

A Life Lived: Remembering Steven Simon Bentheim April 24, 1948 – October 2, 2013

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**A Life Lived: Remembering Steven Simon Bentheim
April 24, 1948 – October 2, 2013**

Jesse Carlock, Honoré France, Stephen Buckbee, and Marion Robinson

Abstract

To honour Steve Bentheim, we have put together a group of four stories of how we remember the first editor and initiator of the Satir International Journal. Steve was an innovative and “out of the box” thinker who wanted to make a difference in the world. He also wanted to fulfill a long standing dream of bringing together those people around the world interested in the theory and practice of therapy of Virginia Satir.

Steven Bentheim was the engine and conductor of the Satir Journal of Counselling and Family Therapy, a journal he launched in 2013 under the auspices of the University of Victoria. His dream was to bring the growing body of post-Satir literature to the people. This was Virginia Satir’s dream as well. Her hope was that her ideas would reach all corners of society.

For as long as I have been a member of the Virginia Satir Global Network (1981 to be exact), we have understood that for the model to thrive, we need to find ways to reconnect the model to colleges and universities. A professional journal is one route to accomplish that.

Prior to launching this journal, Steve had served as Editor of the Satir Journal of Transformational and Systemic Therapy from 2006-2011. John Banmen, founder of the Satir Institute of the Pacific also understood that creating an exchange between Satir’s wisdom and the world of academia via its traditional vehicle “the professional journal” was one way to begin this process. The Satir Institute of the Pacific produced the first journal on the Satir model.

The Satir Journal of Transformational Systemic Therapy (SJTST) was a print journal funded by one institute (Satir Institute of the Pacific). This project was a huge commitment for SIP. Despite limitations in resources, Steve managed to launch the first viable journal related to the Satir model. He produced numerous issues of that journal over a span of about five years.

Steve Bentheim was dedicated to bringing manuscripts written by authors around the world to print. During his tenure as a journal editor, Steve transformed into standard English form, manuscripts written by professionals for whom English was a second language. You cannot imagine how much skill, time and dedication this required. Somehow he could sift through and capture the author’s meaning.

The journal was a mission for Steve, and he always said that he could not have brought all of these articles to print had he been employed full-time in his position with the Salvation Army. He extended himself and his editorial talents to authors

around the world. Steve loved writing and editing and had great skills in this area. He was a talented and generous soul who was always willing to give new writers encouragement and a helping hand.

Steve was a forward thinker, quite knowledgeable about cutting edge trends in journal production. Once his tenure with SJTST ended, he began pursuing a relationship with the University of Victoria in hopes of establishing a journal through them. He was eager to maximize readership. His real dream was to produce a journal on the Satir Model that would have the widest dissemination possible. He did not want to be limited to print copy since he understood the many advantages of a digital format. He believed that we could launch an ejournal that could be offered **free to all**.

Steve found a welcome home for this journal at the University of Victoria with Dr. Honoré France, our current Managing Editor. Steve also strongly valued allowing authors to retain the copyright for their work. He disagreed with the traditional policy of print journals that required that author(s) yield copyright to the publisher. I found this to be a novel perspective and I appreciated his challenge of my unthinking compliance to such “givens” without questioning. The possibility of authors retaining ownership of their writing is a radical idea in traditional publications but in open access journals, a new copyright model is taking hold. Although controversy continues, an increasing number of authors want to maximize free availability of their output. The Satir International Journal allows writers to retain ownership of their manuscripts.

Steven Bentheim was a bright, upbeat and forward thinking man who was multi-talented. Out of our deep appreciation for Steve, we dedicate this issue of the journal to him. What follows now are a series of reflections about Steve from a few of his closest colleagues/friends who served with him on the editorial staff of the Satir Journal of Counselling and Family Therapy.

“Here Comes the Sun”: Honoré France

I first met Steve in my class on diversity in the fall of 2001 and found him to be a gentle, yet creative person who always had some special project going. In the class presentation assignment, he chose to present on the Jewish immigrant experience. As a lead into his presentation, he started with the hopeful song by the dying George Harrison, called “Here Comes the Sun.” I have always liked the song and the lyrical aura around George Harrison as the “mystical Beatle.” In fact, there was always a similarity with this Beatle and Steve in that both had this quiet demeanor with a strong inner core that was unique.

Whether it was the story of Steve's family's life as immigrants to New York City and their escape from the holocaust, to his last message on my answering machine just two weeks before his untimely death in 2013, Steve always managed to make things

sound lyrical. In his presentation, he shared the life of his family experiences as immigrants in the 1930s both in Germany and New York City. It was the strong cultural bounds of his Jewish heritage, which is steeped in mystical traditions of the Kabbalah that I remember most about that presentation. It was not that I found Steve overly religious, although, he always went to the synagogue here in Victoria regularly, but it was that love of something divine that he expressed, the divine in all of us. In his last message on my answering machine, he described how he was looking at the sky and how the stars above the Mission winery on the west bank outside Kelowna British Columbia shown so brightly and he felt very close to God.

My sense is that there was some unknown inner knowledge that was driving Steve forward towards a destiny that even he didn't know unconsciously. In all honesty, his demise came as a surprise, even though I knew he was recovering from a brain tumor. As his PhD co-supervisor, I marveled at his life experiences, in some ways, physically enclosed, but spiritually expansive. His desired project for his dissertation was an auto-ethnography exploration of the twenty odd years he spent in an ashram with a focus on yoga. Before the untimely decline of his guru, Steve kept a diary and over the years began to describe how staying in this place for such a long time had shaped his life. His dreams were influenced by the mystical traditions of his Jewish upbringing and the holistic practices of yoga. Steve saw many parallels of the spirituality of Virginia Satir and the influences of the kabbalah and yoga. As a trained certified professional counsellor, eventually he settled on writing his dissertation that he titled – "Couple Congruence and Spirituality: Expanding Satir's Model through Seven Couple Narratives", which he completed in 2005 at the University of Victoria in British Columbia. He went on to work with John Banmen at the Pacific Satir Institute and along with John, developed an academic journal on Satir therapy, which eventually morphed into the present Satir International Journal.

As the journal ideas developed, he would often come to my house with bagels or croissants and we would discuss our plans for the various issues and brainstorm how we could turn all of the written material into a textbook on Satir family therapy. Everything seemed possible to him. He taught a number of courses at the University of Victoria over the years and was always seen by his students as a thoughtful easygoing man with great depth. On the surface, he seemed undisciplined, but beneath that exterior was a probing mind and strong character of immense integrity. He had a wry sense of humour and a total acceptance of life.

Once I remember visiting him at his apartment and was surprised as we sat drinking coffee that there were three mice nibbling peacefully on crumbs in the corner of his kitchen. I was taken aback when I saw them and pointed them out to Steve with great alarm, but he smiled mischievously and passed off the idea that the cat he had was just too easy going to care to catch them. He went on to say that they had a purpose and he wasn't going to interfere with their lives as mice. That was Steve's gift I thought, that he accepted whatever happened, yet he didn't go through life without a purpose. Doing his PhD was very purposeful and he accomplished that

project through sheer determination and effort that was both creative and rigorous. I was privileged to attend his funeral at the Jewish Cemetery off Cedar Hill Road in Victoria and as I helped shovel the dirt over his simple coffin, I reflected on the lyrics of George Harrison's song "Here Comes the Sun". The words describe the ice slowly melting after a long winter and how it has been awhile since it has been so clear, so in my mind's eye, I saw the cosmic colours of the universe, and I imagined that somehow Steve Bentheim had passed on to the other side in which life for him was still open to possibilities and that things were going to be all right!

Reflections: Stephen Buckbee

It is amazing to me how many directions one person can move in a lifetime. Like diamonds with multiple facets, so many dimensions, that most will not be noticed with only one look. That is how I think of Steve Bentheim.

We met over a common interest of bringing the voice and ideas of the late Virginia Satir to the world. His vehicle for doing that was writing. He was a deeply spiritual man who was as seeker all of his life. He sought teachers for the purpose of his own enlightenment and he liked to share what he knew. During his studies he was attracted to Satir and her work with families and in fact he explored her spiritual focus in his dissertation. He became the editor of the Satir Journal: Transformational Systemic Therapy, for the Satir Institute of the Pacific.

Steve moved on to his last big Satir project and that was to found this journal, to create an open access Satir Journal with the cooperation and support of the University of Victoria, B.C. He was very excited about whole experience and was gathering materials when the course of his life changed.

John Banmen who brought Steve, a number of others myself and myself together to explore the writings of Satir and to write together introduced me to Steve Bentheim. That is when we first met around a table of wonderful folks who all shared many of the same interests. Over the years and after attending conferences where Steve worked to promote the Journal, I began to learn the multiple dimensions of Steve and his remarkable journey to explore his vision of making the world a more conscious and loving place.

Steve was intellectually gifted. He was curious He was passionate. This combination of attributes made him a seeker and a doer. There was a wanderlust about him. At times he could become very esoteric.

Steve and I talked almost every Sunday morning for about two years until weeks before he died. I often enjoyed the wide range of topics he presented. There was no rushing Steve. The conversation would always start with, "Do you have some time?" It was a very sincere question. He was very keen on process so checking in before getting to the reason for the call was important. Sometimes the call was all about checking in and giving support as we struggled with the complexities of life. He

enjoyed my humor and I enjoyed his. I also enjoyed messing with his order and disorder.

I was very sad when I heard he had died. He was an energy that truly struggled to find a path for what he believed and wanted to see, a world filled with love. I found that to be an admirable goal.

Remembering: Marion Robinson

I have known and worked with Steve since the 1970s. How did we know that the cultural exposures, post 60s, inclusive of Ram Dass would shape our perspectives, service to humanity and even our humor. Yet, we needed to know the deeper question of the why and how and that brought us to Satir. As she said, "The problem is never the problem! It is only a symptom of something much deeper."

Steve enjoyed insights into social and political realities while remaining open to other possibilities. He was generous in sharing his own vulnerabilities as we all learned from each other and made every attempt to model what we want to see. For Steve, this included relationships to Metis and First Nation's communities as well as his own heritage. Steve's counseling work with individuals somehow paralleled my work in social and community development. We would often share notes and consult each other with regular phone calls. I provided articles and translations for him as editor of the Journal. Aside from our work, we indulged in the use of metaphors in the form of western mythologies (Joseph Campbell) to give us instant right-brained recognition to communicate difficult concepts in every day language.

Deeply understanding what works in community, we always came back to Satir: "We need 4 hugs a day for survival. We need 8 hugs a day for maintenance. We need 12 hugs a day for growth." We understood that change can only take place in the space of compassion and emotional safety. Steve applied this knowledge and talent to make good things possible with the groups and individuals he worked with. He was committed to sharing through writing with the numerous publications he edited. We certainly have lost a gentle soul among us.

Honouring: Jesse Carlock

I served as Associate Editor with Steve on both journals that Steve launched. I first met Steve one evening in the home of Dr. John Banmen who introduced Steve to me as the editor of the new journal that Steve would produce. In turn, I was introduced to him as his Associate Editor. It was a "blind date", so to speak, that could have been a disaster!

Luckily, the vibrations between us were instantly harmonious. Steve welcomed me with his big smile and we immediately "hit it off." He was warm, bright, witty and

emotionally available. Plus, Steve was funny and playful and his sense of humor jibed with mine.

Steve had the energy, motivation and tenacity to move the puck forward. He had confidence in his writing and editing skills and a clear vision for the journal. Steve and I had a minimum of weekly phone meetings. Every meeting I ever had with the man was punctuated with laughter. We talked about many serious matters, both professional and personal, but we also managed to have a lot of fun. Half of the time, I couldn't be sure if Steve was "pulling my leg" or not. He loved playing with me that way and I'm sure many others must have experienced this side as well.

While we worked very well together, Steve and I were not always harmonious. We strongly disagreed at several junctures but we each listened to the other and tried to find a way through it. I liked that we could face conflict together in a respectful way.

I believe it was early in the summer of 2013 when Steve talked with me about moving to Kelowna, an area where he lived at a much earlier time in his life. To Steve, Kelowna was a very beautiful place and he had been working on a play about the Okanagan First Peoples of the Kelowna area. I am disappointed to report that I was never able to read the play that he wrote. Steve had hoped to have the work performed in Kelowna and he also wanted to complete a video he was preparing about Virginia Satir and her work that he had planned to present at the November Virginia Satir Global Network conference in November 2013. Both of these works have been lost to the world since I was not able to obtain a copy of the hard drive on his computer.

Little did I know that Steve had been diagnosed with a brain tumor (his second bout with a brain tumor) sometime in the Spring of 2013, and that Steve had refused further treatment. On September 11, 2013, I finally reached Steve and he told me he had had a recurrence of the brain tumor. Near the end of September, I was able to reach Steve briefly and his condition had severely deteriorated. After this call, I was unable to reach Steve again. I was very distraught since I had little idea about what kind of support he had in Kelowna. I could not bear thinking that he might die alone.

Through a serendipitous connection involving a dear friend and Satir Global member, Pat Hagerty, and a travel companion Pat had met on a cruise, who just happened to live in Kelowna of all places, I was able to learn more about his circumstance there and I was able to be with Steve in spirit through his death on October 2, 2014.

Steve Bentheim was a special friend and colleague. I loved him dearly and I am very sad that I will not longer enjoy his company, except in my memories. Out of my love for Steve and my belief in his dreams and my love of the Satir Model, I decided to accept the position as editor of the newly reborn journal, the Satir International Journal and to continue to move the puck along as best I can. We renamed the journal to give it a fresh start and to reflect in its title the broader relevance of the

Satir Model. We are creating a strong team of committed professionals and fine human beings to produce the highest quality content and inclusive process for our publication, the Satir International Journal.

I'm sure Steve is delighted to see his work live on. Steven Bentheim's death is a great loss to all of us. We all share his dream and we hope that you will too.

Conclusion

Steven Simon Bentheim, had a Ph.D., that was interdisciplinary but with a major focus on counselling psychology at the University of Victoria. He quickly took charge of his studies and versed himself not only in counselling, but philosophy and religion. His dissertation was on the Satir Model of Family Therapy and during that time he worked as a teaching assistant and professional counsellor in Victoria, B.C., Canada. Steve was the Editor of the Satir Journal of Counselling and Family Therapy, a Lecturer, in the department of Educational Psychology, an individual and family counsellor in Victoria, Canada and a counsellor for the Salvation Army Community and Family Services before his death in October. He was a man of simple needs who loved his children and pursued a life that was spiritual and creative. As the differing thoughts expressed through the eyes of four different people, we all saw those qualities that is best in human beings – compassion and love.