

My Time with Jacqui Schiff

by Ken Mellor

Chuck Olson, Jacqui Schiff's son, agreed to read the following paragraph on my behalf at her memorial service in California on 11 August:

Jacqui's influence on me was so far reaching that I find it impossible to describe. Because I changed fundamentally while living, working, and training with her for two brief years, everything I have lived since then was affected by her. I bless the day I wrote to her and she invited me to come and train with her at Cathexis Institute. My heart is full of gratitude as I think of all she made available to me and of her personal commitment to my well-being and growth. I thank her for her great generosity, her courage, her commitment to understanding, and her zeal in dealing with what was really going on. Rarely easy to know deeply and often a challenge personally, her unique style created a fire that could temper the steel in all who stayed near enough to benefit—and I thank her for this, too. She was a real trailblazer and I feel sure that all gathered here to remember her and tens of thousands of others are the richer because of what she dedicated herself to in her life.

I remember that it was 5:45 pm one day in early December 1973. I had flown for 20 hours from Melbourne to San Francisco, and because of a quirk in international time, I set foot for the first time on American soil 15 min-

utes before I left Australia. I was taken to "the Cathexis School" in Oakland. The school was part of the Cathexis Institute, the transactional analysis training institute. I was to train and work there for almost the next two years. At the school, a small suburban house, I was left alone in the front room for about an hour, during which I tried to collect myself. Having traveled halfway around the world to train with someone for at least a year, I was keen to be at my best when we met.

When several people emerged from a nearby doorway, I scanned each one, looking for Jacqui. My fantasy was

of a powerful woman with great presence, a fantasy partly cultivated as I read *All My Children*, her account of her early work with schizophrenic individuals. She had also impressed me with her quick response to my request for training, in which I had said virtually nothing about myself. Her immediate reply was, "By all means come and will you send me some information about yourself?" I came to know that this was typical of her. She was prepared to make herself available sight unseen to almost anyone, confident that she could deal with whatever arose. I replied just as quickly saying that I would come. It was only after this that I read *All My Children* and began to wonder what I had gotten myself into!

In those days, it was revolutionary to ask schizophrenic and other very disturbed people what was going on with them and what they needed. Commonly, the professional staff decided what was good for "patients" and then imposed selected treatment regimes on them. The notions of making contracts with people who desperately needed help and genuinely respecting them as people were almost unheard of. In contrast, Jacqui's book outlined how she helped very disturbed people learn to live normally without the use of medication and by responding to their real needs. She discovered these needs by talking to the "kids" themselves, "kids" who were almost all adults. She asked them, listened to what they had to say, decided how to act to take account of that, and then acted accordingly. She also had a genius for reading the text behind the overt. What she did became known as reparenting and was both unorthodox and effective.

Thus, I already had the image of a giant of a woman, someone who stood out from current trends and arrived at creative, innovative, and wonderfully effective ways of helping very needy people. So, when I was finally invited into the room to meet Jacqui, I was full of anticipation.

I walked in and stood beside someone I thought was a group member next to me just near the door. She had thick, wheat-colored hair to her shoulders, wore glasses, was obese, only came up to my ear (I am 5½ feet), and looked pale and tired. Searching around for Jacqui, I found only a few others there. Then a high-pitched, childlike voice from right beside me said, "You must be Ken." Talk about a double take! Doing my best to hide my surprise, I said that I was and in that moment we cemented the most significant relationship up to then in my life.

The next 20 months were kaleidoscopic. I loved almost every aspect of my experience at Cathexis, and my learning curve was vertical. Jacqui offered me opportunity after opportunity to grow and develop. Her generosity amazed me because I came from a much less emotionally abundant background. For example, in my early thirties when I arrived in

"My hope is that her passing will stimulate a celebration of her contribution to transactional analysis and to the treatment of people with severe disorders."

Questioning Jacqui Schiff's Work

by Pat Crossman

Jacqui Schiff is dead.

However, the body of her work—known as reparenting or the Cathexis school of transactional analysis and described in the books she coauthored—survives and has been passed on to her followers. I contend that the theories she taught concerning the nature and treatment of mental illness—theories accepted by her followers as essential truths that are invulnerable to criticism and based on scientific research—*have no basis whatsoever in real science*. In fact, not only are her notions unscientific, but they have been responsible for gross patient abuse.

I would like to address three of these assumptions.

1. *The theory of parental culpability, which states that negative parental injunctions cause schizophrenia or hebephrenia* (the term Jacqui Schiff preferred to use). Therefore, contact with the birth family is strongly discouraged. However, current medical opinion would suggest that schizophrenia is a brain disease, often amenable to medication. Family involvement is *encouraged*. The term hebephrenia is rarely even used these days.

2. *The theory of reparenting through regression claims that the biological clock can be reversed*. In other words, it is possible to regress people back to the real, historical child or baby they once were and then reparent them back to adulthood. This assumes that ego states are real historical entities residing somewhere in the cerebral cortex and can be manipulated and/or removed. Much credence has been given in transactional literature to the work of Wilder Penfield, the Canadian neurosurgeon who assumed that the occasional "flashbulb" effects reported by his epileptic patients during electrical stimulation of the temporal lobes were real historical memories, and that these were stored somewhere in the brain (see Steiner, 2002).

However, over the last 50 years, and with greater understanding of how memory works, Penfield's findings have been challenged. Current understanding is that these "flashbacks" were no more than brief hallucinations and of little significance (see Neisser, 1982; Rosenfield, 1988). In any case, Penfield never worked with nonepileptic patients, and out of 520 patients who received electrical stimulation, only 40 produced "experiential responses." It is from these data that Lawrence Kubie, psychoanalyst, colleague, and mentor of Eric Berne, enthusiastically raised the speculation that "repressed" memories could now be accessed and age regression achieved "under the influence of various narcotics and other dissociative agents and maneuvers such as hypnosis" (cited in Penfield, 1952, pp. 191-195). It should be noted that subsequent studies of hypnotic age regression demonstrate that it "produces much confabulation and little or no hypermnesia" (Neisser, 1982, p. 44). In other words, the subjects simulate the regression.

3. *The theory of passivity confrontation*. Passivity confrontation is a euphemism for a policy of negative reinforcement as a cure for schizophrenia/hebephrenia. The physical and emotional punishment and humiliation inflicted on Jacqui's regressed "kids," as described in her (1970) book *All My Children*, is justified by the assertion that these patients were by definition dangerous and homicidal.

To justify their policy of negative reinforce-

ment, certain authentic animal experiments were co-opted and the results altered to fit the theory (see Schiff et al., 1990, p. 33). Schiff asserted that "serum from schizophrenic patients, when injected into rats, inhibited reward learning but not avoidance learning. Serum from control subjects did not have this effect" (pp. 32-33). The scientific paper she referred to, but obviously did not understand, is based on research by experimental psychologist Dr. M. P. Bishop (1963) and was designed to test whether there might be a psychotoxic agent associated with schizophrenia that would inhibit avoidance learning in the laboratory rat. The paper does not refer to human treatment and/or psychotherapy. Contrary to Schiff's assertions, Bishop found that "the shock employed in the learning tasks was equally stressful for all animals as mea-

sured by the rate of defecation" (p. 86). But "the schizophrenic sample showed an extremely poor rate of learning" (p. 82, italics added). Furthermore, reward learning was not used at all, since it was irrelevant

to the purpose of the experiment. Common sense would therefore suggest that negative reinforcement would be contraindicated in the treatment of schizophrenia!

Not only are Jacqui Schiff's assumptions called into question, but perhaps we should reexamine the whole theoretical basis of transactional analysis. And maybe the death of Jacqui Schiff will make this possible.

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AFTER HE SAID HELLO

by Pam Levin

Advice from Eric on Writing

This is the introductory installment of a new *Script* column inspired by Melissa Farley, who served as Eric Berne's cotherapist in an adolescent group at St. Mary's Hospital, San Francisco, in the mid 1960s. We were talking about how much there was to learn from him, and we were both feeling sad about the loss of the rich learning environment he provided. Realizing later that this richness is still available—although scattered throughout the world in many transactional analysts—I thought it would be fun and interesting to develop a column titled "After He Said Hello" in which we could all share what Eric "said" to us, either in person, in a group, via tapes, or through his writing voice. That way we could all be reminded of and benefit from the incredibly rich legacy he left us.

If you learned something from Eric after he said "hello" to you, even if it was via a page in a book, please share it with us by sending a short vignette (up to a few paragraphs) to me at perfectbones@pacific.net. All submissions will be considered for the column. Let's share the benefits of being part of "Eric's club."

To get us started, I offer the following vignette about Eric teaching me to write.

It was probably 1969. Eric had asked me for examples of "games nurses play" because he

was to give a speech at the Oakland Naval Hospital to the nursing staff. Afterward we talked about writing it up because, he said, the *American Journal of Nursing* had contacted him requesting an article. He told me to write up the first draft and he'd have a look at it and make changes. I was having an extremely hard time doing it; every time I thought about it I felt like I just ran into a cement wall and then headed as fast as I could in the other direction.

"Here's the secret to writing. You apply your backside to the seat of a chair and you don't get up until you've written something."

After the seminar a couple of weeks later, standing in his kitchen, I said somewhat wistfully, "Eric, teach me to write." He looked over his glasses, which were halfway down his nose, saw that I was serious, changed his stance to square on, removed his pipe from between his teeth, and said, "OK. Here's the secret to writing, Pamela. You apply your backside to the seat of a chair and you don't get up until you've written something. That's all there is to it."

That advice has served me well for over 30 years.

By the way, that article, my first and coauthored with Eric, was originally submitted to and turned down by the *American Journal of Nursing*, which wrote back that they didn't recall requesting something, but if they did, they would want "Games Patients (Not Nurses) Play." One psychiatrist suggested we reply that we would indeed write such an article, and we would submit it to the *American Journal of Patients*! But the nursing journal finally not only published the article as we'd written it, but they have included it in various anthologies of articles as a bonus for subscribing to the journal. Thus the ripple effect of "applying your backside to the seat of a chair" continues in ways we can never imagine, and I continue to be grateful for Eric's advice. I hope it serves you well, too.

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Perth, Australia. Sixteenth Annual Australasian TA Conference. Contact: Kate Meredith, 10a Itea Place, Mindarie, W. Australia phone: 6030; 08-93051160 fax: 08-93051150

February 4-12, 2003: Frenchman's

Cove, near Port Antonio, Jamaica. USATAA Gathering. Contact: Diane Maki, 973-763-7973; email: makisethi@aol.com

April 11-13, 2003: Swansea, Wales.

Institute of Transactional Analysis Conference. Contact: Doug Hampson, dhampson@glam.co.uk

August 3-5, 2003: Oaxaca, México.

Redecision Conference. Contact: Janet Lee O'Connor, 2012 South Augusta Place, Tucson, Arizona 85710, USA; phone: 520-360-0007 or 520-886-0176; email: southwesttraining@yahoo.com

August 6-10, 2003: Oaxaca, México.

International Transactional Analysis Conference (designated ITAA conference). Contact: Instituto Mexicano de Análisis Transaccional, Agrarismo 21, Col. Escandón, México, D.F. C.P. 11800; fax: (5255)52-71-52-04 email: information@taconference.com

July 30-August 1, 2004: Bangalore,

India. International Transactional Analysis Conference (designated ITAA conference). Contact: C. Suriyaprakash, email: itac2004@hotmail.com or child_asha@hotmail.com

Time with Jacqui

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America, I was given more strokes about my talents in two weeks than I had received in my whole life to that point. Naturally I was hooked!

Within weeks of my arrival, Jacqui had arranged for my Clinical Member examination, which I passed, and to cosponsor a Provisional Teaching Member contract with Bob and Mary Goulding. Then, as month followed month, she organized many opportunities for me to train with other leading transactional analysis practitioners. She also arranged for me to work beside her in many parts of the country, to present at conferences, and to teach.

As time passed, I was increasingly impressed with Jacqui's commitment to other people; the extraordinary demands made on her at every level of her work; her talent at doing it; her willingness to go to the heart of things where others with less therapeutic courage, skill, or knowledge would pull back; how essentially simple the processes were; the healing power of short-term regressions (a few minutes or hours) and fully supported regressions (up to 18 months); the wonderful value of creating a "reactive environment" for providing support and a profoundly therapeutic atmosphere; and the power and value of talking explicitly about every issue, from tying shoe laces, to sexual intercourse, to inner psychological processes. Significantly, I felt at home in this environment, where I could find inner balance because I was met on the outside with a

strength and caring that matched what I was dealing with and needed inside.

I also became increasingly concerned for Jacqui's welfare because of the toll I saw the pressures of her work and lifestyle taking on her. She isolated herself from peer support and discussion and did not do sensible things to take care of herself physically, emotionally, and in other ways. As active and available to others as she was, she was very unavailable to input from others about herself. She seemed to me frightened of this. I sensed a vulnerability that she kept hidden most of the time behind her competence and by escalating conflict if people persisted.

In August 1975 I passed the Teaching Membership exam and headed home. I only saw Jacqui about five times after that. We exchanged occasional greetings directly and indirectly. However, we eventually lost direct contact. Before that, in 1976, she told me about an issue that turned into an ethics charge against her. While discussing what was afoot, a moment passed almost unnoticed when I said to myself, "She has just decided to fight this rather than to resolve the issues."

I regretted her decision at the time. Subsequent events added to my regret as I watched month after month of protracted difficulties during which people faced the full force of Jacqui's intransigence and her capacity to escalate issues personally and emotionally to a very high level. While an asset at times when working with people with unresolved survival issues, her approach only served to polarize and disturb many of those trying to sort through a very thorny issue for the ITAA. In the process, she even succeeded in alienating and hurting people who had supported her and her work for years. Many became so traumatized by the process that they shut themselves off from her. I know some who carry scars and pain to this day. In the end, she was censured by the ITAA and required to submit a plan that would have resolved things. Jacqui did not provide that plan and so terminated her own membership.

In the midst of all of these events she was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis (MS). The illness progressed until her death. Even so, she managed to work in India and England, teaching the techniques that she had developed. Regrettably, and perhaps because of her deteriorating health and her general style, her work seems to have been extreme at times. Her conduct in some settings created serious cause for concern. All the same, I still meet people who benefited from her through those final years of her work.

Eventually she became so disabled with MS that she was admitted to a total care facility in California, where she lived until her passing. It was there, in her son's arms, that she died on 19 July 2002.

Chuck wrote, "In the end, there was a dramatic change in her breathing and I was able to take her into my arms for several minutes before she passed away. During this time, I spoke to her of all of her children who had gotten well, all of the grandchildren, who we would be sure would remember her and all . . . who wanted her to suffer no longer."

It seems fitting to me that she died receiving what she gave so many in her life and so needed for herself. My hope is that her passing will stimulate a celebration of her contribution to transactional analysis and to the treatment of people with severe disorders, a remembering of all she contributed to many of us, and that it will promote the complete healing of old wounds in those who still carry them.

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Comment on the Terrorist Attack in Bali

Editor's Note: As we were completing production on this *Script*, we learned of the terrorist attack on Bali, which killed or injured over 180 people, many of them Australians. While we do not have members in Bali or Indonesia, we contacted several in Australia to express our concern and to ask for their thoughts. We received the following message in response.

Naturally, Australians are deeply upset about the carnage in Bali. Our hearts go out to those directly affected. Those of us not directly affected can only guess at the distress the bereaved and those who witnessed the tragedy are experiencing. At the time of this writing, most people are still in shock, some are moving into anger, others into sadness. As the grieving process continues, we hope that sensible decisions will be made about how to respond. It seems to me that we need a two-level global response. First, we urgently need to do what is necessary to contain and restrain people doing this kind of thing. Second, and equally urgent, we need to identify why people are doing this and to change the conditions that lead to their activities. The sooner we start both, the better, as neither are likely to be short term. In particular, the second level responses are likely to require large amounts of money and generations of reeducation. An important part of understanding why is to answer the question, "What have we done or not done to invite or provoke these terrible acts?" Real resolution is only likely if we understand and respond to both sides of the story. Let us all affirm, pray, or meditate that the love and beauty in our world prevails.

—Ken Mellor, Sydney, Australia

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