

THE MAKING OF J.S.T.

Long ago, shortly after the beginning of my psychology career, I became aware of the limitations of a cognitive-behavioral model. I had also been trained in various psychodynamic models, as well as being interested and briefly trained in Gestalt and T.A. In my first post-doctorate position, I met another recent graduate who was more interested in family therapy. Thus, in 1973 Arnie Slive and I began getting together, sharing ideas and consulting with each other about our cases. One of these was an extra-ordinarily difficult case involving a young woman who could induce almost catatonic states when anxious. Using my previously limited background in hypnosis, I had her teach me her symptom as a way of escaping it (Young, 1982), and the intrigues of paradox began to fascinate me. Arnie and I were reading the Erickson-Haley literature, doing mutual hypnotic inductions, and beginning to use strategic interventions in our cases. By virtue of their unorthodoxy and novelty, they were quite effective, eventually attracting the negative attention of the psychiatric establishment that eventually extruded us.

I left first, to study Judo in England. By the time I returned to London, Ontario, Arnie was already planning his escape route from our first setting, heading out to free-wheeling Calgary, where new ideas were greeted with enthusiasm rather than apprehension. I was by then (1977) reestablished in rural community outreach clinics and eventually the outpatient clinic of a mental hospital. Despite the severity and chronicity of these cases, I managed to have more than average success, although it was difficult to operate in strategic ways with almost no support. Arnie and I would exchange cross-consultations in the audiotapes we sent to each other, but still this seemed like not enough to sustain me. I was looking for a new friend and colleague.

I heard through the grapevine about a new social worker at Madame Vanier Children's Services that had written a curious paper called "The Creative Symptom" (Efron, 1977) I decided to meet the author, so we got together for several luncheons to talk. It turned out that he was very bright, curious, interesting, sensitive, and astute. I read his paper, in which he developed beautiful interventions based on the concept of functional autonomy. Children can persist in psychiatric and behavioral symptoms long after they no longer receive external social gain; the symptom itself has become a unique symbol of personal mastery in an otherwise chaotic and untrustworthy world. This treatise was all the more noteworthy because Don had used the rather cumbersome concepts of psychodynamic and bioenergetic models to explain and rationalize his intuitively astute interventions. Soon he began to study the strategic-systemic models that simply and easily validated his strategies that were almost magical with many problem children he treated.

The Strategic Therapy Study Group. After several months of regular Wednesday noon meetings Don and I had developed a close collegial bond, but already we craved more external input to enrich our experience. In 1979 we began to invite individuals and small groups of clinicians from the London community to join us in our cross-agency case consultations. At first regarded

as oddities, we finally attracted a small group of professionals dedicated to case consultation and mutual support in developing our understanding of Ericksonian, M.R.I. cybernetic-strategic, and Haley-Madanes structural-strategic, and the Milan models of therapy.

For over a year we thrived on this support, largely absent in our home settings. Beyond our weekly case consultations, we began to function as cross-agency teams on live cases in each other's settings. The cases and projects were fun and exciting. Eventually, however, this level of stimulation was not enough, as our desire for knowledge and theory transcended our need to resolve case dilemmas. Even collaboration in leading workshops and short training courses was not as interesting as taking it to the next level.

J.S.S.T. Don theorized that there must be many other isolated individuals and small groups practicing in this way, but they had few means of networking and sharing their experiences nationally and internationally. While family therapy as a field had its journals, there seemed to be no journal that had the strategic/systemic focus that fascinated us. So Don came up with a stunning and overwhelming idea: "Why don't WE start one?"

I almost fainted. "What do we know about running a journal?"

Don's answer was that we could learn the ropes. (Actually, he already had some idea about running journals based on the experience of his brother). With his casual chutzpah and curious persistence, Don began to contact others with similar ventures, Richard Simon with his broader focused but user-friendly Networker, and Steve deShazer with his Underground Railroad newsletter.

As they and others offered us their support, and the market for sharing ideas in this field seemed promising, we began to assemble an editorial board and formulate some goals and objectives. By 1981 our first quarterly edition was published. Now, after more than 10 years, it has become the well-established and respected Journal of Systemic Therapies, published by Guilford Press (New York). Although an international journal, there is still the easy readability and spirit of relaxed effectiveness that remain from its humble beginnings. Moreover, the luncheon study group still meets, almost 15 years later.

It's amazing what can happen with a good dream, a desire to create, and a worldwide network of similar-minded synergy and support.