



# The Joy of Therapy: An Interview with Moshe Lang

Kim Bieber

Williams Road Psychotherapy Centre, Melbourne

This interview with Moshe Lang by Kim Bieber discusses his life work and formative years and what has helped to keep him engaged and enthused by psychotherapy and family therapy after some 50 years of practice. Moshe shares many stories about therapy and the importance of relationship, connection, autonomy, the joy of doing therapy, language, time, being collaborative, playful and humorous and always open to new learning.

**Keywords:** psychotherapy, engagement, couple therapy, collaborative, autonomy

Moshe Lang is one of Australia's best known family therapists. Born in Israel, he migrated to Australia as a young man and settled here in 1961. He studied psychology at the *University of Melbourne*, and is the *Director* of the *Williams Road Psychotherapy Centre* (previously known as Williams Road Family Therapy Centre), which he founded in 1979—the first independent centre of its kind in Australia. Between 1965 and 1979 he was senior psychologist at the *Bouverie Clinic* and *Director of Training*. In 1975, during a sabbatical, he worked in *Ramat-Chen Mental Health Clinic* in Israel. He was *Foundation President* of the *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Family Therapy* (ANZJFT) from 1979–1988 and from 1982 to 1984 was *President* of the *Victorian Association of Family Therapists*.

Moshe was *Recipient of the Inaugural Award of Special Services to Family Therapy* from ANZJFT (1994), and is a Life Member of the *Australian Association of Family Therapy* (1992). He gave the key-note address at the *Inaugural Family Therapy Conference in Melbourne* (1980). Moshe has practiced and taught clinical psychology and family therapy in Melbourne since 1965. He has been a regular commentator on these subjects and is well known for his workshops and unique teaching style, marked by clarity, humour and empathy.

Moshe has published extensively in the professional literature on themes ranging from work with children and adolescents, depression, eating disorders, suicide, school refusal, work with Holocaust survivors and their families, couples therapy and teaching family therapy. His publications includes the *Children's Depression Scale* (1978) which has been extensively used, translated and published in numerous languages including Dutch, Spanish, Italian, Japanese, Hindu, Arabic, Nigerian and Hebrew. He is the co-author of *Corrupting the Young and Other Stories of a Family Therapist*, *A Family in Therapy*, *Resilience: Stories of a Family Therapist* and *The Answer Within*. These highly regarded books have been extensively reviewed and translated into Hebrew and French. Recently he has brought out two highly praised DVDs, *Behind Closed Doors*, providing the viewers, professional and general public alike with the

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Address for correspondence: [bieber4@tpg.com.au](mailto:bieber4@tpg.com.au); [moshelang@williamsroadpsychotherapy.com.au](mailto:moshelang@williamsroadpsychotherapy.com.au)

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opportunity to see him at work. These DVD's are reviewed in this issue of the journal.

Moshe was last interviewed in the journal in 1987 by *Catherine Sanders* and this interview brings his work to the attention of a new generation of family therapists, providing an opportunity to learn about doing therapy with a joyous heart from a sage and veteran of the field. For further information on Moshe see: <http://moshelang.com.au/>

**Kim:** *Thanks Moshe for making time to have a conversation about your work and practice as a family therapist following the invitation from the journal editor, Glenn Lerner. Hopefully you can speak about what enables you to be engaged with your profession after nearly 50 years of practice. It must feel strange to have someone interviewing you in your therapy room.*

**Moshe:** I'm used to feeling strange.

**Kim:** *Although I've worked at Williams Road with you for many years, I've spent little time here. It feels like a good place and time for you to have the opportunity to tell your story, what's important to you, what keeps you engaged and interested. You could have decided to grow tomatoes or something, so Moshe, what maintains your enthusiasm as a therapist?*

**Moshe:** I could start by talking about growing tomatoes. In my youth I was working in agriculture and to tell the truth it was pretty boring, clearing the fields of stones and weeding. It was back-breaking and I didn't enjoy it very much and I haven't got the skin for agriculture.

**Kim:** *Moshe, tell me more. When and where were you growing tomatoes?*

**Moshe:** As you know I was born in Israel and was educated on a *Kibbutz*. It was a 6 day week and even on the 7th day we often worked. We studied for 5 hours and then worked for 3 hours. Mainly the work was agricultural. However in my case after a while, they made me into a youth leader, because presumably I was better at talking with people than growing tomatoes.

It was a highly disciplined life with almost a religious value given to the importance of work. It has prepared me well for a life of work and appreciating the joy of it. One fundamental Kibbutz principle was equality and this served me well as a family therapist; to regard all family members as equal. In addition, the youth-leading on the kibbutz was a wonderful preparation for working with family groups.

Coming back to your question, maybe I should start not with family therapy but my work as a psychologist. I started working at *Bouverie Clinic* in January 1965. For the first 5 years I worked as a child psychotherapist, and in 1970 the clinic had a conversion to a family therapy clinic, and it was all consuming. I worked at Bouverie as a family therapist from 1970 to 1979 with a 1 year break in 1975, when I went to Israel and worked in an outpatient psychiatric clinic, *Ramat-chen*. From 1979 until today, I've been working out of this room. That's 34 years.

**Kim:** *It's a long time.*

**Moshe:** Yes, it's a long time. But if you're asking me what keeps me going, the first thing is that I enjoy it greatly. Enjoy is a superficial word but that's the one we tend to use. I think I find it deeply satisfying, challenging and exceedingly interesting.

Recently I read in *Positive Psychology* there are a lot of studies about happiness and something called *flow*. Flow means that you are totally absorbed in what you're doing. I've never ever felt bored. Paradoxically, when I feel bored, I find it very interesting to deal with my boredom. What is it about, what does it tell me about me, and the other person? But by and large I feel very engaged, very involved in my work.

Another thing which makes me happy is the work has always been very meaningful. I feel a connection with the people I work with, which is deeply satisfying for me. Otherwise, I find it terribly absorbing intellectually.

For example, I have watched tapes of *The Black Family* many times and when I show it to students I still find it more interesting than people seeing it for the first time. Recently I made some DVDs of role-playing with professional actors, so I've watched it now about ten or twenty times. Again I'm fascinated by what happens, how to understand it, and by the fact that every time I see it differently, I see something new.

Similarly one of the things that interests me greatly is the process of change and how I can promote it. Also the variety of clients and issues. When I started at *Bouverie* I worked with children with a range of psychiatric problems.

**Kim:** *Was it children and adolescents?*

**Moshe:** Yes. When we changed to families, it was still primarily a child psychiatric or child guidance clinic and therefore the families came because of the child. Now I see more individuals and couples and occasionally families. People of all ages come with all sorts of problems and issues. I see a wide variety of people. Also, I'm just interested in people's lives because I have a large range of interests outside of work. Two days ago I saw a family. The gentleman was a vet and the life of a vet is a very interesting life if you pay attention to it. And so it goes with different people.

**Kim:** *It's an amazing privilege to be alongside those stories I imagine.*

**Moshe:** The strongest feeling is being privileged with people trusting me and sharing their life stories. There is an Israeli writer I like a lot, the same age as me with a similar background, *Amos Oz*, who said if he had a choice between flying to the moon or Mars, or to just be a 'fly on the wall' and listen to the life of a family, he would choose to be the latter. I am a fly on the wall every day of my working life.

**Kim:** *So if you had not become a therapist, you could have been a secret agent?*

**Moshe:** No, and I'll tell you why not. I don't like spying on people. I like the collaborative nature of my work, to cultivate a relationship that encourages people to feel free to talk to me or not, to disclose or remain silent. I dreamt of doing many things but spying was not one of them.

**Kim:** *That you didn't want to be a secret agent but a therapist may say something about your desire to be in relationship with people. Is that something that helps you to keep moving forward, the hope, expectation and the privilege of relationships when you work with people?*

**Moshe:** Yes, it's the meeting of people and the connecting with them and making a difference to their lives.

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**Kim:** *Moshe, if I was to ask the families that you see, what they think you bring to your work, what do you think they would say?*

**Moshe:** I'm sure different people would say different things. Recently a man came to see me. He reminded me that he saw me about 20–30 years ago and said I had changed his life. When I asked how, he said he came with his then wife who told him she didn't want to be married to him anymore. He kept trying to convince her for a number of sessions to stay married to him. One day he came to me by himself for an individual session and asked me to tell him what I thought. I was reluctant to answer but he pushed, so eventually I responded. I didn't remember what I had told him but he reminded me. I said: *If I was him, I would not want to be married to someone who did not want to be married to me.* That changed his life.

**Kim:** *That was a very honest response.*

**Moshe:** Clearly it was honest, but it was much more. Theoretically there are hundreds of statements I could have made; all of them would have been honest. But the one I offered him somehow transformed his life. My view of therapy is that at its best we are offering our clients something that is unique, which is a perfect fit between who we are and who they are and the context in which we meet. For example, if *you* had said that to him it may not have worked and if I had said it to another client, likewise. It was in that time and context and for him, coming from me that it worked.

Somebody else said to me once, what struck her the most was I remembered so much. This woman had said I probably wouldn't remember her and I replied, 'Yes I do, I remember you came to see me about 15 years ago'. 'How do you remember?' she said. I said, 'Not only do I remember you, I remember how you described your parents. You told me that they were very provincial, they were so provincial that they didn't even know what a cappuccino was'. I remembered that because that's one of the things that fascinates me. I'm terribly interested in the way that people express themselves; I'm interested in language and the choice of words. So if someone says something, the peculiarity of the language stays with me. I guess that's why I'm a story teller.

**Kim:** *Moshe, do you prefer to do therapy in English or Hebrew?*

**Moshe:** At the moment I'm seeing two people using Hebrew. I'm happy to see them using Hebrew because it helps me to practice or keep my Hebrew alive, but probably I'm more at ease in English. In 1975 when I was in Israel I was worried, because after working in English for 10 years, I wondered how I would manage in Hebrew. But after half an hour into the therapy I realized that in Hebrew it's all the same. Obviously English is not my mother tongue and I have been able to turn it to my advantage in a number of ways.

First, and most important, therapy helps to improve my English and I would never let a word go by I didn't understand without enquiring, so I pay more attention to language than other therapists may do. In my recent DVD, I introduced a new expression, 'Mrs. Palmer and her five daughters'. Anybody watching it would notice how my not knowing is used to therapeutic advantage.

Another example, years ago a woman came to see me and said one of her life's troubles was she prolongs the agony; that when things are difficult, she makes it more difficult than it needs be. I remember she was telling me about what a terrible ordeal she made for herself about buying a washing machine, and in a different context on a

different day she told me that she ‘chews the bitter pill’. I smiled and when she asked why I was smiling, I said – ‘do you know what the correct expression is?’ The correct expression is ‘swallow the bitter pill’. I told her she captured the wording beautifully because when one chews a bitter pill, the bitter taste lasts much longer than when you swallow it. We both laughed, we connected with humor and we both knew that it was profoundly meaningful.

I provide my clients with the opportunity to help me improve my English. They have taught me English amongst many other things.

**Kim:** *I’m wondering if doing therapy, in a language that is not in your mother tongue, helps to protect you in some way from the harshness, the grief of the work.*

**Moshe:** Yes. There are certain things that are emotionally difficult for me to say in Hebrew that I can say with much greater ease in English. There are fears and prohibitions that are connected to the language that one has grown up with, and because I acquired English as an adult, there’s a precision and distance that allows me to express myself in a way that I can’t in Hebrew.

**Kim:** *That’s an interesting observation, and I would like to talk to you more about that at another time, but let’s get back to the story of your work. You said that when you were at Bouverie Clinic you worked with children and young adults and their families, I imagine that the work that you do has changed over the years. What work are you presently doing that holds your interest?*

**Moshe:** Probably the work that interests me most and is my best work at the moment is the *interface between marital and individual therapy*. First of all, it’s a very unfortunate thing that there are marital therapists, and there are individual therapists. We are creating artificial divisions that I think is not sustainable. Ideally, I think most therapists should be able to work both with the individual and with the couple. A woman, who is depressed for example, how much is the depression to do with the marriage and how much is it to do with how she is in the world? How much is it to do with her relationship with her parents, and her difficulties in parenting.

It’s an unpacking process, it’s a very complicated one and needs time and ideally the therapist needs to work comfortably both with the individual and the couple and even sometimes with the family. I do it and I like doing it. I also do it in a way that allows me to have the flexibility of working in a way that I think I’m most efficient and comfortable with. I am most interested and excited by the interfaces between marriage, family and individual therapy.

**Kim:** *Moshe, are there some clients that you would choose not to work with at the moment?*

**Moshe:** I choose not to see too many children. Apart from that, it’s a challenge and interesting to go out of one’s comfort zone. If there is something I choose to avoid, it is not to see too many of the same, whatever the same is.

As an example, at one stage I became interested in and wrote about childhood depression and received lots of referrals of depressed kids. It became almost a conscious decision not to be a therapist of depressed kids and similarly with other conditions that I could have become an expert on or specialized in. I’ve always liked variety in terms of ages, issues, presentations, etc., and the membership, namely working with individuals, couples and families.

One of the reasons I enjoy my work and find it interesting and absorbing is the variety of clinical work along with the teaching and writing. The latter certainly enriched the former but it is the clinical work that I find most meaningful and satisfying. My writing and my teaching are really the further expression of this clinical work rather than the other way round. Also I choose not to work with clients when there is the likelihood of litigation because the relationship with my clients could become triangulated.

**Kim:** *Triangulation? Or Moshe is it because you don't want to write lengthy reports?*

**Moshe:** Definitely yes, you are on the money.

**Kim:** *Sometimes when you finish your day here and I'm downstairs I hear you humming or whistling. For me, often, I just feel like going home and opening a bottle of wine but I hear you whistling, and I've also seen you very sad.*

**Moshe:** I live in the dark, that's why I'm whistling.

**Kim:** *I'm not so sure about you being in the dark, but I do appreciate that you are still moved by the stories that you hear and the clients that you see, can you talk to me about this?*

**Moshe:** I think I'm more moved now than I ever was and why? As a young therapist I was more concerned and anxious about my competency and worried about whether people would see how much I didn't know. Now I know what needs to be done and do it without thinking, it's just natural for me. I can be more with the person and experience their sadness or their joy, or their joy of overcoming their sadness. So I'm more absorbed, more interested, more moved now than I've ever been before.

**Kim:** *And that's a positive thing?*

**Moshe:** Without a doubt. Every so often I feel too sad or worry too much, but I would give up working if it didn't move me, didn't touch me, didn't involve me.

I'll be much more personal. My wife *Tesse* died about 2 years ago and I realized in retrospect that I would not have continued to work if I came to work and was too absorbed in my own grief. It wouldn't have been fair for me or them. But then I realized, despite my own grief, I was somehow able for the 50 minutes to be exclusively *with* whomever I was seeing. This is a *being with* at different levels; it's listening and experiencing the feelings, thoughts and the energy. Obviously it's different with different people, some people are more in your head and some more in the heart, but on the whole, during the day every part of me is being engaged entirely. Last summer I took 2 months off, which was the second longest holiday I've taken in 49 years of working and was missing work and looking forward to going back.

**Kim:** *Moshe, you've been doing this for 50 years, what do you envisage for yourself in the future?*

**Moshe:** I regularly ask myself how long I intend to go on. The answer is, I don't know and like it that way but as long as I feel I enjoy it as much as I have done I will carry on. Another reason I've enjoyed my work so much and lasted is the sense of *autonomy*. Reading the literature on job satisfaction, the most common word used is 'control'. People enjoy their work if they are in control of their work. I'm more comfortable with the word 'autonomy'. Since 1979 I have been autonomous and that

means to see whom I want, to work the way I want, to take holidays when I want, etc. This is a very significant factor contributing to the enjoyment of my work. Had I stayed at Bouverie and didn't have the same autonomy, I wouldn't have lasted the distance. However, I am deeply appreciative of the 15 years that I spent there.

**Kim:** *Tell me about that appreciation.*

**Moshe:** When Geoff Goding offered me a position at the Clinic, I intended to stay for a year. As it happened I remained 15 years and appreciated the teaching, the fact that I could see clients under supervision, that I could work in a multi-disciplinary team, do co-therapy and be stimulated by conversations in the work community, whilst studying at university and carrying out research. I was able to develop my clinical skills with good support and supervision.

I believe in the importance of the public sector, the importance of service provision and the opportunity it provides for therapists to develop and practice their skills. With a touch of levity let's say that when I was growing up I enjoyed team sports and now, I only play singles in tennis.

**Kim:** *Would you suggest that having more autonomy in your work actually facilitates better outcome for clients?*

**Moshe:** Absolutely. Without doubt. I remember, for example, one of the first couples I saw here. He was a medical specialist who came with his wife and said he had cancelled one of his hospital appointments to make a regular time to see me. At Bouverie the number of times people would not turn up for appointments was very high. The very fact this person made such a serious commitment makes it much easier for me to commit to the work in return.

Another aspect of my work I enjoy is, I think and hope, that I'm a truly *collaborative* therapist. I look for ways of working with people that is meaningful to them so that they take a significant role and responsibility in what we do together. I can relax in a way because they do the work and I do the work and we work together. When you work truly collaboratively, you always create something new, which you wouldn't if you just do it or they just do it. Also in order to be collaborative, you have to find a new way of working each time because every person, couple or family have their own needs and requirements.

**Kim:** *What is it Moshe that you bring to the people whom you have seen, what do you bestow upon people?*

**Moshe:** It is different things for different people. Let me concentrate on what people have said to me today. One person told me I described his life with such clarity and simplicity, that it turned his life around. As an example, he said I used the expression, *to listen not just to the words but to the words and the music* and connect it to what he was about. This was terribly important for him somehow.

A depressed woman came to see me. She had terrible marital issues for a very long time and at one point I said to her she was also very tense and she agreed. I then asked her what she did to relax because I could see physically how tense she was by the redness of her neck. She was not aware of the tension. She said she used to be a wonderful meditator. When she next came to see me, she told me I had changed her life because I had embarrassed her by asking her why she didn't meditate or relax if she had the capacity to do it. She went home, started meditating and felt like a

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changed person. She said she's still unhappy about her marriage but she's looking at it differently. She feels like a different person.

Making a simple statement can have a profound effect on the people you say it to. You don't need to say much. Often somebody talks to you and the only thing one needs to say is *it is very sad* and that's enough. Sometimes you talk a lot and they don't hear a thing and that becomes interesting to me in a different way because you realize you're not being heard, and that also becomes a challenge. What do I need to say or do in order for somebody to hear me?

**Kim:** *Is this experience heightened by the autonomy of your work?*

**Moshe:** Of course. Years ago I used to talk about *involuntary therapists*. If therapists see people they don't want to see, they're creating a terrible situation and often I encourage people who come to see me to think whether they really want to see me, would they be better off seeing somebody else, they need to be satisfied as well as I do. Sometimes to liven it up, I tell it as a joke that I'm very fond of: 'An Australian, a Frenchman and a Jew are told that the world is coming to an end and they can have two choices. The Australian immediately opts for a supply of beer and footy. The Frenchman chooses women and champagne. The Jew says he wants a second opinion.' I often encourage people I work with to seek a second opinion. Feel free to go elsewhere as it were.

**Kim:** *So they can be autonomous in the process too.*

**Moshe:** That's right. Ideally, we both choose to work together. It's not comfortable or validating for therapists to see people who don't want to be there. However there was a young woman who was forced by her parents to see me and wasn't going to talk. I told her that it was fine as I hated the idea of somebody talking to me, who didn't want to talk to me. I encouraged her not to talk to me unless she somehow changed her mind, but she continued not to talk to me. We spent months together, meditating and relaxing together which worked like a charm for her. She was doing Year 12 at the time and not long ago she came to see me again. It was an interesting experience for both of us to have a non-talking relationship.

Just to be a bit more light-hearted, this is a wonderful story. A couple asked if I would see their teenage daughter and I said yes, if she was happy to see me. She came in and asked if everything was confidential. I reassured her that it is.

She then said, 'I'm very happy to see you but I don't want my parents to know. I told them, I was not willing to have therapy and managed to extract lots of concessions from them to secure my agreement to go to therapy.' At the end she was very happy to come and see me, but didn't want her parents to know she was happy to do so.

One of the pleasures of therapy is that funny things happen. A mother came to see me and when I asked why was she there, she replied that many years ago I saw her son for therapy and he reminded her that she had made him come to me for therapy and now he was making her come for therapy. He told her jokingly now it's your turn to go and see Moshe.

**Kim:** *Not only do you have a long memory regarding your clients, your clients have a long memory about you as well. I wonder what you would say to therapists beginning their careers?*



**Moshe:** I try to practice this myself and believe in it deeply. Sooner or later you have to be your own person, you can't be somebody else. You can read whatever, you can be trained in a variety of approaches, but in the end, if you really want to be effective, you need to be yourself. I didn't want to be a teacher who would have their students follow in my footsteps, I regard that as a failure as a teacher. Their success is that they find their *own way* and my effectiveness is in somehow playing a part in this journey.

Having said this, sometimes I describe myself as a 'mongrel', therapeutically speaking. I believe deeply in the need to be open to other ways of thinking and working in therapy. Ideally, you acquire and understand your own way of working, you find your own way within it and make your own amalgam. If you want to talk to different people, you need to understand different languages. In couples therapy a husband comes and he wants cognitive, straight, problem solving therapy and if you want to work with him you need to be able to move in that direction, whilst the wife may want communication and attention to emotions, etc. Ideally, you need to work in a number of ways and think in a number of ways.

**Kim:** *Before we started the conversation this evening you told me you have been deeply rewarded by the relationships with people who have contributed to you and your work.*

**Moshe:** Thank you for the opportunity to say thank you. Expressing gratitude is clearly a major contributor to our wellbeing, and doing it in public may be doubly important. I arrived in Australia in September 1961 with the purpose of studying psychology and I started at Melbourne University in 1962. The one lecturer I am most grateful to is *Dr Alan Jeffrey*, whom I tried to immortalize in *Corrupting the Young* by placing the story about him first in the book. He told me to apply at Bouverie and recommended me to *Geoff Goding*. Geoff provided my first job, supervision and supported my writing and research. He read and re-read what Miriam Tisher and I wrote about school refusal and childhood depression.

It was Geoff with his courage who came back from Greece after a conference and said Bouverie was to become a Family Therapy Clinic and exposed himself to uncertainties of a new way of thinking and working. But, I have to admit that to me it was a great gift. I took to it like a fish to water—it felt natural.

Geoff retired and travelled overseas and in 1978 we met in Tel Aviv, the city of my birth, at an International Family Therapy Conference. We went for a walk where I used to play as a kid and I said, 'Why don't we organize a Family Therapy Conference in Australia'. Geoff thought we wouldn't get the numbers but we did and as convener asked me to give the keynote address. That was in September 1980—Collingwood lost the Grand Final. Also, Geoff asked me to supervise his niece, Meredith Goding, and his daughter Margaret. It was a bit daunting but I was reassured by his confidence in me.

A year into my time at Bouverie I had a call from Alan Jeffery asking me if I would supervise *Miriam Tisher*, who became an important collaborator. We ran a playgroup for Autistic children and she assisted me in writing my thesis about that playgroup. Then we did major research on school refusal and developed the *Children's Depression Scale*.

When I came back from Israel in 1976, I met *Brian Stagoll* and we hit it off and did lots of co-therapy. We did lots of talking at the *Prince Alfred Pub* at lunch time and when I left Bouverie in 1979 to establish *Williams Road*, he was very helpful and

supportive and 2 years later joined me in building and expanding it. He has been terribly generous to me with his prodigious knowledge, with my writing and the writing we did together. He wrote the foreword to *The Answers Within* and he provided me with some of my favorite one-liners. He once introduced me by saying: 'I'm sure Moshe is looking forward to hear what he has to say'.

At Bouverie I also met *Peter McCallum* who worked with me to set up Williams Road and became an important colleague and co-author. And of course there are many more that I would like to thank but there is a danger of writing a telephone book.

The most important person of course has been my wife Tesse who died over 2 years ago. She was my best friend, my constant companion, my most enthusiastic supporter, and my most ardent and severe critic. She hated pretention and highfalutin language. She was formally my co-author in *Debbie and her Slurping Stomach*, an article I'm very fond of, and our two books of short stories; *Corrupting the Young* and *Resilience*. She also read and re-read and offered numerous comments on everything I have ever written.

Whilst at Bouverie doing Play Therapy, like all professional men in the sixties, I went to work wearing a dark suit, white shirt and tie. Tesse thought it was ridiculous, conducting play therapy in a suit. So, I was the first one in the clinic to change the dress code; because if I had to choose between taking on Tesse, or the rest of the world, I would always choose the latter. She was too formidable an opponent.

Tesse often told me that seeing the child alone in therapy did not make sense. She thought the family should be seen together. It took the clinic years to recognize this and change to Family Therapy. In a similar manner, Tesse was convinced that I would be better off working independently rather than in the public sector, and encouraged me to leave Bouverie and establish *Williams Road*.

**Kim:** *Moshe, we are nearing the end of our conversation. I hope you feel that we have done a good job with this interview for the journal?*

**Moshe:** As I have already said, when I was beginning as a therapist, I was concerned about doing it right, that people would notice what I didn't know. If you are comfortable in your relative ignorance or uncertainty or confusion, then I think you become a better therapist. It's not so easy to do when you are a beginning therapist.

Not long ago a friend of mine, a psychiatrist, referred a couple to me. A few weeks later we met up and he said, 'Gee, you did an incredible job, it worked so well, such a paradoxical intervention'. When I asked what I had done, he told me that the couple had explained that when they presented their problem, I told them I didn't think I could help them and they went home and sorted it out themselves. My friend may be right, it had a paradoxical effect but my intention was not paradoxical, but to simply say to them that I wasn't sure I could solve their problem.

**Kim:** *I like that you are honest with your clients, that you're honest with yourself as a therapist.*

**Moshe:** One of the key dilemmas in therapy is how to generate hope and not cultivate false hope. Between the two we have to struggle and find honesty and responsibility. When people come to me and ask for my help with something I don't think I can help with, I owe it to them to be honest.

For example, first a couple came to see me, then the woman by herself and mentioned she was a writer and would like to see me to help her with her writing. I was

willing to try because it was something I had not done before and if she found it useful, we would continue and, if not, we wouldn't proceed.

**Kim:** *It seems there is playfulness in your work that you and your clients enjoy facilitated by autonomy, honesty and humor. Many may say your work is a strange combination between formality and informality.*

**Moshe:** I do all sorts of strange things in my work. A couple came to see me, the husband owned and ran a very complex business. He told me he had learned to listen better from marital therapy and wanted to apply this to his work. He asked if he could continue coming to talk about how to run his business, and I said if it helped him that was fine, if not we wouldn't continue and I wouldn't feel offended. As therapists, the more we feel liberated, the easier it is to liberate those we work with.

In my article *Bad Therapy* I wrote about a young social worker I supervised who was asked to see a woman suffering from schizophrenia. Worried she couldn't help I suggested she tell her she was young and inexperienced and as this woman had been in psychiatric treatment for a long time, she would be in a position to guide in how best to help her. It worked very well for both of them.

**Kim:** *We are now coming to an end of this conversation. You said before about 'being in the flow' but also ending on time.*

**Moshe:** It's the way that most human beings are. If you are a violinist, you know that while you are playing you are in the flow and when it finishes, you stop the flow.

**Kim:** *One of the things that has become evident to me is when you take your clients downstairs, the therapy hasn't completely finished. Your clients are welcome to come back in five, ten or even 20 years to see you. It must be validating for them to come back and know that you have retained their story. They probably won't come back in 20 years but knowing the door will be open must bring comfort. Therapy doesn't have to end.*

**Moshe:** Good therapy never ends, the relationship doesn't end. A woman came back to see me recently, she's now in her mid-thirties with a number of children. She said she had seen me before and eventually I remembered her. I asked how long ago I had seen her and she replied she was about seventeen. I asked what her experience was seeing me and she had very positive memories of working together. She then told me about her reason for seeing me now and as she was talking I remembered something. I said to her, 'Tell me, did I suggest to you at the time that maybe you should take up writing'. She replied 'yes' and said, 'Not only did you suggest to me to take up writing, I wanted to buy your book at the time, and you refused. You said you would give me the book, and that I could return the gesture when I had written a book,' She opened her bag and proceeded to give me the book she had written. That's what makes it all worthwhile.

**Kim:** *Is that a good place to end our conversation?*

**Moshe:** A wonderful place.