

Dorothy Rowe

1930 - 2019

Dorothy was born and raised in my part of Australia, Newcastle NSW. Not, though, in the then ‘dirty, gritty city’ that grew from the discovery of coal here when the soldier-pursuers of convicts who had escaped from the penal colony that was Sydney, saw smoke. It was not the escapees cooking something but the local indigenous people burning coal. There was heaps of it, still is! Mines quickly opened up and later there was a steelworks built, and a port, and the city became the fifth largest in Australia. Dorothy lived on the Lake, Lake Macquarie, the largest salt water lake in Australia; beautiful, peaceful, clean. She also went to the most prestigious school in the area, which was in the city, but away from the steelworks!

Dorothy escaped this country by going to the UK, the place that would, we were told, tame and civilise us colonials from ‘down under’, us ‘rough diamonds’, us ‘blokes’ and ‘sheilas’ suffering from a ‘cultural cringe’. As her legacy suggests, though, she gave as much as she took.

I had several visits with her in the UK, in particular once when she lived in Sheffield where I had spent an earlier Sabbatical Leave at Sheffield University. Once in London after she had achieved the dream of owning her own place there. In the Sheffield visit, she parked me in the lounge room with a ‘six pack’ of Fosters Beer while she wrote an obituary which was wanted under a tight deadline by, I think, *The Times*. How audacious of her, as I do not drink Fosters! On another occasion the visitor who had just left before I arrived was Franz Epting; Dorothy hosted not only Aussies but also natives of other lands! She also wrote me a job reference a long time ago and while I did not get the job it was the most validating and beautiful reference I had ever had.

So, that’s some of my stories, there are more, including her keynote lecture at our Townsville PCP Congress in 1993, but in my eyes this was trumped by the beautiful impact on her of one of the Aboriginal dance group, a young girl of

around age five who captured the hearts of everybody present, more particularly, I recall, Dorothy.



*Dorothy Rowe in 2006*¹

What can I possibly say about Dorothy at this time, and am I qualified and entitled to say it? I will, though. Her writing was perceptive, wide ranging, sometimes moving and sometimes self-disclosing, always educative. It was as philosophical as it was practical, insightful, and humble. For those of us of the Personal Construct Psychology tribe her thoughts were framed and theorised in terms of Kelly’s theory, yet not dogmatically. My first encounter with PCP was in my Clinical Psychology Degree, by accident, and amongst other publications I read at that time was Dorothy’s 1971 paper in the *British Journal of Psychiatry: Poor Prognosis in a Case of Depression as Predicted by the Repertory Grid*. That led me to a book that I still think in its first 30-odd pages, its last 16 pages, and especially its last 3 pages, speaks so very well to

¹ speaking at Fay Fransella’s 80th birthday celebration at the University of Hertfordshire (Photo Jörn Scheer)

what its title indicated: *The Experience of Depression* (John Wiley & Sons, 1978). There were many more books, some on the same theme others ranging across numerous of the human strengths and failings. There were talks and papers, interviews and Keynote addresses across many areas of the human struggle. A fragment of Don Bannister's observations in his *Foreword* to the *Experience of Depression* can be seen some four decades later to aptly characterise Dorothy's immense contribution to our thinking more generally than just to the phenomenon we call *depression*:

It seems to me that we benefit from the kind of venture Dorothy Rowe has undertaken both in

our formal comprehension of, and our ability to help, those who are psychologically distressed by what we call 'depression'. At the same time we are reminded of the fact that depression is part of the human condition and that in understanding it we come to an understanding of aspects ourselves.

Dorothy's venture continues to inspire.

Bill Warren, Newcastle, NSW, Australia

Correspondence address:

william.warren@newcastle.edu.au

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