
BOB AND MARY

CHAPTER TWO: MY TRAINING BEGINS

"I'm not going to laugh at that. That's not funny for you!" Bob Goulding, 1970

The Western Institute for Group and Family Therapy was located on the side of Mount Madonna just outside of Watsonville, CA. Watsonville is today what it was then, a town with an agriculture-based economy. The Institute overlooked Watsonville, which looked like a gleaming jewel in the night from the large open-air terrace that skirted the back of the house. Beyond Watsonville there was a magnificent view of the Monterey Bay where you could see on a clear night the lights of Monterey to the extreme left and the lights of Santa Cruz to the right. It was beyond beautiful.

When I had met Bob at his training group in Menlo Park, we had stood outside together on the upstairs balcony of his rented suite in Menlo Park (see Chapter One, *I Meet Bob*). While he smoked a cigarette, one of thousands I watched him consume, he gave me a brief history of his beautiful new Institute that he and Mary had owned only a short time at that point. It was a perfect place to hold training events. The main house had originally been built in the 1930's during prohibition in the US reputedly by the most successful vice king on the Monterey Peninsula, having successful dealings in both illegal whiskey and prostitution.

For those of you who had the good luck to spend time there, you will remember that the large and roomy main house had been obviously built by someone who had some serious coin in his pocket. It is beautifully appointed with imported fireplaces from England. Beautiful tile work covered all the floors and it was warmed with radiant heat. The fireplace in the small dining room was inlaid with the words, "East West, Hames Best." The ceilings were astonishing. They were all heart redwood made up of twenty-four-inch boards. There was not a single blemish on them. In some rooms they had been painted which was a minor crime. If one could find such panels today it would take a Steve Jobs to afford them.

In addition to the main house the property consisted of forty mostly wooded and steep acres. You could take long walks and never leave their property. Water for the house was provided by a spring on the property that was equipped with a large holding tank. There were a number of outbuildings, all of them sleeping rooms with bathroom facilities. This all fit Bob's vision. They could house and feed thirty-five people. He wanted people to live there, be it for a week or a month because he believed in creating what he called, "An environment for change." He wanted people to live in a different stroke economy where they could make new decisions about their lives and their autonomy and have those changes, those "redecisions" reinforced and supported so they could change their lives in a more rapid and efficient manner. To this end he also put in a very nice swimming pool with a built-in hot tub. He believed he was important for people to not only work hard but to enjoy themselves as part of the change process.

Ironically, when the house was sold by its original owner, it was bought by an order of Catholic nuns who converted it into a retirement home. When Bob bought the home from them the big dining room had been converted into a chapel. He converted it back. It must have been a fabulous retirement center. At the time they sold it, they were down to four very elderly occupants and it was time for them to move on. Bob had nothing good to say about the nuns who had sold him the place claiming all sorts of minor ways in which they had misrepresented the deal. They told him the washing machine was in working order. When he took possession, he found it had no motor! Sometimes Bob would

show evidence of having “Irish Alzheimer disease,” which is a condition where you forget everything except for the grudges.

We finished our negotiations and I agreed to start my training by attending a treatment marathon at the Institute at the beginning of the following month, December 1970. This was an absolute requirement. You had to be socialized into their treatment model before training in it. I can’t remember the exact dollar amount, but I think it was in the range of \$500, perhaps \$700. For that amount Bob told me I could participate in any events taking place at the Institute, week workshops or weekend marathons, conducted by them or by an associate.

Unlike a few years later when there were constant training events at the Institute, this was not the case then. They travelled a lot because they were recruiting and marketing themselves. There was no Internet and the most effective marketing in that time was done with shoe leather and plane tickets.

Because I was being given the deal of deals, Bob added one stipulation that seemed eminently fair. He asked me to lodge myself in Watsonville and be responsible for my own food. I willingly agreed to that stipulation; “Cross my heart and hope to die.” I’ll say more about that in a moment.

FIRST TIME AT THE INSTITUTE

At this point in time I no longer remember the reason for leaving for Watsonville late in the evening, but I remember as if it was yesterday the drive in the dark down highway 101. I left from San Francisco because by that time I was living with a woman in San Francisco in the Castro district. Today, that is the part of the City most famous for its predominantly gay population. At that time, it was rapidly becoming what it is today. It was certainly the most radical or left-wing portion of the City (with the exception of Haight-Asbury), which is saying something. I had signed up for a multi-session class on Esalen massage in the City and it was held at this woman’s flat. We ended up being each other’s partner the first evening, were given some basic instructions and told to take off our clothes and take turns massaging each other. One thing led to another

Needless to say, these were novel experiences for someone who had just graduated from seminary and had been recently ordained. But, as interesting, not to say lascivious, as all that might be, it is not central to main theme of this story. I will say that it was my first exposure to the women’s movement (she shared the flat with two other women) and the only time in my life I was trained on how to respond if the FBI knocked on the door. What! Also, I was otherwise introduced to some other elements of life and, in contrast to Bill Clinton, I did inhale and rather liked it.

We all have indelible memories and that first drive to Watsonville is one of mine. There are two ways to make that journey. I took the Highway 101 route which runs you straight down the SF peninsula until you come to a farming community named Morgan Hill. The other route was over highway 17 through Santa Cruz. In those days you ran out of freeway and did the last fifteen miles on a four-lane road with stoplights that was nicknamed “Blood alley” because of the heavy flow of traffic that resulted in lots of fatal accidents. In Morgan Hill I turned right onto Hecker Pass Road. The intersection was prominent because of a large landmark oak tree, which is still there.

Having turned right I found myself on a two-lane road that took me over Hecker Pass. This was a twisty and winding road that traversed Mt Madonna. It was not unlike the roads I had driven all my life growing up in West Virginia, so I felt very much at home. Descending the west side of the mountain I was supposed to make a right turn close to the bottom of the hill. I knew I had missed when I arrived in the outskirts of Watsonville.

I inquired at an open restaurant and was told I had missed my now left turn about two miles back. I retraced my steps and made the correct turn. I negotiated the next few turns without incident and on the last turn found myself on

Gaffe Road. I drove to the very end, about a quarter of a mile and drove through the modest gates of the Institute. I parked my car in front and for the first time (of hundreds and hundreds of times) I walked up the long hillside staircase leading to the front walk of the house.

The front door is made of heavy metal that frames large panes of glass. It was slightly ajar, and I pulled it open. I found myself in the foyer and there was no one around. It was probably 10 PM. Finally, someone came by who was also there for the workshop and she told me Bob and Mary had gone to bed and I should find someplace to sleep in one of the outbuildings. I remember being slightly crestfallen that they were not there to greet me and had gone to bed! But it is important to remember that at that point in my life that me and my considerable narcissism were still strangers to one another; having never been properly introduced. Over the coming years we would become well acquainted and I would understand those rather grandiose feelings more clearly.

I have no memory which room I slept in. Of course, over the years there was not a single room on the property I did not sleep in, including one of the lounges out by the pool. I went by 266 Gaffey Road recently, the first time I had been there since Bob's memorial in 1992. It is now a live-in drug and alcohol facility, which is a perfect use for it. I was allowed to wander the property and I found every inch (no exaggeration) filled with memories for me, the vast majority of them good. Other than a safety fence around the pool, trees now inhabiting the lawn where I married my wife forty-one years ago and a covering that encloses the outside terrace, it looks very much as it did then. And, of course, there is a memorial plaque under a tree where Bob's ashes are buried, but that story will be in a later chapter.

MY FIRST MARATHON

After breakfast (the food was always very good), we gathered in the living room of the main house. It had no problem holding the sixteen or eighteen of us who were assembled. Bob and Mary sat at the head of the room on a velvet-covered couch, each at either end. It was three quarters the size of a regular couch and it struck me (very pleasantly) how much they touched one another. They sat in a most relaxed way and their feet were often intertwined as they took turns talking.

Now, the name "marathon" came from their earlier experiences in doing therapy. When they had been in their previous location in Coyote Valley (which I never saw) they did a lot of experimenting with different strategies of doing workshops. They actually conducted what could only be called marathons, where everyone stayed awake for the entire duration of the workshop. The idea was that the tiredness might help weaken defenses and thereby accelerate therapy by being able to get to the "inner core" more efficiently. What they found out is that it was a great way to become really exhausted and that the only people who got any sleep were the participants who would drift off while others were working. Of course, the therapists had to stay awake. Mercifully this experiment was of short duration, but the name stuck.

Now, these were arduous workshops especially for the leaders. Bob and Mary worked very hard, I mean, really hard. But they kept immaculate boundaries. Starting time was starting time and quitting time was quitting time. In all my years I never once saw Bob Goulding work even one second past the stated quitting time. And he was hard on any of us who deviated from that norm, believing that that behavior stroked people in an improper way. I remember a participant saying he wanted to work late in an afternoon and Bob said, "OK, but it is eleven minutes before five and you need to understand I am quitting then no matter what is happening." The participant agreed and worked for ten minutes.

Once we had gathered, they went over the rules. They were few and simple. No alcohol was to be consumed except for the wine that would be served with dinner. If you brought grass with you, take it off the property and bury it

somewhere immediately as it was an illegal substance. There was to be no violence or threats of violence. If someone needed to express his rage by breaking a piece of furniture, that would be OK as long as the person paid for it first. There was to be no sexual contact or sexual flirtation with anyone except the partner who came with you. If you couldn't agree to the rules, leave. These rules were not gratuitous. This was the early 1970's in CA and the ethic that ruled the day was, "If it feels good, do it." Bob and Mary were all about keeping people safe and giving them, good boundaries and they were not afraid to back them up.

In one particular instance years later, a participant brought a beer into the initial meeting. Bob stated the rules and told him to go pour it out which the participant did with a great show of resentment. He repeated the same thing after lunch and Bob again had him throw it out, much to this man's growing anger. He challenged Bob once again by walking in with another beer at the evening session. He and Bob got into it. The man ended up screaming at Bob that he had had to fight everyone in his life for everything and Bob screamed back at him he understood because he had had to do the same goddamn thing all his life. The man broke down and began to sob uncontrollably as Bob tended to him in the gentlest way imaginable. It's no wonder I loved my years there so much. They took what looked like impossible situations and unforgiveable and hopeless actions and flipped them. It is an overused phrase, but it was truly mind blowing, especially for a kid from West Virginia.

Once they had stated the rules they launched into a rather long lecture on transactional analysis, a 101 course actually. We were allowed to tape record this part of the workshop and I had my Sony 105 taking in every word. Actually, the Sony 105 was the workhorse of their work. They recorded everything they did. They did this for two reasons. They were doing original and ground-breaking psychotherapy and they liked to pull excerpts off the tapes to use in training. (The rules around confidentiality were a bit squishier then). And they used the tape as an instrument of therapy in a very effective way. They would often play back for someone what had been said. They would do it over in over. I later became expert at backing up the tape just the right amount and then playing as phrase. Sometimes it was so someone could hear a harsh parental voice being reenacted by themselves or sometime to hear the quality of their plaintiveness. For some it was the first time that he or she heard how soft their voice was. "Who told you not to speak up?" Bob would ask. Sometimes they would play a piece of what someone had just said and as, "If you were this person's therapist, what you say?" It was very effective.

At some point in the morning Mary put before us an intriguing riddle that no one in the room was able to correctly answer. Remember this was 1970. Also remember that this was a room full of very bright people, as many women as men. The riddle went like this: "A boy and his father were driving down the highway. Suddenly a car coming from the other direction swerved across the road and caused a head-on collision. The father was killed instantly, and the son was gravely injured. He was rushed to the hospital. The emergency room doctor came in, took one look at the boy and said, 'I can't operate on him. He's my son.'" The riddle: Who is the Doctor? Well, duh, his mom. Yeah, not one soul got it. I still remember straining my brain trying to figure it out. In those days, folks, doctors were men! It still stumps lots of people, but someone always gets it today in a room full of people. It was actually a pretty profound educational moment.

These 101 courses would run through lunch and for the first session of the afternoon. I was completely enthralled. They were colorful and excellent teachers. They were a great team, each moving in and out with no apparent competition. Of course, I had no sense of how boring or exhausting it must have been for them to repeat what had to be monotonous material after a time. Remember what I said about my narcissism. It seemed they were doing it for me. I will say that they truly did teach the material with energy and enthusiasm. They were enjoying themselves and they were enjoying being together. They had both only been divorced from their former spouses for a short time. I certainly loved it and I listened to those tapes over and over with headphones on and taking notes. It was as if I was listening to holy writ and who's to say I wasn't. The impact of that information and their way of working in that time were transformational for me.

Once they had finished with the lecture part of the workshop, we took our afternoon break. Here again, breaks were fifteen minutes. At thirteen minutes they would start calling everyone back in. And they didn't wait for stragglers. Fifteen minutes from when the break had begun Bob and Mary were back in their seats and ready to work. Folks did not get extra strokes for being tardy, not did the workshop wait on them.

When we took our places again, Bob and Mary went around the room and asked each person his or her goals for the workshops. They worked from the concept of contracts. They challenged people to make a contract, that is, to agree on the goal of their particular work. They did not like what they called, "Fishing trips." They believed that people were autonomous and that they had the power to change their lives and that, they, Bob and Mary were available to help them in that process; but the client was in charge of stating the goal. In the contract work they helped people by showing them their injunctions and their scripts.

I was stunned, in the best possible way. It seemed as if they had only to speak to someone for the barest few minutes and they knew their lives and their greatest and most shameful secrets. And yet they discussed everything without any sense of judgment or contempt. They were so kind and yet so powerful at the same time. I was sitting at the apex of the circle and they were coming around in order in a counter clockwise manner. There was a woman sitting about three seats to my left. They were clearly familiar with her from a previous workshop. One of them asked her a question and the next thing I knew she was in a fetal position on the floor sobbing. My eyes about came out of my head and then I looked to the head of the room to the couch. They were sitting calmly nodding their heads and looking totally self-possessed, as if this happened all the time. Of course, in their world, it did. I had no idea what had just happened or how it had happened or how they knew how to be so confident in the midst of it. But I wanted to. I really wanted to, like nothing I had ever wanted in my whole life. I had found my place.

Once they had completed the process of getting contracts with each participant they began to work. This was more unstructured, and people volunteered to work as the spirit led them. I remember my own work very clearly and distinctly. I won't bore you with the details, but it had to do with turning my anxiety (of which I had boatloads) into excitement. I do remember standing at one point extending my arms out wide akimbo as Bob instructed me on how to breathe and making a lot of noise and everyone cheering for me. Bob quoted Fritz Perls who had said, "Anxiety is just excitement without breath."

That was a really good piece of work for me with lots of lasting benefits, but that is not my main or most important memory from the workshop. This was the early 1970's. The Viet Nam war was raging, and the death toll of American soldiers was averaging 300 per week; unimaginable. The divisions in the country were severe. I had grown a beard while in Alaska in 1969 and that one feature meant that some people would not speak to me and caused some whom I had known a long time to reject me. It was an awful period.

Now if you talked to Bob or Mary during this time there was no doubt where their particular sympathies lay. They were active in every way possible working against the war and trying to stop it. Bob absolutely believed that he and Mary were being harassed by the IRS (Internal Revenue Service) because of their political activities. I'm not so sure I believe that, but you didn't disagree with Bob and Mary around issues that were considered can't. Memorably at one moment Bob gave his own version of the familiar civil rights motto with his own twist: "We shall overcome, but I'm not going to get screwed in the process!" But they didn't bring their political persuasion into therapy (well, maybe occasionally Mary slipped it in), or at least into this workshop. There was a man in his fifties, who was clearly Republican to the core and I felt a chill between us immediately. After all I was clearly a hippie (beard and long hair) from San Francisco.

But again, they did their magic. He was an angry guy and seemed very unlikeable. The details are gone, but what I remember is Bob's courage in confronting this guy and not backing down in the face of his anger. Then, in a moment, suddenly this guy is sobbing and the next thing I know Bob is walking to the back of the room with a box of Kleenex

and doling them out to him, again in this most gentle way. At dinner that night he and I sat across from one another and had the warmest conversation. He was no longer an icon of an ideology I found repulsive, but a very human person with his own story and a world of vulnerability in him. To me, that was magic.

At the end of the workshop, we said goodbye to one another in the warmest way. That ending has one other significant memory for me. For the closing ritual Bob and Mary requested that each individual go around and say goodbye to the other individuals while we all watched. This was very touching, but also quite time consuming. Of course, I hadn't been through this dozens of times. This was my first. I was just astonished at the amount of affection and gratitude in the room.

There was one man though, a husband there with his wife, who got more and more excited with each person he spoke to. When he got to Bob, he wanted to hug him. Bob stayed seated and put up his hand in a gesture saying, "slow down." I was confused. This all seemed wonderful to me, how excited this man was. Bob said, "I want you to calm down. I will give you a hug, but I don't want to get any broken ribs from it."

The nice thing is that I could catch on immediately. As soon as Bob did that, I realized that he was too excited. It was something else. Of course, in those days I had no idea about mania, or anything related. I could just feel the rightness of Bob's action. And I learned. In the first few years of being at the Institute I don't ever remember coming away from Bob or Mary without having learned something new. They were masters.

The workshop came to an end. It was after lunch on Sunday afternoon that we did the goodbye ceremony. Thankfully for them, Bob and Mary gave up doing a four-hour lecture to fifteen or so people every time they did a marathon. They dispensed with the elaborate after lunch goodbye ritual and began ending the workshops at noon. They were still very work intensive, but they discarded the more exhausting, and inevitably boring for them portions of the formula. But I have always been thankful that I got to drink the full glass with all the bells and whistles. And they were full of enthusiasm. Doing all of that was of great help to them because they were still learning their own material and teaching it helped them to crystalize it.

In summary, it was amazing to be twenty-six years old and to be in that room and to know I was going to get to come back for lots more. For most everyone, perhaps everyone, it was a one-time experience. I was the luckiest person in that room.

ONGOING TRAINING

One of the really nice aspects of the "lottery ticket" that I won when Bob gave me such an all-encompassing deal for such a small fee is that I got to take part in their ongoing training program. This program consisted of two-day sessions every other Wednesday-Thursday. Trainees arrived at the Institute after lunch on Wednesday, spent the night and had training until lunchtime on Thursday. There was always a seminar on Wednesday evening after dinner. This program included dinner, breakfast and lodging for the night. This was great training and a lot of fun.

I remember my first afternoon quite vividly. A small group of us were gathered in the living room with Bob and he was supervising audiotapes that trainees had brought with them. Again, it was a different era. In this age of heightened concern about confidentiality and the presence of the Internet and the ubiquity of ..., it is hard to imagine people taping their clients so that someone else can listen to them and supervise the work. That said, it was a tremendous training tool.

We were listening to someone's tape and Bob was making comments. At one point the person being supervised made a comment something like, "I'm never good enough," and did so in a way that was very humorous. Everyone in the

circle laughed including me. Overtop of our laughter came Bob's voice booming (as it often did), "I'm not going to laugh at that. It's no funny for you!" I got it instantaneously. It was what I learned was called "gallows humor." Without being aware of it this man had gotten all of us to laugh at something that was actually a very serious problem for him from a script point of view. With his intervention, Bob was saying I am not going to participate in your tragic script and promote it by cooperating in this way.

It was a very simple but powerful intervention. This is how they taught. They would teach abstract concepts, as in the 101 that they presented at the beginning of the marathon, but the teaching, the skill building was always in the room. Bob was listening to the tape and giving feedback, but he was always in the room watching for the script elements of person's life being acted out in real time. He taught us to confront and intervene in the here and now.

There was another signature element to their training. They used positive feedback in their work. They looked for peoples' strengths and gifts and reinforced them. In their feedback, whether of a tape or of work done in front of the group, they always started with what they liked about what the person had done. One of the key speakers at Mary's memorial a few years ago was Jeff Zeig. He is a very well-known figure, being the founder and promoter of the hugely successful masters of therapy seminars sponsored by The Milton Erickson Institute.

In his comments, he recounted his astonishment at Bob and Mary's approach. In his own training he had been socialized into a system of supervision that was based on the negative; pointing out the deficiencies of the trainee. He described the first time he volunteered to be the therapist. He did a piece of work with someone while Bob and Mary and the entire room watched. He hardly felt he knew what he was doing and was frankly terrified at what they might say to him. To his shock he was informed about how talented and gifted he was. They pointed out all the ways in which he had done so well in the work. In the midst of that affirmation they also bestowed a few tips on how to improve his skills. That was their style and an expression of their values.

They hated the system embodied by the analytic arm of psychotherapy that emphasized the wisdom of a great master at the expense of an underling. Mary recounted that she knew the day and hour she had finally had it with that system. At the time she worked at Mt. Zion hospital as a licensed clinical social worker. It was a training facility for therapists. There were weekly training seminars in the evening that consisted of an intern presenting a case in great detail to the other interns and the staff of the clinic. On this particular evening the intern in question was presenting in front of a particularly revered icon of the craft.

Having finished with his presentation, everyone in the room fell into an expectant hush as they waited for the great man to speak and bestow wisdom upon them all. In the full regalia of his position the head psychiatrist made some weighty comments, none complementary of the intern, ending with the summation, "The main problem for this client is that he has the penis confused with the breast!" There was a rapturous awe with this magnificent and penetrating interpretation and the seminar ended. As they were filing out of the room Mary overheard the intern who had presented say, "Well, that is all very well and good, but how do I tell my patient. He's a truck driver!"

I mentioned volunteering to be the therapist. Let me explain. This was key to their system. Bob and Mary would normally split the group, with one half in the living room of the big house and the other half in the barn. The barn was just that. The original owner had kept horses. The portion of the barn used for training had a concrete floor and overhead lighting, but not much else. Later it was later expanded, doubling the size of the room and carpeting was put on the floor. The lighting remained the same. They were not fancy.

From the group that remained in either of those two places, volunteers were recruited to form an inner group of three or four people. Once that was set the invitation was given for someone to be the therapist of the group and work with someone. Bob and Mary were adamant that personal work be efficient in a group setting. They set twenty minutes as the arbitrary standard for an effective piece of therapy. They also did not teach analytical group process. They

considered it a waste of time. And they believed it created a situation where people got lots of strokes for their games and scripts.

They believed in group therapy actively led and directed by a strong group leader. They greatly disliked the model of the therapist sitting back and not taking an active role. They liked working in groups because they could train the group to be an active agent of change, to stroke other members in the direction of health. They believed it was the responsibility of the group leader to understand games, scripts and especially injunctions. They believed above all else that individual therapy in groups needed to be contractual.

They wanted the therapist to be focused and to work with the stated goals of the patient. They emphasized the concept of responsibility, that people were responsible for themselves and for their change process. They sought clarity. They wanted things stated in a way that the patient wasn't just looking for the therapist to come up with the answers. They taught people to think efficiently, how to "cure the patient today" in the words of Eric Berne. They weren't interested in what they called "Progress," but in cure. How can I help the person change their script today?

In making the contract they taught everyone to be especially careful of certain words, "try" being at the top. If someone said, "I'd like to try to stop overeating" as a potential contract Bob would ring a cowbell he kept by his chair. He called it his "Try Bell." He rang it with great enthusiasm anytime someone used the word "Try" when speaking of a future goal. He would coach, "Say will or won't, don't say try." If someone was having a hard time with this concept, he would toss him a magic marker and say, "Try to throw it to me." If the person threw it, he would throw it back and say, "No. I said to *try* to throw it to me." The word "Can't" was confronted. "I can't stop smoking" was changed to "I won't stop smoking." Other words which they believed surrendered power were "Want," "Hope," and "Wish." Mary, no friend of the Bible would often rewrite a well know piece of the New Testament by saying, "Faith, hope and charity, and the worst of these is hope."

Actually, as I remember this, consulting some old notes, and think about the sheer amount of information they would give out, it had to have seemed like a bewildering blitz to some. They taught and then they acted.

This brings us back to the scene in the barn or the living room with the small group as the inner circle waiting for someone to volunteer as a therapist. When someone did, he or she would come up and assume the chair in the group that had been set aside for the group leader. That person would give the invitation, "Who wants to work?" At the end of twenty minutes or so, the person would have either completed a piece of work or the supervisor would come in and help to finish it up.

Then came the supervision portion, the part Jeff was so dreading. Countless times I witnessed Bob and Mary decipher the positives of the work, of the effort and emphasize them. They always said that someone couldn't learn something new if the Child inside of them was terrified of being found wrong. And they weren't interested in being negative toward people. They had a different concept of how to educate. They were master educators. I commented to Bob once somewhat later in time, "I feel as if I am learning more than I have ever learned in my life, but there are no tests, no written assignments or deadlines." He said, "That's because your inner Child is turned on and feels safe."

In my notes from that time I wrote the word, "Observation," followed by, "Bob and Mary facilitate an atmosphere of acceptance by listening closely and appreciatively, even when they disagree and when the person is boring. They are also straight in what they disagree with and yet in a way that is not hostile or put-downish."

This scene played out hundreds of times. Later, of course, I was one of the ones supervising. I learned the skill of positive stroking and protection of the one who was doing the learning.

In my own earliest encounter with being the leader, I volunteered and took the chair for the first time. I presume I was both scared and excited. I remember that I worked with a man named Keith and I have no idea of what I did or

said or what happened in the work. It is possible that I still have the tape of the work in my possession, though I think it is most probably lost. As always, Bob recorded the work. He used a small spool of tape and at the end of my work, he went to the recorder, rewound it and gave it to me.

In giving it to me he said, "I want you to listen to this tape over and over until you can hear where it was that you got ahead of the patient." He said, "You are so damn smart that you jumped way ahead of the patient and he couldn't keep up with you. I want you to learn how to pace yourself so people can keep up with you." In my head I remember saying, "I what?" Could have fooled me. I thought he was going to say, "Wow, you really stink at this." But I told you they were good at seeing peoples' gifts. The greatest gift, the absolute greatest gift, they gave me was learning that I was smart. His kids would come and find me when I was first there and say things like, "Oh, I wanted to meet you. My dad says you are really smart." Again, "Huh?"

I have one last note about the ongoing training. You will remember that Bob had made an astonishing and generous offer to me financially that included the agreement for me to house and feed myself during training events. On my first Wednesday evening everyone was trooping into dinner at 6 o'clock. I was sort of standing and watching. Mary spied me and asked, "Did you bring food with you?" Sheepishly (I did a very good sheepish) I indicated the negative. She said, "Well, you better come in and get something to eat." Later that night, after the evening seminar, she said, "I don't suppose you found a place to sleep in Watsonville either." "Uh, no." She said, "There is a bed in room one you can sleep in." That was the last mention of my eating or sleeping off the grounds. Actually, it was not only a generous thing, but a really good thing. I was pretty broke. On the other hand, Bob would say to me on different occasions, "You're a con John, you're a really good con artist." Mostly, he said that with affection, but always with instruction. He was very smart.

WATCHING MARATHONS

If you are reading this and remembering being at the Institute you are recalling a situation from different from when I was doing my early training. In the chapter that will follow, we will meet Ruth McClendon (then Ruth Millar), George McClendon, Jim Heenan, and Gene Kerfoot. Other faculty members will come later: George Thomson, Ellyn Bader, Les Kadis and part time staff like Lila D. Bellenger and Ed Frost (who conducted our wedding in 1974 on the front lawn, but that story comes later).

During this time, Bob and Mary were the faculty along with an amazingly smart psychiatrist named Bob Drye and his associate, Anita Plummer. A very talented therapist from San Francisco named Charles Elias came and taught from time to time. His primary mode was Gestalt Therapy. It also bears saying that Mary Goulding was Mary Edwards at this time. She and Bob had gotten married in Mexico in the year before, but she kept her Edwards surname for practical reasons. She was well known as that name. In time she switched to Goulding.

I never met Fritz Perls or Eric Berne as they had died in the year before I made my foray to CA. I felt like I knew Fritz because he and Mary and Bob had been great friends. There was an enlarged photo of Fritz in the main office. There was another photo showing the three of them sitting at a picnic table having obviously a good time. Fritz was lying back on the bench with his head in Mary's lap while holding up a glass of wine. All were laughing.

Fritz Perls was by all accounts a very intimidating person because of his charisma and his intelligence. He had no fear of confronting anyone in any situation. A story is told of him giving a presentation in an auditorium. During the introductory remarks the person introducing him reminded the audience that there was to be no smoking. Fritz then sat and smoked the entire time that he was speaking. A woman came up to him afterward and remarked that she

would have never had the courage to do what he had done in disregarding the rules. He replied, "So this is a place you would not want to be kicked out of!" From my second-hand knowledge, that was Fritz.

Bob met Fritz at the Esalen Institute that continues to this day. It is perched on the edge of the western coast overlooking the Pacific Ocean in Big Sur, CA. As was his habit, Bob was up very early and went to the eating room to get a cup of coffee. He was the only person in the room save for one very old man sitting across the way. Being one of the more gregarious people in the world, Bob went over and sat down opposite the elderly gentleman and said, "Hi, I'm Bob Goulding." Fritz replied, "I'm Fritz Perls. Who the hell is Bob Goulding?" Bob answered by saying, "Who the hell is Fritz Perls?" The two became instant friends, partly because Bob was just not intimidated of him. And, he really didn't know who Fritz was in that moment.

Because they had only recently acquired the Mt. Madonna property that was large enough for them to enact their dreams, they had not filled out their faculty. Also, they were not as famous as they were going to become in a short time. In the next chapter I will describe in some detail their first month-long workshop, which contained four future faculty members and three future ITAA presidents. It was also made up of people entirely from the US except for one Jamaican who lived in Canada (Vince Gilpin). In a few years it would be uncommon to have less than ten nationalities represented in a month workshop.

It would also be common to have as many observers for their marathons as there were participants. This was not the case in early 1971. After I attended my own marathon, I was able to be an observer for two or three more of theirs during the spring and one conducted by Bob Drye and Anita Plummer. For each of these I was the only observer, sitting alone in the back of the room behind the group. I don't know that Bob and Mary had used this technique before. I've certainly never spoken to anyone who had a similar experience. But then, the concept of doing marathons was very new then. They hadn't done that many and the model of the one I was in changed very quickly so that they didn't exhaust themselves as much.

All of these workshops occurred in the living room. I said I sat at the back, but actually I sat at the head of the room with my back to the big windows that faced out over the Monterey Bay. Bob and Mary sat in the back of the room facing toward the front. As you can imagine it was very back lit for them. Very soon in the game they installed large black out curtains they could pull across the windows when they were working so that people in the back were more than silhouettes. As I have said the room was of very generous proportions and could hold sixteen to eighteen participants plus Bob and Mary and one very eager observer very easily. I told you I was the luckiest kid in the room.

Watching those marathons was one of the great learning experiences of my life. I would have been more than willing to be an active participant. I was eager to work on all my stuff because it was thrilling to finally be able to make sense of my life. But Bob said no, "John, it is important for you to be in the room only as an observer with no other responsibility than to watch. If you are a participant, you will be preoccupied with your own stuff and you will miss a lot of what is going on." Boy, he had that right.

I don't know if I can truly convey to you how astonishing and magical it was to watch them work. After a time, I would watch on Friday mornings when people were arriving for a marathon. I would sit outside by the pool and watch this disparate group of people would come up the steps and front walk, some looking angry, others downcast, and even more looking anxious. Many of these early attendees came from Kansas City, Kansas, having flown into San Francisco Airport the night before. Bob had a big fan in KC, a fellow psychiatrist, who sent lots of his patients out to work with the "magician."

I knew what was going to happen with these folks, but I was not sure how it would. At some point they would be transformed into a group that was warm, supportive and cohesive. There would be a lot of laughter. An event would take place at some point that Bob called "The Suddening," the moment the group cohered. It usually happened sometime in the first afternoon of the workshop. I loved watching it happen. And the laughter was also magical

because it was never at someone's expense or mean-spirited. I mentioned this to Bob one evening out on the veranda, the wonder of it for me. He said, "John, I believe that if someone is laughing at something that is truly funny, that person cannot be sick in the moment."

I quickly fell into a routine while observing. I would write down a code name for each observer in my notes, giving each a half page. It appears that even then I had a feeling for confidentiality and indeed I remember not a single real name from any of the workshops. And then I would write down each of their contracts for the workshop. Remember Bob and Mary refused to work with someone without a contract, a stated goal that was mutually agreed upon. Once that was done in a highly organized manner by going around the room in order and spending only a few minutes with each individual. Now, a person could demur. I never in all my years there saw Bob or Mary pressure someone to work and they never bullied anyone.

Of course, almost everyone made a contract. After all, many of them had come hundreds of miles at no little expense to be there. Then the workshops would become more free form with volunteers being invited to work as the spirit led them. Here again, they rarely ever broke the twenty-minute working time rule. This had the effect to quickly train people into the culture and everyone complied. It was also terribly helpful that Bob and Mary could so incisive. They were able to so seamlessly connect the contract to the person's childhood and their early injunctive messages.

Mary in particular was a marvel of intuition. We would joke that Mary could listen to someone for five minutes and then look at the person and say something like, "When you were five years old were you embarrassed because your mother made you wear a green shirt with spots on it and a pair of blue jeans with a hole in the pocket? And was that three days after she shamed you for wetting your bed?" And in our imagined seen the participant would look back wide eyed saying, "Yes, yes, that is exactly right." The exaggerated humor aside, that is exactly like what it felt like she did. Like I said, magic.

As I watched them work, I tried to jump ahead to see if I could guess what they would say and how they would intervene with each participant. I recorded the person's games, rackets, injunctions and early decisions as Bob and Mary revealed them. Of course, I was wrong most of the time, but it was great fun. Repeatedly I would be awed by the expanse of their knowledge and their timing. They appeared to have an uncanny ability to know how far to take someone and then stop.

They always said to stop therapy with an individual in a group setting when you had a victory, when there was a clear impasse or when twenty minutes had elapsed. Rightly or wrongly they hewed rigidly to this message. They were very conscious of not wanting to stroke people for being stuck. They were enthusiastic and fastidious about stroking people generously when a break thru or some other victory occurred. By the end of any three-day, seven-day or twenty-eight-day workshop with them the group had been transformed into an avid rooting section for everyone else in the workshop.

The notes I have from watching those workshops continue to be a treasure for me. Here are the code names for the people in one workshop who allowed me to watch their work: Black and Beautiful, Sad Eyes, Hard of Hearing, Red Sneakers, Rancher, Rancher's Wife, Good Wife, Good Wife's Husband, Huge and Healthy, Mustache Man, Flat Top, Banker, Beautiful Blonde Banker's Wife, Dorian Gray, Louisville Lum, and No Problem Man. Yes, you right. No Problem Man has no notes on his page. He sat and watched and did no work.

As I read and reread those notes and relive that workshop, I am struck once again at the kindness woven into the work. I do remember one very dramatic moment when Rancher's Wife became very agitated and angry with her husband and stormed out of the room. Bob looked at me, because the young minister in the back of the room (me) probably had risen a little in his chair as if to rush after her. Looking at my startled face with his hand up, he said, "She's alright." Mary followed suit by saying to me, "Don't worry, she'll be back." She was.

They were operating from many years of experience of course. They had seen it all and knew how to gage a situation, which also brings me to one further point about them as I end this chapter. They were a duet. They seemed very often to think from one brain. And they were always nodding in agreement when the other was working with someone. In their private lives, which I also got to observe, they could fight like dogs and cats. That was an entirely different revelation to a kid who had grown up in an “avoid-avoid” home where there weren’t even arguments, much less fights. But when they were working, they were in sync. They came in and out with perfect harmony. And another magical thing for me was they made up in the nicest way after they fought. That was fascinating and very touching for me.

There will be more about the anger, the fighting, the toll of smoking and the heavy drinking later. These reflections to this point come from the mind of the aspirant who was righteously in their thrall. They soared above the clouds in my young eyes, but so did Icarus.

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