

Remembering Fay Fransella

I first came across the work of George Kelly when I was training as a Counsellor in 1976. I found his ideas exciting and came across the book 'Inquiring Man' written by Don Bannister and Fay Fransella which I read avidly. I could not forget such names and I was told that these two people (Don and Fay) were the British people who were introducing Kelly's ideas to people in the UK. We did a mini repgrid on my course and for the first time some interesting insights about people in my life came to light. It was extraordinary how this simple activity made me rethink a lot of the things that seemed to be going wrong in my life at that time.

The following year I had some time off work ill. I saw an advertisement for an introductory course in Personal Construct Psychology led by Fay Fransella at the Royal Free Hospital in London. I telephoned Fay to find out more about the course and she invited me to apply by writing a character sketch of myself in the third person – following what I later learned were Kelly's suggestions for finding out more about a person by asking them and being credulous about what they say. This was a powerful moment for me as it meant that I had become one of what I now know to be a very large community of people worldwide who have found Kelly's ideas inspirational. So I did my training with Fay and an interesting group of people who later became my friends and colleagues. These included Peggy Dalton, Cassie Cooper, and later Gavin Dunnett. When we finished our introductory course we all wanted to continue learning more about Personal Construct Psychology and Fay agreed to continue developing our interest from her home in Chelsea. This further training turned into the Advanced Diploma of Personal Construct Psychology. We all enjoyed our weekly meetings and learned so much from Fay and each other.

Fay had been developing ideas of her own at this point and before long she and her husband Roy had bought premises in Pimlico – 132 Warwick Way where the ground floor and basement became the Centre for Personal Con-

struct Psychology and Fay and Roy lived on the upper floors. I think our first computer was on the landing between the ground and first floors! Peggy Dalton joined Fay immediately at the Centre but before long Fay invited me to become their 'Director of Education and Training'. I don't know how I had the nerve to agree to undertake such a grad sounding job since this would mean leaving my job as Student Counsellor in Wandsworth and also selling my home in Richmond, Surrey.

Fay's interest in growing a school for PCP was compelling and I think we felt like pioneers hoping to introduce these novel ideas to others. At that time most of us were psychologists, or therapists or speech therapists. But soon people from other backgrounds became interested and after one of the workshops we ran our market research arm developed. We were invited to do a massive piece of research to help a major airline find out how to please their customers better. Fay, apparently confidently, agreed that we would do this piece of work and fortunately she was able to call on other colleagues to help with the analysis of data which was required. So our small team of workers just got on with the work of interviewing quite a lot of people using personal construct frameworks for our inquiries. Joyce Watson had also joined the Centre at this time as a psychologist and we worked very hard to complete this first piece of organisational work. One of the major findings was that passenger contact staff really preferred to work with "difficult" passengers rather than being obliged to treat them all equally. From this particular piece of information the airline launched their 'Putting People First' programme involving large numbers of their staff. We offered a back up counselling service to many of them following the research. Other organisations became interested and market research and organisational development became part of the Centre's portfolio.

Fay's energy and enthusiasm for this work was remarkable and her effort unstinting. Setting

up a Centre in central London was a costly business and the main focus of our work – therapy and counselling and education – was not lucrative enough to support the building and premises and the few staff we had. So the organisational work became particularly important. Fay took many financial risks to keep it all going; she had left her job as Reader at the Royal Free Hospital School of Medicine by this time but she was very keen to make Personal Construct Psychology accessible to many more people.

What I am trying to capture is the sense of excitement, innovation and adventure that was around. It was lovely to work with people who came on our courses and workshops and many people now really well known in the PCP world came to the Centre to wish Fay well and to meet the rest of us working with her. Don Bannister was closely involved and I was lucky to have him as my mentor during my own training. Tom Ravenette spent time with us. Spence McWilliams came on sabbatical and worked with us. Finn Tschudi brought groups of students from Norway to our workshops and I met Franz Epting, Bob and Greg Neimeyer when they came from the USA. Dorothy Rowe ran workshops for us on ‘Depression’ in the early days of her published work on many aspects of psychological wellness. And we went to the international congresses. I remember being very impressed when I met the authors there of so many of the papers in ‘New Perspectives in Personal Construct Psychology’. People in this international community became our friends.

I left the Centre in 1986 when I had the opportunity to take myself and my work in personal construct psychology to a job in the National Health Service in Yorkshire. The focus of this job was management development initially for doctors and later for many other people in the NHS. I was lucky to be appointed to a job there which gave me the opportunity to use PCP as the background to research I undertook to identify what needed to be done. I was sad to leave London and the Centre but glad to have the opportunity to use PCP in a wider context. Fay was very helpful to me in her advice and her willingness

to come to Yorkshire sometimes to meet some of the people I worked with there.

Fay herself made the decision later on to run the Centre in a more virtual way and she and more recently Nick Reed who eventually became the Director of the Centre for Personal Construct Psychology at the University of Hertfordshire ran distance learning courses from Fay’s home in Falmouth and Nick’s home in Kent using a more electronic method of working. Peggy Dalton with Ray Evans set up an arm’s length organisation, the Personal Construct Psychology Association, who continued to run the foundation and advanced diploma courses through to the present day. These were all supported by the people who had studied originally at the Centre in London.

I myself kept in touch by establishing a bi-monthly group meeting of what has come to be known as the Northern PCP Research group and we have now been meeting for 22 years up here in Yorkshire. Nick Reed comes to these meetings and in this way we continue to pursue the interest we have all had in Personal Construct Psychology and the work of George Kelly.

Without Fay none of this would have happened and we shall all miss her very much indeed. She was truly inspirational.

Helen Jones, York, UK

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Contact: frepting@hotmail.com

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