it easy at all. I founded, edited, and published *The Australian Journal of Transpersonal Psychology* (AJTP) in 1981. I don't regard any of that objectively; I was intimately involved. I'm a humble psychologist and psychotherapist — and merely an amateur historian. As a fair dinkum historian, I'm a fraud. As a selective, interpretative, amateur historian I'm probably in very good company indeed. So I'll fudge the tricky bits and gloss over the near-disasters.

I had long wanted to publish my own journal (code for controlling all of its parts and aspects, and avoiding journalistic issues and disputes with colleagues). In the first Editor's Note, I wrote that, “The Journal began to take shape in my mind after the Sixth International Transpersonal Conference at Phillip Island [Victoria] in November, 1980.” I have no idea now, 18 years later, just what it was that inspired that taking of shape. I'd chatted with Jim Fadiman over a couple of beers and when I asked what he thought of my ambitious publishing venture he was encouraging. “Go for it,” he said. And I did.

I wrote letters to likely contributors; I pleaded with colleagues. I asked for contributions, new, old, and even previously published. I almost begged for some interesting and diverse writings. There was no Internet in those days, but there was a grapevine, and being a psych. teacher in Academe had its advantages — I used the university and its systems and networks. Especially its mail-out system. Mailing lots of begging letters and enquiries from my university was a legitimate academic procedure, and yes, I still feel guilty about not paying for the postage. Academic freedom is a wonderful thing. Notably, most of the writers I wrote to were also academics. Now *that* is useful historical information. It tells us

immediately that the transpersonally oriented writers had day jobs, so there were hardly any who lived in their own ivory towers and paid for their postage stamps. Transpersonal psychology hacks, in those far-off early 1980s were also teachers, professors, and lecturers. I can't say they were primarily psychologists or principally something else, or even that they might have been closet transpersonalists. In those days that which is now respectably transpersonal in respectable tertiary education often had the aura of voodooism and black magic about it. (In Australian Academe, alas, it still does.)

I commissioned Gaye Chapman, one of our graduates, to design an *AJTP* cover — I liked it so much that it continued uniquely as *the* cover design for years. I aimed at two issues of the Journal per calendar year. I waved a wand and there was an instant team of associate editors, and only two of us in the same institution. (Have you known anyone refuse to be honored on a masthead?) The most important person responsible for producing the *AJTP* was the Psychology Department's typist, Dayna Hilton; she also had the toughest job. Imagine being Dayna

— she was young, she answered to the departmental Chair, and she was obliged to put up with constant interruptions and requests from everyone in the department who desperately needed her life-saving skills. In those days there was no computer...Doug Cornford and I proofread the typed pages as Dayna completed them. I dummied up a few precious copies by using the departmental photocopier and then stapled them between the distinctive yellow covers. Unfortunately for me, some of my ungenerous and voodoo-hating colleagues detected this "illegal" operation and I was billed for the photocopying.

The well-typed pages otherwise became camera-ready copy, and I took them to my undercover printer whose name never appeared in the credits. X was a one-time University printer who had elevated himself up and out of the university and then despired into his secret

basement/bunker at home. Far below his suburban house he had clandestinely and illegally installed some printing machines. When those machines clacked and grumbled and roared in the steaming bowels of the earth, dear reader, the *AJTP* was born. The first transpersonal journal in Australia (as far as I know) was, ha ha, an *Underground* publication...

The first issue contained articles by Fadiman, Moshe Kroy, myself, Cornford, Thomas Roberts, and Jusuf Hariman — four of us Oz-based. The second issue of the first volume was 50-50. The first volume was remarkable (in my opinion) because it contained articles by Moshe Kroy. His first was "Parapsychology, Phenomenology, and the Scientific Method." The second was "Phenomenology, Behaviorism, and the Self." Moshe was an extraordinary man. He was trained in both philosophy and psychology and taught at La Trobe University, Melbourne. His untimely death robbed us of our brightest star and I have no hesitation in asserting he was a genius. Consequently, I always had huge difficulties preparing his manuscripts for publication and I

had to take the heat from both the typist and proof reader...I once spent a further chunk of time re-forming a book-length manuscript which he and I agreed to co-author. At the time I was Visiting Scholar at the US International University, San Diego, and the task was so daunting I was sometimes uncertain which country I was in...perhaps that had something to do, also, with all the gum trees in southern California. (I once remarked to an American colleague on the gum trees in California, and he said, "You have eucalypts in Australia?")

We never did manage to publish that manuscript, but I was able to publish more of Kroy's shorter writings in the *AJTP*. The *Journal* was modeled on *The Journal of Transpersonal Psychology* and it also included writers who regularly published in the American journal. The *AJTP* was also an opportunity for lighter-hearted moments: I



Original *AJTP* cover design
by Gaye Chapman

often filled space on available pages with materials "borrowed" from other publications (may I be forgiven), and was unable to resist the temptation of furtively making *AJTP* "art" by photocopying natural objects on That Machine. I was even rash enough to juxtapose my handwritten criticisms next to clippings of the weighty views of others. And I was also able to posture and pontificate when I wrote Editorial Notes...What fun it all was! My professor couldn't supervise me, the Australian Psychology Society wasn't smart enough to try, and the readership grew. I was out of control and based in my university's Psychology Department. Now that, dear reader, is some kind of Academic Freedom, don't you agree?

Why the readership did grow is a moot point. Word of mouth was a factor. I would of course take *Journal* copies to conferences where potential readers were sometimes able to steal an occasional copy (such flattery), and I certainly gave away copies hoping the word would spread — wishing for subscriptions, if not contributions. There was never enough money and I had always to put my own into the venture. That was part of the price one had to pay for controlling publication, and colleagues and associate editors were always short of funds when help was needed...ah well! Students liked the *Journal* and often enquired about the forthcoming issue in advance of publication. I even attracted a subscription from the USSR, as it was then: T. R. Soidla sent in artwork in lieu of money.

Although the *Journal* was supposedly Australian in concept, I relied heavily on overseas materials. In Vol. 3, No. 3, there appeared an article titled "Periodicals Related to Transpersonal Psychology." It was written by Sam Shapiro. I'd printed a reproduction of a Japanese picture opposite it: mountain, ocean, man on rock with lines (nets?) in the ocean. Sam's writings came to the *Journal* from across the ocean in Hawai'i and have continued to do so, invaluable, for years. His writings have always had an oriental tone (wasn't I perceptive, Sam?). Once I stopped off in Honolulu to meet Sam; he greeted me at the airport in the middle of a tropical night — with a lei of exotic flowers. A lei is also a wreath, but

that hasn't stopped us: we've argued across the Pacific for a century or so now and we're not done yet... The December 1990 issue (Vol. 9, No. 1) was dedicated to Sam.

The *AJTP*, alas, is no longer the *Journal*. I sold it to Gerard Allan, who then owned, edited, and published it from 1985–1989, and I made a brief reappearance in 1990–91 as editor, after Gerard sold the *AJTP* to Marilyn Campling. In 1992, the new owners and editors were Don Chipley and Erin Neill, and from 1994–1997, just Neill. During her tenure the *AJTP* became the *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies* — formerly the *Australian Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, and for a while I was one of the consulting editors...until I stepped out of the limelight and began to merge into the cosmic background.

The glory days seem long, long ago. They include the irate academic whose work I refused because it was Beyond Kroy in its incoherence and was also a splendid example of Absolute Unreadability. Dayna and Doug and I even toasted the *AJTP* with champagne once or twice. And I once caught my behaviorist professor sneakily reading a copy of it...

In a 1990 *Journal* Note I wrote, among other things:

The house has its back to the forested mountain. Some of the windows look straight down the river: casaurina, islets, multi-coloured rocks, and the Diehappy Forest covering the steep slopes...Ducks, herons, sacred kingfishers, and the cormorants move on and in the water all day. The house is a good place to write in.

The house which two of us once built on the river is still here and I'm still in it. I continue to hear the rapids last thing at night and first thing at dawn and this is never a place to be bored in. The new river runs on. And it's still a matter of interpretation, dear reader. Was the eel lazing or was it suffering indigestion? Were those small fish hunting or being hunted? The rains came; we moved on; the river is half a metre higher now. Next week it will all be different: renewed yet again, and also history.

