

## **Fay Fransella**

**1 October, 1925 – 14 January, 2011**

A few weeks following her diagnosis of terminal cancer Fay Fransella, age 85, died quietly in her sleep on January 14, 2011 in Falmouth, England. Fay and Don Bannister, her friend and mentor, were the people most responsible for establishing Personal Construct Psychology in the United Kingdom, as well as making huge contributions internationally. The amount of energy and determination Fay had to invest in this work was seemingly boundless in terms of her own contributions and the number of projects and initiatives she introduced and sustained. She cared deeply that Kelly's approach to understanding people from its humane, practical, and enlivening perspective be made available not only to the field of psychology but to every discipline that aims to help people lead more fulfilling lives.

Fay Adah Rachel Fransella (née Fielden) was born on Jersey, in the Channel Islands on October 1, 1925 to a mother who was 29 years younger than her father, a retired provincial Governor in southern Sudan. Her mother died when Fay was six years old, leaving her and her younger brother to grow up with a much older father who had strict ideas about punctuality and held a dim view of her ability to achieve academically. World War II and the family's subsequent evacuation from Jersey disrupted her life and schooling in profound ways. In fact she left school before the sixth form because she was not considered "bright enough". Befitting the daughter of a provincial Governor, she was educated at the Malvern College for Girls, became a debutante and was presented at Court. According to Miller Mair, a colleague of longstanding, she was a young woman brought up with a strong sense that her role was to marry and be a hostess. When this plan for her life did not work for her, she struggled through a huge barrier of personal and social expectations to become the person she wanted to be. Perhaps out of this struggle she realised that she must have the strength to stand up for what she believed and throughout her life she had great passion for and profound commit-

ment to any enterprise she undertook. Inevitably, sometimes those strong feelings would mean that there would be disagreements and clashes with others who held opposing views.

She made a very long and hard journey from where she began to the academic and clinical successes of later years. This journey began when she was able to train as an occupational therapist and obtained her first job in 1945 at Horton Hospital in Epsom, England, which at that time was a wartime emergency hospital but later reverted to its former psychiatric use. Despite becoming Head of the largest Occupational Therapy Department in the country, the interest that Fay developed in psychological research led her, in her early 30s, to take evening classes for the 'O' and 'A' levels that she needed to be accepted for a degree in psychology. She eventually completed this degree at University College London in 1961 with a BA Honours Degree, and then trained as a clinical psychologist at the Institute of Psychiatry, London. After her training, she remained at the Institute as a Lecturer and completed a Ph.D. on stuttering in 1965.

In 1968 she married her second husband Roy Hodson, a journalist on the London Financial Times, who introduced her to his passion of sailing. They owned a rather handsome boat and made many trips to France and other Channel ports. To prepare for this adventure she was brave and capable enough to complete a yachtmasters' course. Being adventurous was nothing new for her; in her twenties she learned to fly a Tiger Moth. She also took on the adventure of becoming a dedicated and accomplished foodie, to use a term from current parlance. As you can see from these personal adventures, she was well prepared to take on the new psychological theory of personal constructs, which is grounded in the assertion that life at its best is a grand adventure.

Also during the sixties she met Don Bannister, the head of clinical psychology at Bexley Hospital, who had become an academic and social leader of professional psychology in

the U. K. for those interested in Personal Construct Psychology. Don's introduction to Kelly's ideas was enough for Fay to launch her research on stuttering using personal construct theory and Kelly's most well-known assessment method, the repertory grid. Don Bannister was probably one of her greatest supporters in helping her to believe that she had significant intellectual potential, something she perhaps doubted even after she had been awarded her Ph.D.

In this period, she met George Kelly for the first time when he gave one of a series of seminars in 1964 at Brunel University for a group calling themselves the 'Kelly Club'. It was also during this time that she actually met Dennis Hinkle, a former student of Kelly's, whose dissertation on the change of personal constructs was of great assistance to her during the time when she was writing her own dissertation, helping her to understand the change stutterers go through to become fluent speakers. It was from Hinkle's "Implications Grid" that Fay developed the "Bi-polar Implications Grid" that she used in her major research project on stuttering and which resulted in her book *Personal Change and Reconstruction: Research on a treatment of stuttering* in 1972. Fay was constantly promoting Hinkle's ideas in her own work and she spent considerable time in the last few years of her life arranging, at long last, for the publication of his dissertation, thereby making it readily available to countless others. This interest in the ideas and the careers of others was something that she valued and many people benefited greatly from her efforts on their behalf.

Though the methodology with which Fay will always be most closely associated is repertory grid technique, Fay was also devoted to Kelly's narrative method, the self-characterisation. Fay was one of the very few people to have published an account of the empirical work she did using a series of self-characterisations, that work being described in her paper 'Nature babbling to herself: the self-characterisation as a therapeutic tool'.

Fay's applications of personal construct psychology to the understanding and treatment of stuttering, supported by the Mental Health Research Fund, were groundbreaking. Essentially,

she demonstrated that stuttering is the stutterer's 'way of life', whereas for him or her, the world of fluency is relatively devoid of meaning. The therapeutic approach that she developed was based upon elaboration of the meaningfulness of fluency for the stutterer, but has much broader applicability for the treatment of clinical and, indeed, other problems.

The year before *Personal Change and Reconstruction* was published Fay co-authored with Don Bannister *Inquiring Man*, the book for which she first gained her international reputation and which had three editions. This set her on the course to produce over 100 theoretical and research publications of which there are 13 books such as *A Manual of Repertory Grid Technique* in 2004 (2nd Edition with Richard Bell and Don Bannister), *George Kelly* in 1995, and the *International Handbook of Personal Construct Psychology* in 2003, which she edited. Fay also kept Kelly's book *The Psychology of Personal Constructs*, in print by persuading Routledge to publish another edition of the book in 1991. That was only achieved by the hard work of Fay and others at the Centre for Personal Construct Psychology in physically typing up the manuscript of the book. The world of PCP would look very different if that edition of Kelly's major work had not come into being and dwindling numbers of the original Norton edition of 1955 were the only source available to read about Kelly's theory.

In 1971, Fay was appointed Senior Lecturer in Clinical Psychology at the Royal Free Hospital School of Medicine, University of London, and promoted to Reader in 1977. Her research in this post included the application of personal construct psychology to clients with eating disorders. During this period, she was instrumental in organizing what she so generously called the Second International Congress in Personal Construct Psychology held at Oxford University's Christ Church College in July of 1977. Actually it was the first conference to bear that name. While serving as a discussion group leader at the 1975 Nebraska Symposium on Motivation devoted to the work of George Kelly, she had the revelation that what we had all witnessed was in fact the 'First International Congress on Personal

Construct Psychology'. These conferences have continued biennially ever since.

In 1982, she took early retirement to set up the Centre for Personal Construct Psychology at 132 Warwick Way in central London, the first such centre with the aim, as she described, "to give personal construct psychology to anyone who wants it". As soon as the Centre opened Peggy Dalton (a speech therapist) joined her, then came Helen Jones (a psychotherapist) as Director of Education and Training, and later came Gavin Dunnett (a psychiatrist). There would be many others to join her at the Centre in the years to come.

Amongst the Centre's achievements was to become a founder member of the United Kingdom Council for Psychotherapy (UKCP), and to run the first training course leading to registration with the UKCP as a personal construct psychotherapist. The Centre ran its own psychology clinic offering psychotherapy and counseling to individuals in the community. The Centre also offered (and continues to offer) consultancy services to organisations and one of its first contracts involved assisting British Airways in understanding the construing of its staff. In addition The Centre had the opportunity to consult with the Allied Irish Bank, British Telecom, Ford of Europe, the National Health Service, and the Metropolitan Police, to name but a few.

In order to gather the very large amount of data which was needed to carry out these consultations, under Fay's direction the Centre created the 'diagnostic research' process, which uses repertory grids to conduct 'idiographic' attitude surveys to explore the construing of groups of people. The first step in that process is to identify the problem or issue to be explored – often easier said than done. After that constructs have to be elicited and a standard form of repertory grid is then designed based on the elements used to elicit those constructs and the constructs themselves, after they have been categorised. It was part of Fay's genius to recognise that the diagnostic research process would be greatly strengthened if the resistance to change of the constructs in the grid was also measured and a means of doing that was built into the process. In the 1980s it was not easy to get a computer pro-

gram to analyse multiple grids so, with the benefit of the expertise of Professor Peter Fonagy, Fay had a special computer program written to do just that.

Fay's contribution to psychology was recognised by the award of a Fellowship of the British Psychological Society, and by her inclusion in a list of 12 senior psychologists invited to provide their reminiscences in a book marking the Society's centenary. On her retirement, she was made Emeritus Reader in Clinical Psychology at the University of London, and in 2001 she was awarded a Visiting Professorship at the University of Hertfordshire, where until past her 80<sup>th</sup> year she regularly contributed to the Doctorate in Clinical Psychology, the only such course in the U.K. with a strong personal construct component. In 2005, the Centre for Personal Construct Psychology with its newsletter 'The Constructive Interventionist', under Nick Reed's Directorship, became part of the School of Psychology at the University of Hertfordshire with David Winter as its Senior Advisor. The Centre continues to offer courses and workshops in personal construct psychology to students from all over the world both on-site and through a distance-learning program. Also in 2005 she was awarded a Lifetime Achievement Award by the 16<sup>th</sup> International Congress on Personal Construct Psychology in Columbus, Ohio marking George Kelly's 100-birthday year and the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the publication of his major work *The Psychology of Personal Constructs*.

Fay's life exemplified the spirit of adventure that is central to personal construct psychology, and Kelly's view that no one should be a victim of their biography. Shortly before she died one of us (Nick) met her in London and she was talking about dying (her terminal cancer had by then been diagnosed) and how she was construing her death which she was knew was going to happen in the near future. She had no doubts, no hesitation, in being reflexive and applying PCP to this most swirling of events. She ended that conversation by saying, "I have had a good life and I've done what I wanted to do and I have no regrets. We all have to die." There can be few things more validating to a theory than to apply it to oneself, when the experiment of life itself is

*Franz Epting, Helen Jones, Nick Reed, David Winter*

about to end. She had no children, but is survived by her husband Roy.

Fay, we will all miss you so.

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(listed alphabetically)

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(Some of the material used in this obituary also appears in the obituary by David Winter in *The Guardian*.)

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