

## Williams Road 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration

Onella and I are very pleased to be here tonight, for an evening of celebration and remembering.

I've been thinking back to twenty years ago - I have a diary entry of visiting Moshe and Tess on October 21, 1979, a Sunday I think. Moshe took us over to see Williams Road for the first time. He was very proud of the building he had found (and his victory at the Planning Appeals Tribunal) and we dreamed of all kinds of possibilities, but I don't think we ever imagined it would turn out as it has.

In 1979 Moshe and I had both been working in the public sector for a number of years and I think for a long time we never gave much thought to doing anything else. If it hadn't been for, well you know who (interjection from Ed Harari: "you'll tell us over a cup of Liptons Tea!"), we might still be there!

I remember discussing with Moshe what the name of the new place should be, or even whether it should have a name. We wanted to say something about family therapy, but we didn't want to sound too grandiose - and anyway, Margaret Topham had just opened the Australian Family Therapy Institute in Sydney - so that was gone.

Really there wasn't anything in the way of models. Moshe wanted to combine free standing independence and tolerance with absence from bureaucratic constraints and hierarchical doctors, so we could have a clinical and teaching practice based on peoples' talents and abilities and needs, not their titles or doctrines. We wanted to have the comradeship and commitment to good therapy and social change we'd experienced in the best days of Bouverie and Melville, without the heavy hand of public service regulations and time serving functionaries (dickheads), that had left many of us, not the least me, burnt out, exhausted and frustrated.

I think we succeeded beautifully, in combining anarchism with a low level of organisation and it gives me a great pleasure to look back on twenty years of struggle and solidarity, as we forged something that really hadn't happened before in Australia.

I'll always be grateful to Moshe for offering me a place - a home, a refuge where we could rebuild and reconnect with the world. I always like the idea of Williams Road as a refuge, a safe port of arrival, a community for all of us toiling, huddled masses, yearning to be, if not free, then at least not burnt out : the public health workers, disillusioned academics, and independent scholars, riff raff and blow-ins from the war zones wherever they might be.

Of course, this romance of Williams Road and fast talk of the kitchen about changing the world needed to be backed up by lots of hard work by lots of people. It was more than rhetoric.

I don't know how we did it: or should I say Lyn, how you did it. We juggled large clinical practices, with teaching, writing, videotaping and caffeinism while planning and plotting summer schools, levels I, II and III courses, Boscolo and other Conferences, and helping out with the Journal. The video was ultra expensive, a black and white ¾" that lasted only an hour, the photocopier was wet, toxic and completely capricious, and we had no faxes, mobile phones or emails (that probably helped!). Only Lyn, a typewriter and shorthand notepad. I can get tired thinking about how we did it, and of course sometimes we didn't. Apart from our 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 1989, we never seemed to get good parties going outside of Williams

Road : perhaps a symptom of the only serious factional struggle we ever had : the dancers versus the drinkers.

Gradually we grew; ten years ago there were over 25 staff and seven offices coordinated from one small desk in the Waiting Room. These were great days - our dream of a golden community of therapists and scholars linked to teaching and high quality therapy, available to a wide community.

This is an achievement I feel very proud to be associated with. We made a difference, to the culture of psychotherapy in Victoria and Australia, in ways I never thought possible in 1979.

We always had our jokes - more like our mantras - and they need repeating. We had our own slogan, after Milan, of "circularity, hypothesising and jocularity". After one Summer School, we took our position as "Who's afraid of Virginia Satir". Ed once dedicated an article: "To his friends of Melbourne University Department of Politics who taught him to take ideology seriously, and Williams Road, who taught him seriousness was an ideology". Moshe was always ready to diagnose and treat "seriousity" with his "mongrel therapy", which I regarded as a way of avoiding dogma eating dogma. If we were slow about changing light bulbs upstairs, it wasn't because I went on strike (as the only one who could reach, I got tired of being given the responsibility). It was because we were too busy with light bulb jokes "How many Bowen Therapists to change a light bulb : the problem isn't in the light bulb, it's in the fusion box". And so on : perhaps I left because the jokes got too repetitious.

We stepped lightly or tried to, and even danced a bit, in spite of my stern opposition to such excesses. But for me eventually the stairs collapsed, after I'd pounded up and down over 50,000 times. I'd always wanted to rock the foundations, but this was taking post structuralism too far.

Williams Road evolved over the years and became more and more established and as the refugees, by dint of talent and hard work became more confident about their places, they moved on. Williams Road now has a diaspora - Alma Road, Malvern Road, Geelong, Barkers Road, Brunswick Street, where the cultures and memories and jokes continue.

It's wonderful to be here tonight, and join up again in the kitchen talk we've always done so well.

Williams Road was a home and community for me during the greater part of my professional life, and I'm very grateful for the companionship and commitment and community we've shared.

Thanks to Moshe, and Sophie and Giselle ... And here's to another wonderful twenty years.

Brian Stagoll  
23/10/99