



Encounters with Transactional Analysis

by Ken Mellor

First Encounter (1969)

I joined the TA Tribe on 30 October 1970. By then I'd been reading transactional analysis books for almost 2 years. Using *Games People Play* (Berne, 1964), the first, I changed my life. Finally I could understand what was happening inside me and between me and others, and, delightfully, I had simple ways of making changes that really worked.

I was in my late twenties, and like a parched man in from the desert, I squeezed every drop I could from all the TA books I could find, including those by Eric Berne, Claude Steiner, and Thomas Harris. Immediately applying everything to myself and my clients (I was a very new social worker), I was delighted when all of us began to change.

Greatly encouraged, I was emboldened to write to Eric Berne to ask him what else I could read. I mentioned that I lived in Australia where there were no TA teachers. All but certain that such a famous man would not reply, I was delighted to receive a generous letter from him. He was warmly encouraging, recommended several other books, and told me

about the *Transactional Analysis Bulletins*. Little did I know back then that his generosity and availability would be a hallmark of all the TA people I was to meet in the future. What a wonderful beginning!

Flying Solo (1970–1980)

With a background in mathematics, logic, and philosophy, I readily understood Berne's emphasis on theoretical simplicity, clarity, practicality, and utility. By contrast, my training in social work had involved woolly and imprecise theory more suited to talking about helping people than to actually helping them. So, using Berne's guidelines, I set out to create a systematic approach to the tasks and options I faced as a social worker, and those facing my clients. Clearly, Eric (I felt as if I knew him by then) had taught me a powerful approach to developing theory.

Within 3 years, I had a simple system of defining tasks and a set of associated guidelines. Using these, people could predict both success and failure and decide what to do to ensure success. This work formed a key part of the work Eric Schiff and I did on discounting, for which we, in

part, received the 1980 Eric Berne Memorial Scientific Award (Mellor & Schiff, 1975a, 1975b).

Going to TA's Mecca (1973–1975)

I was keenly aware of being self-taught in TA. I had learned by reading as widely as I could, applying what I read, and returning repeatedly to my books when I did not understand how to respond to clients. These books were my technical manuals. By 1972, I was teaching transactional analysis in staff development programs and to university students in the social work course where I had trained. Their responses were just like mine. What a treat it was to witness people finding ease in their lives where previously they had been troubled!

However, without informed guidance, I could not evaluate the quality of my work or teaching. This prompted me to seek TA training in the United States. In December 1973 I started Certified Transactional Analyst training with Jacqui Schiff. My learning curve with her was vertical for almost 2 years. I had rarely been so excited and delighted. Every

day was filled with new understanding. Her generosity was extraordinary as she took me under her wing and arranged multiple learning opportunities with senior TA practitioners/teachers.

“I was delighted to receive a generous letter from Eric. He was warmly encouraging, recommended several other books, and told me about the Transactional Analysis Bulletins. Little did I know back then that his generosity and availability would be a hallmark of all the TA people I was to meet in the future. What a wonderful beginning!”

Encouraged by her, I attended the January 1974 ITAA Summer Conference in Juarez, Mexico. The night before the exam boards started, she asked if I would like to take my CM (now CTA) exam. Why so soon I asked? (I was only 4 weeks in the country). She said, “You know your TA theory better than most people, and you are very straight.” I was astounded, felt unprepared, but accepted the opportunity. What did I have to lose?

I passed strongly with people of Mary Goulding’s standing examining me. Jacqui’s next surprise was to arrange for me to start a PTM (now PTSTA) contract with Bob and Mary Goulding (redecision TA) and her (reparenting TA) as my three cosponsors. In August 1975 I took my TM (TSTA) boards and again passed very well. By then I had coauthored the two articles just mentioned and helped to write the *Cathexis Reader* (Schiff, 1975), a summary of reparenting theory. I returned to Australia in late 1975 and began working as a social worker in private practice.

Developing Theory

Since then I have continued to explore new ways of working with people. A distinguishing feature of this work has been my interest in integrating multiple approaches. I loved the sharing with colleagues involved and delighted in solving the puzzles set when seeking integration between seemingly incompatible polarities.

I have written over nine articles for the *Transactional Analysis Journal* and shared authorship of two others. In addition, I have also contributed to about 16 books, and aspects of my work have been published in 17 languages. (You can find some of the articles [here](#).)

Turning to Life (1980–Present)

By 1980 I had used and taught transactional analysis extensively, published six *TAJ* articles, contributed to a book on psychotherapy, and published my book on tasks and options (Mellor, 1980). Nevertheless, I realized something was missing. There was a great emptiness underlying all that I was doing.

Prompted by this, I began a 35-year exploration, turning my attention to the East and immersing myself in what was available there. Many people thought I had gone off my rocker. However, I knew what I was doing and that my learning was a natural extension of the wonderful benefits I had already reaped from transactional analysis and 35 other similar systems.

I spent time with three Eastern Masters (for 14, 11, and 18 years, respectively). I learned to release and embrace Life and discovered that Life animates us and is the spiritual matrix underlying everything.

Maybe Eric was discovering something similar when he introduced physics in his later years.

Having come to experience Life, I responded as I always have. I integrated the old and the new. I learned to place Life at the center of my activities and thinking and to make everything radiant with it. I recorded these developments in my *TAJ* article “Autonomy With Integrity” (Mellor, 2008) using Berne’s definition of autonomy as the framework.

Everything is One, there are no separate parts. And finding Oneness in everything releases us into the fullness of Life. Transactional analysis can play a powerful part in this.

As a TA elder, this Life focus is the spiritual core of my legacy. 🍷

References

- Berne, E. (1964). *Games people play: The psychology of human relationships*. New York, NY: Grove Press.
- Mellor, K. (1980). *Taking charge: Task analysis, option development, problem solving*. Melbourne, Australia: PIT Publishing.
- Mellor, K. (2008). Autonomy with integrity. *Transactional Analysis Journal*, 38, 182-199.
- Mellor, K., & Schiff, E. (1975a). Discounting. *Transactional Analysis Journal*, 5, 295-302.
- Mellor, K., & Schiff, E. (1975b). Redefining. *Transactional Analysis Journal*, 5, 303-311.
- Schiff, J. L. (with Schiff, A. W., Mellor, K., Schiff, E., Schiff, S., Richman, D., Fishman, J., Wolz, L., Fishman, C., & Momb, D.). (1975). *Cathexis reader: Transactional analysis treatment of psychosis*. New York, NY: Harper & Row.