

## **GUEST EDITORIAL: FAMILY - MY JOURNEY OF CONNECTION**

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Recently I attended a family reunion and quite naturally, it being my first, I was a little nervous. You see I had not met most of my relations before and naturally, I felt unsure of how they would take me and treat me. My adoption into this family had occurred many years prior but until now, I had not met most of my relatives. Sure, there were the locals whom I had connected with, but like me, they stood separated from the family's prominent members. My conversations with them would have us speaking of our family's leaders with reverence and questions concerning their stories. In my mind, these leaders had gained great stature, though I believe that they would not enjoy being on the pedestal that I had placed them on as it went against their teaching. My relationship with them had always been through the written word, not in the traditional sense, however, with the back and forth process of letters or emails. It was through their stories, our family stories that I had come to know them. Even though this was a one-way relationship of my making, it did not take away from the effect that they had on me, a sense of security and connection that comes only from family. Those stories I speak of had always been there for me during the hard times. They had created direction when I was lost, they had created relationship through common struggle when I felt alone, and they had spoken the language of relationship and of "the life space" in a community that spoke in medical model terms, a culture in which I was amongst a minority. They had been influencing me in deep and meaningful ways with the simple written word.

My family reunion was the seventh International Child and Youth Care (CYC) conference held in Victoria British Columbia, Canada. I have worked in the field of CYC practice for almost fifteen years. In this time, I had completed certificates, diplomas and a degree in CYC. Currently I am beginning a Masters in CYC at the University of Victoria, after trying a Masters in Clinical Psychology that I liked but just did not fit my cultural beliefs. I have worked in many settings including: residential, treatment, community development, and family support with a peppering of educational and juvenile justice. Often, as I have done my work, I have not been amongst fellow CYC practitioners, those I consider my family members. As a result, I have often found myself feeling like I was discordant with those around me. I found that my ideas, values and beliefs, my culture, were unique and different. I would speak about normative development and issues from an ecological approach. I would suggest using activities and looking for everyday opportunities for growth and development. This often meant that I would have to interpret

my behaviour so that others could understand my colloquial ways. I found that I would be creating common ground and building inclusive relationships. The sense of inclusion and relationship building, I have begun to understand, is part of what I believe it means to be a CYC practitioner. As I tried to build relationships with other professionals, there were times when I would become lost, overwhelmed, or just needed to hear from a fellow CYCian. At these times I would read our literature, journals and books, and within the words, I would find what I needed, a sense of connection and acceptance built through common thought and struggle. I would find my roots with comments or ideas from Henry Maier, Martha Mattingly, Jerome Becker, and Fritz Redl. I would find a sense of hope and home from descriptions of experience from people like Mark Krueger, Gerry Fewster, Thom Garfat, Roy Ferguson, Jim Anglin and alike. The sad thing I find about being a CYC practitioner is that our family is spread so wide and thin that the opportunity to experience supervision or mentoring with a senior practitioner is so difficult, making growth and development hard, though I must say that more recently this appears to be changing. For me this occurs as I continue with my Masters and through my involvement in committees and community projects. I must also speak of the importance of the CYC-net, as it has been a tremendous tool of connection with practitioners in many areas of world.

Well, back to the family reunion: at the conference I was feeling so excited and I had chosen an agenda that would allow me to come into contact with the senior members of my family. I was nervous, I felt that maybe they would consider me a stalker, or see me as suffering from some kind of psychosis, as I came up to them to thank them for their support through the years. Well, in true CYC fashion, relationship, acceptance and a belief in meeting people "where they are at" was present. I was accepted and greeted with warmth and compassion. The crazy thing about this is that it was not just with these immediate family members, immediate in their importance to me, but I felt that this welcome was extended throughout the entire family, and experienced by all conference members. My experience at the international conference was one of being accepted by the worldwide body of practitioners. I believe that twenty-five countries were represented at the conference. Wait a moment, lets think about that, twenty-five countries had representatives at a gathering that celebrated and challenged the ideas, values and beliefs of our culture, WOW!

Finally, let me share with you how I was affected by the conference, my family reunion: I don't feel isolated and alone; I feel a great sense of connection to the field along with an optimism for its future; a sense of my own commitment to write and actively seek others to connect with. I now recognize that like others I am involved in a love affair with the profession, one that will, like any love affair, shift and change over time. It will sometimes gather me within its great warm arms and comfort me,

other times I will be trying to escape its grasp, as this is the nature of family and love. So please join me as I raise my glass to the organizers of the conference and to all of those who were present. May our future build on the strengths of our past and be fuelled by the passion of those who call themselves Child and Youth Care Practitioners.