# THE ANSWER WITHIN

## a family in therapy re-examined




MOSHE LANG
PETER McCALLUM
WITH NEW COMMENTARY BY MOSHE LANG

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Moshe Lang is one of Australia's best known family therapists, a director of Williams Road Family Therapy Centre, the foundation president of the *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Family Therapy* and past-president of the Victorian Association of Family Therapists. He has practised and taught psychology and family therapy for over thirty-five years and has published extensively in the professional literature. He is co-author of the *Children's Depression Scale*, a psychological test designed to assess depression in children; *Corrupting the Young and Other Stories of a Family Therapist*; and *Resilience: Stories of a Family Therapist*.

Peter McCallum (1943–1999) graduated in medicine at Monash University in 1967 and in psychiatry at the University of Melbourne in 1972. After four years lecturing in psychiatry at the University of Melbourne, he went into private practice. In the late 1980s and early 1990s Peter was involved in auditing Victorian Inpatient Mental Health facilities. Strongly convinced of the importance of a high-quality public mental health system, Peter left private practice to take up the position of Clinical Director of Psychiatry at Geelong Hospital. He had a longstanding interest in psychodynamic psychotherapy, as well as in family therapy, and practised, taught and published his ideas over a period of thirty years.

Moshe Lang and Peter McCallum published the five articles, entitled 'Blackmail Is Against The Law', which are the basis of this book, as well as 'Strategic Family Therapy: Three Case Histories' and 'Incompletely Fractured Families'.

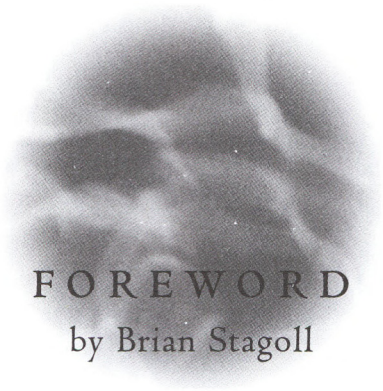
*To Lorraine, Jack, Donna and Ernie*

This book is possible because the Black family agreed to the videotaping of their therapy and subsequently consented to the use of the videotapes for teaching and research. In doing so they expressed the belief that their distress and struggle would have more meaning if it could be turned to some benefit for other people. We hope we have done justice to that belief.

We greatly appreciate their generosity. They allowed many painful and potentially embarrassing details of their lives to be exposed to the camera and the microphone. Many would not be so courageous. Naturally their names and some other details have been altered to preserve their privacy.

*In memory of Peter McCallum 1943–1999*

Without Peter this book would not have been written. His clarity of mind, fairness, scholarship and deep respect for people permeate the text. The many hours we spent together discussing, questioning and exploring were so pleasurable because at all times what mattered was the work itself.



# FOREWORD

by Brian Stagoll

I am delighted and honoured to write this foreword. This is a book that has a special place in Australian family therapy. It is a book I have been involved with in one way or another right from its beginning. Along with Tesse Lang, I was the first person to see the original videotapes. I remember the late Sunday afternoon when Moshe first showed us the sessions. I can still relive the initial darkness and the gloom, and then the glimmerings of light and hope from that day. Therapy can be like a contact sport: physically exhausting but also exhilarating. These were my first impressions and they remain with me.

The sessions became a daily subject of conversation at Williams Road Family Therapy Centre. I flash back to Moshe and Peter in the kitchen forever debating a new angle, inviting everyone around the table to join in, or disappearing upstairs to the video room for more viewing, hundreds of hours of it. The old-fashioned ¾ inch, 1-hour tapes were in danger of wearing out. Peter's early model word-processor slowly produced a painstaking transcription and commentary, with drafts circulating to friends and colleagues, students, visitors and workshop participants at our summer schools. Periodically Moshe would zoom off interstate or to New Zealand with his box of tapes, always coming back with new ideas.

Over time the five articles of 'Blackmail is Against the Law' came out in *The Australian Journal of family Therapy*, playing no small part in establishing the reputation of the new journal. The next step was *A Family in Therapy* with the help of Sue Hines and Hilary McPhee. Unfortunately McPhee Gribble disappeared, like so much else caught up in the economics of the time, and so did the book, going out of print.

All of this work happened over a ten-year period, which I now look back on as the golden days of family therapy in Australia. I don't think it an exaggeration to say that every family therapist in Australia saw the Black tapes, read the articles or the book and talked to Moshe. They were heady days. Family therapy had started to shift the focus of psychotherapy from private and closed spaces to a new realm of visible interactions and public exchanges. The shift was inextricably linked to the rising video technologies. The new ways of seeing interaction were very exciting, all the more for being able to be reviewed continually. We flourished on feedback. Moshe and Peter pioneered these methods, taking them further than anyone else in Australia. They took the essentially American inventions of family therapy and video, and gave them an extra Australian polish and shine.

And how bright it was. It revealed a therapy that was open-hearted, rather than heavily shielded by theory. It was willing to give everyone a fair go, gentle, patient and (sometimes) funny. It did not ask for the impossible, but set about finding accessible ways for families to be together beyond the blame, secrecy and withdrawal they were stuck in. It did not impose a perfect model of family life, just a life that could work to make relations with loved ones less troublesome. It was the ambition to have the day go more sweetly together. This was an ambition on a small scale, the only scale we can all understand as individuals.

A whole generation of therapists was affected and strengthened against the seductions of the high-blown theory, excess cleverness and therapeutic correctness that seem to periodically entrance family therapists.

How does it all look in the new millennium? Once again Moshe is reviewing his 'raw data', asking questions, putting forward his tentative answers, and above all, listening. He is making a rather novel move here. I can't recall any other family therapy authors who have gone

back to question their old work in the way Moshe does. Family therapists like to move on, not look back. Peter is not here any more to join in, but he would like the idea. I can still hear his voice: his clarity of address, his acute attention to the fine detail of evidence, his refusal to accept any theory as a given, his weighing of nuance. We miss him.

We are more comfortable now with video and with public disclosures of family life, as well as being more attentive to privacy and the rights of our clients. But we feel even more burdened by depression, youth suicide and drugs; by time pressures and new work practices; by social isolation and the break up of families and communities. We feel even more the need for reconciliation, for injustices and for restoring dignity.

This book still has much to offer about how we can address these issues. It gives us a wonderful chance to quietly converse with Moshe again, as we read along with him reviewing what he did then, and how he might do it now. Just what have we learnt about families and family therapy since this book was first written? Here you can read what Moshe has to say, and match it with your own ideas.

Grand questions are proposed about what makes good therapy possible. The answers are patiently built up from smaller questions and specific and technical inquiries about the craft and counterpoint of therapeutic moments. Moshe approaches these questions in the same way as he approaches families: with a blend of inquisitiveness, steadfastness and courtesy. He never lets anything rest easily or be taken for granted. He is constantly curious, responsive and respectful. As you pick up his rhythms you start to feel changes yourself. These are the qualities that come through in the video transcripts and commentaries of the first book. They are the qualities that come through now. I believe they are the heart of any successful therapy.

If Moshe shows us what has changed in our maps and schemes of family therapy over the years, even more importantly he demonstrates what has not changed, and what is most worth preserving.

I congratulate Moshe and ACER and hope this book will contribute to the next generation of therapists and families as much as it has to previous ones.

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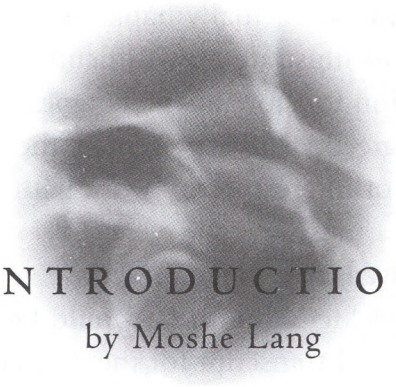


# INTRODUCTION

by Moshe Lang

I vividly recall the frustration of reading about psychotherapy and finding the writing abstract and vague. I kept wanting to know what the therapist said, what the patients said, what was actually happening. There was so little detail of this kind available at the time that I was once provoked to remark, 'There are only two things in life we are supposed to do without any prior observations: sex and psychotherapy' (Lang, 1981). How things have changed!

In 1970 I was introduced to family therapy, a new and radical way of conceptualising human problems which offered an effective method of resolving many of them (Lang, 1987, 1995). It was a kinder way of understanding human suffering, because it placed the explanation for a person's pain in the social domain, in the interactions between individuals and those around them. Before, psychotherapists tended to look for the cause within the individual, which often led to victims being blamed for their own pain. My excitement about this new approach was augmented by the way family therapy offered transcripts and videotapes of therapy, making it possible, at last, to see what was really happening.

When I taught family therapy my students told me how disappointed they were with their own work after seeing videotapes of American family therapists resolving all kinds of problems almost instantaneously and with the greatest of ease. It was never so quick and easy for my students, and their results were not nearly as satisfying. I wanted to show them that for me, too, working with families was a struggle. I was videotaping my work with the Black family at the time and thought that what was actually happening in our sessions would be an excellent way to illustrate how difficult therapy can be. I asked the family's permission to show the videotape to my students and, to my surprise, they agreed. I also presented the tape to professional audiences and a lot of interest in my work with the Black family was generated.

The more I viewed the tape, the more absorbed I became. I eventually asked Peter McCallum if he would be interested in writing articles based on the full transcript for the *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Family Therapy*. This led to the publication of a series of articles describing all five sessions, and these were later republished by McPhee Gribble as a book. Hilary McPhee observed, 'Most authors hope that their book will become a TV show or a movie one day. *A Family in Therapy* is the opposite — it is TV made into a book.' It was the first time a full transcript of everything said and done in therapy had been available to the general public. The commentary on the therapy allowed readers to assess the validity of our conclusions for themselves. The book was favourably reviewed and became a standard text in training programs.

I was delighted that ACER agreed to make *A Family in Therapy* available again. I looked forward to re-examining the therapy that took place twenty-five years ago. My involvement with ACER goes back to 1978 when they published the Children's Depression Scale (Lang & Tisher, 1978), a test designed to measure and assess depression in children. So it is fitting that they should also publish this book, since it deals with how to treat attempted suicide — the most serious expression of depression. The transcript and commentary by Peter and me remain unaltered. The section 'Other Views', written by several professionals from a diversity of backgrounds, is omitted.

It is beyond the scope of this book to describe the prevalence and seriousness of suicide in the young, but I believe that the problem cannot be solved without confronting the complexity and uniqueness of the individual and family involved. By providing an opportunity to examine why two attempted suiciders got into trouble, and how their problems were resolved, this book could offer a useful example for helping others with similar difficulties.

The inclusion of the raw data enables readers to assess for themselves, discuss and debate with others. I believe one way to avoid 'psychiatric abuse' is to allow consumers to discuss what is being provided, and that is only possible if the public knows what takes place in therapy behind closed doors. Therapy should be a collaborative and cooperative process between patient and therapist and, for this to occur, the patient needs to be fully informed.

It could be said that the video is to family therapy what the telescope is to astronomy. It captures what actually takes place and makes it possible to separate the process from theoretical explanations. The tape also makes it possible to check and recheck earlier interpretations and conclusions and so arrive at new ways of seeing and understanding. For example, repeated viewing of the video makes it difficult to maintain any explanation that psychiatric and psychological difficulties reside within the individual. Verbal and written presentations of what happens in psychotherapy make it possible to edit out other people's (including the therapist's) contributions to the way the patient behaves. Viewing the video, one can see how all those present impact on each other. The video encourages multiple ways of understanding.

When I show professional audiences the videotape of the Black family, a frequently asked question is, 'What did you think and how did you feel at the time?' I usually say, 'Naturally I have no recollection of what I thought and felt at the time.' My comments in this book are based on my current thinking and observation of the videotape. I may guess or imagine what I thought and felt twenty-five years ago, but it is all retrospective, it is not a memory of the event as it occurred then. Of course, many of these comments and thoughts have been influenced by conversations, discussions and questions raised by my students and audiences over the years.



# MAKING CONTACT

The endeavour we now call therapy, the 'talking cure', has a history dating back to the ancient Greeks. For centuries 'the cure of souls' was the responsibility of religious communities, but in the last hundred years the role of the secular therapist has become well established. There are now training programs, a burgeoning literature, professional associations and so on. When an individual or a family in trouble seeks help and is referred to a therapist, they are entering into contact with a professional community, with whatever interests or preoccupations are current at that moment.

The history of thinking about therapy is rich and diverse. Ideas have accumulated, like sediment on the bottom of a lake. Innumerable contributions are taken for granted, while the most recent ideas perhaps inevitably receive exaggerated attention.

In the 1970s, many people in different parts of the world became concerned that human misery be understood as rooted in the social setting in which people live and that the family and the way it functions be seen as specially important in establishing and maintaining symptoms. One person's distress may not so much point

to illness in that individual as to a dysfunctional family. Such ideas were widely discussed in Melbourne. Early experience of approaching the whole family as the patient was very encouraging. A number of therapists found that the new approach led to more rapid improvement in problems than was achieved by the usual approach of seeing the individual patient alone.

On 13 August 1976, a psychiatrist, Dr Baldock, rang Moshe Lang to ask if he could make an urgent appointment for a family. He told Moshe that his patient, Lorraine Black, had made a serious attempt to kill herself three months ago. He had seen Mrs Black several times and when she told him that her fifteen-year-old daughter had also taken an overdose a few days earlier, he decided to refer the whole family for therapy. Moshe agreed to see the family and asked Dr Baldock to get someone in the family to phone to arrange an appointment.

Dr Baldock was interested in family therapy but was more used to working with individuals. He knew about the Williams Road Family Therapy Centre, where Moshe Lang and others had been working with families for some time. He thought that the unusual problem of two people in the same family taking an overdose of tablets within a few weeks of each other cried out for an approach that included the family as a whole. Two hours after Dr Baldock's phone call, Lorraine Black phoned and spoke to Moshe Lang's secretary, who took some details. Lorraine described herself as a qualified physiotherapist who had not been able to work since she fell down a flight of stairs eighteen months earlier. Her husband, Jack, was managing director of a small trucking firm. They had two children, Donna, fifteen, and Ernie, twelve. The family lived in Bendigo, a large town in central Victoria.

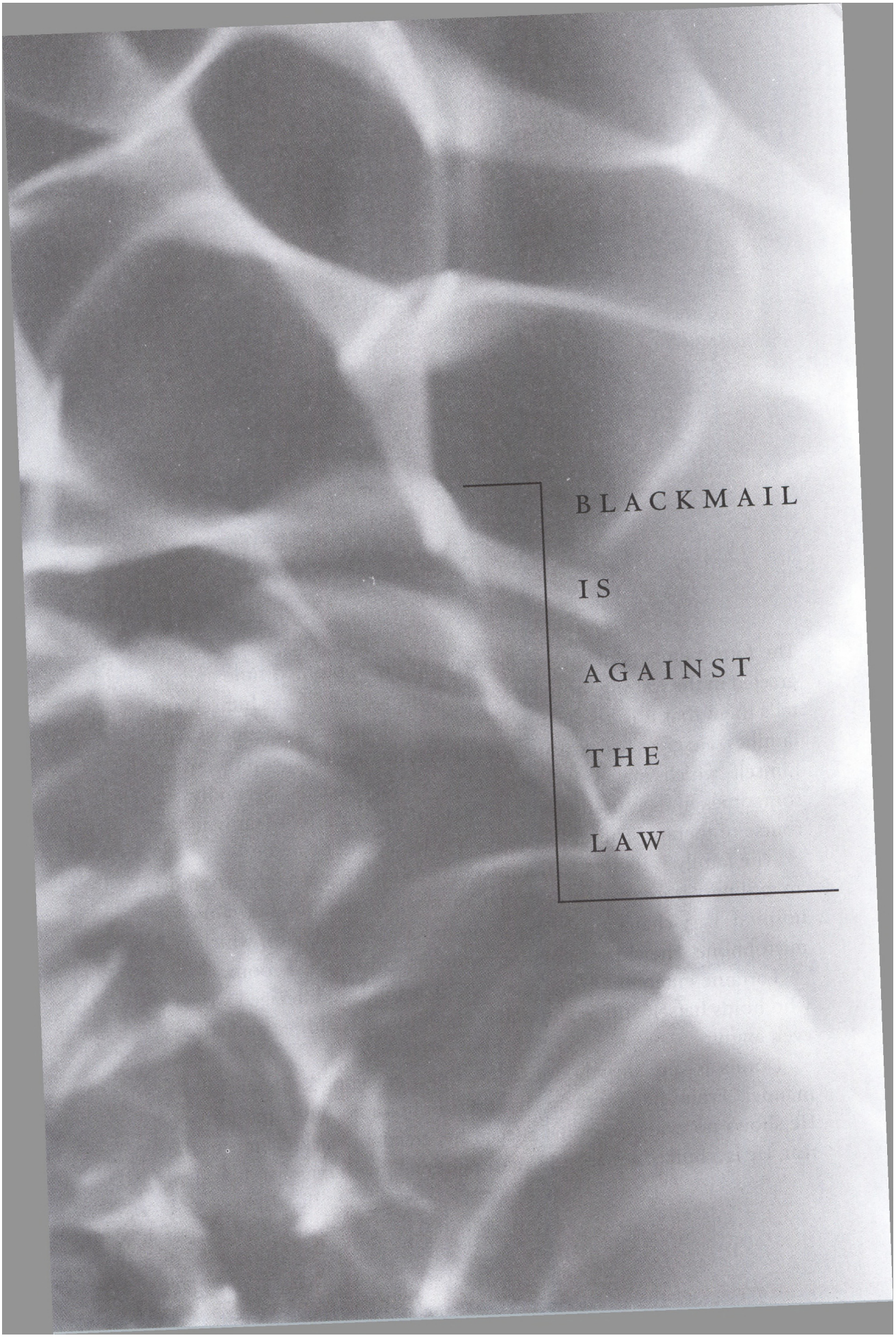
Lorraine also told the secretary that she had taken an overdose and had been in hospital. Her main concern was not herself but Donna, who had taken an overdose of Lorraine's Indocid tablets while at school. She said that Donna complained of feeling unwanted and that her brother Ernie got all the attention. Lorraine described her son as 'hyperactive and attention-seeking'. She said that her husband did not have much time for psychologists, but she would try to persuade him to come, at least to one appointment. An urgent appointment was arranged for three days after the initial phone call.

A call like this gives the therapist some fragments of information and allows some tentative thoughts. It was Lorraine who rang. It is more often the women who see to the welfare of the family. Some men are more comfortable with actions than with words and feelings. Maybe Jack would feel out of place in the consulting room of a family therapist. He seemed to have misgivings about therapy altogether. Lorraine is a member of the helping professions, used to dealing with fellow professionals. Many people who take overdoses are treated medically in the casualty department of a hospital and then continue to live their lives with little or no further help. It is more common for people with some personal contact with psychiatrists and psychologists to think of seeking therapy for themselves.

It is rare to see a family in which two members have made a suicide attempt. Further, it is striking that it is the two females who acted this way. When a family is in trouble, it is more common for the female members to experience and express the distress and to feel unhappy, unwanted or lonely, while the men resort to drinking or overworking and the boys to misbehaving. Attempted suicide may be a signal — a cry for help, or a protest about what is going on. Perhaps Lorraine's cry for help fell on deaf ears, while Donna took an overdose at school and so brought the problems of the family into public view.

Since the family lived two hours from Melbourne, they knew that the appointment entailed a long journey. They also knew that they would receive no government assistance with the therapist's fees. Their commitment to therapy in time and money were both considerable.

But these thoughts are based on Lorraine's comments. When a family is in conflict, each member has his or her own view of it. The therapist at this point must wait to see what other views and information emerge.


BLACKMAIL
IS
AGAINST
THE
LAW



# SESSION 1

The four members of the family arrive at the appointed time and are greeted in the waiting room by Moshe Lang. He introduces himself and tells them that it is his custom to make a videotape of interviews with families. He gives two reasons. One is that he likes to have a record for himself which makes it easier to remember details. Secondly, he sometimes finds it useful to show parts of the work to a family in the course of therapy. They all agree for a videotape to be made.

The family is invited to the interview room. This is a large room in an ordinary suburban house that in no way resembles a clinic or hospital. Easy chairs are arranged around a coffee table on which is a microphone. The video camera is in the far corner of the room.

Lorraine enters the room first. She is a solid middle-aged woman who holds herself stiff as she walks. She looks determined and strong, even angry.

Donna is very smartly dressed, with an engaging smile and lively manner. Ernie, her brother, is solidly built, quiet and unobtrusive. He shows no evidence of his alleged hyperactivity. Jack brings up the rear. He is a bull of a man, 183 centimetres tall, with massive shoulders

and arms. But he moves tentatively and looks awkward. He strikes you as someone who would be more at home at the wheel of a truck than talking to a psychologist.

*

MOSHE I am sorry to take so long. It works very well this videotape machine, but it takes a while to rewind until you are ready for the camera. (*Laughter from everyone.*)

DONNA Oh, no. Blackmail is against the law.

MOSHE Why is that?

DONNA (*smiling*) You are taking photos of us to blackmail us.

MOSHE (*smiling*) I see. You think I'm going to blackmail you into what?

DONNA I don't know.

MOSHE You better work something out. (*Everyone smiles.*) What should I blackmail you with?

DONNA I don't know.

MOSHE (*humourously*) I'll have to work something out. (*In a more serious tone*) How long does it take you to come here from Bendigo?

LORRAINE (*in a serious voice*) Donna and I have been down in Melbourne this week. We came down Monday afternoon. I don't know how long it takes. (*Indicates her husband.*)

JACK About two hours.

MOSHE It is a while ago, but I spent about a week in Bendigo. You have a hospital there.

JACK A big hospital.

LORRAINE That is where I worked.

MOSHE Maybe you were there when I was there. Years ago I worked in a place called the Bouverie Clinic.

LORRAINE I have been to Bouverie Clinic.

MOSHE They asked me to come to Bendigo to advise them on a few things. I spent the weekend with the superintendent of the hospital.

LORRAINE That was Dr Williams at that time.

MOSHE He had just got married.

LORRAINE That's right.

MOSHE And you spent the week in Melbourne?

LORRAINE Donna and I came down Monday afternoon on the bus.

*

Most people who come for the first time to an interview like this are naturally worried and anxious about what is going to happen. The therapist here is trying to put them at ease.

Even before the business of the interview begins, a lot of observations can be made. Mother and father have seated themselves with the two children between them. Donna is closest to her mother and Ernie beside his father. As the interview proceeds it becomes clear that this is no accident. Also it is apparent that Lorraine is the most physically isolated in the room. She sits apart from the others, with her arms folded over her chest. At the same time she seems to be the spokesperson for the family. She talks to the therapist like a colleague. They swap reminiscences, names of people encountered in their work. Donna is the liveliest and the most active member of the family. She is both engaging and humourous.

While he is drawn into conversation with Lorraine, Moshe glances several times towards Jack, including him and checking that he is happy for Lorraine to be the spokesperson.

*

MOSHE I see... OK... I arranged this appointment rather quickly... and we have not that much time — perhaps you can tell me between you why you're here today. (*This comment is not directed to anyone in particular.*)

LORRAINE Dr Baldock suggested a couple of weeks ago to come and have family therapy. I had a fall about eighteen months ago and nine months later I had a laminectomy. I am not allowed to work any more. I have been superannuated. I find this very difficult, I became very depressed after and I took an overdose of Warfarin and Valium.

*

Warfarin is a drug that delays clotting of the blood. The chemical is also used as a rat poison. It is very dangerous when taken in excessive doses and can cause a painful death from haemorrhage. Lorraine, as a qualified physiotherapist, was well aware of this. Valium is a tranquilliser. A laminectomy is an operation on the spinal column.

*

LORRAINE I was down in the Prince Charles Hospital for some time. Dr Baldock had a family conference with us then. Just recently things have become worse in the household. Donna took some tablets at school one morning. I took her to Dr Baldock. Then I was called on Monday to school. Last Friday... (*She breaks off.*) We do not talk in our household. We don't. My husband and I do not communicate together. One talks to the children, then the other, and the children are in the middle.

MOSHE Yes, I can see even now they are in the middle. (*Gestures to the children.*)

LORRAINE One says one thing and one says the other and it has come to the crunch now that Donna was quite upset last Saturday and she did not want to stay home any more. (*Lorraine sits with her arms folded, speaking rapidly in a monotone voice as though presenting a rehearsed speech. There is an undercurrent of suppressed anger. No one moves as she speaks.*) She was ringing to see if she could go into a boarding house which has been suggested when we first saw the school teacher. She feels that if she goes to boarding school she will be out completely. She feels that she is on the fringe and that Ernie gets all the attention.

DONNA (*interjects indignantly*) But it's not that I *feel* it. It is true.

LORRAINE Well, this is true... well, um... this is the way you see it, Donna. On Monday she was so upset when she arrived at school they thought she had taken something. She was almost incoherent and I was sent for and they suggested that I bring her away for a week to give her a break away from the situation in the household. My husband did

not want to come down here whatsoever. (*She glares at him and her voice is harsh and accusing.*) We had quite a…

JACK (*interrupting quietly, but firmly*) No, that is not true. That is not true.

MOSHE I will tell you what I will do. I will listen to you, Lorraine, and then I will go around to each one in turn. I will be very interested to get everyone's view.

*

Moshe very quietly asserts that he is in control. The therapist is not prepared to allow the interview to disintegrate into a fight. He is also reassuring Jack that he will get a fair hearing. What Lorraine is saying is treated as her view rather than the only truth.

*

LORRAINE So now it has got to the stage where Donna does not want to go home. And I feel the same. I don't want to go home either!

MOSHE So what you are saying is that there are a number of problems, but listening to you, the main problem is that things at home are very difficult.

LORRAINE Yes. It is like living with a time bomb. You can cut the air with a knife. I speak to Donna and I speak to Ernie. But not even when it is in front of Jack do I get any backing from him. Then he speaks to the children privately. I do not know what he says to them. Then he gets a message from them that I have said such-and-such. And it is a whole rigmarole that is mixed up from the beginning.

MOSHE So, instead of you as parents working as a team, you are pulling and pushing against each other. And the kids are in the middle, being pulled and pushed in different directions. (*Moshe gestures towards the children.*) And you are worried that they are very hurt by that.

LORRAINE (*quiet, but despairing*) Well, it is quite obvious that Donna is becoming very upset about it. If you had seen her on Monday… And I can't take it any more either! (*She is angry now.*)

MOSHE (*to Lorraine*) Would it be all right now if I talk to Jack for a while?

LORRAINE Yeah. Yeah.

*

On the social level, it is common courtesy to ask someone if they have finished speaking before turning your attention to someone else. But in addition, Moshe is responding to his sense that Lorraine is in charge of communication in the family. Any therapist can only have as much power as the family is willing to give. So, in order to be in charge of the interview, Moshe requests a temporary hand-over of this control from the power-broker.

*

MOSHE (*to Jack*) I am sorry if I interrupted you before.

JACK That's all right.

MOSHE Do you mind if I call you Jack?

JACK No. No. Sure.

MOSHE Could you tell me how you see the problems? What are the problems or the issues as far as you are concerned?

JACK Well, I do not see it that way! (*He speaks quietly at first.*) Number one, apart from the accident, which I know is a big thing, the problem is that Lorraine can't handle the two children. There are no ifs or buts about it. I think people will agree that I have practically brought the children up. More so when Lorraine went to work for five years. She was not worried about us, or the children. (*With increasing belligerence*) All she wanted to do was climb up the tree.

MOSHE What do you mean, 'climb up the tree'?

JACK Well, just keep studying and studying... (*He gestures with his hand, making steps in the air.*)

MOSHE She was interested in a career?

JACK Yeah!

MOSHE Rather than the family?

JACK (*in a hurt tone*) Well, she was going to lectures at night time down in Melbourne, for a week or a fortnight.

Someone had to stop home and look after the children. And I started the business off four years ago, so I had that, too. I just had no help whatsoever.

MOSHE So as far as you are concerned, the main problem is that your wife, until the accident, really neglected the family. She thought only of her career rather than you and the kids. And, at the moment, the issue is that your wife cannot manage the children.

JACK Right! (*Jack speaks with animation while the other three sit frozen.*) And also, my opinion at any rate is that to get results from the children, at times you have to kid with them, play with them a little bit. Lorraine doesn't do that. She never asks them to do anything — she demands. Perhaps she got used to talking to the patients like that. I don't know. And I think the kids get their backs up against her.

MOSHE So she issues orders, as it were, she doesn't talk?

JACK She doesn't ask them or talk to them, or joke with them, or play with them.

DONNA (*interrupts with indignation.*) Not that you do either, Dad. You are never home.

JACK (*affectionately*) What do you mean, love, never home? I'm home every night.

DONNA (*avoiding his gaze*) Yeah. Oh, definitely. (*sarcastically*) So is Mum.

MOSHE I'll ask you in a minute also, Donna.

DONNA Sorry!

MOSHE That is all right. I can see that you feel very strongly about it, don't you?

DONNA Yeah.

*

Donna interrupts Jack and comes to her mother's defence. Neither parent corrects her. Jack allows himself to be drawn away from his theme on to another of Donna's choosing. But for Moshe's

intervention, Jack would not have had the chance to finish. Presumably this is what would happen at home. The result is that others in the family may not know much about what Jack really thinks.

Moshe reminds the family that he wishes to be in charge. Donna clearly accepts this. Moshe has earlier introduced a rule that each person will get a fair hearing without interruption. Donna, by apologising as she does, shows that she readily accepts this arrangement as appropriate. This is a good omen. She has demonstrated very early in the interview a willingness and ability to change, even if only in a small way.

*

MOSHE (*to Jack*) Can I ask you, is there anything else, Jack?

JACK (*after a long pause*) No, I don't think so.

MOSHE So the issue in your opinion is your wife's inability to manage the kids. The way she goes about it is wrong. So when she tries it she gets nowhere.

JACK That's right.

MOSHE Donna, how do you see it?

DONNA Well, part of what Dad said is true. Mum wanted to get on with her career. But the problem is that I was neglected in the first place with Ernie, so it didn't really worry me. But after that, I was just expected to turn around and be there. So I did... And then, Ernie runs our household. Mum and Dad, instead of saying 'no', if he wants something, they just go and get it. He treats them exactly like slaves!

MOSHE You think they are spoiling him?

DONNA No. He just says he wants something. Mum will say 'no', and Dad will go and get it. And if he is off to bed at night, going to sleep, and he wants a drink, he yells out. And Mum and Dad will have to go and get it. But then, about what Dad said about looking after us, Mum looks after us now. She isn't giving me anything I haven't wanted. You know what I mean?

*

Most people of Donna's age would have accepted this resumé of what she was saying. But Donna is not satisfied. She notices an inaccuracy and is careful to make her point clearly understood.

*

MOSHE I don't understand.

DONNA If we want something, she gets it for us. And everybody reckons that it is a good idea if I go to the boarding house. Mum comes home and says Ernie should go to the boarding house. So I don't want to go home. Because Mum and Dad have problems, Mum comes and tells me about it, tells me something. No, Dad will come and tell me something and I'll say to him, 'Have you told Mum?' And he says, 'no'. And say two or three days later he still hasn't told Mum. So I go tell Mum. And then Dad says after that he forgot to tell you. And with the two of them, Mum says something to Dad and Dad gets upset about it or mad about it. And instead of telling Mum off, he comes and tells me off. (*She gestures vigorously with her hands.*) So I am stuck in the middle and everybody is just putting their pressures on me!

MOSHE And you hate it!

DONNA Yeah. (*Her voice rises indignantly.*) So I'm leaving!

MOSHE So your main problem is that Mum and Dad don't talk to each other much.

DONNA Yeah. They talk between me.

MOSHE Only through you, not directly. So you are what I would call 'the go-between'. You are the meat in the sandwich. And you don't like that spot.

DONNA Yeah. Exactly. (*Nodding vigorously*) I hate it. If they want to talk, let them talk to each other.

MOSHE Anything else from your point of view, Donna?

DONNA (*struggling for words*) Just that everybody says that Ernie is trying hard now not to run them round in circles. But he still is. From what I have seen, he is, anyway. That is really their fault in the first place for letting it happen.

MOSHE (*nodding to Donna, then turning to Ernie*) Ernie, how do you see things?

ERNIE I dunno… A bit of Mum's point and a bit of Dad's point of view.

MOSHE You can see truth in both?

ERNIE (*after a long pause*) Yeah.

MOSHE From your point of view, what is the worst thing at home?

ERNIE When Mum and Dad don't talk.

MOSHE What are they like when they don't talk. Are they moody? Can you see it? Or grumpy?

ERNIE No. Just a few words.

MOSHE So as far as you are concerned, the worst thing in the family is that your parents don't talk to each other.

ERNIE Yeah. (*He does not sound convinced.*)

*

Unlike the other three, Ernie is not forthcoming. The therapist has to work hard to try to elicit his views. Ernie is immobile and expressionless.

*

MOSHE Let me ask you another question, Ernie. How do you and your sister get on?

ERNIE (*pause*) I dunno.

DONNA (*interrupting with a smile*) We don't!

MOSHE (*smiling*) It is murder, is it? Terrible?

DONNA (*chuckling*) It doesn't worry me.

MOSHE But you don't get on with each other?

DONNA That doesn't worry me.

LORRAINE That's the understatement of the year!

MOSHE (*to Ernie*) How do you think you get on with each other?

ERNIE We don't… I can't explain!

MOSHE Are you good friends?

ERNIE Nope.

(*Donna smiles.*)

MOSHE When was the last time that you and Donna had a good time with each other?

DONNA (*laughing*) I can't remember.

MOSHE (*to Ernie*) Did you ever have a good time with her?

ERNIE I dunno.

MOSHE (*Donna is smiling.*) When was the last time she was nice to you as far as you are concerned?

DONNA (*looks at Ernie and waits*) Two weeks ago?

ERNIE What did you do?

DONNA (*to Ernie*) I bought your records for you. (*There is no animosity as they talk together.*)

ERNIE Oh, yeah. She bought me records.

MOSHE And you thought that was being nice to you?

ERNIE Oh, yeah.

MOSHE You were pleased?

ERNIE Yes. (*Donna is smiling.*)

MOSHE Good.

*

Donna repeatedly intrudes on Moshe's conversation with Ernie. On this occasion the therapist allows it. He has established that he is in charge of the interview. So now he can afford to allow Donna to intrude. He needs all the help he can get to engage with Ernie. Donna is clearly better than Moshe at attracting Ernie's attention. Even though Ernie and Donna agree that their relationship is terrible, they nevertheless talk together harmoniously and cheerfully as they try to describe this relationship.

*

MOSHE (*to Donna*) When was the last time, from your point of view, that you and your brother had a good time together?

DONNA Can't remember. (*Laughs with pleasure.*)

MOSHE When was the last time he was nice to you?

DONNA I really don't know.

MOSHE Has he ever in all his life been nice to you?

DONNA Maybe once or twice, but that is about all. He treats me exactly the same as he treats Mum and Dad.

MOSHE Like rubbish?

DONNA Yeah. We are just there to wait on him.

MOSHE I see. And do you wait on him?

DONNA Not now. No. I used to when I was little before, because I had no choice.

MOSHE Why no choice?

DONNA Because he used to bash me up.

MOSHE Your younger brother used to bash you up! (*With deliberate astonishment and disbelief*) You mean physically bash you up? You were physically scared of him?

DONNA Yeah.

MOSHE Fair dinkum?

DONNA Yeah.

MOSHE Do you think I should be scared of him, too? Maybe he will bash me up too.

DONNA (*laughing*) I don't think so.

MOSHE (*to Ernie*) Are you going to bash me up?

ERNIE (*grunts unintelligibly, and then*) I didn't used to bash her up much.

DONNA (*sarcastic*) Oh, No. No. Not much.

ERNIE Did I used to hurt you?

DONNA Yes!

ERNIE In what way?

DONNA You used to nearly break my arm all the time.

MOSHE So you reckon Ernie was a big bully all the time?

ERNIE (*to Donna*) Is it broken?

MOSHE (*to Ernie*) You ask better questions than me. (*Turns to Donna.*) Did he ever break your arm?

DONNA No. He always used to hit me across the face a lot though. And I used to hate that. But I couldn't do anything about it, because if I touched him, like that (*she touches him gently*) he would go and tell Dad and I would get into even more trouble. (*Ernie pulls away from her, resenting her touch.*)

MOSHE Did he ever give you a blood nose?
DONNA No.
MOSHE Broke any legs?
DONNA (*smiling*) No.
MOSHE You have both ears? (*Bends forward to look at her face.*)
DONNA (*laughing*) Yes. (*Donna lifts back her hair to show off her ears.*)

*

Talk about the body is engaging and involving. To actually inspect it creates intensity and immediacy like few other things. Veiled in the humour are some serious concerns. Ernie has clearly been violent to Donna. He defends himself with, 'I didn't used to bash her up much'. But the 'much' gives him away. Donna felt that she could not rely on her father for protection, let alone on her own resources. This exchange deserves close attention in a family where it is the two females who have attempted suicide.

*

MOSHE What did happen then is that if you answered back to Ernie, or kicked him, then he called Dad or he'd cry and complain, then Dad would come...
DONNA Exactly, yes... or Mum.
MOSHE And you get in trouble with your parents?
DONNA Yes.
MOSHE Is that true, Ernie?
ERNIE No, usually I get into trouble, I used to get smacked and that. Did you?
DONNA (*sarcastic*) Oh, sure, Ernie.
ERNIE Did you?
DONNA Yeah.
MOSHE So one way or another you both agree that you haven't been the best of friends.
DONNA (*laughing*) We haven't been friends.
MOSHE You have been enemies.
DONNA In a way, yes.
MOSHE You hate your sister, Ernie... you do, you don't?

ERNIE No. (*He sounds vague and uncertain.*)
MOSHE Do you wish your sister would go away to boarding school and get out of the house?
ERNIE No.
MOSHE (*to Donna*) Do you hate your brother?
DONNA Sometimes.
MOSHE Do you wish to get rid of him?
DONNA Yeah.
MOSHE It would be better?
DONNA Well, then it would be better for me and Mum and Dad, anyway we wouldn't have anybody to run around.

*

Before this lighthearted exchange with the children, the atmosphere in the room was heavy and oppressive. Some light relief was needed and Moshe does not hesitate to look after himself as well as his clients. But many things are going on at the same time.

First of all, Moshe is stepping outside the spirit of stubborn pessimism prevailing in the family. This allows him to test what happens when he does so. It is often a mistake to take up, without thinking, the emotional stance of the family. The opposite danger lies in demanding that a family changes its attitudes without being sensitive to the response.

Second, the therapist is testing out the flexibility of the family and its readiness to accept a more positive definition of themselves and their relationships. And there is no question that Donna and Ernie come to the party and join in the humourous exchange. Lorraine and Jack are totally uninvolved.

Third, he is exploring the relationship between the children. It may seem strange to select this relationship where there is so much else that people are worried about. Moshe takes a clear initiative in choosing this for special attention. He does this by instinct and any clever explanation is thought up afterwards. The main reason at the time was simply to make better contact with Ernie. But there are other implications in this move.

Fourth, it is interesting to recall Jack's earlier comment that to get anywhere with the children you have to kid with them and play with

them. His opinion seems to be borne out here. They certainly join in with relish when approached in this way.

*

MOSHE OK. (*to Lorraine*) How do you see the relationship between your two children?

LORRAINE (*in a monotonous voice*) Ernie was always hyperactive and on sedation until he was four and he was a very demanding child because of the hyperactivity. When he was under sedation he was not so bad. Ernie does crack Donna and he stands over her and quite often hits her. I have caught him. They don't communicate very much at all, except if they fight, which is constantly. One is barging the other. Jack and I don't actively fight. We have words very rarely. We just don't speak. Half the time I think they do... They fight more. Even to watch a show on television, or last time we came to Melbourne was a typical example. We booked two rooms. It got to the stage where I almost had to move in with Donna and Ernie had to move in with his father to stop the fighting... between the two of them. We didn't, except for the last night when Jack was going to leave early with Ernie.

*

Lorraine replies at first about the distant past. Ironically, Ernie sits very quietly listening to this account of his 'hyperactivity' (as he has throughout the session). This is more than many twelve-year-olds could manage.

She does in the end turn her attention to the here-and-now relationship between her children. But quickly switches to problems between herself and Jack. This confusion between what are parental concerns and what are marital concerns appears repeatedly.

Some connection exists in Lorraine's mind between the cold war in the marriage and the heated fights involving the children. She seems to be on the verge of saying, 'Half the time I think they are doing the fighting for us'. But she stops in mid sentence, and returns to the subject

of the children's relationship. As she is discussing the fighting in the hotel she realises belatedly that her statement is ambiguous, and that Moshe may be uncertain about whether they changed rooms to stop the fighting between the children or between the adults. She adds a clarifying comment. She cannot talk about the tension between the children without introducing the other theme.

This is not to say that the problem resides in Lorraine's mind. She is struggling to convey her embryonic awareness of a real confusion in the family's life. It is as if she is saying, 'You cannot properly understand the fights between my children unless you also understand the "inactive" fighting between me and Jack.'

*

MOSHE (*looks at his watch, realising that time is running out*) Jack, can I ask you how do you see the relationship between your children?

JACK (*after a thoughtful pause*) Yes, they do fight and argue. (*Pause.*) But I don't think it is all Ernie's fault, I think it's a bit of both at times. Donna gets him going sometimes, too, but Ernie seems to finish it off. (*Ernie becomes restless, but does not speak.*)

*

Jack also has trouble answering this question. He cannot get away from the issue of who is to blame. Lorraine tends to blame Ernie. Jack comes to his defence and points the finger at Donna. The therapist has to restate his interest in the quality of the relationship.

*

MOSHE (*to Jack*) Do you regard it as a problem the way they get on with each other?

JACK No, not really. I think every household you go to there seems to be kids fighting and arguing.

MOSHE To be honest with you, it is not the fighting so much that worries me. I see families all the time and kids tell me that they fight with each other, that does not matter. It usually worries the parents, not the kids. But what worries me listening to these two, is the fact that they tell

me that they have not been nice to each other, that they do not enjoy each other's company. Other kids tell me that they fight, but we make up and make friends and look after each other and when the parents go away, we have a ball together. And that doesn't seem to happen to them. Do you think they have good times together? (*Lorraine shakes her head and looks at her husband.*)

*

The family is preoccupied with the 'pathology' of their life. They habitually think and talk about what is bad or wrong with each other and their relationships. They do not ever spontaneously talk about the good or pleasurable things they would like to have with each other. The therapist is seeding an important idea about the usefulness of thinking about rewarding possibilities that might yet be realised. Until now they seem only to have minds to think about what is wrong, eyes to see what is wrong and language for saying what is wrong. Perhaps what fuels effective therapy is hope. This is the first attempt to kindle some hope.

*

JACK (*after a pause*) No, perhaps not as much as they should.

MOSHE They do a little bit, do you think?

JACK I think a little bit.
(*Lorraine is still shaking her head.*)

MOSHE You have noticed at times they do, so they both, in your book, are painting too black a picture.

JACK Yes. (*He nods.*)

MOSHE Because what they have both told me is that they don't remember any time that the other was nice to them in all their lives.

JACK They seem all right at times together, doing homework...

DONNA (*interrupting*) Yeah, that's because, Dad, I have to, because Mum asks me to. (*She does not look at Jack while she speaks to him.*) That's the only reason why I help him, because if I don't Mum can't do it, then who else can? So I get loaded with it.

LORRAINE (*to Jack*) If Ernie and you are going to the football and Donna asks before you come home or mentions about going to the football, you haven't seen the performance he puts on about her even wanting to go to the football with you.

ERNIE When I want to go to basketball...

DONNA (*to Jack accusingly, ignoring Ernie*) And most of the time when I ask if I can go to the football it's usually 'no' by you.

ERNIE (*provocatively*) All right, but when I want to go down the street with you, what do you say? You don't want me to go down.

DONNA You can go down as long as you don't come home with me, that's all.

JACK No, Donna, he has asked to go down the street with you, but you have always refused.

DONNA (*angrily*) Well, maybe I have to get back at him somehow, don't I?

JACK Yeah, perhaps.

DONNA (*mimicking*) Yeah, perhaps.

*

Donna directs her comment to Jack but Ernie intercepts it. Donna allows herself to be distracted. Jack does nothing to prevent this and does not deal directly with what Donna is saying to him. In this way the three of them combine to avoid a clear and direct interchange between Donna and Jack. This preserves the split in the family between the males and the females and leaves undisturbed the special relationship between Ernie and his father.

*

MOSHE Tell me, are there two camps in your family, more or less? There is Ernie and Dad and then Donna and Mum?

DONNA Yes, exactly.

MOSHE The women against the men?

DONNA (*bitter*) And the women always come second best.

MOSHE (*to Lorraine*) Do you agree?

LORRAINE Yes, there are two camps. (*with passive resignation*)
MOSHE You are sitting in the two camps?
LORRAINE Yes, we always sit like this.
MOSHE Ernie, do you agree with this?
ERNIE Yes, a bit and a bit not.
MOSHE You are a bit on Mum's side, too?
ERNIE Yes, and a bit on Dad's side.
MOSHE Jack, do you think there are two camps?
JACK (*pauses for a few moments*) No, I don't, to be honest.

*

Even though Jack denies the accuracy of the observation about the family split, the way the family as a whole receives his comment seems to confirm its correctness. A further instance of division along sex lines occurs immediately, this time about whether or not there are two camps. Lorraine and Donna not only accept but elaborate on the idea. Donna adds the opinion that the females are in the oppressed and disadvantaged camp.

*

MOSHE (*to Jack*) How do you see it?
JACK I think I do as much for Donna as I do for Ernie.
MOSHE How do you see your relationship to Donna, how do you feel you get on with her?
JACK I think I get on all right with Donna.
MOSHE You're quite happy with your relationship? (*Jack nods.*) What are some of the things you enjoy, that you see as positive, about the way you and Donna get on with each other?
JACK We often joke about football and have football bets, which you haven't paid yet. (*He smiles for the first time here, but gets no response from Donna.*) Well, I probably spend... I go to the football with Ernie every Saturday.

*

Ernie at first sight seems inarticulate and inattentive, yet his hesitation is not without reason. Even in the midst of the controversy there are clear signs of attempts by Donna and Jack to bridge the gulf between

the sexes. Donna drops broad hints to Jack about wanting to go to the football with him on Saturdays. Jack tries to engage Donna in a joke about the football bets. In each case the overture falls on deaf ears. But signals pass between the two camps quite freely.

Moshe attempts to re-direct attention to the positive qualities in the relationship between Jack and Donna. This is quickly cancelled by the family. Jack's approach to Donna is snubbed. He then turns back to his ally in Ernie and the interests they have in common. This time Ernie does not take an active part in preserving the split.

*

MOSHE Which team?

JACK He plays football, under fourteens, and I go over.

MOSHE What team is that?

JACK A local team in Bendigo.

MOSHE What position do you play, Ernie?

ERNIE Any sort.

MOSHE You are a utility player?

JACK Back pocket, isn't it?

ERNIE I don't know, mostly the back flank, I think.

JACK I support him, I go and watch him every Saturday. Shouldn't I... or?

*

Jack seems to have few pleasures in life. One of them is going to watch his son play football on Saturday. But so strongly does he anticipate that his fathering will be criticised or found wanting that he has to check with Moshe that this is acceptable. Perhaps he finds it hard to let himself enjoy going to the football. Many patients expect their therapist to be critical of them, particularly parents when their children have problems.

*

MOSHE I don't know. The only thing at this point is I am asking questions to see how you get on with Donna and you are telling me that you are quite happy with it.

JACK Yeah, I think I get on pretty well with her.

MOSHE Could you tell me, as you see it, some of the good things you see in Donna?

JACK Well, Donna does quite a bit around the house. I think more so before than now. She does a bit of ironing. When Lorraine was at work she used to help me get the tea, and the washing up was done, we didn't seem to have any problems.

MOSHE You say once she was a very helpful daughter, and also she could be fun to be with.

JACK Yes.

MOSHE You have giggles, you have fun, you enjoy yourself together, you appreciated that. (*To Donna*) Do you go along with what your father said?

DONNA (*sulkily*) Not all of it.

MOSHE How would you put it?

DONNA (*grudgingly*) Well, fair enough, we have our laughs. But the reason why I help so much is because I have to. There is nobody else to do it. And Dad always comes in as I said before. Something goes wrong with Mum; that's Dad's fault; instead of taking it out on Mum, he comes in and always wants to talk to me about some little things I have done, and really goes off his rocker about some really little, tiny thing I have done, and makes a big deal out of it, and I just get blamed and it's not because of me, it's something Mum's done or Dad's done. (*Donna speaks with increasing indignation and disappointment.*)

*

It seems impossible for anyone in the family to talk about Jack and Donna without a third person becoming entangled with them in the conversation. On this occasion the third person is Lorraine, who is made the subject of discussion by Donna. In so doing she diverts herself from the original focus of her relationship with her father.

*

MOSHE So you get blamed by Dad for things that are not your fault at all?

DONNA Yeah. Oh not really that. The same happens with Mum just sometimes. But we don't really see much of each other now.

ERNIE Why?

DONNA (*accusing*) Why, 'cause Dad's always at work, then with you at the footy.

ERNIE So and then... ?

DONNA And then I go out Friday nights. I never see him at nights during the week. I see him when he is at home and that's all.

*

Donna's words can be understood in a number of ways. For instance there is a request, and a longing, for closeness to her father. But there is also complaint and accusation. Jack, true to the style of the family, responds only to the negative.

*

JACK But you are making it look bad, Donna.

DONNA I am not.

JACK I am home every night of the week and weekends, isn't that true? (*Emphasises every word.*)

DONNA Yeah. (*She refuses to look at him.*)

JACK At quarter past five. Now I can't see how you can sit there and say that... every night.

DONNA Well, how many times have you been home on the weekends when I've been home?

JACK I am home all weekends, except football for Ernie or perhaps an hour at work on Saturday morning. (*Donna tosses her head.*) Now I don't know where you get that story from.

*

It is characteristic that Jack responds at the level of the facts. He does not respond to the feelings that stand out in Donna's words and manner. The males in this family deal with the 'facts' and the females talk about and express feeling. Neither camp is satisfied that their own position is understood or appreciated by the other.

*

DONNA Fair enough.

MOSHE When you say 'fair enough' — do you say you agree with your father or disagree with your father?

DONNA No, I don't agree with him, but I'll go along with it to keep the peace. (*Jack shrugs helplessly.*)

MOSHE I'm more interested in what you really think. (*To Jack*) Is that all right with you?

JACK Yes.

DONNA No, I don't want to get into trouble when we leave.

MOSHE What trouble will you get into?

DONNA Dad will crack up at me for saying it.

JACK Oh, Donna. (*exasperated*)

MOSHE Will he bash you up?

DONNA No, he will tell me off.

MOSHE Donna, I notice watching you, you look to me as if you are very, very angry and very hurt. Is that right?

*

Moshe does not buy into the question of whether it is a 'fact' that Jack really is home a lot. Clearly Jack is trying hard to be a good father. He is trying to reach her but she will not look at him. He speaks of her with pride and affection. He called her 'love' at one point earlier. He does not hesitate to say that he enjoys her company. Donna must be deeply distressed and so caught up in her indignation and despair that she cannot acknowledge the affection and concern her father has for her.

At the same time Jack has great trouble listening to her distress, just as earlier he had trouble taking in how badly she wanted to go to the football with him.

So Moshe changes the topic from 'how often is your father home?' to Donna's intense feeling of distress. He switches from the male domain of facts to the women's concern with experience. At this moment Donna is no longer the go-between but the one who feels left out.

*

DONNA (*hurt*) I am. I've never done anything to this family but they've done so much to me.

MOSHE What have they done to you as far as you're concerned?

DONNA (*in tears*) Well, kind of neglected me. Just shoved me in the middle so I could be the go-between.

MOSHE Has it done a lot of damage, do you think?

DONNA Yes.

MOSHE Like what?

DONNA (*in tears*) Well, it can't be mended, can it?

MOSHE I don't know. What damage has been done?

DONNA Well, it hurts doesn't it, (*Wipes her eyes.*) Well, to know you're just something outside the family.

MOSHE You don't feel you belong?

DONNA No.

ERNIE (*belligerent*) You shove us around when you want to go out too, don't you?

DONNA (*sarcastically*) Oh, definitely, Ernie, just like you do, don't I?

*

When Moshe focuses on Donna's feelings of distress, the other three in the family turn and look closely at her. As she speaks she becomes increasingly upset and in the end is wiping tears from her face. Jack turns away and lights up a cigarette. Finally, Ernie interjects and distracts her from her pain and back to her irritation and her argumentative posture.

It is as if the family does not know how to cope with sadness and is more at home with bickering. It seems to be Ernie's job to needle and provoke when people get too sad, so that they are jolted back to arguing instead of crying. Conspicuous by its absence is any comfort or loving for the person who is distressed.

The logical contradictions in Donna's description of her experience underline a paradox in her place in the family. In one way she is central and important, as the person who keeps her parents in contact, although indirectly, through her as messenger. Yet she feels that she is shoved into the centre. She is there to serve other people's interests. When it comes to her interests, she feels she is on the outside. She misses the warmth or comfort which is absent even when she is in great distress.

*

MOSHE Donna, when you took the overdose, did you try to kill yourself?

DONNA Yeah.

MOSHE You just felt that life was just not worth living?

DONNA Yeah, exactly.

MOSHE You felt what's the point in going on?

DONNA Yeah.

MOSHE Did you have any other thoughts then?

DONNA No.

MOSHE Do you think you are likely to do it again?

*

Moshe does not allow Ernie to distract Donna from her despair. He is concerned that he has not talked so far to Donna about her suicide attempt and wants to assess the seriousness of the risk.

The best judges of the level of risk are Donna and her family. Offering them the opportunity of talking openly about suicide tends to reduce the risk rather than to increase it. This is true so long as the question is raised in a spirit of concern and cooperation rather than of dispassionate 'scientific' inquiry.

*

DONNA I don't know, I really don't know. All depends.

MOSHE Depends on what?

DONNA If I have to go home.

MOSHE If you have to go home, you will do it again?

DONNA I don't know. It just depends. I don't want to go home, because I hate it there.

MOSHE Time is short in a way and there are many things I want to talk to you about. But first of all maybe we should talk about... (*To Donna*) Where do you live at the moment?

DONNA I do live at home now because I have to.

MOSHE Do you believe yourself that things could get better at home, or are they doomed always to be like that?

DONNA I don't think they can get any better. Not from my point of view anyway. It could get better for them but not for me.

MOSHE Do you think it is impossible?

DONNA Yes!

JACK Why is that, Donna?

DONNA Because.

JACK (*exasperated*) Donna, for some unknown reason, I don't know what has gone wrong, but this is a totally... totally different story you are saying now than what you said a couple of months ago to Dr Baldock.

DONNA What was that, that I said a couple of months ago?

JACK (*incredulous*) Totally!

DONNA Well, why don't you tell me so I can remember.

JACK Well, you are sitting here now and you are virtually blaming me. I'm virtually the culprit that you don't want to come home.

DONNA I didn't say you were the one, did I?

ERNIE (*anxiously*) No.

DONNA If I said it then maybe you could say it was you, but I didn't, so don't. (*There is a tense pause as Donna refuses to look at Jack, while he glares at her.*)

MOSHE If I could support Donna, I heard her. (*To Donna*) Is that all right?

DONNA Yes.

MOSHE I thought that Donna said, 'If there is fault, it is both my parents'. What she says is she hates that she is the meat in the sandwich, that you communicate your angry, critical thoughts and feelings to each other through her.
(*Donna says 'yes' repeatedly in the background as Moshe speaks.*)

LORRAINE Not only that — our thoughts and feelings. Jack never tells me anything. The children tell me. If we are going somewhere or we might be doing something, the children tell me.

*

Lorraine tacitly accepts Moshe's statement, but she wants to add that it is not only critical thoughts and feelings that are relayed through the children. She is saying that Jack has difficulty saying friendly or affectionate things to her directly. He cannot approach her openly about family outings or other activities that she might enjoy.

*

MOSHE And Donna is telling me that she doesn't like that.

DONNA (*with hurt in her voice*) No!

MOSHE In fact, I tend to understate it. She is telling me that she hates it. She hates it and can't take it any longer. (*Donna grunts and nods her total agreement as Moshe talks.*) And may I ask you, Jack, is there any truth to that? Do you communicate to your wife through Donna?

DONNA (*indignantly*) You always tell me things before you tell Mum.

JACK (*interrupting*) Not really. (*Shakes his head, hesitates, and then nods.*) Yes, it is probably my fault. I probably let things slip out sometimes with the kids.

DONNA (*with increasing anger*) You told me about us going out to dinner and then, what was it, Friday night, or some night close to it.

JACK To which dinner?

DONNA Mum's surprise dinner!

*

Jack seems to be on the verge of talking about his contribution to the family problem. But Donna indignantly interrupts him. He is thoughtful in his response to Moshe, and they are about to talk about how much he communicates with Lorraine through the children. But Donna opts into the discussion energetically, taking up the role of go-between, and unwittingly pushing Jack back again into the combative, self-justifying and argumentative mode.

*

JACK (*exasperated*) You weren't supposed to say anything!

DONNA (*with increasing animation*) One night really close to it, when Ernie wasn't there, you said to Mum we might be

going out to dinner. I didn't say anything about a surprise. I said we were supposed to be going out to dinner. You should have told her that ages ago.

JACK But I didn't want to tell her until towards the end of the week.

LORRAINE Ernie told me earlier that we were going out Sunday night. Then Donna said we were going out Saturday night.

JACK Yes, but Ernie made that up, because we were going out Saturday night.

ERNIE I didn't tell you we were. I said we might. Not 'were'.

*

Even Jack's attempt to arrange a surprise dinner for his wife gets bogged down in the morass of bickering and distrust. It is no wonder that everyone in the family is discouraged about taking any constructive initiative.

*

MOSHE (*quietly and deliberately*) Now I want to tell you a few things. It is natural with families, that when you go around as I have and ask each one how they see things, they see things differently. That's the way people are. They see things somewhat differently. But from what I have heard, there is a lot to be worried about. (*To Lorraine*) You have taken an overdose?

LORRAINE Yes. (*They are all listening intently.*)

MOSHE Donna has also. Maybe the children are portraying things worse than they are but they are not getting on with each other. (*To Jack*) You and your wife are not getting on with each other. It obviously has an effect on all of you. I haven't talked to you about it, but I bet that if I did you will all agree and you will all tell me that at times you feel very bad. Very, very hurt. Very angry at times. At times I am sure very, very lonely. At times frustrated. You feel as if you are going around in circles, as if you are just drowning. And the question really is whether you will be prepared to try to do things

differently. Whether you feel it is worth trying or whether you feel so demoralised that it is not worth the bother. (*Lorraine starts to cry and reaches for a tissue.*) You are obviously upset. It hits home for you?

*

This is an important moment in the interview. The therapist has listened with great care to each person. It is surely rare for all of the family members to be really listened to in the presence of the others.

The therapist is able to speak from a position of strength. They all know now that he has listened carefully, and repeatedly checked with each of them that he heard correctly. He can now speak to them and hope to command a hearing. This is a second important new experience. Previously no one was heard, so no one could listen. Now they know they have been heard, so they in turn can begin to listen.

Then there is a major shift in the interview. The therapist is telling the family that he is ready to declare himself. He is prepared to tell them what he has heard and what ideas he has for therapy. This is accompanied by a change in the quality of the voice. There is a softness in tone and a slowing of the pace of the words. The family is silent and intently listening. Lorraine begins to sob quietly as she listens, discarding for the first time her brisk and abrasive manner.

Perhaps for the first time someone is able to talk to them about their plight as a family, and not just about their plight as individuals. The therapist is naming for them what they all feel. Instead of mutual blaming, their attention is drawn to what unites them.

The therapist is putting to the family the choice between giving up or facing the difficult task of changing. Implicit in this offer is the message that they could change and that he could help them to do so.

*

LORRAINE I just feel that I am in the garbage bin. I feel as though I might just as well be in the garbage bin. (*She is sobbing.*)

ERNIE Well, you went off to Melbourne, you and Donna. Did you tell me?

LORRAINE I didn't have time. I was sent for from the school.

JACK She wasn't home.

LORRAINE You weren't home.

MOSHE Are you ready to give up on things, would you be prepared to change things?

LORRAINE (*hardly able to speak through her crying*) I keep trying, but Jack won't try. Jack won't even listen or see. We tried before, so many times, and I'm the one who always gives in for peace sake.

MOSHE Tried what?

LORRAINE Tried to mend things. All right, I might have worked, but I went to work for a reason.

MOSHE So you are saying to me that for your part, you are prepared to try?

*

Moshe is juggling with two conflicting demands on his time and attention. He is aware that Lorraine needs to tell someone how helpless and defeated she feels. His description of the family's plight has evoked intense feeling for her. But the end of the interview is near and he needs to seek some agreement about how to proceed.

*

LORRAINE (*crying*) I don't know whether I can any more.

MOSHE It might be too late?

LORRAINE What is the use?

MOSHE So you are ready to give up?

LORRAINE (*in great distress*) Ever since the operation. They left me down there for three weeks on my own. They didn't even bother to come and see me. Nothing. (*She is inconsolable.*) Even when I developed pneumonia they weren't there. Jack wasn't there the day I went to theatre. I didn't know whether I'd walk again or not. He couldn't have cared less. And then his excuse was that Donna was too tired. She doesn't like that excuse either. That hurt her. (*To Moshe*) How would you feel?

MOSHE I would feel very bad if I had to experience what is going on in your family.

ERNIE (*interrupting, accusing, talking to Lorraine*) And how did we feel when you had the operation?

LORRAINE (*hurt*) I don't know. You didn't bother coming down.

*

On the superficial level, Ernie simply comes across as a selfish and self-centred little brat. Here he is, while his mother is sobbing and recalling a time when she was very ill in hospital and at risk of dying; and he demands to know why she was not thinking of him.

But if you observe the times when he speaks, you see that he constantly protects his mother and sister from their profound distress and despair, by needling them into an argument. Here he tries twice to trip his mother up and to divert her argument as she cries.

Perhaps in fact his constant 'selfish' demands on her make her feel wanted, at least by him, if not by her husband.

*

MOSHE I would not want to be in Jack's position. I wouldn't want to be in yours. I wouldn't want to be in Donna's shoes, or Ernie's. I don't believe, listening to you, that it has been a picnic for any of you. (*There is a long pause here while Moshe searches for what to say next.*) Do you think, Jack, that there is any point in trying? Would you be prepared to try, to do things differently?

JACK (*without hesitation*) Yeah, for sure.

*

Although Lorraine says that Jack will not try, the therapist chooses not to hear that and asks him directly. Without any hesitation he agrees. He can say 'yes' to the therapist who is a stranger, who approaches him courteously and without anger. Perhaps he says 'no' to his wife, who approaches him with rage and blame. For him to agree to his wife's request may seem to both of them an acknowledgment that he is to blame for the problems. In contrast, to agree to Moshe's request may seem to him, if not to Lorraine, to mean that he is a concerned father and husband. We do not know, in fact, whether Lorraine has asked Jack directly to agree to therapy. His 100-kilogram frame in the room seems like unmistakable evidence of his willingness to attend.

In this family, the men 'do' and the women 'feel'. So when Jack is asked will he 'do' something he discards his usual hesitation and reserve. Lorraine's response may at first be seen as resistance, because she does not immediately agree to 'do' something. But she is entirely co-operative with the therapist in her own characteristic style, because she responds to his question by sharing her feelings with increased freedom.

*

MOSHE What about you, Ernie?

ERNIE Yeah.

MOSHE What about you, Donna?

DONNA No!

MOSHE You want to give up?

DONNA I just want to go and leave.

MOSHE Um... I want to suggest something, very specifically to all of you and see if you could agree to do that and come to me in a week's time to report back to me. If you could do that. If you agree. I want you to agree to two or three things. (*Moshe speaks slowly and quietly, in stark contrast with the stridency in Donna's tone.*) One. Tell me if it is impossible. That your parents talk to each other, not through the children. If you don't wish to talk to each other, that is OK. But you are not to do it through the kids. Now, I want you in turn, Donna, to agree that if your parents do that, you tell them: 'I have resigned as from today from my go-between position.'

(*Donna smiles a little and says 'yeah' quietly in the background.*)

'I am not the meat in the sandwich any more.' So, when Dad comes and does that, say: 'We have a deal, an agreement'. When Mum does it, say to her: 'I'm fourteen and a half, and I have my own life to worry about. I can't be responsible for you. Maybe I'm sorry I haven't brought you up properly'.

DONNA (*softly and thoughtfully*) Yeah.

MOSHE (*continuing*) Say: 'That's not my job. From now on I'm going to worry about myself'.

DONNA Well, the only reason I stayed home until now was because we had to come down here today. So I said as soon as I go back home I'm going to leave, because I don't like the way things are. Me and Mum will be staying in Melbourne till probably Friday or Saturday.

*

Donna is saying no. But what is she saying 'no' to? Three separate items are under consideration; that Donna will stay at home, that Donna and the others will try to do things differently at home, and that the family will attend a further session. Donna quite rightly interprets Moshe's question about a further discussion as including a request that she return home. This she is very reluctant to do.

Moshe deals with her refusal by spelling out in some detail the kind of changes he is advocating. But there is some confusion here between Moshe and Donna about which of the three items is being considered. If she was simply asked to come to a further session, and this was not coupled with an implied request that she go home and act differently, she may have responded more favourably. Nevertheless, she listens closely and her voice as she begins to respond is much softer and more reflective.

She is wary because she sees therapy as keeping her at home, and therefore as a way of preventing the change which she sees as the only viable solution. It appears that the appointment with Moshe was used by one or both of her parents to stall her efforts to leave home without delay. Yet her discussion with Moshe has the quality here of an open-ended negotiation. Not only is she listening carefully to him, but she is quietly spelling out the reasons why she does not accept his specific proposal.

The design for Moshe's suggestion to the family is based entirely on the formulation the family has of the problem. He puts to Donna the idea (perhaps quite new to her) that she could simply refuse to be the go-between, whether or not her parents are able or willing to change. Implied is the serious offer of helping her to extricate herself from the predicament she has so eloquently described.

*

MOSHE So you are saying that you can't do that?

DONNA No. I don't want to stay home any more!

MOSHE So, what will you do?

DONNA I'll just go!

MOSHE Go where?

DONNA To a boarding house or somewhere, I don't know.

MOSHE (*to Jack*) How do you feel about Donna going to a boarding house?

JACK (*after a long pause*) I can't see anything wrong with it.

MOSHE (*to Lorraine*) Would you go along with that?

LORRAINE If that is what she wants. I feel that we should give it a try at home in some ways. But only if it is better for her. I would prefer to see her at a boarding house, than being so unhappy as she has been at home.

JACK Perhaps come home at weekends or something like that.

DONNA (*not looking at her father, emphasising every word with determination and anger*) I meant what I said the other night. If I go I don't come back. And I meant it.

MOSHE (*after a tense silence*) You don't want to come home at all? You don't want to see your parents again — ever?

DONNA No! Mum yes. Not Dad!

MOSHE Do you want to say good-bye to him now and never see him again?

DONNA (*softer*) Yes.

MOSHE You must be very, very angry and very hurt!

DONNA Yeah, I am.

MOSHE I guess if that is how you feel, I have heard very little of all the thoughts and feelings about the things that have happened. You told me just a fraction.

DONNA Yeah.

LORRAINE (*quietly*) Donna wants me to leave; just her and I go.

DONNA It would be better for Mum anyway.

ERNIE Yeah, and what will me and Dad do?

DONNA You can survive on your own. You have in the last week, haven't you?

MOSHE (*to Lorraine*) So Donna wants you to leave. How do you feel about that?

LORRAINE (*calmly, very tired*) We have been married twenty-one years today.

MOSHE (*with astonishment*) Today is your anniversary? Today?

LORRAINE Today... I have fought so hard in different ways to keep things going. Well, I feel I have tried. I probably haven't as far as Jack is concerned, but I see it that way.

JACK It is probably the same the other way too.

LORRAINE Yeah.

MOSHE (*to Lorraine*) What do you think of that idea of the two of you leaving?

LORRAINE (*sighs*) I just don't know where I am at the moment. (*With resignation*) I am just so tired of it all. It has been so peaceful the past few days.

ERNIE (*quietly*) Without me?

LORRAINE No. Without fighting. Without the tension in the household.

MOSHE So one of your problems is to decide whether to go along with Donna's suggestion or to come back.

LORRAINE Do I throw her down the drain?

ERNIE And you don't worry about me!

LORRAINE I'm torn three ways, Ernie.

MOSHE (*struggling for words*) This is a very, very difficult situation. (*Takes out his diary as he speaks.*) For me as well as for you. (*To Lorraine*) You are down in Melbourne at the moment?

LORRAINE Yes. We are staying at the Waratah.

MOSHE One possibility is... (*Moshe is lost for words.*) We are really talking about some very, very serious things... (*To Jack*) Is what you hear now news to you? Is it the first time you have heard it, what Donna is saying and your wife is saying?

JACK No.

LORRAINE No. Not with Donna.

JACK Yes. When we were talking about going to boarding school, Donna said if I go to boarding school, I go for good.

LORRAINE Yes. That's right. You have heard that before.

MOSHE I'm reluctant to do it. But what may be the best thing to do is, if you stay in Melbourne in the meantime, for us to arrange the quickest possible appointment to review things. Just to talk about things and somehow in some way maybe work things out.

DONNA But it is up to Mum. Whatever she wants to do!

LORRAINE No. It is not up to me totally now, Donna. I am not going to throw you out, which is virtually what you are telling me to do.

DONNA Doesn't worry me.

LORRAINE (*more thoughtful and composed*) I know it doesn't worry you, which worries me more. I have been very concerned about it as I have told you. I don't want that to happen. So anything rather than that I'm willing to go along with. But I am not going to put you in that situation you were in last week that you were so upset that the principal called me and told me to take you away for a week.

MOSHE (*after a long pause*) How do you feel about the suggestion of us getting together on Friday? I try to keep that afternoon free, but…

LORRAINE Yes. We could do that.

MOSHE Jack?

JACK Yeah. OK.

MOSHE Ernie?

ERNIE Yeah. That's OK.

MOSHE Donna?

DONNA (*in a much softer voice*) Yes. That is OK.

MOSHE Make it three on Friday. You are all facing some very difficult decisions. I would also like to think about what you have been saying to me. So let us get together on Friday.

LORRAINE So that is three on Friday. (*Everyone gets up to leave.*) All right. We'll be here. (*She leads the family out of the room.*)

*

Moshe easily obtains from the parents an agreement to commit themselves to work on the problems of the family. The last ten minutes or so of the session are taken up with a process of negotiation and clarification between him and Donna. The interview lasted just under one hour. Donna and Lorraine respond to Moshe's wind-up signals with an urgent attempt to say something of all that, for them, still needs to be said. The result is that the last minutes are crammed with meaning added upon meaning in a sequence that is extraordinary in its complexity.

Several layers in the interaction between Moshe and Donna can be dissected out. The first stage involves a simple request that Donna commit herself to the general proposition that she try, with the therapist's help, to change the things in the life of the family that worry her. She will not agree. In the second stage she is invited tentatively and courteously to agree to a specific change in her behaviour so long as the others also agree to change. This is also met with a refusal, although she is interested in the suggestions about how to extricate herself from the go-between position. She is preoccupied with her determination not to go home after the session, and will not agree to anything that entails this.

Moshe then pushes her to the limits of her position. Does she want to say good-bye to her father on the spot and never see him again? She still shows no sign of giving ground. So Moshe himself shifts and reaches out to her feelings of defeat. There is no hint that this approach offers a way through the impasse, either.

Moshe, as he openly admits to the family, is then in a very difficult position. Donna has been close to suicide. She can hardly be admitted to a boarding school at twenty-four hours notice. If she refuses to go home, she is in danger.

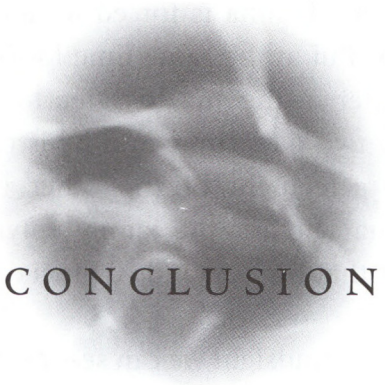
Unable to get through the obstacle, he tries to work around it. He tests out making an alliance with Lorraine in order to deal with Donna. Here he strikes pay-dirt. Lorraine is able to summon some caring for Donna. She is not willing to abandon her daughter. She

will never again allow her daughter to get to the position of such desperation that the headmaster will have to contact her and ask her to rescue Donna.

Finally, Donna challenges her mother, demanding a decision: 'It is up to Mum, what she wants to do.' But Lorraine rejects this and says that she is no longer alone with this decision to make. She seems to be committing herself to sharing the problem and asking the therapist's help with her dilemma. Donna is forced to abandon her attempt to impose her 'solution'. But at the same time Moshe softens his request to Donna and asks her in the end to agree to nothing more than a second discussion in two days time. And he is careful to do this only after obtaining the agreement of the other three. He avoids the intransigence that characterises the family's style of negotiation. He does not try to insist that his demands be met and that Donna be the one to give in.

With the wisdom of hindsight we can see traces of Donna's position from the beginning. She was quite serious about not wanting to go home after the session. Moshe failed to appreciate how serious she was, perhaps mistaking her comments for idle threats. The last ten minutes can be seen as a period of clarification more than of negotiation. It is only at the end that he is fully aware of Donna's views, and is able to offer her a further session without coupling this with any request that she go home or change her behaviour within the family.

On her twenty-first wedding anniversary, Lorraine believes that she has nothing to celebrate. Yet despite the terrible disappointment this must be for her, she still manages to find the means to comfort her daughter. Perhaps it is this glimpse of good mothering that allows Donna to soften her demands and agree to return.



# CONCLUSION

Donna says at the beginning of this interview: 'Oh, no. Blackmail is against the law.' It is possible to pass over this as a harmless joke before everyone settles down for the serious business of the session. But Donna's response to the video recorder may have deeper implications. Has she, under the cloak of humour, begun to reveal her anxiety about what she knows is going on in the family? This has previously been largely contained in the privacy of the family home. What subsequently happens in front of the camera is dominated by questions about the fairness of how people treat each other. Much of what is revealed is 'against the law' in as much as the law is based on a sense of felt fairness. Perhaps from the very start the family members are concerned about whether the therapist will treat them well or as they treat each other: in a way that breeds frustration and a sense of injustice.

Those who work in the area that can loosely be called the 'human sciences' often long for the kind of impartial or value-free stance that is supposed to characterise the physical scientist. Yet this is difficult because the human scientist works with human values and to take a completely impartial stance, as a physicist might do towards an

experiment in his laboratory, is itself to adopt a set of values towards the work and to behave in a way that will only add to the family members' feeling of being not understood.

So whether the therapist likes it or not he is drawn into a social world in which questions of justice are absolutely central. Every member of the family believes himself or herself to be the victim of injustice. And every one of them attributes this to failures on the part of the others. The onlooker, like the therapist can see that they all behave in ways that the others experience as against the law — the law of natural justice. What they hope for is some way that justice can be done.

By the end of the interview Donna's overdose reveals itself as not simply a negative and destructive act, but as one of several attempts she has made to do something about the chronic sense of unfairness that she and others feel about life in the family. Donna's suicide attempt cannot be viewed only as a reflection of an individual psychiatric problem in her, although this might not be so obvious if she were interviewed alone. The overdose is a social act, a way of 'going public' and making it known outside the family that they are in trouble and need help. One of her other tries at solving the problem is her suggestion that she leave home and live in a boarding house.

Donna has not been alone in searching for solutions. Indeed the whole family is able to give a very impressive account of the problems. This is the tragedy for them. Despite their understanding, they have been unsuccessful and are caught in recurring interactions which are destructive. Effective decision-making seems impossible. Care or comfort is hard to come by, in spite of the intense distress that each of them feels at certain times. There are long-standing and serious problems in the marriage. There are rigid coalitions along sex lines, so that Donna is allied with Lorraine and Ernie with Jack. These patterns are fixed and persistent and constantly undermine attempts to grapple with the problems. So the conditions that prevail in the family repeatedly interfere with their attempts to raise for discussion their feelings of grievance and to seek redress. The role they intend for the therapist is for him to create conditions in which these attempts at getting a hearing can be more successful.

The central question for the family and the therapist alike is that the family members are all pre-occupied with a sense of unfairness. The problem for the therapist is that they have no way of thinking collectively and of taking shared responsibility for the difficulties. The therapist cannot ignore the concern each person in the family has as an individual with the injustice of what has been done and said to them. To do so would presumably amplify the existing sense that no one will listen and take seriously what worries them. But while the therapist listens to one person, the others for the moment are left with the experience that they are not being listened to and understood.

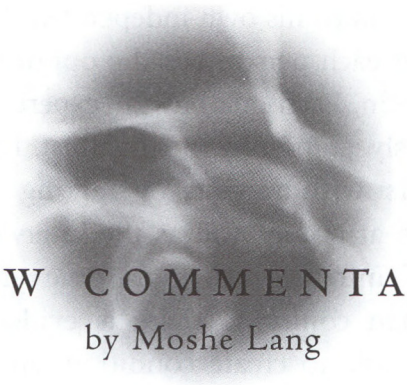
This highlights the circular and unproductive quality of the discourse in the family about fairness. The family members can only approach these issues by identifying the immediate antecedent cause for any event, and then levelling criticism at the person responsible. This person then feels that he or she is being told: 'It is all your fault'. Each one knows full well that it is not all his or her fault, and responds with a counter-criticism. This results in a ceaseless round of blame and counter-blame. The therapist tries to extricate himself from this by indicating that it is not all any one person's fault.

To illustrate, it is possible to say that Jack neglects his daughter. Donna at one stage is pleading to be taken to the football, but he does not take this request seriously. But it is inadequate to say that the problem is that Jack is a bad father. For when Jack begins to acknowledge some of his failings, Donna berates him unmercifully, and pushes him back to defending himself. Furthermore, Ernie can be expected to protest about any loss of his exclusive and privileged relationship with Jack. Also, the coalition between Donna and Lorraine makes it more difficult for Jack to be friendly and relaxed with Donna. And the profound marital problems seem to institutionalise the split between male and female camps. It is precisely this complexity that Jack is struggling with when he says to Donna: 'But you are saying it is all my fault'.

At the same time Moshe must avoid the opposite error of absolving everyone of responsibility for the strife. If no one is responsible then no one can alter his or her behaviour and improve life in the family. This is a prescription for therapeutic nihilism. There is already a sense of pessimism in the family.

Moshe tries to counter this helplessness by creating space in which everyone can contemplate alternative behaviour. Lorraine in the end seems to choose a new direction for herself. She resists Donna's demand that she decide alone what to do, and opts to share her decision-making with others. And Donna changes in allowing the adults to decide what will happen, at least for the next two days. So the therapist, while joining with the family to understand how they think and feel, also stands outside, and retains his own independent frame of reference.

The result is that each person has the opportunity to talk without too much interruption. Each one has the experience of being listened to and taken seriously, at least by the therapist. Each person can speak without the others withdrawing or talking over, which would presumably happen at home. And as the interview proceeds there is some softening of intransigence and some greater willingness to negotiate rather than confront. There is evidence in this that the therapist has been able to create conditions in which the discourse about justice within the family can begin to develop.



# NEW COMMENTARY

by Moshe Lang

It has long been recognised that it is a family therapist's job to put the family at ease, since the therapist is the host and they are the guests. What is often overlooked is the family's ability to put their therapist at ease. Despite the severity and urgency of their problems, the Black family did manage this with me. Their willingness to share was evidence that they accepted me as their therapist. As a result, I had more work to do because they communicated more complex and profound distress to me.

In recent years family therapy literature has been full of discussion about the therapist's power (e.g. Luepnitz, 1988), but in this interview there is plenty of evidence that I, as the therapist, lacked power whenever the family did not wish to accord it to me. For example, Donna felt perfectly free to reject some of my suggestions, yet was willing to accept others. She used my words when they suited her, but whenever I hadn't described her experience accurately she did not hesitate to challenge me. I admit to being delighted that the family gave me as much power over their lives as they saw fit. I accepted their independent judgment comfortably.

Of course there are families who never feel comfortable in therapy, and who believe they must accept all the therapist's recommendations. The fact that the Black family was able and willing to challenge me, particularly in view of the fact that they encountered me at a time of a profound crisis in their lives, is a very positive sign. Their capacity to connect with me is evidence of their strength and resilience. When they reject what I say they are indicating that I do not fully understand them and this pushes me to inquire further and understand better. I am then able to offer new, more appropriate interpretations and suggestions. As a consequence my impact becomes more significant or, if you wish, more powerful. There is an inherent paradox here. The less interested the therapist is in his own power, the more power he can accord to the family. This makes him a more effective and thus more powerful therapist. As the Right Honourable Jim Hacker of *Yes, Prime Minister* recognised, 'I'm the leader. I have to follow my people.'

Collaboration between the therapist and the family is impossible unless the family feels entitled to use its discretion about accepting what the therapist has to offer. It is essential that the therapist and the family both feel responsible for what takes place and for the eventual outcome.

## WOULD I DO IT DIFFERENTLY TODAY?

When I reflected how the family felt, I should simply have summarised how I imagined their experience. I should not have gone on to say, 'Will you be prepared to try, to do things differently?' (p. 38)

Nor would I now suggest to Donna that she stop being the go-between, or that the parents stop talking through her. All of these are prescriptions for conducting their family life in the future, and they now seem premature.

If I wanted to highlight these ideas today, I would say, 'You may not have thought of it, but it seems to me you have your own solution to your problems. Your solution is that Donna gives up being a go-between and that you talk directly or not at all, but you work together as a team. Perhaps Donna's going to boarding school has merit and helps her not to be the meat in the sandwich.' Or I could have said to Donna, 'If you don't like being the go-between, what do you think of giving it up?' The difference between then

and now is not so much in the content as in the ownership of the solution. Towards the end of the session I would now say, 'You have taken an important and very difficult first step by coming to see me. You've told me a great deal and I think we've had a very good conversation.

'Jack, it must have been particularly difficult for you to come. You're a very busy man, and to take a day off at short notice can't be easy. It seems to me you are a man of action, not of words, and by coming here you may be conceding a home-ground advantage to Lorraine, who is much more comfortable with this sort of context.

'Lorraine, you have been very open and trusting. You've told me your pains and concerns in great detail.

'Donna, I was extremely impressed by how clearly you expressed yourself and how alert you are, listening to every word and not letting me get away with anything. I like your strength and determination. Perhaps even your suicide attempt is evidence of your determination not to let things go on the way they were. Things have to change and improve, or you don't want to go on.

'Ernie, you have been protective of your family, possibly without even realising it. When they get too emotional, upset or hurt, you find ways of changing the subject, to bring the temperature down.'

The family may have experienced these complimentary comments as glossing over their pain and conflict, but it is the sort of thing I would now be tempted to say to them. Then I might continue, 'Today was a useful beginning and I am sure there is much more, but you can't tell everything in fifty minutes. What do you think about getting together next week to talk more?'

I am certain that today I would be more inclined to conduct the interview as above, but whether I could have done so at the time, I don't know. It would have depended on how it impacted on the family, also on my response to their reactions and on my bodily sensations. For example, there may have been cues from the family that these positive comments made them feel uncomfortable. Perhaps they were not yet ready for the positive, since they were still in despair.

If I had said all this, would it have been more 'therapeutic'? I don't know. Most likely the family would have been ready to come to the next session without the resistance Donna displayed towards the end of therapy. Yet that

very resistance made Lorraine communicate her distress more fully and brought out her determination, as a parent, to take care of Donna. It also alerted me and the family to the extent of Donna's distress and showed that we needed to hear more from her.

Most importantly my interventions, though perhaps premature, may have communicated my belief in the family's resilience and ability to solve their problems, which could in the long run have been very beneficial.

But I believe that all these considerations are peripheral. More fundamental aspects of therapy, which I would not change, are the following.

### 1 Attention

When I observe the tapes, I see that I am fully with the family. I give them my undivided attention. All my thoughts, feelings and bodily sensations are totally with them and for them. It is only towards the end of the session that I become aware it is nearly time to stop.

### 2 Listening

The task of the therapist is to listen, with understanding, empathy and respect, to the family's accusations and grievances, and to understand the position of each family member without conveying agreement with any one of them. So, at the end of the hour of therapy, you hope that the family leaves with a sense that each was heard fairly and that you, the therapist, understood everybody but are on no one's side. To the best of my judgment, this was achieved.

This is not to say that the therapist needs to remain mute. You can, in the ebb and flow of the therapeutic hour, take sides from time to time, as I did, for example, when I agreed with Donna that she had not just accused her father but had said both her parents were at fault. What you aim for is that, by the end of the session, things will even themselves out and, on balance, all the family will feel that you have been neutral, that you had the same degree of distance or closeness or understanding with each of them.

The most important thing that therapists can offer a family is listening to all of them. It is commonly assumed that listening is passive but, to my way of thinking, nothing is further from the truth. Of course, listening is done in silence — your mouth is shut and your ears are open — but in therapy it is

incumbent on the therapist to put his listening to the test. The therapist should not assume that he has heard correctly. He should offer to the family his understanding of what they have said, so that they can decide whether it is accurate. This achieves a number of things. It gives the family the opportunity to hear and reflect on what they have said and to refine their understanding by accepting, rejecting or correcting the therapist's version. As well, the therapist's recapitulation often evokes a further response from the family, so that therapy can be seen as an ongoing conversation. The therapeutic power of being listened to should never be overlooked. It is greatly increased when the listening occurs in the context of the family, so that each one is heard, perhaps for the first time, not just by the therapist but by the other family members.

What is it that makes listening so powerful? One explanation is that, when all have their say, the destructive assumption that there is only one truth is undermined. If you believe that there is only one truth, superior to all others, you continue to argue about what that truth is. You are therefore caught in arguments, fights and mutual accusations that are never resolved. Being able to hear each other for the first time, family members often realise that there are different truths for different people in the same situation. When accusations stop and listening occurs, empathy — understanding and recognition of the pain and suffering of the other family members — becomes possible. Also being heard and understood, not just by a therapist but by those people who are most important to us, is invaluable. Being listened to makes us feel connected, it makes intimacy possible. It is a major contributor to our self-worth. To know who we are and what we think, we need to be heard.

Even though I believe that this family's most significant therapeutic experience was being listened to and having the opportunity to hear each other, they also listened to me. When I spoke to them I did not just offer them back what they had said to me, I took it further. I offered them my understanding of what they had said and added my empathy — my view of what I imagined life must be like for all of them. In order to do that I didn't just listen, there is evidence of me observing the family, sharing my observations and memory of what had taken place and offering words to describe their experiences.

### 3 Being with, yet apart

Shortly after the end of therapy, after obtaining the family's permission to show the tapes to professional audiences, I came to work on the weekend to look at this tape with my wife, Tesse, and my then partner, Brian Stagoll. We watched it uninterrupted and, by the end, all three of us were feeling exceedingly depressed, overwhelmed by the gloom, doom and hopelessness of the family situation. I guess that when I was simply an observer, relieved of the responsibility of being the interviewer and the therapist, I could sense the family's distress more fully. It is a problem for therapists to determine how much they allow the emotional tone and experience of the family to dominate their own perception and behaviour.

As a therapist, you need to listen, understand and empathise with the family. In order to do that, you have to experience their feelings as if they are your own. If this is your only emotional experience, however, you have nothing else to offer. The task of therapy is to maintain a certain balance between feeling the family's feelings and being true to yourself, maintaining your own assessment, perceptions and emotional reactions. That balance is a very difficult one; it is even hard to judge what constitutes an appropriate balance. Yet that is what I am trying to do now, in hindsight. And I think that, on the whole, I am reasonably happy with the balance I offered the Black family at the time.

### 4 Balance between humour and seriousness

When I say 'Is it murder' my word choice is interesting. Where does it come from? Clearly I am using a word that suggests a severity much greater than what has been communicated on the surface. Did I sense something here? Was it my own idiosyncrasy? Or (as I prefer to think) did I, without even knowing, respond to and compute Donna's previous comment that I should take the problems with Ernie more seriously? Since Donna had accused me of understating the problem, perhaps this time I chose to err on the side of overstating.

Some observers of this conversation between Donna, Ernie and me have charged me with trivialising the seriousness of Ernie's behaviour in my humourous interchanges. This is possible, of course, but my own way of

seeing it is this. Sometimes, to engage the family in discussing a serious matter so early in the therapy, you have to lighten the emotional tone to make the conversation possible. If you keep using dark colours, it makes seeing impossible. Secondly, for therapy to be assessed correctly, it has to be assessed over time, not on a minute-by-minute basis. With a lighter touch I was able to draw the family into the discussion more fully. Further, if I had been more serious, I may have reinforced Ernie's tendency to be inarticulate and non-communicative. Violence in families occurs in the dark; discussion does not take place. Bringing it into the light, into conversation, even if relatively flippantly, reduces the likelihood of it occurring. Of course the therapist should not sanction, promote or condone violence.

### 5 Overstating and understating

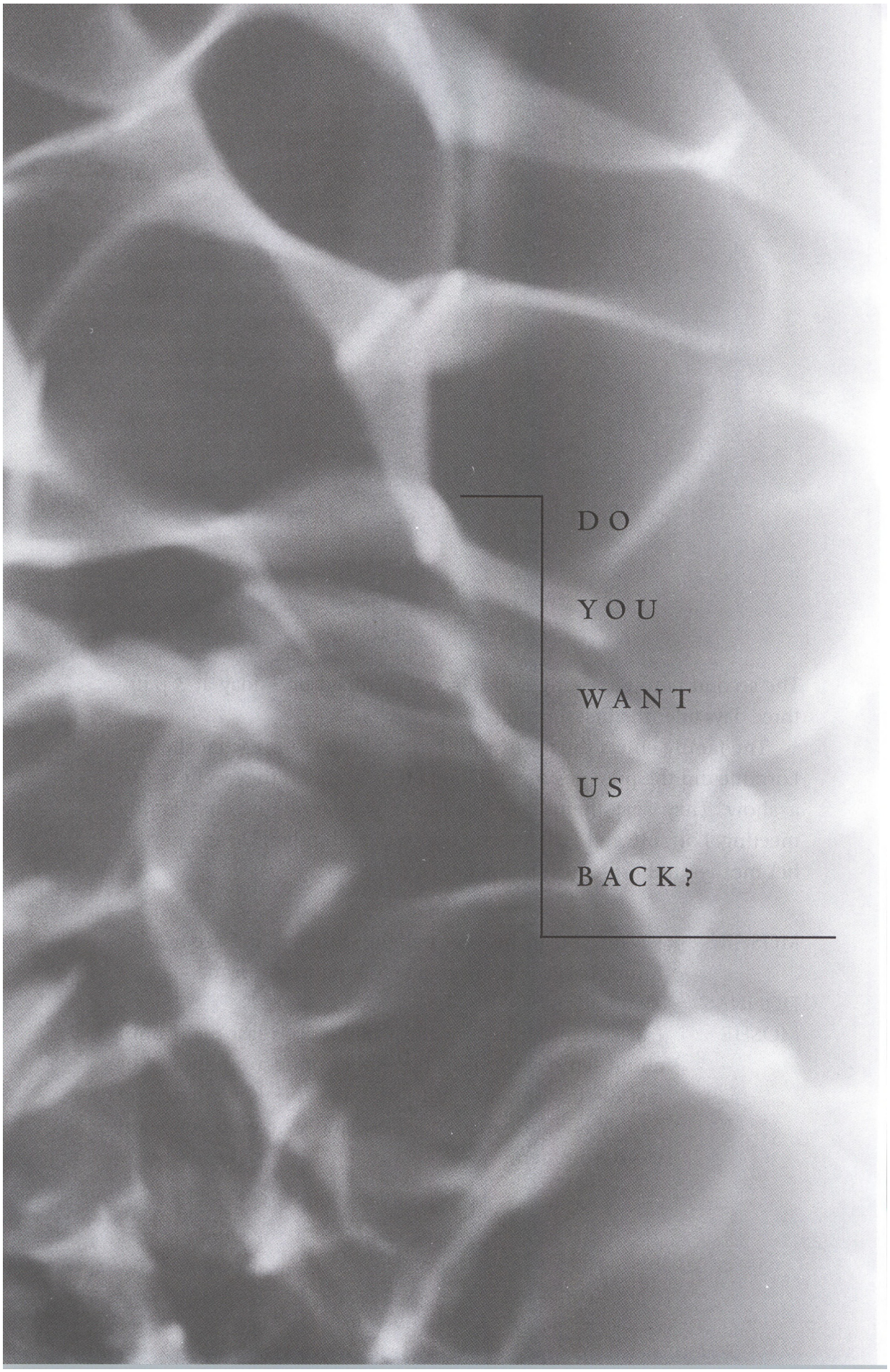
The job of the therapist is to correctly reflect the thoughts and feelings of his patients, but you can never be sure that you've got it right. You can only try, and perhaps it is better that you don't always get it right, because what is right? In reality therapists often find themselves either overstating or understating the intensity of the feelings or issues presented. This is not a problem as long as therapists have no attachment to their own statements, and patients are allowed to choose which of a range of expressions fits them best. When I try to assess this interview against this ideal criterion, it seems to me that the balance between overstating and understating the problems is about right. One could argue that I am sailing close to the wind when I talk about 'murder', 'blood-nose', 'broken leg', 'bashed up', 'damage' and 'kill'. There is certainly overstatement in the words themselves, though they arose in a humourous and light-hearted exchange with the children. It seems to me that this worked in freeing the family to talk more openly about their experiences and allowed them a wider range of expression. The humour releases some of the tension. The question is whether the family experiences the humour as me laughing at them, or whether I succeed in helping them to laugh with me? My view is that we managed to laugh together and, as Alan Rosen (McCallum & Lang, 1989, pp. 238-240) correctly observes, if you cannot laugh at your difficulties they can kill you. Similarly, the introduction of humour and playfulness allows the children a more appropriate and childlike opportunity for exchange. Sometimes people who have read the material have forgotten that Ernie is only twelve and, for a twelve-year-old

boy to be able to talk about what's occurring in his family, he needs a context and language of humour and playfulness.

A significant omen for therapy was that the family agreed on what the problems were and how they could best be understood. We all agreed, semi-tacitly, that the primary object of therapy was Donna's safety, because of the suicide attempt. We appeared to assume that the suicide attempt was due to pressure on her and conflicts in the family, that there was serious marital disharmony and that the parents involved Donna in their unhappiness and conflicts. Such an understanding of the problem contains the resolution within it.

At the time I was interested in structural family therapy, which has ideas such as the failure of the parental sub-system to work effectively, 'triangulating' the child as a way of dealing with marital difficulties and 'parentifying' the child; that is, giving the child inappropriate burdens and responsibilities.

In other ways the interview did not reflect structural family therapy theory. I paid minute attention to the parents' feelings and explored every person's subjective understanding of their difficulties at length. I still believe that the best way to conduct therapy, in an ideal world, is for the therapist to be open to as wide a range of concepts, ideas and techniques as possible, so that you can offer the most appropriate mix for that specific family. There is an implied agreement between the Black family and me as to how we would proceed to achieve the goals of therapy. I would be in charge of conducting the therapy, I would generate the questions and the family would be invited to speak in turn. They would tell me what they thought and felt and would challenge and correct me whenever they thought I was off the mark. I would accept such challenges as appropriate and would not see them as a threat to the relationship.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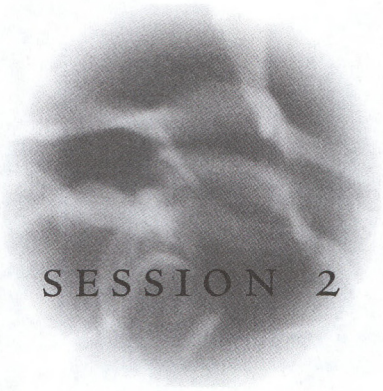

# SESSION 2

The second family meeting took place as planned on Friday at 3 p.m., three days after the first meeting.

The family enters the room with Ernie asking Donna what she and Lorraine did the previous night. Donna tells him that they went out to a show. They seat themselves the same way as at the first family meeting: Lorraine and Jack directly opposite each other, Donna next to her mother and Ernie next to his father.

*

MOSHE I want you to be very patient with me, if I seem a bit funny, because it's been a very long week for me.

DONNA That's all right.

MOSHE I teach family therapy and I had a class last night until about ten o'clock. I do remember quite a bit about our last discussions, so I am interested to know where you people are and what you think and where do you want to go from here?

*

Moshe tells the family how he feels and they seem to welcome his frankness, especially Donna and Lorraine. This hopefully makes it easier for the family to be open. But it also makes explicit the fact that, if there are problems in the interview, they are not necessarily due to the family.

*

LORRAINE (*softly, after a long pause*) Donna and I have had a discussion, and she wants to ask her father a question, but she doesn't know whether to ask him or not. I think she feels that when she gets home he will not be very happy about it.
She would like to ask him a question. (*She looks at Donna.*)

DONNA (*quietly and gently*) What is it? I forget.

LORRAINE You know what the question is.

DONNA I don't, honestly, I forget.

LORRAINE About whether he wants us to come home or not, isn't it? You ask him, and not me.

DONNA Yes. (*tentatively to her father*) Whether you want us to come home or not?

JACK Yes, of course, we do. (*There is a pause while Jack and Lorraine eye each other uncertainly.*)

*

The atmosphere in the room is different from that of the first interview. There is an open and exploratory quality about the interchange. The threat of an irretrievable break-up of the family was dominant before but now the focus is on how they can live together. The anger and despair of the Tuesday has given way to a mood of cautious hopefulness by the Friday.

*

LORRAINE Also I think, which is very relevant at the moment, Donna and I have been having a talk. Jack, you say you're home every night at quarter past five. You say you're home all weekend. I am sure the look on Donna's and my face when you said it almost denied it. If this be the

case, I think that's something to settle. We never talk as a family…

DONNA Me and Mum came up with this decision.

LORRAINE Not decision, an idea that we put.

DONNA Oh… yeah. Well, what it is, that since you're supposed to be home at quarter past five every night, because that's what you say, and since Ernie's got no more gym, that we don't have any telly, we have tea at half past five every night.

LORRAINE (*interrupting*) Or quarter to six. I said half past five to quarter to six is a reasonable time, so that…

DONNA (*talking over her mother*) And nobody can come at that time. And we just sit down without any telly, and just… (*She stops.*)

LORRAINE … have a discussion around the table with the children. We have been having tea at news time, and when they open their mouths, we say 'shush, the news is on'. (*Challenging*) Don't we?

JACK Yeah, that's fair enough.

MOSHE I just want to understand. (*to Jack*) You say you accept that suggestion. Is that what you are saying?

JACK Yes.

DONNA But Mum said, well, we both said that… what about Mr Andrews? He'd be there… (*Looks at Lorraine.*)

*

Lorraine makes it known that Donna wants to ask her father a question. Donna manages to forget the question and then when she is reminded she uses the pronoun 'we'. Perhaps Lorraine wants to use Donna as her mouthpiece, and Donna is surreptitiously rebelling.

It is difficult to get to the bottom of what is really happening. Lorraine has been staying in Melbourne with Donna. This gave her time to think about a separate life without the frustration of living with Jack. Presumably behind all the confusion, Lorraine is saying, 'Jack, I have been doing some serious thinking over the last couple of days while I have been away from you. I have decided that I want to come back to try again to live with you. Do you really want that too?'

Donna, perhaps, also is asking her own question of Jack, something like, 'I don't want to be separated from you, Dad. I want to come back home. But I want to know if you really want me at home or would you be just as happy for me to go off and live in a boarding house?'

But these reconstructions are tentative. It seems impossible to discern precisely what the two females are saying. They do not separate from each other and speak about their individual wishes. Jack seems to speak as a member of the male camp, because he also uses the pronoun 'we'. This discussion begins with 'Do you want us back', and ends up with 'Can we have dinner together'. But throughout the discussion it remains unclear whether the primary discussion is wife with husband or daughter with father. Lorraine and Donna finish each other's sentences and in the end Donna cannot work out whether she said something about Mr Andrews or her mother did. It may be making too much of it, but when Lorraine talks about, 'Donna's and my face', it does seem that her grammar is more correct than at first it seems. The only point where their voices are separate is when Donna wants to announce a unilateral 'decision' and Lorraine speaks up for the more democratic 'idea'.

*

LORRAINE (*to Moshe*) In my husband's business he has a man away quite often and when he comes home from the job he comes to see my husband to report on what's happening and to then get his orders...

MOSHE (*holding up his hand to redirect her back to Jack*) I like very much what has been happening. And that is you have been saying to Jack what you want. I would like you to go ahead and ask what you want and see what he says.

LORRAINE (*to Jack*) We just sort of feel that every teatime, we have either got the news on or Mr Andrews is there. Donna fully realises, as well as I do, that this is necessary. But if you could say to Jim, well, instead of coming straight from work, if he goes home and comes around and sees you later, I am sure he would be agreeable. I know Jessie would be. Then if you've got to talk to eleven or twelve o'clock at night, that's business, we are not interfering

about that at all, we don't see anything at all there. What do you feel about it, Jack?

*

The specific question 'How will we arrange teatime?' is so much more constructive than a generalised criticism like, 'Why don't you ever talk to me?' which was characteristic of Lorraine's approaches to Jack in the first session. But what is more important is that Jack and Lorraine are starting to talk to each other directly, without Donna in the middle.

*

JACK No, I don't think I can agree there a hundred per cent. I think if the man's been away working — after all, business is business.

DONNA But business has to come before your family, does it, Dad?

JACK No, Donna, but it's part of... um, that man's out making money for us, isn't he? Now surely he wants to pop in to see me, and then go home.

ERNIE 'Pop in' is two hours.

DONNA Well, Dad, if you like your business so much, well then... why? ... you know...

JACK But I can't change that...

DONNA (*voice rising*) But you put us second, all the time!

JACK But how can I change that?

DONNA On weekends, instead of staying home, you go to work for an hour. That hour ends up to be about three or four. It's business before us, always.

LORRAINE No, I am not complaining about the business...

*

The set coalitions suddenly start to shift. Ernie momentarily deserts his father to side with the women and Lorraine dissociates herself from Donna and comes to Jack's defence.

*

JACK No, Donna, I think you're wrong there.

LORRAINE I feel we have got to allow for this.

DONNA (*strong*) What's wrong, Dad? Do you want your business to survive or our family to survive? (*She looks directly at him.*) Which is most important to you? You have got to make that decision. Your business or us?

ERNIE If we don't have the business, we've got no money.

JACK (*to Donna*) The family, love.

DONNA Yes, the family. Well, why don't you put the family before the business?

*

Ernie returns to his father's side. Donna resumes her generalised demands about where Jack's loyalties lie, and the constructive co-operative spirit of a few minutes earlier is quickly eroded. The specific questions are forgotten, 'Will we eat without the television on?', or 'Can we ask Mr Andrews to come after tea?' Perhaps the family does not recognise that the earlier approach was so promising.

*

MOSHE Can I suggest something? You made between you some very interesting suggestions...

DONNA Yeah... we thought about it.

MOSHE One of them is... let me just check... the first one is that you wanted to find out whether your father wants you back?

DONNA Yes.

MOSHE Are you satisfied with his answer?

DONNA Yes.

LORRAINE Yes.

MOSHE The next one is that you want dinner, family dinner, at about five-thirty...

LORRAINE No! (*sounding conciliatory*) I don't want to make it a set time. Five-thirty or quarter to six...

MOSHE Right. Now, you want it without TV.

DONNA Yes.

MOSHE The next thing is that you don't want to have other people there. Jack says (*to Jack*) it is essential that this man that works for you should be free to come. I also notice, however, that you (*gesturing to Jack*) say he comes for 'a few minutes', Ernie says for 'two hours'.

JACK Well, sometimes he does talk a little bit, yes. (*The whole family is highly amused at the understatement.*)

MOSHE Which is it?

LORRAINE Two or three, I will have to agree with Ernie there.

JACK Oh, some nights it is only twenty minutes, twenty-five minutes. It all depends on what time he gets there.

LORRAINE Yes.

MOSHE (*Lorraine, Donna and Ernie all want to speak. Moshe gestures to stop the eruption. To Lorraine*) Can I represent you for a moment on that issue?

LORRAINE Yes.

MOSHE (*to Donna*) Can I represent you?

DONNA Yes.

MOSHE (*to Jack*) What time does he usually come?

ERNIE Any time.

JACK Any time.

DONNA It depends what time he gets back.

JACK Sometimes, it's before tea, sometimes after tea.

LORRAINE and JACK Sometimes it is right on tea time.

MOSHE What would happen if you said to him: 'I have this crazy wife and daughter. (*Donna laughs.*) They want time for the family and could you come at seven o'clock?' What would happen? (*Substantial pause. Moshe gestures, to continue the idea.*) Well, five-thirty to…

JACK Probably nothing would happen; he would accept it.

MOSHE Would there be any bad consequences?

JACK (*after careful thought*) No, I don't think so.

MOSHE Would you feel unhappy about it? (*aside to Donna*) That last one was a joke. (*She smiles and nods.*)

JACK The only thing I'm looking at is that he is away a lot. He has been away all this week, and when he does call in I suppose he wants to call in and see me first and then go home, which is probably natural. His kids are probably waiting for him.

MOSHE So he can enjoy his time with his family. But what would happen if you said to him to come after? Does he need to talk to you in person, or could you talk to him on the phone?

JACK No, he always reports to me in person.

LORRAINE He always reports in person.

MOSHE He needs to?

LORRAINE Yes. Yes.

JACK Oh yes, we go through planning timetables and so on.

LORRAINE It is essential. I agree there.

MOSHE (*to Jack*) What is it you do?

JACK I run a trucking firm.

MOSHE I see.

JACK We do jobs all over the state.

MOSHE So, if you told him: 'Look mate, you know, my family has been distressed over that issue and everybody is keen now to have dinner without interruption and could we make it at seven?', would he leave you and go to work for your competitor? (*Donna and Lorraine laugh. Jack takes it seriously.*)

JACK No.

LORRAINE I also feel his wife and children…

MOSHE (*reaching out to touch Lorraine's shoulder, to silence her*) Don't worry, I will look after your interests for a minute. (*To Jack*) Then I'll look after yours, too.

*

Moshe has secured permission from Lorraine and Donna to act as spokesman for them. As he tries to engage Jack in conversation, Lorraine repeatedly interrupts. She described him in the first interview as someone who 'won't talk'. Yet here we see his efforts to talk thwarted by the very person who resents his silence. She seems unhappy about

being excluded from the conversation between Jack and Moshe, just as she feels excluded from the male domain of 'business' with Jack and Mr Andrews.

*

JACK No. No, he wouldn't do that.

MOSHE Would it put him out in any way?

JACK (*thinks*) No, I don't think so. No.

MOSHE What time does he have tea with his family?

ERNIE (*very quietly*) He doesn't do it. (*Lorraine is smiling and shaking her head.*)

JACK (*to Moshe*) I beg yours?

MOSHE When does he have tea with his family? (*Jack sighs heavily. Donna glances at her mother.*)

JACK Except when he is working at home, probably only at weekends.

MOSHE I am confused now. He comes when you are having dinner?

JACK But this is not every night.

MOSHE How often would it happen?

ERNIE Once a week.

JACK If he is working locally... (*Donna looks at him, then glances at her mother, sharing a smile in collusion. Ernie gestures and smiles in unison with Donna and Lorraine*)... every second night, but if he is working away like he is at the moment, we won't see him probably until Sunday, or Monday. (*Lorraine seems to be holding herself down, smiling with the effort.*)

MOSHE So, if you went along with these ladies' wish, he would not be upset.

JACK No.

MOSHE He would not be put out and you could have a family dinner? Then he could either come before or after?

LORRAINE You could even make it... Friday night we don't have a set tea — everybody has bits and pieces. It wouldn't matter on a Friday night, or Saturday night. I mean during the week.

MOSHE So, it's not a problem really?
JACK No, I don't think it is.
MOSHE Did I push you into it? Or did you sort of...
JACK No. No. No.

*

Moshe buys into the discussion by offering to represent the women in talking to Jack. You could see this as a mistake. He risks becoming allied with the females and being left with Jack not openly opposing him but not wholeheartedly co-operating either. He has to work hard in the end to try to satisfy himself that Jack is happy with the outcome of the discussion. Jack is said to have a business relationship with Mr Andrews but Lorraine and the children see him as a rival for Jack's time and attention. (In fact Mr Andrews seems to spend more time with Jack of an evening than with his own wife and children.) Although Jack says he did not feel pushed into agreeing to what was asked, his tone of voice is unenthusiastic and it remains unclear whether he really accepts what is asked of him or is simply being passively compliant.

But serious problems are only likely if Moshe enters into a permanent and fixed alliance with one part of the family against another. In this instance he indicates that he does not intend to hold indefinitely to his role as advocate for the female camp. He is testing out Jack's response to a sustained attempt at constructive negotiation free of anger or accusation. He shows a persistent interest in understanding Jack's point of view.

The other advantage in Moshe taking on the role of negotiator is that he displaces Donna from her usual position as go-between with her parents. This is in accord with Donna's expressed wishes.

*

MOSHE Just one thing, who would cook the meal?
LORRAINE I cook the meal.
DONNA And I help.
MOSHE (*to Donna*) And you help. (*to Jack*) What sort of cook is your wife?
ERNIE And I set the table.
JACK A very good cook.

MOSHE There is no argument on that score?

JACK Beg yours?

MOSHE No argument on that score?

JACK No.

MOSHE Ernie, is your mother a good cook?

ERNIE Yes.

MOSHE No argument on that score.

ERNIE When she cooks spaghetti and meatballs, I don't like that. (*Lorraine smiles broadly.*)

*

Lorraine likes cooking and the results are appreciated by all. Jack has no problem giving her credit for this. They volunteer that preparation of the meal is a co-operative and amicable affair. So there is a good chance that meal times can become an enjoyable time for all.

*

MOSHE Now we have arranged that... (*to Lorraine and Donna*) you go on with what you want.

LORRAINE The other thing is; I have had time this week to look and think quite a lot. I've had time. We wandered around yesterday, at the art gallery. Donna went one way and I went the other. We did things together but we also did things apart. Now, I think a lot of the problem has been that while I was sick, and before I was sick, Donna was Jack's right-hand girl as far as doing things. She had to do more. She was the lady of the house in lots of ways, while I was away for so long ill. And I feel now that I have taken over my normal role and I'm not going back to work, that this could be affecting Donna unconsciously and this is why she feels a bit pushed out. For months I never did the shopping. Jack and Donna did the shopping.

DONNA Dad only went because he had to pay the money. (*Laughs.*)

LORRAINE (*gestures gently with her hands as she speaks*) You see, these sort of things they did, they no longer do. And I think this could be part of the problem, as well as the fact that

Jack and I do not talk about what Donna's limits will be. She has now had to come back to a fourteen-year-old, fifteen-year-old daughter instead of being more or less the boss of the household. I see that very much so. (*To Jack in a more challenging tone*) The other thing, one of my main gripes: when Jack says to me, 'You worked for eight years and you pushed me out and you pushed the children out', Jack doesn't give me any credit for the fact that, if I hadn't been working, it wouldn't have been as easy to start the business. He doesn't give me credit for the fact when he started the business I was working from eight to four-thirty, weekends off, and I made sure I was home; and even when I was working weekends or afternoon shift, not once could they ever say they went to the deep freeze or the fridge and there was nothing there. (*She emphasises the point by gesturing with her index finger.*)

JACK No one is disputing that, but you haven't given me any credit either…

LORRAINE (*interrupting*) Oh, Jack, I do.

JACK … That I started the business and looked after the kids.

*

Lorraine has done some constructive thinking about her role as a parent. She remembers well the previous session and the questions that were raised. She did not only separate from Donna physically as they visited the art gallery, but also in her thinking, so that she is now reporting clearly about her own individual thoughts. What she says makes good sense. Her retirement from work and her return to health after the accident do entail a loss of status and privilege for Donna. She is now able to identify her belief that Donna would benefit if she and Jack could set limits on her behaviour.

But she still finds it hard to talk for more than a few moments about her concerns as a parent, without sliding off onto her preoccupation with the debits and credits of her marriage. The result is that she does not get to discuss with Jack the need for them to set limits with their daughter, but instead finds herself back in the unending debate about her marriage.

Jack, for his part, does not respond to her comments about Donna's position in the family or her need for definite limits. But he does respond promptly to Lorraine's comments about his failure to give her credit as a wife.

*

LORRAINE I do give you credit...

JACK (*interrupting*) There were lots of times when I couldn't go where I wanted to go because I had to be home for the children. Now, I never complained about it, did I?

LORRAINE And I didn't complain about it either...

JACK ... Because I had to be there because you were at work.

DONNA But Dad... (*Moshe gestures to silence Donna.*)...Sorry.

*

Jack and Lorraine do manage to talk to each other for a few minutes, but Donna puts herself back into the position of go-between without any obvious invitation from either of her parents. She is silent while they talk about themselves but opts back in when they talk about the children.

*

LORRAINE I had to be at work at times when you probably did have to go... there.

MOSHE (*He moves across to sit between the two children and speaks to Lorraine.*) You go on... I just want to talk to the children. (*Lorraine continues as Moshe involves the children in a low-voice conversation, leaving the parents 'on their own'.*)

| Lorraine's and Jack's conversation | Moshe's conversation with Donna and Ernie (only partly recorded) |
|---|---|
| LORRAINE (*loudly and clearly*) The thing is, if I hadn't worked... I am not taking from you one iota that you are a self-made man. As I have told you before you're more to | MOSHE (*to Donna*) Do you ever have a fight with each other?<br>DONNA (*Giggles and whispers her reply.*) |

be admired for where you've got. I can't get there. I couldn't do what you have done, in your case. Jack, you have had no education and yet you've got a thriving business. I have never, ever denied that fact, and you ask anybody what I think about it. So this is something, when you wanted the house paid off, so that you could have more collateral, did I grizzle? Did I moan? Didn't I immediately go down and fix up the papers and everything and get it ready for you? You see, all I want is a little bit of love and affection. (*Gestures at Donna who is happily chatting to Moshe.*) Your daughter asked me an embarrassing question yesterday. She wants to know whether you're having an affair, and I said: 'What a ridiculous thing!' You see… this is where… how many times have you ever turned to me? I've turned to you repeatedly; 'it's too cold' was the last excuse. (*Pause.*) And do you feel I am wrong about feeling bitter about not coming down when I was so ill? (*Pause.*) Do you think I am being unreasonable?

JACK I beg your pardon?

MOSHE (*to Donna*) Do you have a steady boyfriend?

DONNA (*laughs and shakes her head*) Not really a steady boyfriend.

MOSHE Who is this Mr Andrews?

DONNA He works for Dad.

MOSHE What does he do for your dad?

(*Donna whispers inaudibly.*)

MOSHE (*to Ernie*) Do you know her boyfriend?

DONNA No. He doesn't.

LORRAINE Do you think I am being unreasonable being bitter about you not coming when I was ill? (*Long pause, Moshe's whispered conversation breaks the silence, making it obvious the parents are still on their own.*)

MOSHE (*to Ernie, gesturing to his parents*) Do you think they will be all right if they talk by themselves?

*

Jack and Lorraine are apparently in agreement about the contract which implicitly exists between them. They seem to have agreed that their obligations to each other include: working hard (for Lorraine this includes keeping the refrigerator full, even while she is working full-time); being reasonable at all times; not complaining; giving credit. The disagreement is about whether the contract has been honoured and, if not, who is the guilty party. The irony is that Lorraine is complaining at length and in a very aggrieved tone, while apparently claiming that she has honoured her part of the agreement by not 'grizzling or moaning'. It seems that she is not saying, 'I am complaining, and I have every right to do so', because she accepts the basic agreement, even though it ties her up in knots.

It never seems to occur to her that she could discard the contract within which the dispute is occurring. Jack's silence can be understood as an attempt to abide by the rules of this same contract. He momentarily lapses into complaining that he is not given credit, but then desists. It is possible that the strict taboo on complaining is something which pushes Lorraine toward the more radical response to her helplessness that is evident in her suicide attempts. In behaving this way she both adheres to the letter of the rule, and violates the spirit of it at the same time.

*

JACK Well, perhaps I was wrong. (*Long pause.*) I can't split myself though, can I?

ERNIE (*shrugging his shoulders*) I dunno. I suppose so. (*Donna is now attending fully to her parents' conversation.*)

LORRAINE The children would have come with you. Jack, Jessie offered to take Ernie the day of the operation, Pat would have had Ernie the day of the operation, Anne would have had him. They all offered if you had wanted to go down on that Wednesday.

MOSHE (*stands up and leans forward to talk to everyone*) What I am doing is: last week when we met, one of the ideas was that both kids were saying in a way that they get caught up between the two of you (*Lorraine smiles and indicates agreement*) so when Donna now for a minute got in there, I told her to stay out and let you guys sort it out. (*Donna laughs.*) And I reassured her that if you hurt each other, then I'll watch and when you start to get at each other's throats; I will take you off, as it were.

DONNA (*laughing*) Yeah, we will split you apart.

LORRAINE (*laughing*) We are apart. (*Lorraine and Donna look at each other and laugh, as if they are pleased. The mood in the room suddenly changes at this moment to one of relief.*)

MOSHE Jack, I wonder if you would mind sitting there and you talk to your wife, while I talk to Donna and Ernie? (*Jack moves to a seat beside his wife, and Moshe sits in Jack's seat. Lorraine's attitude to Jack seems more friendly.*)

*

There is a long interlude here during which Moshe is engaged in a whispered conversation with the children, some of which is inaudible on the videotape. Donna has indicated decisively her hatred of being the 'meat in the sandwich' of her parents' marriage. Moshe distracts her and engages her and Ernie in light-hearted conversation, leaving the parents alone with each other to talk.

At one point, where Lorraine gesticulates towards Donna and begins talking about whether Jack is having an affair, Donna is so caught up in trying to hear what Moshe is whispering in her ear that she does not even notice. Under ordinary circumstances she would be drawn into the unproductive squabbles between the parents.

When the children are removed from their customary position in the middle, the conversation between the parents takes a distinctive form. Lorraine speaks in a monotonous, accusatory and unfriendly tone of voice, while Jack stares into space and responds with extreme sluggishness to any question addressed to him. In earlier discussion these pauses were filled in with animated interjections from Donna and diversions or distractions from Ernie.

The atmosphere between Moshe and the children is dramatically different. Moshe is inviting the children to relax and enjoy themselves even while there is tension and disagreement between the parents. To disentangle the children from their unrewarding position in the marital turmoil is the primary aim of therapy at this stage. Ensuring that Donna's role in the family is more satisfying is a first priority.

Indeed Donna's future well-being depends on her leaving her parents to deal with their own marriage and joining her brother and others of her own age in activities appropriate to an adolescent. While she is caught up in discussion with her parents, her voice is indignant and helpless. When there is a clear boundary between her and her parents and she is involved in a playful dialogue with Moshe and Ernie, her voice is free of tension.

She sounds more like an adult when she is struggling with her parents and their many problems. It is easy then to think of her as depressed and potentially suicidal. But when she is chatting with Moshe and Ernie she sounds like an ordinary, fun-loving teenager. Donna's two complaints in the first session were that she was neglected and that she was caught in the cross-fire of the marital strife. During these parallel conversations she is temporarily relieved of both these concerns. The immediate and dramatic change in her demeanour that results is a promising sign. We cannot properly understand her experience of depression without considering it in the social field in which it has developed.

*

LORRAINE (*to Jack*) Do you really think that's unreasonable?

(*Jack stubs his cigarette, at length.*)

JACK No, I don't think it is.

LORRAINE But you can't understand why I was hurt about it?

(*Jack sits back, half turned away, hands folded across his stomach.*)

JACK Nobody can make mistakes, is that it?

LORRAINE No, Jack, it wasn't a mistake in my estimation. You realised how ill I was. I cried on your shoulder that Monday.

JACK You had been ill before.

LORRAINE I know I had been ill before.

JACK I've done the right thing, haven't I?

LORRAINE Jack, it was so terribly important, when I said to you I might never walk again, on that Sunday.

JACK I can't stand these damn medical things!

LORRAINE No, but you didn't bother to find out, did you? (*Pause.*)

MOSHE (*to Ernie*) Do you play football on Sunday?

ERNIE No. On Saturday. I sometimes play soccer on Sunday.

MOSHE You are a soccer fan?

ERNIE A bit.

MOSHE But not on a Saturday, is that it?

ERNIE That is right.

MOSHE (*to Donna*) What do you do at the weekends? Do you play any sport?

DONNA I play tennis sometimes.

MOSHE (*to Ernie*) Do you ever play tennis with your sister?

ERNIE Once I did.

(*Donna laughs.*)

MOSHE What was it like?

DONNA It was all right, I suppose.

MOSHE Do you ever feel like playing games together?

*

We can glimpse here that Lorraine's repeated illness has become a major source of controversy in her relationship with Jack. Implicit is the rule that you must be reasonable at all times. Lorraine is arguing that she had a specially reasonable claim on Jack for care and comfort, which he failed to honour. Because she was seriously ill, she believes that she was doubly entitled to his attention.

Jack for his part is saying that he has become so used to her being sick that he does not recognise in her illness any special entitlement. He wants to classify his failure to go to the hospital as simply an error of judgement, a 'mistake'. For Lorraine it belongs in a wholly different category. For her it was an almost unforgivable action.

*

JACK Well, I was advised not to come down.

LORRAINE Why? Who advised you?

JACK (*pause*) Because there was no use in coming down (*pause*) right at that time. (*He does not look at her: she stares directly at him.*)

LORRAINE On the day of the op? When I came out of the anaesthetic, or the weekend, you were advised not to come down on the weekend? I could see the day of the op. there was no use in coming down. But do you think it would have been nice for me if you had been there? (*Pause.*)

ERNIE We sometimes play games together.

DONNA Sometimes we play games together, but we always end up having fights in the end. Then we pack it up.

MOSHE Do you ever have pillow fights?

DONNA Nup.

(*Ernie shakes his head.*)

MOSHE Do you think you are too old for that?

DONNA Yes.

MOSHE My worry is that you haven't had much fun with each other.

(*Donna laughs.*) If I told you to have a pillow fight what would you do?

JACK Yes, fair enough.

LORRAINE What about the weekend? (*Long pause. She continues to challenge Jack with her direct look, which he won't — or can't — meet. He eventually nods, indicating agreement.*) But you just make me feel I'm being unreasonable. (*Very, very long pause. Moshe is busily involved with the children. Their sound begins to intrude on the others' silence.*)

JACK (*looking into space*) Yeah. Fair enough.

LORRAINE (*with a deliberate effort to be calm*) What is your gripe as far as… being with me? (*There is another long pause while Jack sits woodenly, staring into space.*)

(*Ernie shrugs and mumbles inaudibly.*)

DONNA (*giggling*) It is only a dare, Ernie.

MOSHE (*to Ernie*) Are you scared of her?

ERNIE A bit.

MOSHE Do you get sunburnt? I do. Both of you have fair skin like me.

DONNA I don't get burnt.

MOSHE Today is Friday. If you went home, is there anything you and Ernie could do that you both enjoy?

DONNA Not really, because we usually go out with different people.

MOSHE There is nothing you could do to enjoy yourself, even for five minutes?

DONNA (*chuckling*) Not unless things get fairly desperate.

MOSHE If you don't have anybody else, then you put up with each other?

DONNA Yes.

*

There is a strong undertow drawing Moshe and the children back into the other discussion. When Donna's attention is not fully engaged her gaze turns to her mother. Lorraine glances at Donna occasionally or gestures in her direction. It requires a constant effort from Moshe to prevent the two streams merging again.

MOSHE What about your boyfriend? Does he (*nodding at Jack*) know about him?

DONNA I don't know. (*She glances at her parents.*)

(*Lorraine stares fixedly at Jack, who sits rigidly, refusing to look at her. They are involved in a tense battle.*)

JACK Well, I think as far as the kids go, I think you bring it on yourself most times.

LORRAINE In what way?

JACK The way you talk to them. You say how you have been out with Donna. Now that's probably the first time you have been out with Donna for months.

LORRAINE I haven't been able to, Jack!

JACK Why?

MOSHE It's confidential?

DONNA Yes.

(*Silence here. Donna's attention is on her mother.*)

MOSHE (*to Donna, fighting to regain her attention*) Donna, do you think they can sort it out?

DONNA (*shaking her head*) It's gone on too long.

MOSHE Ernie, do you think they can sort it out?

*

Jack does not accept Lorraine's claim to be incapacitated by illness. He is implying that her illness is not 'real'.

*

LORRAINE I have not been able to move about. You say I haven't been out with Donna before. But every time she had

ERNIE Yeah.

MOSHE Ernie, when was the last time you had a good time with your mother?

to go to the orthodontist, we went out for a day together.

JACK What about at home?

LORRAINE Now where do we go at home? Up until the last month or so when I have been able to drive more, and get around? (*Long pause.*)

JACK Apart from the last eighteen months?

LORRAINE We always went together! We always went shopping together of a weekend. She used to come down the street with me when we went shopping. She used to come out shopping with me on a Friday night. (*Lorraine never takes her eyes from Jack's face, while he refuses to look at her.*)

JACK (*after a long pause*) Yeah, fair enough.

LORRAINE Every six weeks, Donna and I had a day out. (*Silence.*)

LORRAINE Every four to six weeks for the last two years, Donna and I have had a day out in Melbourne. Ernie didn't come. She had me all to herself. We used to go

ERNIE The other day when she was cooking these biscuits, and I was getting into them.

MOSHE Was it good fun?

ERNIE Yeah.

MOSHE (*to Donna*) When was the last time you had a good time with your Dad?

DONNA Can't remember.

MOSHE Is there something you would like to do with him on the weekend?

DONNA I get used to doing nothing.

MOSHE If I could give you anything you wanted, is there anything you would like to do with Dad?

DONNA No. It doesn't worry me any more.

ERNIE We mostly play with our friends, and we have our homework to do and that.

MOSHE Is there a picture theatre near you?

DONNA There is the drive-in and there is a picture theatre in the centre of town.

MOSHE How far is that?

DONNA About three kilometres away.

shopping. We used to have lunch, go to Myer's. We used to go to the orthodontist. We went to the pictures sometimes. We would catch the bus into town, and then we would come home. We never just went to the orthodontist and then went home. We stopped at Anne's place if she wanted to stop there. We laughed at different things. (*She realises that she has caught Donna's attention.*) Donna doesn't like the same sort of art shows as me. We saw the modern art yesterday, but I took her to the old part.

DONNA (*interjecting*) But we I had a good time all the same.

(*Lorraine lights up another cigarette*)

LORRAINE But all those times then. Last Saturday when Donna was home on the afternoon that you worked, she and I would be doing things. But you and I, we never talk. (*Plaintively*) We never have any time together! (*Pause while Jack sits immobile, staring into the distance.*) When you first started out in business, my pay packet was very important, Jack. Did I go out and spend up big?

MOSHE Do you like going to the pictures?

DONNA Oh, yes. I go to the drive-in sometimes.

MOSHE Have you ever been with just you and Dad?

DONNA To the pictures?

MOSHE Yes.

DONNA We just don't do that sort of thing. We have fun with our friends.

MOSHE But sometimes you can have fun with your parents? Or are they too old? Do you think they have had it?

(*Donna laughs and shakes her head but her attention strays back to her mother.*)

(*Moshe motions to the children, trying to regain their attention.*)

MOSHE Sometimes with the fights between your parents, they fight about you?

ERNIE They don't pay much attention to me.

MOSHE What do you reckon they'll say about…

DONNA I don't know.

MOSHE What do you think, Ernie?

JACK I'm not denying that, but...

LORRAINE (*interrupting*) But you do deny it. You wipe it off completely!

JACK What did I suggest when you went back to work?

LORRAINE (*indignantly*) You didn't want me to go back to work!

JACK I did not say that at all.

LORRAINE As long as the children were looked after.

JACK You only needed a part-time job; four or five hours a day.

LORRAINE A part-time job which I couldn't get at the time. I tried repeatedly. I tried to get a part-time job!

ERNIE I don't know, I don't talk to them very much. (*Moshe and the children are listening in silence to the other conversation.*)

MOSHE (*to Donna*) You talk to Ernie and try to stay out of your parents' way and I'll talk to them.

(*Moshe returns his attention to Jack and Lorraine while the children continue to talk together.*)

LORRAINE You say I was so busy climbing the tree.

JACK Well, that is true!

LORRAINE I wasn't busy climbing the tree. The fact that I got to director of physiotherapy wasn't just a matter of climbing the tree. I didn't want to go over to the front office in the first place. Dr Williams asked me to go, and that was only temporary. Then the position came up and he asked me to apply for it. That wasn't going to make any more difference.

(*Donna's attention comes back to her mother. Moshe indicates she stay out of the conflict. She is good-humoured about it. Moshe quietly suggests to the children that they go and draw on the blackboard in the corner. They move away from the circle.*) When the director job came up...

JACK (*angrily*) Which was more important, the hospital or the business? In your eyes, it was the hospital.

LORRAINE No, I gave it every opportunity, Jack.

*

The conversation between the parents, although its content is not of central importance for the therapy at this moment, is very revealing about the problems between Jack and Lorraine. Lorraine feels that her work and her financial contribution to the household was completely ignored by her husband. He clearly resented her commitment to her own career, and shows that he expected her to put his business venture ahead of any undertaking of her own. He saw her work as a stop-gap that should be as limited as possible, until his own venture was established. He resented her willingness to accept promotion and to treat her work as meaningful in itself rather than simply as a temporary source of supplementary income. There is no agreement between them on these fundamental questions.

They cannot stay with the urgent problem of Donna's suicide attempt because they are both so caught up with the balance sheet of their own past relationship. Lorraine's career is over and she has been superannuated, but so strong is her indignation at the way her work was regarded that she cannot attend to the current crisis.

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MOSHE (*moves to sit down next to Lorraine, while gesturing to include both parents and leans forward intently*) May I suggest to you one thing: could you talk to each other about what you want from each other as from today? You can't do anything about the past. It is what you want from each other as of today. Do you know what I mean? You agree? (*To the children, who are making a lot of noise.*) Ernie, I'm sorry, we can't hear each other. Could you make for me,

between you, on that blackboard there a funny drawing of your family?

ERNIE (*cheerfully*) Yeah. OK.

LORRAINE What I want today… ?

MOSHE As from today, from Jack, and Jack from you. (*The children are happily busy together.*) You see, the past is the past. But in the present there are some very serious issues for you to consider; you have to get your act together. (*Pause.*)

LORRAINE (*to Jack, very slowly and deliberately*) I want more affection. I want it shown more. In turn, I will be able to show it. I built my wall because I am sick of you turning your back on me. That's what I ask for, and things to do with the family; that you and I talk over things jointly, with the children, not one against the other. (*Pause.*)

JACK Yeah, that's fair enough. (*Pause.*) So long as we can talk, and talk properly.

LORRAINE Yes. Jack, what do you do when I try to talk to you?

JACK How do you mean? (*He almost looks at her.*)

LORRAINE If I have been really upset and wanted to talk to you, what do you do?

MOSHE (*gesturing*) You're going back to the past. See if you can work it out. You say you want affection from Jack, and you propose to give him the same, and you also want to do things as a family. (*To Jack*) What do you want from your wife? Do you want the same or different things?

JACK Yeah, that's fair enough. But…

MOSHE Do you want to?

*

Jack's restricted response to Moshe's attempt to engage him in some fruitful dialogue is a puzzle. Perhaps Jack believes he has been blackmailed into therapy in the first place by his wife and daughter and their threats of either suicide or desertion. He does not seem to approach therapy with any anticipation that it offers any benefits for him. His wife has spent much more time among helping professionals, both as a colleague and as a patient, and he may feel that she is more

at home with Moshe than he can ever be and that Moshe is bound to end up taking Lorraine's side. It may be that he sees therapy as some sort of punishment arranged for him by the females of the family for the damage he is supposed to have done to their lives. In this case, his strategy would simply be to endure the therapy.

It often appears as if he speaks a completely different language from Moshe. When he is asked, 'What do you want?' his reply is, 'That's fair enough'. His response seems to have little bearing on the question. Perhaps it is this kind of unresponsiveness that his wife is fed up with to the point where she has 'built a wall around herself'. Presumably it is for the same reason that Donna has seriously contemplated severing all connection with him once and for all.

Perhaps he knows that he has more to lose in these discussions than the two females. He does have his health, his business, his employee and friend Mr Andrews, and his football with Ernie at the weekends. He has much less to be depressed about than Lorraine.

Then again, it is possible that he is just defending himself against overwhelming feelings of despair. His whole family life is in tatters. His wife and daughter are threatening to leave him. Perhaps he does not want to talk about it because it is all too much. Perhaps for him it is true that 'real men don't cry'.

Probably a better approach for Moshe, once the children are out of the ring, would have been to request the couple to focus clearly on their concern as parents for their daughter. This presumably is where Jack wants to focus attention. His awkward response perhaps reflects an uneasiness that Moshe is more interested in following up Lorraine's pre-occupation with the marriage.

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JACK (*to Lorraine*) Some nights when I come home if the kids have done some little thing wrong, I don't know, you just reckon the world is coming to an end, or something. You don't seem to be able to handle the problems.

MOSHE So, what do you want from her, as of today?

JACK Well, OK, if some little thing has gone wrong (*he looks at her*) surely we can sort it out?

MOSHE So you want...

JACK (*interrupting*)... Not just look real groucho and look into space, and 'that little bugger' or 'I'll kill him' or... I think that's a bit unfair to come home to that, and I think that goes on a fair bit. Do you agree?

LORRAINE I'd agree. Especially...

JACK (*interrupting*) OK, if Ernie's done something or she's done something, it's not the end of the world. (*He shifts his position.*)

LORRAINE Yes, but then, when you walk in the door, say g'day, and get the paper and read it while I'm dishing up the tea, and then the news is on; by this time I'm frustrated.

JACK But we can still talk.

LORRAINE But we never have, Jack. This is what I'm saying; if we did, the frustration for me would not be there. I wouldn't get to the boiling point, that I get with them. Then I could get you to talk to them and it would be over with.

JACK But I don't see how you can get to the boiling point. There is no major disaster. To me, the way I see it, it is not a major disaster. It might be some stupid thing, like he didn't pick up his pyjamas or something.

LORRAINE (*very softly*) Yes, but when I have asked him three times!

JACK (*open-legged, striking his thigh with his open hand*) But that's not a major disaster, it's not the end of the world, you don't have to...

MOSHE One of the things that makes it difficult for you to make things better, was that when you tried to talk about what to do about it you start arguing about what happened in the past, and so you remind each other of the bad times and you get demoralised.

JACK Yes, but this is one of the points that I would like to see changed.

MOSHE (*to Jack*) So you told her clearly, you don't want her to make such big things (*gestures with wide arms*) of the fact that Ernie left his pyjamas on the floor. OK.

(*To Lorraine*) I hear you say quite clearly that you don't like being like that, 'I don't like exploding and carrying

on like a two-bob watch'. And you're saying: 'I think I might be able to do that if, when you come home, I could talk to you. If I'm not alone, but we are partners, maybe we could pull it off.'

LORRAINE But when I haven't spoken to him (*gesturing at her husband*) for a week and I've had no physical or any contact with him for a week, to me the frustration builds up in me, and the things do become enormous.

MOSHE Sure.

LORRAINE And this is where I think sometimes... If I'm honest, Tuesday night you can't look at me. Tuesday nights when I have been to the physiotherapist, I can't even have tea, I am in so much pain, so I always prepare something ahead. So if it's Tuesday night that you come home and I've got a long face, well, generally I have. Generally, as you know, I am in my nightdress and dressing gown early on Tuesday night.

JACK Well, at least you can always say to yourself: at least I am still coming home early. I'm not saying to myself: Well, I'm not coming home tonight because on Tuesday night I could go down to the hotel, couldn't I?

LORRAINE Yes.

JACK ... and come home about seven-thirty or eight o'clock.

*

At least Jack and Lorraine have started to talk directly to each other, however inadequately, and for once the children are not embroiled in their discussion. As soon as they begin to talk, it is obvious how difficult constructive, or creative, dialogue is for them. They each want very different things of a marriage. He wants a wife who is a calm and efficient mother and housekeeper. She wants a companionate, affectionate and articulate husband. There is little common ground. Yet neither shows evidence of wanting to separate. It is as if they are both condemned to remain in a relationship that appears to be lacking in pleasure for both of them. Their conversation shows signs of polarisation which may have been present for many years. Jack, by his silence and unresponsiveness, pushes Lorraine into nagging and

complaining at length. Lorraine's nagging and complaining makes Jack more entrenched in his logical but unexpressive demeanour.

Moshe, having displaced Donna from her position as go-between, finds himself subjected to the same kind of pressure that she lives with. He becomes aware of the futility and lack of direction in the discussion between the parents. He then attempts to act as go-between and to arrange some sort of constructive problem solving.

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MOSHE Jack, I would like to ask you a question. From what your wife said a few minutes ago: you're doing financially all right at the moment?

JACK Yes.

MOSHE When was the last time the two of you have been away? (*Lorraine turns side on to the conversation, laughing, making a show of being very affected by the question.*)

LORRAINE (*very softly*) I can't remember.

JACK (*after a pause, to Lorraine*) Is it that bad?

LORRAINE No, I am just saying: I can't remember.

JACK (*to Moshe*) But when you say get away…

MOSHE Hang on! Let me ask you a stupid question. When was the last time you went away?

*

This is an inappropriate question. It is the wrong time and place to talk about the marriage. The central concern is the well-being of the children. It is more appropriate to talk to Jack and Lorraine about how they act as parents than about how they get on as husband and wife. At this moment the therapist is drawn into the confusion within the family between marital and parental issues.

*

LORRAINE Just you and I.

JACK (*Pause.*) I don't know.

MOSHE Was it this year? Have you been away this year? Have you ever…? How long have you been married?

LORRAINE Twenty-one years — on Wednesday.

MOSHE And you have never had a holiday together as a couple.

LORRAINE No.

MOSHE Not once.

LORRAINE Oh yes, once, we did have a holiday just together.

MOSHE Once, in twenty-one years!

LORRAINE Just on our own, yes.

MOSHE (*to Jack*) Is that true?

JACK Yeah. We probably had a couple of weekends down there in Melbourne.

LORRAINE Yeah. Yeah.

MOSHE When was the last time you went out to the pictures or theatre or something, or a meal together, outside?

LORRAINE On our own?

MOSHE Just the two of you. (*Long pause.*) Ever?

JACK Oh, we've been on our own with other people.

LORRAINE We have been with friends and that. He is talking about just you and I.

MOSHE What would happen if tonight or tomorrow night you dropped the kids at home and the two of you… Is there a place to go out for dinner in Bendigo?

LORRAINE A few nice places.

MOSHE What would happen if the two of you went out together? Will you cut each other's throats?

LORRAINE We would sit and not talk.

MOSHE You wouldn't be able to talk to each other? (*Long pause.*)

JACK Oh, I wouldn't say that.

MOSHE Could you talk to each other?

JACK I think so, yeah.

MOSHE Could you talk to Jack?

LORRAINE I'd try.

MOSHE Would it get heavy, if you know what I mean? Could you make it a pleasant evening for both of you?

JACK Oh, I think we could.

MOSHE Yes? You think you could pull it off and make a pleasant evening for both of you? (*Jack nods.*)

MOSHE (*to Lorraine*) Could you?

LORRAINE I'd try, but I am so out of practice, I wouldn't know.

MOSHE Would you know what to wear?
LORRAINE Yes, I'd know what to wear.
MOSHE (*to Jack*) Would you know what to wear?
JACK What to wear?
MOSHE Yeah. I'm just worried about you being out of practice.
LORRAINE We've been out with friends for dinner; my husband gave me a surprise birthday earlier this month.
DONNA (*interrupts with a theatrical cough*) Me, too!

*

It is easy to get caught up in Lorraine's pessimistic account of what her husband is like. Her mention of him arranging a surprise birthday party for her is unexpected. It seems inconsistent with her description of his behaviour. Is it that when Jack does take some initiative, Lorraine is slow to recognise it or appreciate it and so he is not encouraged to repeat the performance? Is it that they are both so entrenched in feelings of pessimism and hopelessness that promising signs are overlooked? Or is it that when they do notice some sign of affection or constructive behaviour in the other, they do not know how to acknowledge it or show that it is appreciated?

*

MOSHE Something very interesting happened. When I saw you the first time, it was very, very… you know… the atmosphere could be cut with a knife. Do you know what I mean?
LORRAINE Yes. It has been like that for months.
MOSHE But today, when I walked into the waiting room downstairs, there was some cheer.
LORRAINE I had just shown Ernie a toy I brought him and his father was having a go at it and Donna wanted to have a go and see what score; they had all beaten each other.
MOSHE So you, as a family, could have fun together. I could have fun with your kids; they seem all right…
LORRAINE (*butting in*) Donna and I had a lot of fun these past few days.
MOSHE … we had giggles.

*

Moshe compliments the family on their capacity to have fun together. Lorraine restates the compliment in a significantly different way. What she acknowledges hearing is that the female camp knows how to have fun. This passes without challenge from Jack or Ernie. Moshe resists being recruited into the women's camp by drawing Jack into the discussion. Lorraine is contesting Moshe's global statement that the family can have fun together. She believes that she and Jack cannot have fun together.

*

MOSHE (*to Jack*) I was trying to work out... Donna reckons she could still have laughs with you, but she thinks you have had it! Do you think she is right? You can't have any laughs with your daughter?

JACK (*pause*) No, I think Donna and I can have lots of fun.

MOSHE Yes?

DONNA Where? I will go down the skating rink and get him on skates.

JACK (*smiling*) No, not there, Donna. (*Jack and Lorraine and Donna are all good-humoured.*)

*

At first sight Donna is reacting differently from her mother. She seems to accept the view that the family can have fun as a family. Yet it is interesting that she proposes to Jack a way of having fun together with him that is slightly ludicrous. He is an overweight, slow-moving, middle-aged truck driver and it is very hard to imagine him on ice skates. We cannot help wondering if he is set up to look as if he is unwilling to join in and have fun. Or maybe this is just Donna's way of having fun by suggesting something silly and creating amusement for everyone.

*

ERNIE (*to Moshe*) Can we go and look at the picture? (*meaning the video monitor.*)

MOSHE Sure, you can go and watch it.
(*The children depart to the video room next door.*) Did you notice what happened? (*Moshe speaks quietly but with an air of celebration.*) When the two of you were talking to

each other, they were good friends, they were happy running out together.

LORRAINE (*happily*) To have a look at something together.

*

Previously Moshe initiated a separation between the parents and the children so that the parents were able to talk about their relationship while the children could have fun together. On this occasion it is Ernie who initiates this move and his sister joins him enthusiastically without hesitation. The spontaneous reappearance of this separation between parents and children without the intervention of the therapist is promising.

*

MOSHE When you put your act together, they become friends. Other kids fight with each other when they draw on the blackboard. They worked out who would do what. They are very pleasant to each other.

LORRAINE (*looking at the blackboard*) I see Trojan Trucks is there. That's my husband's insignia of the business. Ernie has drawn that. (*She looks very pleased and proud.*)

*

Lorraine manages to cross the boundary between the sexes to make a comment about Ernie and Jack which is complimentary and which is said with obvious pride in Jack and his achievements in business.

*

MOSHE I guess, myself, you know, maybe there is a beginning of something for you as a family. I would like... I don't know if I can do it in terms of time (I'll have a look in a minute)... to meet for a period regularly and talk about things, because things can very easily slide. To change life-long habits is not easy at all, and I think you both know it, and I don't need to kid you about that. But it is essential because you're playing for very, very high stakes. Maybe I don't need to tell you that you could pick some winners if you do it right. You know, I think you have done some good things, too, otherwise you couldn't

have the kids that you do; they have some nice qualities. I was surprised to see Donna today; she could smile, she could kid, she has spark, she has life.

LORRAINE You should have seen Donna and I during the last few days.

MOSHE Ernie is really doing...

LORRAINE (*interrupting enthusiastically*) Ernie loves his toys.

MOSHE So it suggests to me that you have done some good things together and brought up two nice kids to show for it.

LORRAINE We are screwing them up now.

MOSHE You're running that risk. You have done some bad things to date, no question about that, but you have done some good things. (*Pause.*) I would like you to commit yourselves to... It is very important for the children to be left alone to work things out between them, without you. Symbolically, you go away, and let them work things out; you go out for dinner, start thinking about going away for a weekend together; maybe, when you're ready for it, have a holiday together.

LORRAINE Jack doesn't like leaving the children for a holiday, like, just for us to go away.

MOSHE So, in which case we talk about it next time. We work it out with the children. On the whole, the best thing you can do for the children, no question about that, if you care about the children the best thing you could do is work like a team, as parents. It's most important, because they'll find their own way.

LORRAINE (*softly*) I think if we can talk at the tea table, and have that time together, it would be very important, because they could tell us. It wouldn't be late then, it would be flexible enough. If Jack gets held up and just rings and says: 'I can't get home tonight', that's fair enough. You can't tie someone down in business to the stage that it is ridiculous. If he rings and says, 'I can't get home till late' — fair enough. The three of us sit down and have our tea without the television going.

MOSHE Sure.

LORRAINE I have to come down to Melbourne next Thursday. The children have got appointments. I've got an appointment with Dr Baldock in the morning and the children have got to see Mr Crane in the afternoon. So we will have to come down on Thursday.

*

Of the people outside the family mentioned so far, almost all are professional helpers who are Lorraine's medical attendants or former colleagues. She has many years of experience in dealing with such people. Although she is in a less prestigious or powerful position than any of these people she sees them as her allies.

Jack is not at home among professionals. He has said, 'I hate these damn medical things'. He resented Dr Williams offering his wife a promotion. His ally is a truck driver, who, as an employee, is his inferior.

*

MOSHE (*looking at his diary*) All right. I'll tell you what we could do... I might pass out, but... I'll see you at six o'clock.

LORRAINE OK.

(*Jack nods his agreement.*)

MOSHE (*to Lorraine*) You are a physiotherapist or an ex-physiotherapist. You'll look after me if I pass out?

(*Lorraine and Jack both laugh.*)

LORRAINE Yes. I'll give you some resuscitation if you need it.

MOSHE OK, make it six o clock.

LORRAINE OK. Thursday. We'll have to come down the night before anyway. (*The children walk back into the room.*)

DONNA (*excited*) That is a good machine. You can hear youse and everything. It's cool and trendy.

MOSHE (*smiling*) Cool and trendy, eh?

DONNA Yes.

*

This is a cheerful throwaway remark from Donna. But it is remarkable the change in her perception of the video machine since her comment about it at the start of the first session. The threat of blackmail seems

to have melted away and the machine is now seen as not just friendly, but 'cool and trendy'. Perhaps there is a need for research on patients' relationships with video recorders.

*

MOSHE What do the children have to see the doctor for?

LORRAINE We've got to see Mr Crane, the orthodontist.

MOSHE Do you have any sort of black humour in your family, about what things have happened to you? Can you kid at all about it, or is it all heavy?

DONNA Yes.

ERNIE Yes, I can.

DONNA (*enthusiastically*) Are you coming down with us, Dad, to stay overnight?

JACK I don't know yet, love.

MOSHE (*to Donna*) Don't ask. Say: 'I want you to'.

DONNA (*laughs*) You can come if you want to.

MOSHE Say, I want you to.

DONNA (*smiling*) You can come if you want to.

MOSHE Oh, I see, you are tricking me: only if you behave yourself, you can come.

LORRAINE It might not be easy for Dad; if he came down later in the afternoon and came back with you, it would probably be better for him.

JACK Yes.

DONNA OK.

MOSHE So, it's Thursday, at six o'clock. There is only one thing. I want to give you one job (*to Donna and Ernie*) you two...

DONNA Fair enough.

MOSHE Your job is to bring up your parents.

LORRAINE I have a book on that.

DONNA Yeah.

MOSHE Listen, what I want you to do is: you make sure, between now and next time I see you, at least once they go out of the house and have dinner together. So you have a night to yourselves.

ERNIE Can I tell Mum to pick up her dressing gown? (*Lorraine laughs.*)

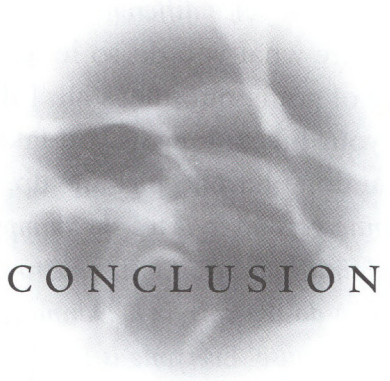
MOSHE Yes, I guess so. Another thing you could do, is when they go out, you could have the pillow fight that you have never had. Brothers and sisters should have a pillow fight.

DONNA I get headaches!

MOSHE Or a tickle fight.

DONNA (*protesting in a voice different from any she has used before*) I don't care what you do so long as it doesn't interrupt my way of going out, that's all. I don't mind. Youse can go for your life so long as you take me down the street. Oh, you don't have to pick me up, do you?

(*As Donna gets up to leave she dumps two carry-bags on her uncomplaining father. Moshe queries good-humouredly why Jack has to do the carrying. Donna tells him that Jack is the man of the house. Everyone is laughing as they leave.*)



# CONCLUSION

Although there are serious problems with the marriage, it is clear that the problem of the children deserves to be the first priority. In this interview the parents begin to talk directly to each other without using Donna as go-between. This is a very important development.

It is better to start with a problem, namely, the well-being of the children, which offers some reasonable chance of rapid progress, and therefore some encouragement for them to continue. The marriage has apparently been in trouble for many years and it is likely to be much less amenable to change.

Most important is the realignment that occurs within the family. The boundary between the generations becomes increasingly clear and definite. It may be helpful to review the sequence of events.

When the parents began to discuss their disappointment with each other, Donna attempted to intervene. Moshe holds up a hand to stop her.

A few moments later, he physically moves and locates himself between the children and the parents. While his body marks the boundary between the parents and the children, he engages the children in an animated discussion about football, boyfriends and

other matters. They are distracted from their parents' conversation so that they cannot listen or participate. As the parallel conversations develop, the emotional climate of the two diverge. Jack and Lorraine are stuck in their helpless frustrated struggle. The two children and Moshe are able to have an enjoyable and cheerful conversation.

Moshe asks Jack to move so that he sits close to his wife, which further emphasises the separation between the generations.

The children go over into the corner of the room to draw on the blackboard and leave their parents to their own concerns.

Later the two children leave the room to go next door to look at the video recorder. It is Ernie who initiates this move so that Moshe, by this stage, is no longer solely responsible for policing the boundary between the generations.

Moshe congratulates the parents on the impressive qualities in their children. He addresses them as co-parents while putting the children in a separate category. He draws their attention to signs that their joint efforts have been successful.

Finally, at the end of the session, Moshe asks everyone to take on some 'homework'. The parents are invited to go out to dinner without the children. The children are encouraged to play with each other and enjoy each other's company.

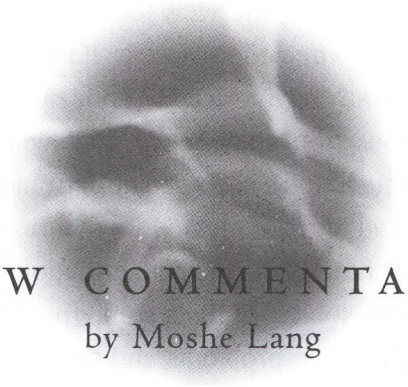
The message is that the parents need to get together and act in concert. They will no doubt continue to struggle with their marital dissatisfaction, but they can do so without involving the children. The children need to leave their parents with their plight as husband and wife and enjoy each other's company as children. This message is reiterated in many different ways during the interview.

But there are also some serious shortcomings in the therapy. The request that the parents go out to dinner without the children is unsatisfactory. The family is presumably left with the impression that this is supposed to result in Jack and Lorraine having a good time and discovering each other again. Moshe must seem to be suggesting a second honeymoon when he talks about them going away without the children. There is no basis in the interview to support such simple remedies.

Lorraine says clearly that Jack has little warmth, affection or sexual interest in her and that she is bitterly disappointed. Moshe has not attended closely to this or explored the details of what they feel about each other as husband and wife. He is in no position to make any recommendation about their relationship.

The intention of the suggested 'homework' is to reinforce the boundary between the generations and to remove Donna from her role as marriage counsellor. The task suggested will achieve the intended result, but at some cost, because the family will almost certainly misinterpret this as Moshe's proposed solution to the difficulties in the marriage.

Despite these defects, there is evidence of substantial change by the end of the second session. This is most apparent in Donna's behaviour as she jokes with her father and dumps her baggage on his lap, talking to him very affectionately as 'the man of the house'.



# NEW COMMENTARY

by Moshe Lang

Peter McCallum and I described the benefits to the family and the positive aspects of this interview in the original commentaries. Now I propose to discuss some aspects of therapy that I probably would do differently today.

**1** In the waiting-room I noticed that the family were very cheerful — in marked contrast to their demeanour three days earlier. I now believe I should have *started* this interview by commenting on their good mood and seeing how they responded. If they had agreed that they were more cheerful, I should have encouraged them to go into more detail about their more positive feelings. Then I should have asked, 'What do you think made these positive changes possible in such a short time?', encouraged each one to answer and promoted further discussion. This family had a long history of disappointments and defeats and, as a result, a diminished ability to notice their successes. I should have highlighted the positive changes, thereby encouraging them to learn from their success.

**2** The next question I could have asked was, 'When you went away after the first interview, what did you feel and think about our first meeting?'

It had been a good interview, and helping them to reflect on it would have consolidated and clarified the issues and benefits. I should have asked how the interview had been helpful and whether it could have been more so. This would have given us a sense of continuity, and I would have learnt what the family found helpful or not. In other words, there was an opportunity for the family to teach me how to be a better therapist for them, for establishing a clearer basis for future therapy and for a contract between us.

Peter and I studied that first interview for an entire year, and I still did not understand fully why it so affected the family. If I had only asked the last two questions at the time, I may have solved the puzzle that has preoccupied me ever since. I now know, from experience, that whenever I ask questions motivated by my own curiosity, it seems to be extremely helpful to the family. It seems that, if I had communicated my curiosity about their quick improvement, it might have fired their imagination, provoked questioning and encouraged them to look into their strengths. This would have helped them to stop dwelling on their problems and deficiencies.

**3** My offer to represent Lorraine and Donna in their discussion with Jack about putting a stop to Mr Andrews' dinner-time visits (see p. 76) was a mistake. Jack would have been justified in feeling that I was not impartial and that I gave the females more support than him. Perhaps his relatively inarticulate behaviour later in the session was due to him feeling more isolated as a result of my intervention. This is difficult to assess.

**4** At the outset Lorraine said Donna had two questions, 'Do you want us back? Can we have an uninterrupted family dinner?' At that point I should have said, 'These questions suggest that you feel much more optimistic about the future of the family than you did at our last meeting, and that you are keen to negotiate ways to improve your family life.'

**5** Lorraine said that she had time to think quite a lot, and that Donna felt pushed out because she was no longer the lady of the house, as she was when Lorraine was sick. She added that she and Jack did not talk about what Donna's limits would be. My failure to respond to this was a serious mistake. I should have asked Lorraine what else she thought, and explored her views with Donna and Jack. Also, I should have asked what Jack thought of Lorraine's idea of discussing the limits on Donna. I think one of Lorraine's struggles was to find a balance between being a responsible mother and

dealing with her marital pain. When I addressed their marital issues I tilted the balance in the wrong direction.

**6** On rejoining the parents, I asked about Jack and Lorraine going out or away together and subsequently recommended it. This was a serious mistake. I did not have a contract to work on their marriage. Obviously Lorraine wanted it, but Jack had never agreed.

The more urgent problem was Donna's welfare. I should have said to Lorraine that I understood her relationship with Jack was very painful, and asked her to postpone dealing with it until after Donna's difficulties were attended to. Then I should have seen if Jack would agree. To recommend their going out together without knowing what was going on in the marriage and without a contract was to trivialise the probable complexities and seriousness of their marital problems. Further, blind Freddie could see that, since it was so difficult and awkward for Jack and Lorraine to talk to each other, I was prescribing a night or weekend of torture. This couple had had major disappointments. To prescribe something likely to lead to further failure was irresponsible. Then I turned to the children and asked them to remind their parents to go out, when Donna's main problem was her over-involvement in her parents' marriage.

My use of the words 'I want' was also confusing and inappropriate. My wishes and motivations were irrelevant. The task of therapy is to find out what the family wants and to help them implement it. Nevertheless, it is possible that, since the family felt so isolated and dejected, it was reassuring for the therapist to offer involvement in their struggle rather than detached observation of it. Perhaps the family felt this to be right and appropriate.

**7** Lorraine said, 'We are screwing them up,' to which I replied, 'You have done some bad things to date, no question about that.' (p. 94). The job of therapists is to suspend judgment, not to be hasty, let alone as certain of their judgment as I was then. There is evidence in this interview of Donna and Ernie's strengths and capacities, and it would have been enough for me to say, 'I guess you are very worried that you have damaged your children'.

I'd be surprised and disappointed if I couldn't find faults in my work after practising for another twenty-five years, but there may be deeper reasons for this mistake. I was reacting to Lorraine's pain and urgency about her marriage, and it was her distress that made me offer unrealistic and superficial remedies. I suppose, too, that by paying premature attention to

the marital issues, I may have been trying to relieve Donna of this responsibility. When I agreed with Lorraine that she had done bad things to Donna, I was only pronouncing a universal truth. After all, what parent has never done something bad to their children? In any case, Lorraine was probably not just engaged in an objective appraisal of her mothering. It was very likely that she would feel guilty about her real or imagined contribution to Donna's difficulties, so I should not have reinforced her feelings.

What were Lorraine's crimes, anyway? According to Jack she did not manage the kids properly and did not know how to have fun with them. She went to work and neglected them. Then she had a car accident, was superannuated, returned home full-time and thus pushed Donna out of her privileged position as the 'lady of the house'. When feeling lonely and in pain about her marriage, Lorraine talked to Donna about it. How many parents are not guilty of such 'crimes'? It's possible that the very situations which may have been damaging to Donna paradoxically contributed to her confidence, insight and ability to express herself. Despite such a severe crisis in the family, she was still able to laugh and have fun.

But when I say to Lorraine, 'no question about that', I am running the risk of closing the book, rather than leaving it open with a promise of future exploration.

Although recent family therapy literature has emphasised that therapy is a conversation, the patient may attribute expertise or infallibility to what therapists say, which makes it incumbent on them to be very careful.

**8** I feel uncomfortable, too, when I review the tape, about joining with the children and asking the parents to speak to each other. I sense that Jack felt very awkward about this, and it is inappropriate for therapists to make their guests feel awkward. I'm sure Jack didn't take days off work and travel hundreds of kilometres to have me ask him to talk to his wife while I talked to his children. On the tape Jack seems inarticulate, perhaps even sullen or angry. It is difficult to work out whether his intransigence is due to his conflict with Lorraine or to my inappropriate contribution.

I have another worry about my parallel conversation with the children. My exchange with Donna and Ernie was lively and humourous, in sharp contrast to the difficulty and painfulness of the parents' interaction. Was I indirectly telling Lorraine and Jack how well I could interact with their children, thus highlighting their inadequacy and failure?

Even though I now feel uncomfortable about my orchestration of the parallel conversations, and in all probability I would not do it today, the benefits to the family from this intervention were probably considerable. It allowed Donna to extricate herself from her go-between position and made it possible for her to experience what it was like not to be the go-between. It gave her the support and encouragement of an adult — me -- to help her maintain her new position. The interview provides many examples, though, of how difficult it was for her not to be drawn back into the parents' battles. The temptation was great, and both Donna and I needed a lot of effort and vigilance to avoid it.

The conversation also gave Donna and Ernie an opportunity to improve their relationship with each other, not just by talking about it but by experiencing it within therapy, by having fun together — something which they both agreed in the first session they hardly ever had. And they had fun in front of me and their parents, thus giving us evidence of their capacity to do so. This process also provided a very important qualification to Donna's depression — if she was depressed, then she was depressed only in certain social situations. When her parents talked directly to each other and she was engaged in light-hearted conversation with Ernie and me, she was humourous and fun-loving.

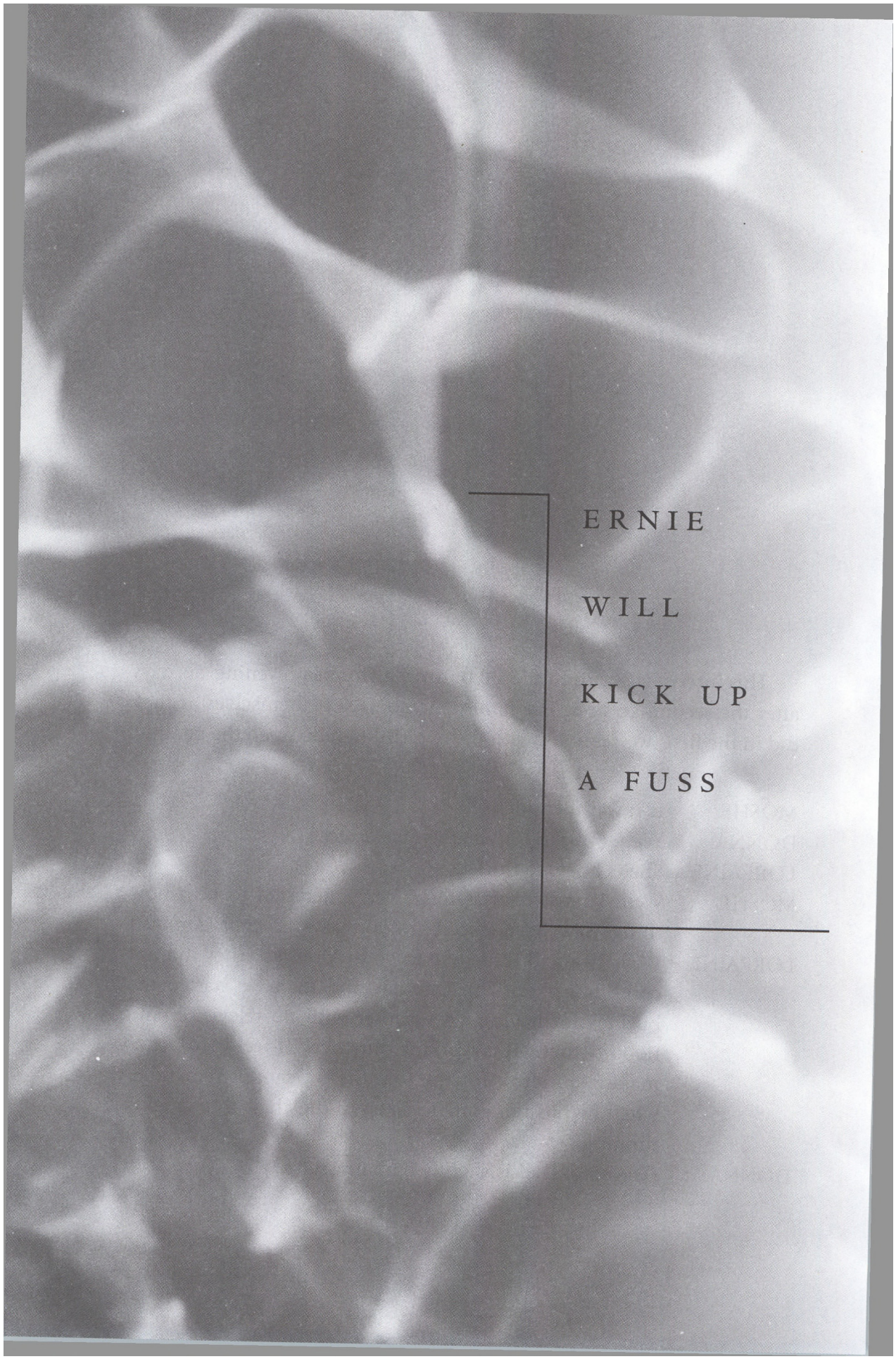
The parallel conversation also gave the parents the opportunity to talk directly to each other without the children being drawn into their exchange. Without the children's participation it was clear that the parents were worlds apart, and there is a lot of pain and tension between them. There are several benefits of this having occurred in front of the children and me. First, it made it obvious to all that there were serious problems in the marriage. This provided a very strong pull for Donna to be drawn back into the go-between role, and diagnostically it showed me, and perhaps them as well, that there was still much work to be done.

It is interesting to reflect on the origins of this parallel conversation. Students of family therapy would be familiar with Minuchin's structural family therapy (Minuchin, 1974; Minuchin & Fishman, 1981) and the way he moved chairs or used his own body to create physical boundaries that separated the generations — an intervention which I was implementing. But this did not come out of the blue. In the first session I engaged in a light-hearted exchange with Donna and Ernie. Also in the first session we all

agreed that Donna did not want to be the go-between. So, in the second session, when she initiated the interruption to her parents' conversation, I reminded her of her wish and then, with a gesture of my hands, stopped her from interrupting. Subsequently I joined her and Ernie in the parallel conversation.

So Minuchin's idea came to me in a natural way, as a result of a process that started in the first session and continued in the second. But I modified Minuchin's technique in a number of significant ways. I explained to the family what I was doing and why. I was interested in the feelings of the participants. And I created another boundary that Minuchin did not consider — namely a boundary or barrier in terms of the emotional tone of the two sub-systems. While there was seriousness in the parental camp, there was light-heartedness between the children and me. In that sense, I also drew on my years of experience as a child psychologist and play therapist, and as someone who has had a life-long interest and practice in working with depressed children.

Perhaps I also needed the relief of fun myself. It is important that therapists look after themselves to ensure that they are not overwhelmed by the intensity of the session and the grimness, anxiety or depression of the moment. It is impossible to look after other people if you don't look after yourself. The parallel conversation in this case was a sort of synthesis of three important influences — Minuchin, the family and me. The three came together like the tributaries of a river — once the river flows you can no longer tell where the water has come from — it runs smoothly, even though it may hit some rocks along the way.


ERNIE
WILL
KICK UP
A FUSS



# SESSION 3

This interview occurred at 6.00 p.m. on a Thursday evening, six days after the second session. The family members seat themselves as they did in the first two sessions, with the two children between the parents.

*

MOSHE Is it warm enough?

DONNA Yeah. (*Warms her hands on the heater.*)

LORRAINE She is hogging the fire.

MOSHE Well, I must confess to be very interested to hear how things have been since I saw you last. (*Looks at Lorraine.*)

LORRAINE Well, Jack and Ernie had to go to Albury so they did not come home until the Sunday and then we started the business of having tea together with no television and nobody there. It is working quite well. I feel that Jack is making an effort for the first time. I cannot remember when he has not gone to sleep in the chair three nights running.

DONNA (*laughing*) Dad is slightly embarrassed.

LORRAINE One who is not co-operating with teatime discussions and has got up in a storm both times and had to be called back was Donna. Donna feels that her father and I are trying to pick her friends and order her life. At the moment, we do not meet her friends. Donna has been going down the street on a Friday night and then going to the drive-in. For a fifteen year old I do not agree with this. She has had a very clear field in that she could always come out and say, 'Dad said', and now Dad and I have said 'no' at the table. I think you will agree there, Jack. That was what happened.

JACK Yes.

LORRAINE And so she got up and stormed out. This to her was curtailing her freedom. If she wants to go, I am quite willing to go with her. And Ernie has tried too, I feel. The way he has been speaking to Donna has been better. Donna still is not making much effort in answering. Even if Ernie does tease Jack a bit. (*Laughing*) He said, 'There is a policeman at the door' and gave him his bag and told him that he better get away. He said he would bring him peanuts in gaol. (*Everyone is laughing.*)

MOSHE (*looking at Lorraine*) I notice one very dramatic change between this time and the last two times, and that is that you are all laughing and smiling.

LORRAINE I feel better. I don't feel as tense even about coming here.

MOSHE You felt tense before about coming?

LORRAINE Yes, but not only about coming here. I felt I couldn't see any future in it at any rate. It is the last-ditch stand as far as I am concerned. But to me Jack has made an effort in the last couple of days. Even in the fact that he has been home and has sat down and we have discussed things at the table.

*

The atmosphere in the room is much more relaxed than in the first two interviews. Lorraine's voice now is softer, more gentle and friendly, although she still chooses her words carefully.

Lorraine's opening comments are remarkable for the way she is able to focus on parental matters quite unambiguously. She comments on the problems they have in disciplining Donna, without introducing the subject of her marriage. She and Jack are now standing together as parents. And because they are acting together Donna is no longer able to escape their authority by playing them off against each other.

As Lorraine says, Donna's freedom is curtailed. Donna's closing remarks in the last interview suggest that she saw that this was in the wind. The discussion that is taking place now is much more the sort that would be expected in the average family with a fifteen-year-old daughter.

*

MOSHE (*to Lorraine*) One more question, then I want to go around and get other people's version. What about the two of you going out?

LORRAINE We have not had a chance, because we did not get home till Sunday, and then I had to come back to Melbourne yesterday to see Dr Baldock and Jack met me this afternoon.

MOSHE OK. So we will come back to that. So one thing that has not happened is that you have not gone out together?

LORRAINE No, we have not had an opportunity. We thought it was more important to start meal times together.

*

Lorraine is asserting without any apology that they omitted that particular part of the suggested homework task. Their priorities were different. In this respect the family was wiser than Moshe.

*

MOSHE (*softly to Jack*) Can I ask you what things have been like for you since I saw you last?

JACK Yeah. I think things are a lot better. (*Pause.*) Ernie's definitely a lot better.

MOSHE In what way?

JACK Oh, he doesn't seem to do his lolly as much as he used to. He will go and do things when he is told or asked to.

Donna has been a lot better, too. I think she can do a bit better.

MOSHE In what way has she been better?

JACK I think she must realise that with this going-out business, we are only trying to help her, not hinder her, or pick her friends or anything like that.

DONNA (*whining*) But before you did let me go out, but now you say 'No way, not at all!'

MOSHE (*to Jack, after a pause*) So from your point of view, you feel Donna is much better because of what?

JACK She is much better than she has been. She is not getting up and storming around.

MOSHE She is not losing her temper. I see. So things have been much better, particularly in relation to both your children. What about how you felt yourself? Has it been a big effort for you, or difficult?

JACK No, I don't think so. I don't think it has been difficult.

MOSHE Has it been fun?

JACK It has been quite a good idea.

MOSHE (*smiling*) Is it true that now you are not falling asleep like you used to before?

JACK (*more quietly*) Oh. (*Smiles.*) Yes, it's true it is not happening. (*Everyone laughs.*)

MOSHE Is it because they (*gesturing toward the children*) are more entertaining now?

ERNIE There are a lot better shows on TV! (*Everyone laughs at this.*)

MOSHE Better shows on TV? Maybe it is because you are more interesting he is not falling asleep now.

JACK Yeah, could be.

MOSHE (*to Jack*) Have you enjoyed dinner time; was that a pleasant experience for you?

JACK Yes.

MOSHE So you were not just doing it because you had a gun at your head?

JACK No. No.

MOSHE (*looking towards Lorraine*) Because it has been a bit of an ultimatum, or it could be seen as such? But you are saying it is something you are happy with?

JACK (*nodding*) Yeah.

MOSHE That is important for me to hear.

*

Several details about Ernie have emerged in quick succession. Lorraine says he has been trying hard and has been speaking to his sister in a less aggressive way. She also tells us that he has been playing jokes on his father that everyone clearly enjoyed. Jack says that Ernie has been keeping his temper better. And then, as if to demonstrate the changes directly, Ernie chimes in with a joke about why his father is staying awake that greatly amuses both his parents. This is important given that Ernie's misbehaviour (linked by Lorraine with his life-long 'hyperactiveness') was presented at the beginning as one of the most serious problems in the family.

A debate is in progress in the family about why Jack is staying awake. It may be that the television set is deified within the family, so that any change in his behaviour must of necessity be evidence of an act of God. But other explanations vie for attention. Perhaps as Moshe suggests, there is more to stay awake for now.

Moshe is concerned about the implications of Jack's presence in the room. Was he there in the first place only because he had a gun at his head over Donna's threatened suicide? Was he really reluctant to come at all, as Lorraine stated in the first interview? Now that the immediate crisis seems to have subsided, is he still happy to attend, and if so what are his hopes and expectations? Ernie's humour eases the uncertainty in the discussion. Perhaps he is in the habit of joking with his father when awkward or difficult issues crop up. We do not know. In the end Jack spells out how he sees the changes in his children. But he also says he is pleased with the changes for his own sake. It does not seem that he attends the interviews only as a father. Moshe emphasises that this is important for him to know.

*

MOSHE Donna, how have things been for you?

DONNA All right, except for when they tell me I can't go out. When I used to ask to go out, they said I could. But now I can't go anywhere, or else Mum wants to come with me. (*Giggles.*)

MOSHE So the problem for you — the bad news — is that now you haven't got the freedom that you had before?

DONNA Yes.

MOSHE Apart from that? Let me be specific, one thing you said that worried you a great deal was that you were the meat in the sandwich, remember? You were the kicking board. You were being kicked between Mum and Dad. Has this happened since I saw you last?

DONNA (*sadly*) Not really. No.

MOSHE Very good! Beautiful!

DONNA Not as much anyway.

MOSHE Not as much or not at all?

DONNA No.

MOSHE It hasn't happened?

DONNA Oh, it happened once. Dad came in but that was all.

MOSHE Dad came in and what?

DONNA He didn't say anything about Mum or anything. He just came in to talk to me. That was all.

MOSHE Came to talk to you about what?

DONNA I forget what it was.

LORRAINE I think you got stuck into your father the minute he walked in the door. But you were told off. You tried that with me and I said you could wait for tea.

DONNA Yeah.

LORRAINE That was the night your father did not go in to talk to you. We talked about it at the table.

DONNA (*whining*) No, that was another night. I am not talking about that. It was another night.

LORRAINE What other night? There has only been Monday and Tuesday nights.

JACK Yeah, but we were only talking just generally.

DONNA No. (*Pause.*) No.
MOSHE I'm confused.
DONNA (*laughing with pleasure*) So am I!
MOSHE (*gesturing at Jack and then at Donna*) What are you telling me? Dad came in and talked to you about something?
DONNA No, it wasn't this week. (*Laughs with embarrassment.*)
MOSHE Oh! Well then it does not matter.
LORRAINE It does not count.
DONNA No.

*

Presumably Donna is annoyed with her father for putting his foot down with her, and is looking for something to criticise. But she cannot put her finger on anything very substantial. In the end she has to go back into the past to dredge up some example of a supposed failing in her father's behaviour. Despite her complaints, she sounds reasonably contented.

The changes that have occurred are being enacted at the same time as they are being reported. The parents talk directly and clearly to each other about Donna. Perhaps in the past a vague allegation about one parent by Donna was taken up unquestioningly by the other. This does not happen here.

*

MOSHE (*to Donna*) OK. So the good news is that you haven't been the meat in the sandwich any more.
DONNA Yeah.
MOSHE The bad news is, as far as you are concerned, that your parents are not letting you do some of the things you want to.
DONNA Yeah. Which is a bit unfair, because before they said 'yes' and now they say 'no'.
MOSHE Right. And this has been a very abrupt, very sudden change. Instead of being free, you are now imprisoned.
DONNA (*giggling at the over-statement*) Yeah, kind of.
MOSHE I want to talk about that in a minute. But apart from that, are there any other changes you have noticed?

DONNA Nup.

MOSHE None at all?

DONNA Nup!

MOSHE What about how you and Ernie are getting on with each other?

DONNA (*assertively*) It was all right until this morning. (*Both parents laugh, but Donna does not join in.*)

MOSHE What happened this morning?

DONNA We were back to the way we were.

MOSHE Like what?

DONNA Oh, fighting and everything. (*Points at Ernie.*) He woke me up at nine o'clock and wanted me to go around to the shop for him.

MOSHE Yes, and what happened?

DONNA I told him 'no'.

MOSHE What happened then?

DONNA Well, I went around at eleven o'clock because I couldn't stand...

ERNIE (*interrupting*) Well I usually hit you when you do that, but did I do it today?

*

Ernie unwittingly condemns himself. He confirms one of Donna's complaints in the first interview; namely that he uses violence to intimidate Donna and to coerce her into doing what he wants. His normal practice, when he wants something down the street, is to bully Donna into getting it for him. Part of Donna's indignation has been that her parents have not put a stop to this. But at the same time he indicates that he, too, like others in the family, is trying to change his usual behaviour.

*

DONNA Once!

ERNIE (*indignantly*) When?

DONNA In the morning.

ERNIE (*with mounting indignation*) When did I hit you? Come on?

DONNA You hit me once.

ERNIE Where? Tell me that?

DONNA On the arm.

ERNIE I didn't. When?

DONNA You did!

ERNIE So… All right. (*He remains unconvinced, but retires from the argument.*)

MOSHE So there are two stories, one that he did hit you and one that he didn't. (*To Donna*) But apart from that once that he hit you, is it true that in one week you and your brother had only one fight?

DONNA One big fight.

ERNIE When was that?

DONNA This morning. And lots of little fights.

ERNIE That wasn't a big fight!

DONNA (*exasperated*) That was a big fight, Ernie, it lasted all morning!

ERNIE (*whining*) But I bought you a Prima, didn't I?

DONNA I bought that out of my own money, didn't I?

MOSHE (*to Donna*) Do you want to have a bit of a fight now for a few minutes?

DONNA No, it is all right.

MOSHE If not, tell me, how many little ones did you have?

DONNA About fifty-two dozen. (*She looks at Ernie and then at her mother and they all laugh.*)

MOSHE You're fair dinkum?

DONNA (*cheerfully*) We just fight over who is going to sit in the front of the car or something.

ERNIE We tossed a coin today.

DONNA (*assertive*) Oh, not that, Ernie.

MOSHE You mean they were fun fights? Good ones?

ERNIE Yeah. (*happy to have that construction put on things*)

DONNA (*not satisfied*) When we went round to Dusty's place last night, he (*points at Ernie*) kept fighting and telling me not to do things.

ERNIE Such as?

DONNA When I was washing the dishes, and that.

ERNIE Oh yeah! But everyone was, everyone was.

JACK (*to Donna*) But he wasn't fighting with you.

DONNA (*defiantly*) He was telling me what to do!

MOSHE (*to Donna*) Did you have a pillow fight like I told you?

DONNA No.

ERNIE No.

DONNA I'm not about to anyway. (*Laughs.*) I'm not game to. He'd bash me up.

MOSHE What about a tickling fight?

DONNA No. No.

MOSHE So did you have any fun together at all?

ERNIE Oh yeah! When I was going to the restaurant last night, and you know how it is usually ladies before gentlemen? And we were sitting near the door, but I opened the door and said, 'Ladies before gentlemen'. And she couldn't fight!

MOSHE (*Nods uncertainly at Ernie.*) Donna, is there anything else that you would like to tell me about how things have been?

DONNA No. That's it.

MOSHE OK. So there is that one thing that you want to talk about later, is that OK?

DONNA Yeah. (*Laughs.*)

*

The children are squabbling in a fairly good-humoured way. Jack and Lorraine look on with enjoyment. Although Donna seems to deny that any worthwhile change has occurred, the whole atmosphere belies this.

It seems that Donna has lost out more than anyone as a result of the changes. Perhaps Donna is pining for some aspects of the old arrangement in the family even though then she suffered very much. She seems to be searching for ways of re-establishing the old male-female split. She tries to implicate first her father and then Ernie. She tries to convince everyone that her father is 'up to his old tricks' and then that Ernie is still being a bastard, but no one is impressed.

For some reason it is always easy to overlook what Ernie has to say. But here he is going to some effort to convey to Moshe that, in his opinion, he is behaving like a gentleman, rather than like an uncontrollable little brat, as Donna claims.

*

MOSHE OK. Ernie, how have things been for you?

ERNIE Oh, good!

MOSHE What has been good for you?

ERNIE I don't know, just talking a bit, you know.

LORRAINE (*giggling*) Going up to your room one night, you squealed out, remember? And we all pretended we were deaf, didn't we?

ERNIE (*chortling*) I got you one night.

LORRAINE (*enjoying herself*) But only once instead of six times.

*

One of Jack's criticisms of Lorraine was that she did not know how to kid the children, or play with them. While this may have been true on many occasions, it is not true here. Lorraine mischievously reminds Ernie of an incident in the previous week when they played games with each other. The split between the male and the female camps is nowhere near as deep as Donna would like to portray.

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MOSHE (*to Ernie*) So it has been very good for you? What is the best thing that has happened to you since I saw you last? (*Pause.*) The fight you had with Donna?

ERNIE Oh, I don't know. Just sitting at the table talking about things.

MOSHE Yeah. You enjoyed that?

ERNIE Yeah, it was good.

MOSHE Beaudy! (*Turns to Jack.*) And what happened to the guy who was working for you? How did that resolve itself?

JACK Well, actually, it hasn't, because I haven't really had a chance. He has been away and will be coming back tonight, and I haven't had a chance to talk to him about it.

MOSHE I see. (*Gestures to all four.*) That is very good. What you are telling me is, that in a very short time, a family that was very, very desperate — you were close to rock bottom, weren't you? — you have been able to pick yourselves up and put yourselves together again.

LORRAINE (*nodding agreement*) I think the idea of the meal table was a great idea. When Ernie came home on Monday, he started to say something about food, and I said, 'You know the new rule'. So he went off and did what he had to do. And then Donna came storming in and said she had to go out, and I said, 'You know the new rule'. Then Jack came home, and had a drink and read his paper and wasn't barged at, while I was dishing up tea. Then I called the others and they came in, and the TV wasn't switched on. It gives Jack twenty minutes to unwind. Tuesday night we all had to have a look at the new ute. Ernie had to have a ride in it. So we went and picked up Donna from the hairdresser's. So we had tea a little bit later. But that was neither here nor there, because Ernie was dying to get into it.

MOSHE I see. It is very good. This must mean there must be a lot of hidden strength in the family, do you think?

LORRAINE What I think concerns Jack and I both is Donna. By being able to play us off against each other for so long, Donna has been given too much freedom. And there have been reports. Bendigo is not a very big town. It still has a lot of small-town qualities. And we were disturbed by what we heard about her going to R-rated shows at the drive-in, just for starters. I may be old-fashioned but I am against that. I have offered to take her over to Ballarat on a Saturday afternoon instead of her going to the drive-in on a Friday night. And if she wants to go down shopping on a Friday night, we could both go down together. But then she is against that because then I would see who she is meeting. And both Jack and I have told her we have no objection if she wants to bring her friends home.

Ernie could go up to his room and Jack and I could go to bed early...

DONNA (*interrupting in exasperation*) Oh, Mum! That is wrong. Dad does have an objection. Dad always has.

LORRAINE And you are just playing the radiogram?

DONNA Yes, that is all. Every time I brought a friend home it happened. Dad comes in the next morning or the next night and really cracks up on me.

LORRAINE Yeah, but what sort of friends were you bringing home? A twenty-two year old chap?

DONNA What is wrong with that? He is only a friend.

LORRAINE And you are fifteen?

DONNA (*raising her voice*) He is only a friend!

*

Lorraine speaks with confidence, sure that she and Jack are in agreement. Donna makes a spirited attempt to challenge her mother, Lorraine is saying that she and Jack are together in wanting to provide Donna with a home where she is free to entertain her friends. Donna wants to refute this by citing an example which is well outside the limits of behaviour that are acceptable to the parents.

Lorraine is not distracted for a moment. She does not take up the allegation that Jack is remiss as a father. Donna's statement does not re-activate any conflict between Lorraine and Jack and the result is that she is confronted firmly and calmly with her parents' constraints on her behaviour. The 'hidden' strengths in the family are on display.

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MOSHE (*slowly*) I think maybe we are going too fast. You see, the important thing for me is that there are levels of difficulty, and levels of problems. There are some problems that are almost good problems, that are normal problems and there are some that are very destructive. And to me it is extremely important and very good news indeed the way the two of you (*gesturing to Lorraine and Jack*) are working together as a team. You as parents talk to each other and decide what is right and

wrong for your children. And that is very good. I was very worried about what Donna was telling me about the way things were before. And obviously you are both telling me now that you got into trouble as a result of what was going on; that you were not exercising your parental responsibilities like you are now. (*Lorraine nods in agreement.*) But if you can speak with one voice to Donna and keep that up, then maybe one of the major battles will be won. The question is, could you maintain it? Could you continue to work together as a team?

LORRAINE I think we have no option as far as this is concerned, have we, Jack?

JACK No, I don't think so.

MOSHE You will be able to, Jack? (*He nods.*) It may be in Donna's interest to see if she can split you apart again, because then she could get her own way again. Could she get away with that? Do you think she could succeed?

LORRAINE No. We have spoken together about this privately. And we feel that blackmail won't work. All she had to say in the past was, 'Dad said I could', and my hands were tied. I had no option but to go along with him.

DONNA Well, most of the time you did.

LORRAINE (*assertively*) I said I had no option. But now I do have an option. What did I tell you would happen if we left and I had you on my own? What would the rules be?

DONNA I don't know. I forget.

LORRAINE Oh, no you don't! We spoke about it in the motel room. What did I say about the drive-in? And what did I say about Friday night shopping and a few other things?

DONNA (*reluctantly*) That you would go with me.

LORRAINE That is right.

*

Moshe sabotages Donna's case. He makes her strategy explicit, and then challenges the parents about whether she will get away with it. Lorraine now feels that she can confidently confront her daughter. She attributes the change to the way she is able to talk privately with Jack

and reach a consensus. She has a new sense of togetherness with him, so that she can talk now about what worries 'us' about Donna. She can now take a decisive position with Donna, without worrying that she will be undermined by her husband taking an opposing position.

She does not hesitate to name the tactics that Donna has used until now as 'blackmail', and to announce that they will not succeed any more. And of course, nobody knows better than Donna that 'blackmail is against the law'.

This can all be seen as a working out of decisions that were reached during the first interview. At that stage Donna was making pronouncements to everyone about the nature of the problems in the family and the kind of solutions that would be acceptable. Towards the end of this interview her mother called a halt to this and announced that she would no longer tolerate Donna having so much power. We seem to be witnessing here a further working through of this decision. Lorraine has been able to find a way of setting the limits with her daughter that she considers appropriate, without having to separate from Jack. Donna complained in the first session about being neglected. She is not being neglected here. Lorraine and Jack together are saying that they care enough about her to limit her, despite the argument that results. It seems that the parents have gathered strength and confidence in the therapy so they can take charge without any apology.

Lorraine this time goes further than before. She says to Donna: 'Your position is much weaker than you realise: even if I were to leave your father, the limits would be the same.'

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MOSHE The argument you are having now is an argument that happens in practically every family in Australia. It is a good argument. Donna is a young, energetic, enthusiastic girl, and naturally she wants to do things. And some of the things she wants to do, you have doubts about. And so you have hassles. That is OK.
(*Jack looks interested and nods in agreement.*) I am happy for us to hammer things out. That is a very good thing. That is what families do. It is very good for a girl or a young

woman of fifteen to want to go out and stay up late to meet people. But you are responsible parents, and some of the things she wants to do you are worried about. You have some misgivings. You will have some arguments, but you will sort it out one way or another. That is good. That is the way it should be. What is terrible is what happened before. Donna was able to exploit the split between you to get her own way. And you were using Donna in the battles between you. The changes are very good. Ernie, do you think your parents can remain united?

ERNIE Yeah.

MOSHE You would give your parents a vote of confidence on that?

ERNIE Yeah.

MOSHE Donna, do you think your parents can stick together and speak with one voice?

DONNA (*sulky*) I don't know.

*

Moshe re-asserts that the most important question is whether the parents can stick together. He is challenging the parents again, through the children, to demonstrate that they can do this.

*

MOSHE Are you having second thoughts about helping them get together, because you are now missing out?

DONNA (*irritated*) It doesn't worry me. They can do whatever they like.

LORRAINE (*curious, but calm*) Why? What are you going to do?

DONNA (*spitefully*) What's it to you anyway!

LORRAINE (*after a long silence*) We are back to that again, are we?

DONNA Well.

MOSHE You are angry with your mother?

DONNA (*indignantly*) No!

LORRAINE (*smiling*) I'd say she is angry with both Jack and me.

DONNA (*glaring at her mother*) Is that something to laugh about, is it? (*With mounting anger*) You have a big smile on your face as if you are really proud of yourself.

LORRAINE I am not letting it upset me. It is your privilege if you want to be angry. It is your right to be. I don't have to be angry back at you.

DONNA I'm not saying you don't have to.

MOSHE (*to Donna*) Would you like to tell me what it is about, because I am not sure that I am in the picture...? You would rather not talk about it?

DONNA I thought Mum was going to explain.

LORRAINE No, you explain it.

JACK (*to Donna*) He is asking you.

DONNA It is just that Mum is sitting there with a big smile on her face as if it is some great big joke. Just because she has got her part sorted out.

LORRAINE No, I haven't.

DONNA (*sarcastic*) Oh, no, Mum. Not much.

ERNIE (*to Donna*) You should not complain about your part. You are allowed to ask if you can have your friends over.

DONNA I didn't say I had my part sorted out. I said my part was wrong, or whatever it was...

MOSHE (*a little confused*) What are the things you want to be allowed to do, Donna?

DONNA Well, if I was allowed to do them before, why can't I do them now? That is all I want to know.

MOSHE What are those things?

DONNA To be allowed to go down the street on a Friday night. They say I have to be home by eight-thirty or nine o'clock. And I am always home by that time anyway.

ERNIE But Mum and Dad don't know what you are doing down there.

LORRAINE Mum and Dad have been hearing.

DONNA (*to Ernie*) So!

ERNIE (*with obvious relish*) There is a lot of things to tell them about you.

DONNA Tell what? That I am standing on the street corner smoking dope or something?

MOSHE (*smiling*) Which corner is that, where you smoke it?

DONNA (*laughing*) No.

ERNIE Bendigo is not like Melbourne.

LORRAINE It is still available though.

DONNA (*sarcastic*) I am sure going to take it, too.

LORRAINE (*not amused*) You are not. You are not.

JACK (*to Donna*) When you go somewhere, love, you have to be honest and tell us, don't you?

DONNA Yeah.

JACK But you don't.

DONNA (*sarcastic*) I don't, do I.

JACK You didn't tell us about the night you went to the drive-in. You told me you were going with Jo-anne and her brothers. You did not go with them did you?

DONNA I did! I did not go in their car, no!

JACK Well, you didn't tell me that at the time. We had to find out later.

ERNIE I seen Jo-anne down the street that day.

DONNA I know that. Dad didn't come until late.

ERNIE What time?

DONNA Eight.

ERNIE (*after a moment of silence*) Tell me…

JACK (*interrupting*) So when we find out later, do you think that is fair?

DONNA What do you mean?

JACK When we find out that you didn't go with Jo-anne and her brothers…

LORRAINE (*completing his sentence*) That you went with your boyfriend?

DONNA (*sulky*) But Jo-anne and them still come.

JACK No, Donna, you are twisting the story.

DONNA I could have gone in anyone's car. It wouldn't have mattered.

JACK (*softly*) No. That is not the point… (*There is a long pause as Donna stares defiantly at Jack.*) So it makes it harder when we find out, doesn't it?

DONNA What do you mean, makes it harder?

JACK Well, you didn't even tell us that next day, or when you came home that night.

DONNA So, I didn't think it was that important. Gee, anyone would think the whole world was at stake. (*Lorraine prepares to speak, but Moshe motions her to wait so that Jack can continue.*)

JACK Well, it does mean that the whole world is at stake in a way. It is important for me to know who you are with and where you are going, right? (*Pause.*) Even when I am at work and I walk out of the office, I always tell the girl in the office where I am going. I don't tell her I am going to Ballarat when I am going to Melbourne. That is exactly what you have done.

DONNA (*not convinced*) Whatever you reckon.

*

Jack is unusually active, taking the initiative with Donna in raising his concerns about her. Donna is sulky and resentful of his involvement. His behaviour on this issue seems to fit with the idea that when Jack is speaking as a parent he is very different from when he is speaking as a husband or as a person in his own right.

It is interesting to speculate about what makes it possible for Jack to be so vocal at this moment. His style of dealing with problems in his marriage seems to be one of withdrawal. Previously, any attempt to discuss the well-being of his children has been immediately contaminated with discussion about his marriage. Now that it is possible to stay focused on the children, he is free to participate.

Lorraine sits quietly throughout the discussion between Jack and Donna. With one exception, when she starts to speak, she is happy to let the discussion flow. Her demeanour suggests that she is quite pleased for Jack and Donna to be talking and for Jack to be assertive with Donna.

*

MOSHE What your father is saying to you, Donna, is, 'I care a great deal about you, and that is why…'

DONNA (*interrupting*) I don't reckon he does if you ask me.

MOSHE That is what I hear him telling you. Could you tell him directly that you think he doesn't care?

DONNA (*hesitant*) What do you mean?

MOSHE You tell him what you said to me.

DONNA (*to no one in particular*) Well, that is just how I feel anyway.

MOSHE That is all right. I am just suggesting that you tell your father how you feel. Could you tell him that?

DONNA Well, I suppose I could if it came to be necessary. Like if I was about to walk out or something.

MOSHE (*persisting*) You couldn't just turn to him now and tell him now? That you feel sometimes he doesn't care about you... (*She looks defiant.*) You would rather not?

DONNA (*collecting her thoughts*) Well, if he did care, he wouldn't have let me go out before. And as far as I can see he didn't care before. And then now he just turns around and says, 'I care now, and you can't go out here and you can't go out there'.

*

Moshe intervenes in the conversation between father and daughter in the hope of facilitating the dialogue that is beginning. Whether he ends up having this effect is another question.

It may be that he has distracted the discussion from its original focus, which was of Jack trying to assert some measure of parental control over his daughter's social life. The attention shifts to the desirability of Donna expressing her feelings. This is certainly not what Jack had in mind.

Perhaps Moshe, in leading Donna towards talking to her father about her wish to be loved and cared for, is moving her outside the bounds of what is normally permitted within the family. There seems to be a taboo about talking about these kinds of positive feelings. Expression of bad feeling comes much more easily.

The intent of Moshe's intervention is frustrated to some degree by three things. Donna is very reluctant to co-operate. Jack remains silent and does not volunteer any declaration of affection or care. And thirdly, Ernie, whose timing is faultless, soon introduces one of his now familiar distractions.

Still, it seems that Donna is genuinely confused by her father's change of posture towards her. She interprets his detachment from her as complete indifference. She is reluctant to accept that he remains seriously interested in her welfare.

Yet embedded in her rather confused statement is the clear indication that his attempt to restrict her freedom of movement is something she interprets as caring. She is then in a dilemma in that she has longed to feel that he is interested and caring, but she does not want to be restricted. Her stumbling language reflects the struggle.

*

ERNIE Can I say something? (*For once he does get everyone's attention.*) Well, we weren't allowed out at night anyway, and that, and then he gave you a set time, when you could go out. He cared enough to let you go out, didn't he? And anyway, if he never let you go out at all, and that, well, you woulda been upset, wouldn't you? You wanted to see a few friends that you couldn't see, you know? And he said you could. Is that right?

DONNA I do not understand!

*

Ernie speaks in a much more disjointed way than the transcript conveys. It is difficult at times to decipher what he says, because he speaks in a mumbling and at times incoherent voice. His comments are lavishly sprinkled with 'and that' and 'you know'. These mannerisms of speech so dominate what he says that sometimes his meaning is all but impossible to grasp.

His lack of fluency is in quite dramatic contrast to his sister, who at her best is extremely lucid. Perhaps this is a reflection of their different roles within the family. Donna is often her parents' spokesperson, whereas Ernie mostly acts to introduce distraction or confusion. Sometimes he does so with such effect that everybody loses the track of the subject under discussion.

Also it is noticeable that usually, when Ernie speaks, nobody pays attention to what he says. This is rarely so with the other three members of the family. It is a pity that Ernie does not receive closer

attention this time. While no doubt he is looking after his own interests, he is also speaking up here on his father's behalf. He is trying to reassure Donna that her father cares for her. Though he may lack the eloquence of a persuasive advocate, he does at least find some words, which is more than Jack seems able to do. It is hard to know if what he says to Donna is true. Jack does not declare himself on the matter. Perhaps Ernie is creating a protective smokescreen, this time to shelter Donna and Jack from the unpleasant realisation that they have little warmth for each other, or at least cannot show it if it is there.

*

ERNIE Well, Dad let you out like, for a certain time like, to see your friends that you want to see, right?

DONNA Yeah.

ERNIE Yeah.

DONNA (*annoyed*) But I was always home at the time he said, or even before that. It is not as if I walked in two hours late every time or something.

ERNIE Yeah. I know you were always on time. But you never tell us what you have been doing, and that.

DONNA (*her voice rising*) What is there to tell?

JACK (*after a long pause*) So you are telling me that you don't have to tell me everything?

DONNA What do you mean, tell you everything?

JACK When you go somewhere, who do you go with?

DONNA I always tell you that anyway.

JACK (*softly*) But you never told me about the drive-in!

DONNA All the other times. (*Lorraine gestures in disbelief.*) No, I haven't, have I, Mum, to you? No, you wouldn't think so, would you?

ERNIE I could tell a lot of times that you haven't.

DONNA Like when, Ernie?

ERNIE On Sunday afternoon you went roller-skating, right? Got me roller skates. I was there. I talked to Kathy Erikson. Where was Donna? Oh no, she was off somewhere with a boy in the car, weren't you?

DONNA I went with Jane down to see Arthur and Ron.

ERNIE You said you were going roller-skating.

DONNA I did. I was there most of the time.
(*The others laugh at this.*)

ERNIE About half an hour.

DONNA (*sarcastic*) Whatever you reckon.

ERNIE Did you go in there? No!

DONNA Oh no!

ERNIE You stayed out. You ask Kathy Erikson. Because I was looking for you to get some money off you. No, Donna wasn't there. I asked Kathy and she said you went off in some red Charger or something.

DONNA (*challenging*) What?

ERNIE You know that bloke's car or something. I go, 'Where's her bag?' She goes, 'She never came in.'

DONNA No, I didn't, did I? I was in there most of the time.

ERNIE Well, ask Kathy.

DONNA All right.

ERNIE You weren't, Donna.

DONNA Don't believe me then.

ERNIE Because this kid was annoyed with something. Remember I was telling you off that you went away like that. You never told me...

MOSHE (*interrupting*) Ernie, I am not sure that I am right. But I have a feeling that what you are doing now is a parent's job, not a young brother's job.

ERNIE Well, she didn't tell... you know.

LORRAINE Actually this is one of Jack and my concerns that Donna is saying she is going somewhere. We are dropping her off and we are picking her up...

MOSHE I understand. But that is your concern. It is a very legitimate concern for parents, but not Ernie's.

LORRAINE And not Ernie's?

MOSHE I am not sure that it is, really. I think he should worry more about his drop kicks and his hand passes and not about where Donna is. (*To Ernie*) I am sure I can find better problems for you to worry about.

JACK (*in agreement*) Yeah.

ERNIE Yeah, but I was explaining that she goes off and doesn't tell you and that…

MOSHE I would like your parents to reassure you that they will look after your sister. You should feel free to have a more enjoyable time. And if you don't have to worry about how your sister behaves, you eventually have good fun with her. (*To Jack and Lorraine*) Would that be OK if he doesn't help you so much to be good parents?

LORRAINE and JACK (*together*) Yes.

LORRAINE It's much better he doesn't have to tell her off. That's our job. And he doesn't have to butt in when she is being told off.

MOSHE Could you do that, Ernie, or do you like to jump in on the band wagon and when she gets told off you like to put your two bob's worth in?
(*Lorraine chuckles.*)

ERNIE Yeah, a bit.

MOSHE You might miss out on something?

ERNIE Like sometimes you like to jump in, you know.

LORRAINE (*excited*) Yes, that was one of the most interesting things to see. At the tea table, when we had tea together for the first time, Donna was upset and who stuck up for her and against us, but Ernie. And they stuck up together against us. Ganged up on us completely! (*She is amused and pleased.*)

MOSHE Good on you! Did they really do that? Good on you. (*He stretches across and shakes hands with both Ernie and Donna.*) That I like to see. You stick up for your sister and let your parents worry about her.

LORRAINE (*chortling*) It was funny because I have never seen it happen before in our household. They turned on us, both of us.

MOSHE That's good. That's beautiful.

*

The parents wait quietly while Ernie takes over their role with Donna. They do not take control themselves, perhaps because Moshe is there. Only when Moshe comments on this does Lorraine indicate that she knew all along this was happening. She takes permission from Moshe to put Ernie in his place. Also, it is only after Moshe's comment that information about the children joining forces against the parents is forthcoming.

This is a sign of progress. Lorraine reports it with great pleasure as a completely new occurrence in the household. It indicates the continuation outside of the therapy of an appropriate boundary between the generations. The stereotyped split between male and female camps is less pervasive than before. Also, much more simply, it means that they are starting to have some fun together at home.

*

LORRAINE I think Donna must realise that our concern is a very real concern.

DONNA (*very bitter*) No. As far as I'm concerned you would rather go and jump in a lake than worry about where I am. (*Long pause.*)

LORRAINE So am I supposed to get all upset now?

DONNA (*firmly*) No. I am not supposing you do anything. You can do anything you want. Get upset or laugh around. Doesn't worry me.

LORRAINE (*calmly*) Well, it is not going to upset your father and me. We are going to say yes and no together, and if it upsets you, you will have to put up with it. You may argue the rights and wrongs of it, but it won't change our opinions.

*

Lorraine is delighted about her children ganging up on her and Jack. Perhaps part of her delight is that this reinforces the unity that she wants to have with Jack. The way it is reported shows that the incident was cheerful and playful and had nothing of the toxic quality of the old ganging up of the males against the females.

However, the air of celebration is punctured abruptly by Donna's extraordinary statement. She accuses her mother directly of not really

caring. Embedded in this there is perhaps an allusion to Lorraine's suicide attempt. Donna seems sceptical about any declaration in mere words that her parents care for her. It is as if she is saying, 'It is not enough for you to say that you care, and then turn around and try to kill yourself. I will only be convinced by action, not words, that life will be different from now on'.

Lorraine does not hear the longing for security and consistent caring. She does not recognise the frightened child wanting to know that her parents can be relied upon. She only hears and responds to the adolescent challenging parental authority. The family is at home with struggles about power, but is all at sea with feelings of love or caring. Solace is hard to come by for any of them.

At this moment, Lorraine moves onto new ground, introducing a spirit of joyful togetherness. But she is quickly pushed away from that back into more familiar emotional territory, and she resumes the confrontation.

*

MOSHE You sound very confident as if you and Jack have put your act together and you sound as if you are very certain that you can act as parents from now on — play in one team and work together well.

LORRAINE We even discussed, discussed together alone one evening, the first time in a long time that I can remember. Jack has even said to me, 'I am going to bed'. He hasn't just nicked off. To me these are the little things that make the difference. You can go to our bedroom two ways, through the toilet or through the passageway. And quite often I didn't know whether Jack had gone to bed or not. Ernie would tell me. He now says, 'I am going to bed'. If I'm going to bed, I always say I am going. If Donna wants to sit up and watch something else on TV, that's fair enough. Ernie doesn't always stay up. He didn't on Monday night. He went to bed.

MOSHE Do you have the same confidence, Jack, that the two of you are going to work together? (*Jack nods.*) Tell me then, would you within a week, be able to take time out and go

out, or something like that? Or would that be too difficult for the two of you to do?

ERNIE You can if you want to. We could go to the races.

LORRAINE (*laughing*) Go to the races again? Your father won't go to the races again.

ERNIE Why not? You two are members?

LORRAINE (*to Moshe*) We were given member's tickets for the racing club, and Ernie keeps on telling us to go to the races.

ERNIE I want to sit in the member's stand.

LORRAINE See! He wants to come.

ERNIE I sometimes try to sneak in, but the bloke is always on the gate.

LORRAINE And that is why you want us to go to the races!

ERNIE Yes, it would be real good.

LORRAINE You are not coming the night your father and I go out?

DONNA (*to Ernie*) I have to stay home and look after you.

LORRAINE You have to have the pillow fight. I've got the two pillows ready.

DONNA No way. I am going to watch telly and do my homework.

MOSHE (*smiling*) Maybe you could stay home together and plot how to get your own way with your parents. (*Everyone laughs.*) Do you know how to get around them?

DONNA (*giggling*) Something like that.

ERNIE I am going to my friend's house or something. That would be better.

MOSHE I think you better stay home and...

LORRAINE (*interrupting*) You will be staying home!

MOSHE (*to Ernie*) What if you tell your parents that you are looking after Donna? (*To Donna*) And you tell them you are looking after Ernie? So you say to them that you are looking after each other. But when they walk out the door, you work out schemes for getting your own way with them. Is that all right?

ERNIE Yeah, how to nick off to the shops and that!

DONNA I am not having it that you can do all the running around.

MOSHE (*to Jack and Lorraine*) Would you be able to go out together?

LORRAINE (*to Jack*) There is nothing on this week, is there?

JACK Eh?

LORRAINE You haven't anything on this week, do you?

(*Jack shakes his head.*)

MOSHE I would like you to be able to convince your children that you are working together as a team. You going out together may be some extra evidence…

ERNIE (*whispering*) You could go off to the Chinese place.

MOSHE What?

LORRAINE (*laughing*) He wants us to bring a snack home for him.

*

One of Donna's complaints in the first interview was, 'Ernie runs our household'. It does seem that Ernie is accustomed to his wishes taking priority. He raises some muted protests when Moshe begins to promote a social event for the parents which is in no way designed with his preferences in mind. He starts out by giving them permission to go — 'You can go if you want'. He takes it for granted at first that he will be included and that he will choose the venue. Only slowly does it dawn on him that something unprecedented is happening. He does not give up easily. He asks that his parents keep him in mind when they go out, and remember to bring something home for him.

*

MOSHE I notice that you sometimes all laugh together. It looks like you can all have some fun together. Even Donna has a smile under her moustache!

DONNA (*laughing despite herself*) Maybe we could go out for Sunday picnics.

LORRAINE And run out of petrol, like we did that other time.

JACK We could go down to the tip.

ERNIE (*laughing*) We could set up the barbecue. Or go to Luna Park. That would be good.

LORRAINE What is the use of going to Luna Park? You won't ride on anything when you go to Luna Park. (*To Moshe*) Donna

and I are going to Adelaide with my sister and her daughter for a week. (*Indicating Jack and Ernie*) I've got two people here that won't fly. They won't even get on an aeroplane!

ERNIE But what if it goes down? (*Lorraine laughs.*)

MOSHE So you two will fly. (*Turns to Jack and Ernie.*) And what will the two of you be doing?

ERNIE I'd rather be going by boat.

JACK No. He'll be going camping with his uncle.

DONNA Dad is going to work.

MOSHE I think it is a very good idea that sometimes the two of you go out together; and sometimes the two men. (*To Lorraine*) It is nice to see you and Donna spending some time together, doing something you both like.

DONNA (*querulous*) Yeah, but does she have to come out with me everywhere?

MOSHE No. No.

DONNA Dad went down the street by himself Friday night.

MOSHE No. I am suggesting something else, Donna. You know how you have arguments with your parents about how much freedom you have?

DONNA Yeah.

MOSHE And that is good. You should have that.

DONNA (*cheerful now*) That is bad. Because they always win.

LORRAINE (*laughing*) We haven't to date.

DONNA (*playfully*) You won't compromise.

MOSHE (*serious*) Donna, listen to me for a moment. You can still have arguments with your parents about how much freedom you have. You should have those arguments. But you could still have some time with your father. You could go somewhere together, because you both enjoy it. Or you could just sit and talk to each other...

DONNA (*interrupting*) No, I could not do that because Ernie always has to go with Dad.

MOSHE That is exactly the point I am making!

LORRAINE Ernie can come with me.

DONNA Ernie goes to the footy, and on those trips with Dad. Ernie goes everywhere.

MOSHE That is exactly the point I am making, Donna. I think there are times when you and your dad should be together without Ernie. Just the two of you.

ERNIE Can I say something? I would like to go down to Melbourne for a week with Mum. And Donna could go to the jobs and that, and slosh around in the mud.

DONNA That would be good.

ERNIE Yeah. I bet!

*

Ernie can see some of his cherished privileges evaporating. His first attempted defence of his position is to suggest to Donna that they are not privileges at all, but unpleasant chores. But Donna is too smart to swallow that.

*

LORRAINE (*to Ernie, as if to appease*) Well, you can come down to Melbourne in the second week of the holidays.

DONNA What second week? Are we staying down in Melbourne all the holidays?

LORRAINE No. You are going down for a week. Then you can stay with your father and go to the jobs with him.

ERNIE Yeah. Go to the jobs.

DONNA I'm going to. I've got homework to do.

ERNIE Go to the footy.

DONNA (*sarcastic*) Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. I'm sure Dad would take me, too. Like all the other times. No. It is always, 'No, No, No. Ernie's going, so you can't go'.

MOSHE Donna. Donna, would you do something for me?

DONNA What is that?

MOSHE Would you ask your father something that you would like to do with him? Now. And see what happens. Just you and him?

DONNA I would like to go to the footy. But I know it is impossible...

MOSHE (*interrupting*) Hang on. Hang on. Don't tell him what is possible, just ask him and see what happens.

DONNA (*to Jack*) Well, can we go to the footy?

JACK You can go to the footy.

DONNA (*sarcastic*) Yeah, and bring Ernie along with us, too.

ERNIE I will go to Melbourne. (*Everyone is talking at once.*)

DONNA It will be just like all the other times.

LORRAINE No. Ernie will stay with me.

ERNIE Yeah. I will go to Melbourne.

DONNA (*unconvinced*) Ernie will kick up a fuss, just like all the other times.

ERNIE No. I won't.

LORRAINE It doesn't matter if he does.

MOSHE (*cutting in*) Donna, do you ever gamble?

DONNA Yeah.

MOSHE You do? Would you take a gamble with me? A bet?

DONNA (*teasing*) How much first? (*Laughter all around.*)

MOSHE You say. You say.

DONNA (*to Lorraine in a stage whisper*) Can you give us a loan? I'm broke.

LORRAINE (*laughing*) What's new.

DONNA (*very excited*) I had to buy Ernie's lunch. Two dollars. Is that all right?

MOSHE Two dollars? Yeah, two dollars it is.

DONNA All right.

MOSHE The two-dollar bet is that when you want to go to the football with your father, he'll take you.

DONNA What about when St Kilda plays at the MCG?

ERNIE You could go down by train.

MOSHE Do you know when that is?

DONNA No.

MOSHE I have a football fixture. Shall I go and get it?

DONNA Yeah. Go on.

(*Moshe leaves the room, and returns a few minutes later.*)

MOSHE I am ashamed to admit that I can't find my footy fixture.

LORRAINE Don't worry. We have one.

DONNA (*with great exuberance*) We are going to Moorabbin, because friends of ours have membership tickets and we can get in there and visit all the players.

MOSHE I think Collingwood is playing at the MCG next week.

JACK I don't know.

DONNA Who are they playing?

LORRAINE Anyone. It doesn't matter who they are playing.

JACK Yeah. I've got a hunch St Kilda is playing Fitzroy at the MCG the week after.

DONNA But we don't want to go to the MCG. We want to go to Moorabbin.

ERNIE But when you go into the club rooms, you can't talk to the players.

JACK No, it will have to be Moorabbin to see the players.

DONNA So we will have to go to Moorabbin.

MOSHE So, next time St Kilda plays at Moorabbin you will be going with your father. That is the bet? Just you and him.

DONNA Yeah, but what about Mr Williams?

MOSHE Who is he?

DONNA He has got the membership tickets. He can get us in.

MOSHE Oh. That's all right. The point is that you and your father go. And Ernie and your mother won't be there. That is the bet between us?

DONNA Yup. But anyone else can go.

MOSHE (*nodding*) How much?

DONNA (*very pleased*) Two dollars.

MOSHE Two dollars, OK. You are a witness, Jack, right?

JACK (*pleased*) Right.

MOSHE Ernie, you are a witness.

ERNIE Yes, I am a witness.

DONNA (*laughing excitedly*) It will be Mum's money anyway.

MOSHE Two bucks. Do you want to shake hands on it?

DONNA Yeah. Shake hands on it. (*They reach across the coffee table to shake hands.*)

ERNIE (*sulky*) I don't reckon that is fair!

MOSHE Because I might get the two dollars?

ERNIE (*with increasing anger and hurt*) I... I... I watch footy all my life. And Donna does not really take it all that seriously. I should be able to see the players, too. (*To Jack*) Have I ever got to see any football players with you?

JACK Yeah. But you have been playing yourself. And I have been coming to see you every Saturday.

LORRAINE You went down to Melbourne once with Roger Simmonds.

ERNIE (*rising to his feet*) Youse went down for the week! (*violently angry now*) I just went down for the one match. Come on. Why can't I go?

JACK (*to Ernie, sternly*) That is enough! (*Ernie sits down again.*)

MOSHE (*quite taken aback by the ferocity of Ernie's reaction*) I think Ernie is right in a way. He is missing out. (*To Lorraine*) And I wonder if you could make up for it. What I would like you to do is... could you somehow... Ernie feels left out.

ERNIE But what would be more fun than going to the footy?

MOSHE (*interrupting and speaking to Lorraine*) And I want to see if you could make it up to him, in a way that would be fun for both of you. (*To Donna*) So that then you will feel that you are missing out. Then your father will have to make up to you for that by giving you a better time.

ERNIE (*to his mother in a peeved tone*) What can we do?

LORRAINE I don't know.

ERNIE There'd be nothing, I mean like seeing the players and that.

JACK (*to Ernie*) Yeah, but you've seen a few games this year with me. You've been down with me three or four times this year.

ERNIE Yeah, four times.

JACK Well, Donna hasn't seen any.

DONNA For the past two years!

ERNIE (*sceptical*) Aw!

LORRAINE No, she hasn't Ernie.

ERNIE Yeah, but she gets an opportunity to see the players. I might never get that.

LORRAINE (*laughing*) Argh. (*Moshe gets up and walks around to whisper in Ernie's ear.*)

MOSHE Just between you and me, I think I can win the bet. If I give you the two dollars, would that make it up?

ERNIE No, it is not enough!

(*Lorraine laughs.*)

MOSHE I'll give you the two dollars.

*

Moshe buys in to the proceedings here in a way that is unnecessary and unhelpful. Jack is managing Ernie's angry outburst quite adequately. This is one of his rare spontaneous initiatives in the therapy so far and it was a pity to cut across him. If there is not enough care or affection to go around and Ernie is missing out in some significant way, then two dollars is no compensation.

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ERNIE I don't think that's fair. Donna doesn't watch the footy replay, and that. And then she wants to go down.

DONNA (*laughing*) So?

ERNIE (*sulky*) So, you are going to take her down, and... I suppose you'll go to McDonald's on the way.

JACK Yeah, but we've got to eat.

LORRAINE (*to Ernie*) Well, that's up to Dad, what he's going to do. It's up to you and I what we are going to do.

ERNIE (*petulant*) What is there to do at our place?

LORRAINE (*playful*) We don't need to stay in Bendigo.

MOSHE (*to Lorraine*) I think you need to convince your son that you could have a good time with him.

ERNIE Where can we go?

LORRAINE You decide where we go.

MOSHE How long does it take you going home?

JACK About two hours.

MOSHE You have lots of time to talk about it going home.

LORRAINE Yes.

MOSHE (*to Ernie*) I would be very interested if you tell me when we meet again, if you and your mother can work out a

way of having a good time together, or whether it is impossible for the two of you.

JACK (*to Ernie*) You could look after me broad beans! (*Ernie snorts indignantly, and everyone else laughs, especially Lorraine.*)

ERNIE (*not to be deflected*) I reckon it isn't possible, 'cause there is nothing to do in Bendigo. And Mum's back has gone.

LORRAINE Oh, yes, there is.

ERNIE (*sceptical*) What?

LORRAINE (*almost playfully*) Lots of things.

*

Jack's time is 'over-valued' by the children and Lorraine's is 'under-valued'. They both treat Ernie's allegiance with his father as more to be prized than Donna's with her mother. This mirrors the marriage; Lorraine wants more of Jack but Jack, if anything, seems to want less of Lorraine.

Moshe asks them to re-consider the idea that Ernie should be able to tyrannise his mother and sister. But also he is questioning the assumption that Jack is far more fun to be with than Lorraine. Perhaps her own belief is that she is not worthwhile and the children's preference for Jack's time and attention tends to reinforce this. Moshe is gently provoking Lorraine to reconsider.

Another interesting detail emerges. Jack accuses his wife in the first session of not being able to 'kid with the children or play with them'. But in this segment, when Jack is firmly in control and unperturbed by Ernie's misbehaviour, Lorraine is relaxed and in the end quite playful as she thinks about what she and her son can do together. It seems that under the right circumstances she can be very playful.

*

MOSHE I would like to see you again next week...

LORRAINE (*interrupting*) All right.

MOSHE ... But it is not possible. (*Gets out his diary.*) The earliest I could see you is... could we make it the nineteenth?

JACK (*to Lorraine*) When are you going away? The twenty-fourth?

LORRAINE I've got to come down on the eighteenth to see Mr Parsons. (*She gets out her diary.*) What time on the nineteenth?

MOSHE Eleven o'clock. Is that OK?

LORRAINE (*to Jack*) Is that OK?

JACK What day? Tuesday? Yes. OK.

ERNIE (*triumphantly*) I know what we could do! We could go to Melbourne and use the Bankcard. Right, that's OK.

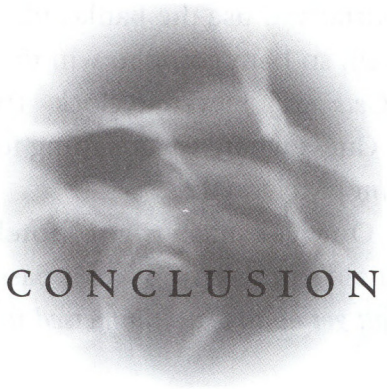
MOSHE OK. Well, so I am going to win the two dollars.

LORRAINE OK. (*Gets up.*) Eleven o'clock, Tuesday. (*Writes in her diary.*) Guess where we are going for tea?

ERNIE (*laughing*) McDonald's.

LORRAINE Yeah. Our car hasn't got hotel problems, it's got McDonald's problems. It can't pass a McDonald's.

(*They all get up to leave, immersed in cheerful conversation.*)



# CONCLUSION

The first session was dominated by the constant intrusion of tensions in the marriage into any discussion of the children and their well-being. In this session neither Moshe nor the couple bring up the marriage at all. This is an extraordinary shift in only two weeks.

The parents now show strong evidence of working together as a team in handling the children. A succession of effects can be discerned in the interview from these fundamental developments.

Donna protests vigorously at the decisive limits that are now placed on her. She complains that she has lost some of her freedom of movement.

Moshe acknowledges her grievance but insists on knowing also if the parents have stopped using her as a go-between.

Donna reluctantly admits that they have stopped. Her two complaints at the outset were that she was 'neglected' and that she was 'the meat in the sandwich' of the marital feud. One of her complaints only has been dealt with so far.

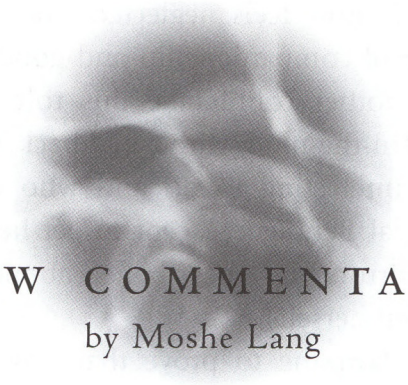
Her second complaint concerns her wish to be cared for and included in the circle of her parents' interest and affection. With this in

mind, Moshe sets out to promote an outing for Donna and Jack, without the other two. Donna has all but given up on Jack as a source of anything good. The long-standing gulf between the sexes limits her access to this kind of experience.

But Moshe immediately runs into a formidable obstacle in the form of Ernie and his vested interest in keeping Jack all to himself. He angrily protests with unprecedented eloquence and persistence. Moshe comments that Ernie now feels neglected. He is used to seeing his father as the source of companionship and good times. He does not conceive that his mother could take this role. He sees her as an unimaginative stick-in-the-mud, with a bad back, who cannot possibly think of anything interesting to do and who could not leave the confines of provincial Bendigo (except to get her bad back treated). Perhaps in this he mirrors his father's beliefs about her (and worse still, her own beliefs about herself).

Moshe calls on Lorraine to prove that Ernie is wrong in these assumptions and that she does know how to have fun and be adventurous. She seems set on rising to the occasion.

The second session has most of all to do with drawing a distinction between the generations. The third has most to do with softening the distinction between the sexes, so that both children can look to both parents for care and stimulation.



# NEW COMMENTARY

by Moshe Lang

Thank heaven that families often have more sense than their therapists, as the Black family showed at the beginning of this interview.

Lorraine said that she and Jack didn't go out because there was no opportunity, and it was more important to start meal times together and implement setting limits for Donna (p. 110). Clearly they had more sense than me in giving priority to their plans rather than mine.

The family forgave me for my mistake, but gently told me that other things were more important. I noted, without being judgmental, that they hadn't done what I recommended. I didn't confess that my suggestion had been a mistake, and that wasn't very big of me, because I wasn't aware at the time that it was! Ideally I should have explored why Lorraine thought the meal-times issue was more important, then checked whether other family members agreed, acknowledged that Lorraine was right and congratulated them for exercising independent judgment. Often the family knows best, and if therapy goes well and collaboratively, they may be able to find their own solutions. When the therapist's relationship with the family is good, you can work well together and correct and accept each other's mistakes.

Experiences like this have taught me to say simply, 'I have a few suggestions for you; if you think they are suitable, try them out', rather than offering recommendations or prescriptions as I did then.

This session provided further evidence that the family's strategy for improving its life was valid. Eating together had given them a sense of achievement, as well as enjoyment. It was also deeply reassuring to them that they could live and thrive as a family.

The parents had also set limits on Donna. In this session there was ample evidence that Lorraine and Jack were united and supporting each other. Though Donna protested and was defiant and provocative in her vigorous attempts to disrupt this new alliance, Lorraine and Jack weathered the storm and their unity remained steadfast. As a result, I didn't need to work as hard as in previous sessions. I was left to notice, praise and comment on the parents' new unity, and also to probe and test, in an effort to consolidate their new arrangement.

All this had additional consequences. It enhanced Lorraine's and Jack's sense of well-being, lifted their morale and improved their self-esteem. To achieve this, they had to talk to each other and that, in turn, improved their relationship, not just as co-parents but also as husband and wife. As a result, Lorraine reported with delight that for the first time Jack told her when he was going to bed. (p. 133) Previously Ernie had always told Lorraine when Jack went to bed; now Ernie, along with Donna, had been relieved of being a marital informer and night watchman.

In spite of the mounting evidence that the parents' strategy was working, I persisted in my mistaken advice that they should go out together (pp. 133–4). To make matters worse, I said that this would help convince their children that they were working together as a team. This was patently wrong. Many parents work well together without having a good marital relationship. Going out together is not necessarily evidence of being able to be good parents and work as a team, just as failing to go out together is not an indication that they are failing as parents.

Throughout this session I asked Donna to speak directly to her father, but she did not. Some family therapists recommend direct communication in the family, but it seems that Donna had not read those books and she disregarded my request. Fortunately I found another way to proceed in my attempts to improve the relationship between Donna and Jack.

When I first watched my orchestration of the football bet, I was impressed with its originality. A few weeks later, on reviewing the first interview, I noticed to my chagrin that Jack had told me they often had football bets in the family. So much for my creativity! On further reflection, I found this very interesting. I'd had about thirty other interviews between the Blacks' first and third sessions, and somehow what Jack had said had come back to me. Looking back on this was pleasing because it indicated that I had absorbed the family's culture, then used it spontaneously and naturally. To be precise, it was not a bet about football — I had in fact put my money on Jack. In the debate in my mind about who owned the football bet I had got caught up in linear thinking, namely that the idea resided in someone's head. Careful viewing shows that the bet emerged from our conversation.

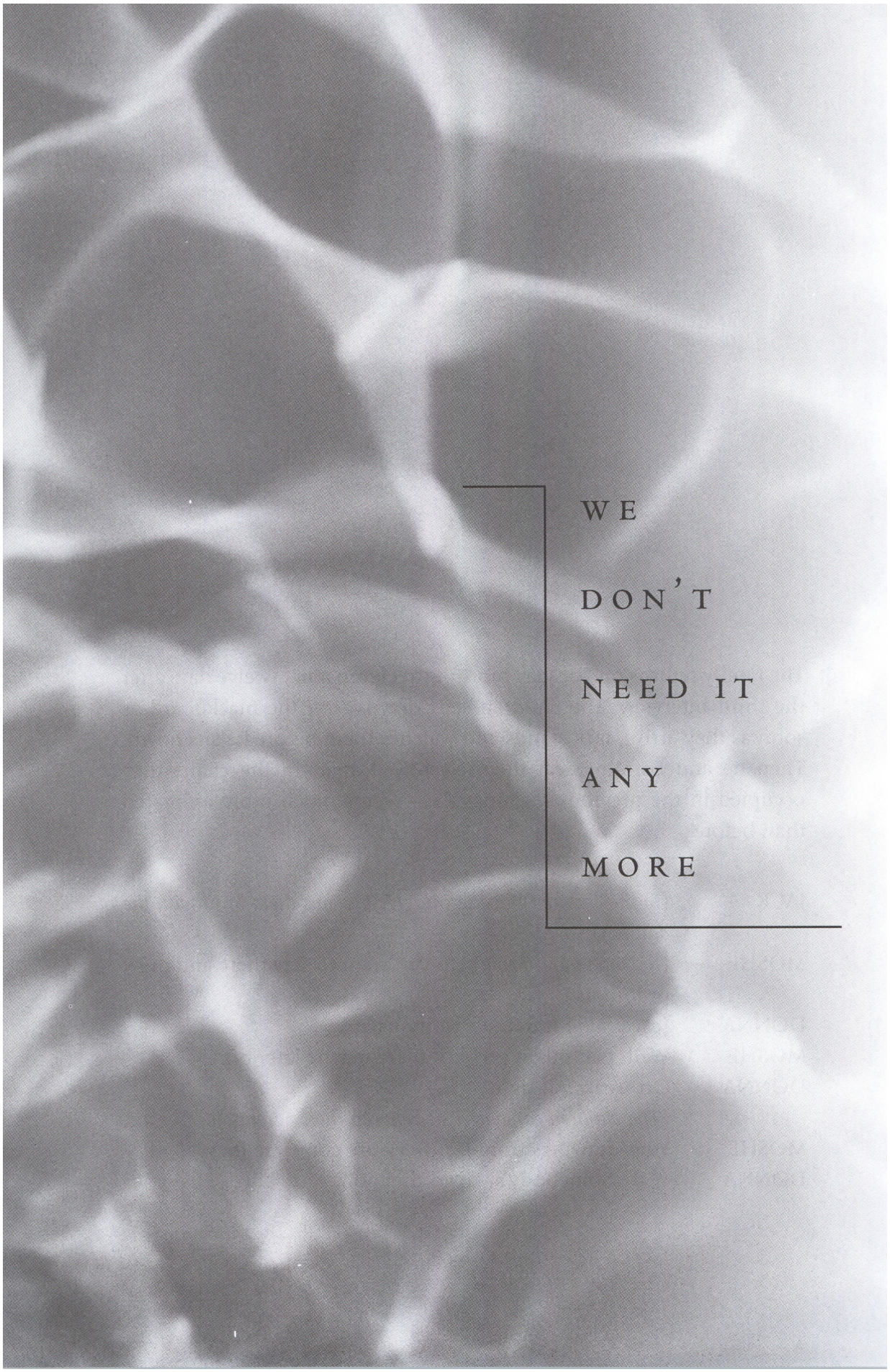
The bet idea is an example of therapy working well. There were free-flowing ideas from all, everyone was comfortable and both therapist and family contributed. This contrasts powerfully with my suggestion that Jack and Lorraine go out, which was something I imposed. Rather than arising from interaction between us, it came from nowhere.

The football bet had another potential benefit for the family. In the first session, the accusations and counter-accusations were flying and we see further evidence of this throughout sessions two and three. The culture of the family was an ever-escalating cycle of accusations. This cycle has another side — the more you accuse another person of causing you injustice, the more you also accuse him or her of causing you pain, depression, tension and unhappiness. Thus the family was caught up in a competition in which they were compelled to demonstrate the ever-increasing scale of their pain or disability. The football bet had the potential of turning this culture on its head by changing the parents' competition from 'look how hurt I am' to demonstrating to the children which parent was the more caring, nurturing and fun to be with. Perhaps it also challenged the more profoundly entrenched cultural assumptions typical of country Victoria in the seventies: that boys and girls, males and females, could not have pleasure and fun with each other. Football was the domain of males, and intimate conversation, for example, was the domain of females. When Lorraine demonstrated to her son that she could be nurturing and fun, she was also proving to herself that she was a person who could provide such experiences, thus changing her definition and experience of herself as a morose, depressed woman.

This was an unusual way to overcome depression. Psychiatrists and psychologists are often referred to as 'shrinks'. I have always given this term an idiosyncratic meaning: that good psychotherapists shrink not the patient but themselves. Good family therapists contract themselves so that their own needs, wishes and views of the world are suspended, become invisible or irrelevant, while they work with and for a family. There is something about the football bet that suggests that I absorbed the culture of the family so much that it was as if I had become one of them.

Some years ago my wife Tesse and I published *Corrupting the Young and Other Stories* (Lang & Lang, 1986). It was translated into Hebrew and retitled *How to Stop a Nagging Mother* (Lang & Lang, 1989). Later it was translated into French under yet another title, *Families I Love You* (Lang & Lang, 1989). To coincide with the publication of the French edition, I was invited by the translator, a French psychiatrist, to conduct a workshop in Paris. During the workshop a participant asked me a question to which I replied, 'I don't know the answer'. The translator interjected, 'You do know the answer,' and proceeded to give it. I was taken aback, but had to admit that he was right. I did know the answer, and he knew it better than me.

What is the relevance of all this? It demonstrates the obvious — that different cultures see and express things differently. In some Australian families, particularly in country Victoria, if you want to engage a twelve-year-old boy you have to speak the language of Australian Rules football. Good therapists become like the French translator — they get to know the culture of the family better than the family know it themselves. Sometimes therapists know it better than they realise, because they have absorbed it so fully. In a good translation the voice of the translator has disappeared.


WE
DON'T
NEED IT
ANY
MORE



# SESSION 4

The family returns on Tuesday morning at eleven a.m., twelve days after the third interview. The children start drawing on the blackboard as soon as they arrive. Jack stands and watches them before he sits down. Then he and Lorraine seat themselves well apart in the chairs they occupied in the previous meetings. Jack seems much more animated than before.

*

JACK (*to the children*) Come on. (*He beckons them to sit with the adults.*)

MOSHE (*to Donna and Ernie*) Do you want to stay there and draw or join us?

DONNA (*cheerfully*) It doesn't worry us.

MOSHE Well, you might go back there maybe later on.

DONNA Oh. Yeah. All right.

(*The children come and sit between their parents.*)

MOSHE Your drawings from last week are gone, are they?

DONNA Yeah. Somebody's wiped them off.

*

Although Donna and Ernie do not speak directly to Moshe when they arrive, they seem enthusiastic about being back in the room. They make themselves at home and cannot wait to check on their drawings from the previous time, chatting happily to each other. Their parents are drawn into smiling at their good humour. The family seems much more lively than before.

*

MOSHE Aah... Well, I must confess to be very interested to hear how things have been for you.

DONNA (*happily*) Well, Mum and Dad went out to dinner anyway.

MOSHE They did?

DONNA On Thursday night. Yep. We stayed home. Watched telly. (*Laughs excitedly.*) And...

ERNIE (*interrupting*) And had a bean-bag fight.

MOSHE (*to Ernie*) And what?

DONNA (*very happy*) Had a bean-bag fight.

MOSHE You did?

ERNIE Yep.

MOSHE Well, good on you. (*He reaches across the table to shake hands with Ernie and Donna.*)

DONNA Oh, and me and Dad went to the footy.

MOSHE Yep.

DONNA Yep.

MOSHE And? (*He beckons to remind her that she has to pay up.*)

ERNIE St Kilda lost.

LORRAINE Go on. Teaser! (*Lorraine laughs happily as Donna pretends she forgot about the bet.*)

DONNA (*with mock surprise*) What? I have to pay you. Have you got some money, Mum? I left mine at home. (*Lorraine and Donna laugh heartily.*)

ERNIE (*quite indignant, having missed the joke*) Why does she have to pay you?

LORRAINE She lost!

ERNIE Why?

MOSHE (*to Jack, because it was Jack who won the money for him*) Tell you what. We've got a partnership. I'll go halves with you.

JACK (*smiling*) OK.

DONNA I'm going to pay it soon. I left my money at home, Mum.

MOSHE Aaah... (*Consults Jack and Lorraine.*) Is she a good payer when it comes to that?

LORRAINE (*laughing*) No.

JACK (*quietly, smiling*) No.

DONNA (*affectionate and playful*) Oh, I pay, Dad... eventually. But, I pay.

MOSHE That is very good. Very good.

LORRAINE (*looking directly at Jack as she talks*) They wanted bean bags and I bought them bean bags. They've been wanting them for ages. So they had a bean-bag fight instead of a pillow fight.

(*Her voice sounds more cheerful than before.*)

ERNIE (*excitedly*) Yeah, every night. It was good.

MOSHE Yeah?

ERNIE Yeah.

LORRAINE (*smiling*) So with the bean bags they fight with them more than sit on them, you see. Donna can win. She can tickle Ernie and she can say, 'I'll kiss ya', and it sends him off completely. (*Lots of laughter.*) He can't bear being tickled, so she gets him down and she...

(*Jack moves his chair closer to the others.*)

MOSHE (*laughing*) I see.

LORRAINE She's better at it. She puts her knees up. He can't get the bean bag on her. Then she gets him down and says, 'I'll kiss ya now', and of course then he goes berserk. (*She is laughing heartily.*) So the television just goes on regardless and they are quite funny with the bean bags. I didn't buy them for the bean bag fights. That is what they use them for.

DONNA (*cheerfully*) Oh, well, you've got to get some use out of them.

LORRAINE They are quite funny with them.

MOSHE Aaah. That is very good. (*With emphasis*) So you do have fun when you have those bean bags. What size bean bags are they? (*Makes a shape with his hands.*)

DONNA Big ones.

MOSHE Yeah? They are big ones?

LORRAINE Just the usual-sized ones.

JACK Medium.

LORRAINE Medium sized, vinyl.

*

The family spontaneously reports back to Moshe on the two weeks since the previous session with great good humour and enthusiasm. Lorraine and Donna in particular have enormously enjoyed the so-called 'fights' between Donna and Ernie. They also enjoy reliving the event with Moshe. Jack, although less expressive than Lorraine or Donna, is smiling and in a quieter way indicating his enjoyment.

Ernie's behaviour in the early portion of the session is particularly interesting. Towards the end of the third interview he was very angry, claiming that he was missing out badly. But he shows no hint of ill-humour now, and contributes to the account of the previous two weeks with obvious zest.

Moshe expressed concern during the first interview that the children did not have fun together. Now each of them is reporting that in the last two weeks they have had a great deal of fun together, and they re-enact their pleasure as they recall it. Lorraine said at the first meeting that she was worried about the children fighting all the time. The 'fights' of the last two weeks seem to be of a different kind that entertained and pleased her. Moshe, too, is greatly enjoying the first few minutes of the session. The whole atmosphere in the room is one of celebration.

*

MOSHE Let's take it one at a time, because I am very interested. First of all, you did go out for dinner, the two of you?

LORRAINE (*without enthusiasm*) Yes.

JACK (*nodding*) Mmmm.

MOSHE And that was… was it nice?

JACK (*nodding*) Mmmm.

DONNA (*cheerfully*) We'll go and draw now, Ernie. (*She gets up and takes Ernie's arm firmly and leads him away into the far corner to the blackboard.*) Come on. Come on. (*To Moshe*) I can take a hint.

*

Moshe has given no hint that he wants to talk to the parents without the children. Donna is taking her cue from past sessions where Moshe has carefully drawn a boundary between the children and the problems Jack and Lorraine have with each other. Donna can cheerfully opt out without waiting for permission from anyone.

It is promising that Donna can take the initiative as the older sister and remove her younger brother from discussions that do not concern him. This is a far cry from the earlier arrangement where Donna was intensely resentful about Ernie running the household like a tyrant and bashing her up when she challenged his position.

*

MOSHE (*gesturing with feigned helplessness and smiling*) Um... (*To Jack and Lorraine*) Did I give a hint?

JACK (*shaking his head*) Nup.

LORRAINE No. She asked me the next day.

MOSHE Ah. Ha.

*

Lorraine is still pre-occupied with the events of the night out. She responds only momentarily to Moshe's question and then continues. Her account of the night out is not presented separately from her account of her subsequent discussion of it with Donna.

*

LORRAINE But the dinner was nice and we finished early. (*Her merriment has disappeared.*) We went to the Chinese restaurant, and we finished very early. So I asked if we could go and have a talk somewhere, just sit somewhere, in the car, and talk. Just the two of us. (*There is a long pause while Lorraine looks at Jack as if expecting him to continue.*)

*

Jack said without hesitating for a moment that the dinner was nice. Lorraine says the same, although it is possible that she is referring to the food, not the company. This is the only meal they have had together alone at a restaurant that either of them can remember and it seems to have passed without complications.

Lorraine pauses for some moments, having commented on the meal itself, as if unsure about what to say next. It is Donna who breaks the silence.

*

DONNA (*from the far corner*) Tell him about our conversation, Mum, in the morning.

LORRAINE What conversation? You're making that...

DONNA (*interrupting with emphasis*) our conversation... Tell him what we decided. (*Sarcastic now*) What you decided!

*

The interaction between Lorraine and Donna is subtle, complex and, to some degree, impenetrable. Donna, having physically distanced herself, prompts her mother, to report on a conversation that occurred the morning after the big night out. Lorraine smiles knowingly and then acts as if she cannot remember the conversation in question. Donna cuts across this and insists that Lorraine does know, but in the process, confuses herself about which pronoun to use, so that again we are left unsure about whether one or other or both of them has come to some 'decision'.

*

ERNIE (*to Donna, still immersed in the drawing on the blackboard*) How come it got rubbed off, anyway?

LORRAINE (*to Moshe*) Donna asked me the next morning how I enjoyed my night out. Oh, before we went out the children put on their usual performance about going out. Donna came in. Someone she can't stand, a friend of Ernie's, was sitting in her bean bag. So that was the first performance. Jack hadn't said we were going out until the Thursday morning. (*Lorraine's voice again sounds whining.*) And I hadn't had time to tell the children we

were going out. And I said to Donna, when she said, 'What is for tea?', 'Well I haven't cooked anything. You can buy tea tonight'. 'I don't want to buy tea.' So, she had a first go. Then Ernie came in, 'I'm not buying tea. If you're going out, I want to go out!' So the evening was set very well before we started. We didn't talk very much at the restaurant. You can't, till afterwards.

MOSHE Because?

LORRAINE Well, you can't at the restaurant. There are other people you are quite close to at the table. Then afterwards we just sat in the car and talked. To me it was a complete fizzle. We had a big argument. And then next morning Donna asked me if we went all right. And I said that as far as I was concerned I didn't think there was much use in going out to dinner for your father to tap his fingers on the table. We can do that at home. I don't see much future.

*

Lorraine hesitates and Donna seems to cue her on how to proceed. She diverts her mother away from the memory of the event itself, forward in time to the next morning, when a discussion between Lorraine and Donna led to a consensus between them as to the implications of the events of the previous night.

It seems that at this post-mortem Lorraine and Donna reached very pessimistic conclusions about Jack and how unco-operative he was. While Lorraine is giving an account of what happened to Moshe she changes grammatical feet in mid-stride and lapses into language that belongs to her private conversation with Donna. She refers to 'your father', while still addressing her remarks to Moshe.

Jack has complied with Moshe's request that he go out to dinner with his wife. Likewise he has without any protest taken a fourth full day away from his business in as many weeks to come to Melbourne to do what he supposedly refuses to do — talk. This evidence that Jack is tractable and responsive is strangely at variance with the picture Lorraine is painting of him as rigid and totally unreasonable.

*

LORRAINE Donna, at the moment, would like to go to boarding school for the last term.

MOSHE Oh, yes?

*

Finally Lorraine reports a decision which Donna has apparently made, namely, that she would now like to go to boarding school for the last term. Donna gives us to understand that Lorraine has also made an important decision, which is somehow contingent on Donna's plans, but we do not find out what the decision was.

*

LORRAINE There has been talk of this before. Now she feels that if she goes to boarding school, Jack and I would split up. I don't know how she feels this but she feels that, by staying home she would be able to prevent it. She feels the custodian, she feels the caretaker that if she…

MOSHE That she needs to stay to look after the two of you?

LORRAINE Yes. Which is bad for her in one way. But this is the responsibility that she puts on herself. I see that as not necessary. We've lived more or less apart for so long anyway. We can go on. That is my interpretation.

*

Lorraine has apparently talked freely to Donna after her night out with Jack. Donna is prompting her here to take a risk and express herself freely in the presence of Jack and Moshe. She sees Lorraine as very hesitant to talk honestly in this more public setting. Perhaps Lorraine has talked with Donna about the idea of leaving Jack, and Donna wants this out in the open. But Lorraine only reports Donna's 'decision'.

There are suggestions all the way through this that Lorraine and Donna are struggling with how to be discrete people, making individual decisions which do not necessarily commit the other.

For the first time here Lorraine clearly attributes some responsibility to Donna for involving herself so actively in the marriage. She seems at first to be saying that Donna's concern is quite unnecessary and can be dispensed with. But there are a number of ways in which she cancels this out.

Her reassurance that she has lived at a distance from Jack for so long that it doesn't matter, is not convincing. She has repeatedly said that she is bitterly upset by Jack's distance from her. Furthermore, she constantly switches tack, talking first about her sense that the marriage has no future, then about Donna's involvement in the marriage and Donna's dilemma about whether to leave home or not. She describes Donna's preoccupation with the marriage as 'bad for her in one way', as if it is not bad for her in some other way. The message to Donna is quite ambiguous and not one that would unequivocally encourage her to relinquish the role of resident marriage counsellor.

Strangely, Lorraine does not state her own thoughts about the likelihood of separation. She chooses instead to report on her daughter's thoughts. She leaves unclear how much she shares Donna's extreme pessimism about the future of the marriage. She presents Donna as demoralised about her efforts as a marriage counsellor, and as believing that her efforts have been fruitless. Yet she reports that Donna sees her continued presence as necessary to prevent the otherwise inevitable split.

Lorraine presents this account of Donna's thinking in the middle of reporting on her night out with Jack. In so doing she elevates Donna to an extraordinary position of balanced judgement, responsibility and wisdom. Donna's appraisal of the situation is given a great deal of respect. But Donna pays a price for such an elevated station in the family. She is left responsible for whatever happens.

But this arrangement between Donna and her mother becomes visible to us at a moment when each of them is struggling to forsake it. Lorraine, by stating openly the burden of responsibility that Donna carries, is releasing her from her duties as custodian of the marriage. She does so hesitantly, in language that is ambiguous. But she does it nonetheless.

Donna, for her part, is also struggling to free herself from this privileged but onerous role. Her eagerness to leave home and go to boarding school is presented by Lorraine as having more to do with giving up her role as caretaker than with any direct advantage to be gained from boarding school. The significance of Donna's decision (in Lorraine's mind at least) lies not in what she goes to, but in what she leaves.

Donna has been on the receiving end of her mother's confidences about her marriage on this occasion and maybe on many others. We can perhaps see some features of the first interview now in a different light. Lorraine has thoughts of leaving, but never acts on them. Donna is frustrated by the inaction. She is agitating for some decisive move. When she threatens to leave home in rage, and never speak to Jack again, it is as if she trying to set an example to her mother of how to be decisive. If her mother acted this way it would of course free Donna from her helpless but responsible position in the family.

Jack's unworried response to Donna on that occasion is also less puzzling. It seems that Donna, as an adolescent, is close to leaving home to live in a boarding school. Lorraine as a wife is very disappointed and frustrated, but is not in any danger of leaving home. The probable outcome then is not going to disturb Jack's comfortable life in any major way.

*

MOSHE But from your point of view, going out with Jack to dinner was a great disappointment, wasn't it?

LORRAINE Well, for a start off, there were no arrangements made till the last minute. I waited and waited to be asked to go out to dinner.

DONNA (*from the corner*) And I ended up telling Dad to make it anyway.

LORRAINE Then, between Jack and I, we don't talk any more as far as personal talking is concerned.

*

In the second session, Moshe encouraged the parents to go out to dinner without the children. There was a delayed response to his suggestion. The use the family made of the suggestion is very complex. Lorraine and Donna treated the suggestion as imposing an obligation on Jack, and he is represented as treating it as an unwelcome but inescapable chore to be postponed as long as possible.

Moshe questioned Lorraine specifically when he made the suggestion two weeks ago, about whether the evening would 'get heavy'. He asked her to make it an enjoyable night out. She did this in the early

part of the evening, but later she decided to use the occasion to corner Jack and embroil him in a 'heavy conversation about us'. She believes that Jack sabotaged this from the start, signalling his impatience by drumming his fingers on the table during the meal and agreeing to the private conversation in the car while showing by his demeanour that his heart was not in it. The children may have foreseen the outcome and tried to prevent or delay the outing as much as they could.

One purpose in the proposed outing was to give Jack and Lorraine time to be alone away from the children. The children resisted this before they left the house. Donna also contrived to include herself in the occasion by asking Lorraine the next morning to let her in on the juicy details of what happened. Lorraine agreed to be drawn into this discussion. She chose not to spend time alone with Jack and then keep the episode private. At the same time Jack made no move to actively exclude Donna or to rebuke her for intruding. We are given to understand that the really intimate conversation took place between mother and daughter rather than between husband and wife. The dinner was scarcely a clandestine affair. It ended up being very public and very unromantic.

The result of the outing supports the view that Moshe's prescription was premature and based on an inadequate knowledge of the complexities of the marriage. Also there is an ominous indication that Lorraine (and Donna) have treated Moshe's suggestion as his intended remedy for the marriage and interpreted the failure of the venture as proving that no improvement is possible. This is in line with their own pessimistic appraisal of Jack and his capacity for change.

*

MOSHE So before we go into that, there are one or two other issues that I want to check with you. We had a deal for you to go out to dinner, so I'm happy because I got my way. You got hassled, didn't you? (*Speaking now to Jack*) There may be some issues around that. We may need to talk about it, but I don't know that it needs to be done now. The other thing that I want to check with you — when you left last time, one of the issues was that the two of you started working together as a team — as parents

in relation to Donna. Do you remember? I was worried that you wouldn't be able to stick it out and remain a team as parents. I wonder if, have you been able to work as a team, as far as being parents go?

LORRAINE (*shaking her head*) No.

MOSHE No? You have been going against each other?

LORRAINE Well, I feel… (*To Jack, who seems surprised*) The episode of the bike is the one I was meaning, but what is the use of saying anything about that. (*To Moshe again*) We discussed at the table and both agreed that Ernie should not get the other bike. Ernie got the other bike. Which makes his third one.

MOSHE You're telling me something I haven't heard before. Is that right?

LORRAINE Yes. We had a discussion over the tea table the first night after we had been here. Ernie wanted to buy a bike.

MOSHE To get a bike?

LORRAINE Another bike.

MOSHE Right.

LORRAINE (*tight-lipped*) And Jack said no and I said no. Ernie now has got the bike.

MOSHE How did he get it? (*Lorraine nods disapprovingly towards Jack.*)

ERNIE Well, Dad never…

JACK (*interrupting*) Well, you didn't say anything against it.

ERNIE Yeah!

LORRAINE I said no at the table. I agreed with you, 'No, he's already had two bikes!'

JACK Yeah!

LORRAINE And you said that that was the end of the discussion as far as you were concerned and this is what you told Ernie. That night.

JACK Mmm. (*Long pause.*) Well, that's all right. We changed our decision. But you didn't say anything about it.

DONNA Yeah, but, Dad, was it that we changed the decision or you changed the decision, 'cos Mum was still dead

against it. But she just went along with it because you said yes.

ERNIE (*interjecting*) It was *we*.

MOSHE (*after a pause to Jack*) You changed the decision in the belief that your wife wouldn't mind at all?

JACK Well, I didn't think there would be any problem with it at all.

ERNIE (*whining*) Yeah, what's wrong with that?

DONNA (*tangling her words*) Yeah, well, you… but you suggested how mum said no and you go and say yes.

MOSHE (*pause*) Um… If you thought that your wife would have minded, would you have checked up with her first?

JACK Yes.

DONNA You knew she would have minded, Dad, because she said no.

*

For a moment here the form and structure of the discussion in the family is the same as it was in the first interview, although the atmosphere is less acrimonious. Donna is again embroiled in her parents' affairs with her own abrasive style of confrontation. Moshe has to persistently intervene before he manages to restore order. The changes in the family are not secure and Lorraine's grievances with Jack remain as an undertow pulling the family back into the old arrangement.

*

MOSHE Are you going to be a lawyer when you grow up, Donna?

DONNA A lawyer, what for?

MOSHE A lawyer to represent people. To speak on their behalf.

DONNA No.

MOSHE (*feigning astonishment*) No?

DONNA (*Comes back from the corner of the room and sits down between her parents.*) No, I haven't got the brains.

MOSHE You do a good job for your mum, you represent her. I look at her and expect her to speak…

DONNA (*holding out her hand, amused and teasing*) I want the fees please. Fifty dollars a minute.

MOSHE (*smiling*) I think you might be a lawyer when you grow up. Yes, I think so.

DONNA Nup.

JACK There was talk on it for about a week before he got it, so I can't see the problem.

DONNA (*sighing with exasperation*) Oh well!

MOSHE (*to Jack*) So it's not a problem as far as you are concerned. (*To Lorraine*) And its a very big problem as far as you are concerned.

LORRAINE (*whining*) I feel that once the decision is made that it was said 'no'. The decision was no to my way of thinking.

ERNIE (*indignant*) I saved and earned for it, didn't I? (*He is still in the far corner of the room.*)

DONNA (*mocking*) You didn't 'save and earn for it'.

ERNIE I done the dishes and that, didn't I? Didn't I, Dad?

JACK Part of it.

ERNIE I helped, yeah!

JACK Not all of it.

*

Close to the end of the third session Ernie was vehemently protesting about Donna and Jack going to the football without him. He saw this as threatening his privileged and pre-eminent position as Jack's mate. His weekly trip to the football without the women was the most valued (and most envied) expression of this mateship.

In the two weeks that followed he apparently nagged Jack behind Lorraine's back into giving him another bike. The bike then replaces the football match as the emblem of his special tie with father. Jack colludes with this in his usual way, without any direct confrontation with Lorraine, and without opposing Moshe's suggestion that he take Donna to the football. Again the family's use of Moshe's suggestion is revealing. Jack has honoured to the letter his commitment to take Donna to the football without Ernie. But the old pattern in the family is slow to yield, and the bicycle becomes the new focus of Lorraine and Donna's complaint.

Discussion centres on what Ernie got from his father. What has slipped away from attention is that Donna enjoyed going to the football with her father and that Ernie presumably enjoyed his outing with his mother. These seem of little value alongside a shiny new bike. The kind of gift that is most highly prized is tangible and material. Having a good time together is devalued; it is 'just' experience. It leaves you only with a memory.

In this family, the giving of material things seems more characteristically male. Lorraine does not complain that Jack has wasted money, but that she was not consulted. What she does not say is that Jack, in going behind her back, makes himself the good guy in Ernie's eyes, while she looks tight-fisted and withholding. Her generosity in taking him out to a concert is forgotten.

Lorraine responds by denigrating Jack's generosity to Ernie, portraying it instead as weakness under pressure from Ernie's nagging and as a deliberate attack on her. She wants to convey to Moshe this picture of Jack as an irresponsible parent.

Donna is certainly convinced of Lorraine's view. At this moment Donna sits between her parents again as supervisor of parental behaviour, while Ernie is a child drawing on the blackboard in the corner. When Lorraine raises the bicycle controversy, Donna leaves off playing in the corner with Ernie to return to her duties as counsellor, impelled perhaps by the rivalry that is aroused when she is reminded of the bike.

We do not know if Jack thinks Ernie has nagged him about the bike, or even if he agrees that there was an agreement not to buy another bike. We do know that he manages to hang on to his place as number one parent for Ernie. Furthermore, Jack is the only one who is earning an income, so that buying an expensive present is in itself a token of his own privileged position.

*

MOSHE So you see what is happening now is what happened the first time I saw you. You are almost about to go back into the original camps. That's Ernie and Jack against Donna and Lorraine.

LORRAINE (*laughing*) Well, Ernie and I have just had the weekend in town together, so…

MOSHE (*interrupting*) At the moment around the issue of the bike you are slipping back to the way you were.

LORRAINE (*nodding as if she knew all along*) Mmmm.

DONNA Then when me and Mum talked on Friday morning after they'd been out, Mum said that she was going to tell you today that she didn't think it was worth while coming down here any more, wasting your time. She said that she couldn't get anywhere with Dad because Dad wasn't talking, so she said that she was just going to come down here and… I forget what happened after that… she was going to say that it wasn't worth while wasting your time, because nothing was going to happen. Nothing had changed all that much!

*

Lorraine sits expressionless as Donna spills the beans here. Now we know at least Donna's version of what 'our' conversation was about. If we are to believe Donna, the sole agenda of therapy for Lorraine is to get Jack to talk. Changes that benefit anyone else are dismissed as a waste of time. We are told that Lorraine shared only with her daughter the information that she wanted to give up on Jack and abandon therapy. Donna gives up waiting for Lorraine to make this announcement and decides to make it herself.

If we accept this outline of the conversation on Friday morning, why does Lorraine hesitate to declare this herself? Perhaps she agreed with Donna's pessimistic appraisal in that conversation but privately is still committed to the marriage. Or is it that she is in the habit of having intimate talks with Donna, in which she bemoans the state of her marriage and says she cannot stay with Jack? But she is letting off steam rather than planning to act. Donna seems to take her resolve to be done with Jack more seriously than she does herself. Donna certainly wants her mother to act more decisively and to either leave or sort it out.

Decisive action is more in Jack's line. He does not wait around feeling upset and talking to someone about his dilemma over Ernie's wish for a new bike. He simply goes off and buys one without regard for how Lorraine feels about it. The bike keeps Ernie allied to him, in spite of Lorraine's generosity in taking Ernie out on the town. The post-mortem over the night out keeps Donna allied primarily to Lorraine, despite Jack's generosity in taking her off to Melbourne to the football. Ernie has no reason to complain about this arrangement. It is Donna who is agitating because her role as mother's shoulder to be cried on is no fun at all. But also she is nearly three years older than Ernie and has much more of the animation and initiative of adolescence about her.

*

MOSHE Yep. Do you agree with her?

DONNA In a way. Yeah!

MOSHE In what way?

DONNA (*doubtfully*) Oh! Nothing's really changed all that much. Nobody can make anybody talk or anything.

MOSHE Ernie, do you agree that nothing has changed? Things are just as bad at home as they always have been?

ERNIE No.

MOSHE Yeah. They are better for you?

ERNIE Yes.

MOSHE In what way?

DONNA (*interrupting*) Oh well, they're better for me and Ernie, but they're not better for Mum and Dad.

MOSHE Ernie, in what way are they better for you?

ERNIE Oh well, they've been talking a bit, but not that much.

MOSHE Who? Your parents have been talking a bit?

ERNIE Yeah. Oh, not that much.

MOSHE Yeah. (*Turning to Jack*) Have things been just as bad for you, or have they been in any way better?

JACK (*after a pause*) No. I thought they were better. (*Runs his fingers through his hair in frustration.*) But it appears that I am not right.

*

Taken at face value, this comment suggests that Jack sees himself as not competent to define reality. What he says is 'the truth' only if Lorraine confirms it. Lorraine seems to hold that view. We cannot tell whether Jack really believes this or is being ironic.

*

MOSHE In what way do you see things as much better? Or better?

JACK I don't think the kids have been arguing and fighting as much. They still have their little niggles, but...

*

Moshe, by persisting with his inquiry, is refusing to accept that Jack is not qualified to have an opinion.

*

DONNA But I said that was better, Dad, but it's not better between you and Mum. That's what I meant. And Mum was going to say that today (*Prompting Lorraine*) Mmmmmmm...

LORRAINE You're not giving me much of a chance, are you, Donna?

*

Moshe's gentle challenge of the existing assumptions animates Donna. Her dilemma is that what Jack says here tallies with her experience. She and Ernie are better off than before. But she is accustomed to working on the understanding that Jack is not competent to say what is the truth. Her only escape from these unreconcilable demands is to push her mother into declaring herself.

*

DONNA Why? Well, you were there arguing over the bike.

ERNIE (*raising his voice*) Yeah, but I thought that was settled!

MOSHE Let me tell you what I think, Donna. I think your mother would like to speak for a few minutes. Do you think you could give her a chance to see if she could struggle by herself?

DONNA Yeah, sure.

MOSHE Or do you want to represent her?

DONNA No. It's OK.

LORRAINE Things have been better as far as the children are concerned and the tea-time having a talk together, but I

see no change in Jack's and my relationship whatsoever. After Thursday night's episode, as far as I'm concerned, I can't see any change coming.

*

Only a few minutes earlier Lorraine was expressing delight at the improvement in her children's relationship. But, if we accept Donna's account, she is intensely pessimistic about the family and its future and sees the therapy as a waste of time. She seems to have forgotten that the trigger for therapy in the first place was Donna's suicide attempt and that Donna now seems a much happier and more relaxed person. Thoughts about her unsatisfactory marriage seem to capture Lorraine's attention so completely that changes in any other domain pass unnoticed and she is left with a feeling that life is nothing but a succession of disappointments. Moshe tries to undercut this by confronting her with the positives without glossing over the remaining problems.

*

MOSHE (*speaking quietly*) Let me tell you a few of my thoughts. I felt in fact that, having seen you three times, the positive changes have been too rapid. They have been dramatic — the positive changes. So the fact that you are reporting now that there are still issues and problems is a good thing. Because it is very difficult for a family to make adjustment to positive changes too quickly.
(*The family is sitting still, listening intently.*)
And let me say to you what they are. They are quite obvious. Starting with you, (*gesturing towards Lorraine*) it was quite clear when you came, seeing you, that in spite of the difficulties, there is much more laughter and enjoyment and confidence in the family. There is no doubt about it. There is no doubt that Donna and Ernie are having good times together, and they are brother and sister. I remember their words to me the first time we met; that they never had any good times together. So this is a very dramatic change. If Donna now can look back in years to come and think, 'My brother Ernie, gee I did

have good times with him'.
(*Donna grins at Moshe.*)
'He is not a bad sort of a chap after all'. And if Ernie can remember that, that's a very, very big, very big change — it's a major change. It may be that you people, among some other things, find it difficult to give yourself credit when credit is due. Because you have made some unbelievably big changes, some very big steps. (*To Lorraine*) You, for a period of time, have taken a united front as parents in relation to Donna and in relation to Ernie. And Donna has gone out with her father and they obviously had some good times together. Ernie and you spent some time together.

LORRAINE Yes. We had a lovely time.

MOSHE And you enjoyed yourself. I saw it in your face when you talked about it. That you obviously had a good time.

LORRAINE (*without hesitation*) Yes.

MOSHE (*raising his voice to Ernie in the corner*) Ernie, how was it for you with Mum?

ERNIE Oh, it was all right.

MOSHE You could stand her? Yeah? She was all right, was she?

ERNIE Yeah.

MOSHE Give her two out of ten?

ERNIE Yeah.

MOSHE Just about? (*To Lorraine*) You had a good day, didn't you?

LORRAINE (*laughing at this exchange*) Yes, a very good day. We had all day Sunday, but it was not doing all the things he wanted to do. He had to choose some of the things that I wanted to do. Even to going to church, which he moaned all the way through, and he moaned all the way through the Evergreens concert. (*Laughs.*) And I went to the rock concert, and got blasted out of the seat.

ERNIE (*rising to the bait*) I got blasted out of the seat sitting at the Evergreens concert.

LORRAINE (*laughs*) And we walked. And he wanted to ride the trams, but he realised that I can't, because of my back.

We did have a good day. He stayed with me the last two days and Donna stayed with Jack the last two days, which is a change.

MOSHE That's very good. That's very good. Now these are some major changes. These are major changes. In fact I get anxious because you are changing too fast maybe. What you are saying is that when you came to see me you had the following problems. (*He counts them off on his fingers.*) There was the problem with the relationship between Ernie and Donna. There was a problem with the relationship between Donna and her father. There was a problem with the relationship between Ernie and his mother. There was a problem of the relationship with the two of you working as parents. There was also a problem with you as a couple, independent of the children. (*Lorraine grunts agreement.*)

Out of this what you are saying basically is that most of these problems have changed, maybe even resolved or look as if they are much better.

You, as a couple, still, (*to Lorraine*) as far as you are concerned, maybe not as far as Jack is concerned, there is quite a bit of room for improvement. And you, as parents, have made some very useful moves, but also, once or twice, you have moved out of step with each other. Do you feel that that's a fair assessment, Jack?

JACK (*nodding in agreement*) Yeah.

LORRAINE (*nodding*) It's a fair assessment.

(*Donna has sat between her parents throughout the discussion. At this juncture she gets up to join Ernie at the blackboard but Ernie joins the adults for a few moments.*)

MOSHE Well, if that is the case… (*shrugging his shoulders*) Maybe. You know it's understandable that when someone is standing on your toes, that you can't think to yourself, 'Well, I used to have a headache until yesterday. But the headache is gone'. You know, they're standing on your toes and it's hurting.

*

Moshe is under pressure from Lorraine to declare his acceptance of her view of the marriage. His dilemma is that he is confronted with two very different definitions of reality. From the beginning Lorraine described the marriage as terrible. Jack seems to be fairly unworried about the relationship. Moshe does not commit himself to either one of these descriptions. He has secured agreement that the children no longer require attention and is in a position to move on to deal with the marriage.

*

MOSHE (*gesturing to Jack and Lorraine*) Maybe that's the problem of yours.

(*Ernie rejoins Donna in the corner.*)

Jack, do you believe it would be useful for the two of you to talk with me about your personal problems with each other and if so I would think probably that the kids wouldn't need to be involved in that. What do you think? Does that sound as if it would be useful to talk and is that the right time or is it too early?

JACK It is fair enough.

LORRAINE I think so. I think something has got to be done. I think this is where the breakdown is.

MOSHE Because there is another issue, and that I am happy to talk about in front of the children and that is the way you co-operate as parents. Do you know what I mean?

LORRAINE (*nodding*) Yes.

MOSHE Because it's very important, I think, that you don't allow children the chance to feel that they can set one against the other. Because, it's natural for a child, if I understand correctly, to want to get his own way. And if he gets what he wants that is OK in one way. But if by getting a present from you (*gesturing to Jack*) then Ernie has to deal with the idea that for him getting a bike means that his parents are at each other's throats, then it is not good. That's the way I see it. So you need to get your act together better.

LORRAINE I see also, with certain things, that our children have never seen us have a fight together. That is forbidden in our household. Jack will not have it. Jack will leave the house or go into the other room where our children don't see us arguing. That has to be suppressed or gone into at a later stage. There's no such thing as blowing up.

*

It may seem absurd for anyone to complain that there are no fights in the household. Millions of people long for such a luxury. Yet for Lorraine it is a source of complaint. Although her choice of words is surprising, she is saying that she finds Jack over-controlled. She sees him as too committed to peace at any price. She longs for spontaneity and animation, even if it leads to the occasional furious row.

At the same time Lorraine is refusing to accept a description of herself that puts her on the same level as Jack. She baulks at Moshe's statement that she needs to co-operate with Jack, just as he needs to co-operate with her. She puts this comment aside and substitutes the idea that Jack is the one who needs to change.

Lorraine aspires to the role of co-therapist with Moshe in dealing with her problem child/husband. This is the same position she was offering Donna. Moshe is refusing her this role and insisting that he wants to deal with them on equal terms as co-parents and as husband and wife. While she behaves like a critical, nagging mother with an uncooperative problem child she has no chance of having what she wants, namely a communicative and affectionate husband. Ironically Lorraine does not recognise that, by getting her own way in this and enjoying the role of co-therapist, she ensures that she will not get what she wants most of all.

*

MOSHE (*to Jack*) You're a very peace-loving man, are you, Jack?

JACK (*smiling*) Mmmmmmm.

LORRAINE No, I think that you can't stand this, Jack, because of your own childhood and this upsets you and you don't want your children to be upset and that's the biggest problem.

*

When Moshe speaks of Jack as a man, rather than as a problem child, Lorraine objects. She sees him as the one who needs help. She knows that he is determined not to upset his children by fighting in front of them. His care for his children seems in her mind to create 'the biggest problem' in the way of open discussion.

*

MOSHE What do you mean because of Jack's own childhood?

LORRAINE Jack's own background is of a poor childhood background.

MOSHE What do you mean?

LORRAINE (*mumbling*) Oh, he'd be able to tell you better than I can, but he won't, because he never talks about it.

JACK (*in a subdued tone*) You like telling the story. You keep bringing it up every now and again.

MOSHE Do you know what your wife is referring to?

JACK (*in a resigned tone*) Well, I've probably heard it that many times that I suppose I do by now.

MOSHE (*Pause.*) Is it something important for us to pursue, or not?

*

This is the first time in any of the interviews that the previous generation has been mentioned. We have heard nothing at all about Lorraine's or Jack's family of origin. This poses a dilemma for Moshe as to how to proceed.

Lorraine is trying to be helpful by canvassing an important influence on Jack's life and on the family as a whole, but it is not clear that Jack views this as helpful. He comments elliptically on his wife's reference to these matters. Perhaps he hears in this a reminder from Lorraine about his humble origins and sees her as patronising. But there seems to be a hint in his words that he is encouraging her to go on. As so often, he does not declare his hand.

Lorraine is less opaque. She is insinuating that the damage supposedly done to Jack in his childhood is really far more important than, for example, the effects of events in her childhood. She is also side-stepping the point Moshe was making about the need to work together co-operatively as parents.

*

LORRAINE I don't pursue it any more because Jack won't. And I haven't brought it up repeatedly. It isn't something that I throw up at you repeatedly.

JACK I think you do. (*Long pause.*) I haven't mentioned it because it's the past, and it seems best to forget about it.

DONNA But, Dad, if it's the past and it's going to affect the future, you can't forget about it.

JACK I don't see where it is, love.

DONNA Well, Mum obviously thinks it does, and everybody else!

JACK Yeah, I know.

ERNIE (*indignantly to Donna, who is scribbling over his drawing on the blackboard*) Don't rub it out!

DONNA But you can't, you can't...

MOSHE How come when we talked about that, you wrote 'violence' there?

(*Lorraine smiles.*)

DONNA I didn't. I was just writing words...

MOSHE Who wrote violence there?

DONNA I was just writing words on it. Just to fill it up.

MOSHE Oh! It's interesting that you wrote 'violence' though... (*To Lorraine*) You believe that Jack's childhood had impact, influenced the way he is today. Is that what you are saying?

LORRAINE Yes.

MOSHE (*to Jack*) And you are saying that your wife keeps bringing it up and you are sick of hearing it?

JACK That's true. Yeah.

MOSHE And what you are also saying is that you wish that from time to time you could have a good fight or a good argument between the two of you?

LORRAINE Well, it clears the air occasionally. You don't put it down underneath and suppress it and go off steaming underneath all the time.

MOSHE Which has been your experience. A lot of the time you are very angry with Jack but you suppress it.

LORRAINE You've got to because you're not allowed to say anything in front of the children. You don't do that.

MOSHE What about not in front of the children?

LORRAINE Well, when do you get the time?

MOSHE I don't know. You don't have time?

LORRAINE No.

MOSHE (*turning to Jack*) Do you know what your wife is angry about?

JACK (*Pause.*) No. (*very quietly*)

MOSHE I just want to check between you and me. Do you agree that your childhood was a particularly unhappy one?

*

Moshe is under pressure to ally himself. Lorraine is saying, in effect, that the long-distant past is very important and should be talked about. Jack seems to be reluctant to talk about it. Donna, as we have come to expect, throws in her weight on her mother's side. She is assuming that her mother is right and that everybody else will necessarily agree, including Moshe. Moshe manages to avoid aligning himself with either position by indicating his awareness of both sides.

*

JACK My childhood?

MOSHE Mmmmm.

JACK Yeah. Looking back. Yeah. Sure.

MOSHE Do the kids know about your childhood?

JACK No.

MOSHE Nothing at all?
(*Jack shakes his head.*)
Is that something you would rather they know or they didn't know about?

JACK Well, I don't see. Why worry anyone about it?

MOSHE My experience is that usually children are very interested in their parents' childhood, even if it was not a happy one. Do you mind if I check with them?

JACK No, sure, go ahead.

MOSHE Ernie, are you interested at all what Dad was like about your age and before that.

ERNIE Aaaagh. (*hedging*) Oh, a bit and a bit not, you know.

MOSHE Do you know what school he went to?

ERNIE Yeah.

MOSHE How do you know?

ERNIE He showed me it.

DONNA State school 2349, wasn't it, Dad?

JACK 2346!

MOSHE She's interested, she knows.

DONNA (*with obvious pleasure*) Dad tells us all the time, not only about the number of the state school.

*

Both the children join in at this point. They take pleasure in talking about Jack's childhood and his schooldays. Contrary to Lorraine's comment, it appears that Jack has often talked about his past and that the children enjoyed this. Donna is describing Jack as someone who chats freely to her about his life. But there is also a clear hint that Jack is reluctant to talk about certain of his past experiences, because he wants to spare his listeners unnecessary worry.

*

MOSHE (*to Jack*) Just to clarify a few things for me. Your parents are still living?

JACK Mmmm.

MOSHE Where do they live?

JACK In Bendigo.

MOSHE In Bendigo?

JACK Mmmm.

MOSHE Not far from where you are?

JACK Oh. Half a mile, three-quarters of a mile.

MOSHE You have brothers and sisters?

JACK Mmmm.

MOSHE How many?

JACK Four brothers and three sisters.

MOSHE A big family. Where are they?

JACK One sister in Bendigo and one in Bairnsdale and my brothers live in Melbourne. Oh, one brother lives in Albury, the rest live in Melbourne.

MOSHE Right. And where do you fit in the age between your brothers and sisters. Are you the oldest in this?

JACK Oh, no, no, no, I'm the fourth youngest.

MOSHE Fourth youngest? And your parents, they are well, both of them?

JACK Yes.

DONNA (*reproving*) How would you know, Dad, you never see them?

JACK (*not looking at Donna*) And why don't I, Donna?

DONNA I don't know. But they never come up to our place. They always go up to Auntie Bette's. But they never come up to our place.

JACK That's correct!

DONNA And we never see them.

JACK That is right!

ERNIE Yeah, and when you do see them, they don't talk to you.

MOSHE They don't talk to you?

ERNIE (*doubtfully*) Oh, they do talk to you, but...

DONNA As though you are just friends. Not relations.

ERNIE Yeah.

MOSHE Really. They don't treat you as if you are their grandchildren?

DONNA Oh, sometimes, yes. Mum's parents are better. Or Mum's parent. There is only one now.

MOSHE So you don't go and see your grandparents? Jack's...

DONNA (*interrupting, as she moves back to sit between her parents*) No. And they never come and see us.

MOSHE And you never go to see them?

DONNA No. They go to see our cousins, and Dad's sister. But they never come to see us.

MOSHE Why is that?

DONNA I don't know. Ask Dad or Mum.

MOSHE You don't know and you never asked?

DONNA We've just accepted it that they don't come to see us.

*

The children are listening closely as Moshe talks to Jack and Lorraine about their own families. First Donna and then Ernie abandon their play at the blackboard in the far corner of the room, and sit on the floor at the feet of the adults. They seem relaxed and unworried and join in discussion about their grandparents with a lot of animation. They certainly are very interested in why Jack's parents keep their distance and welcome an opportunity to explore what seems to be a taboo subject in the family.

*

MOSHE I see. (*To Jack*) Is there something that you could explain to the children? Or you would rather not?

JACK I think it would be better if Lorraine explained it.

LORRAINE I've never known the reason why they stopped coming. I never knew the reason why they stopped coming.

JACK They never even started.

LORRAINE No. Your mother stayed with us for a week when I was having Ernie. They never came after that.

JACK So we just accepted the fact when we got married that it was just a one-sided marriage.

MOSHE What do you mean?

JACK (*forcefully*) Well, Lorraine's family and Lorraine's parents, they had to have everything and that was it — and I just accepted it and went along with it.

MOSHE Sorry, I don't understand. When you got married, what happened?

JACK It just went a one-sided affair. So rather than have arguments or anything like that I just went along with it.

MOSHE How do you mean?

JACK Well, we always had to go to Lorraine's mother or father or brothers or sisters. Mine were just, I don't know…

MOSHE As if they didn't matter, you mean?

JACK Yeah.

*

Most of the time Jack appears inert but now he comes to life. He begins to unwind physically, and to speak with his hands as well as his voice. He seems in the end quite overcome with emotion in a way that we have not seen before. A hint of desperation creeps into his voice. His words have a directness and immediacy lacking earlier. He speaks promptly, without his usual long delays. He believes that he and his family have been treated as second class by Lorraine, and perhaps by the rest of her kin, from the beginning of the marriage. He feels that his relatives are just not good enough in Lorraine's opinion.

Lorraine is the one who led Moshe into this line of inquiry. She shows Moshe a way beyond Jack's granite exterior, even though she could not use it herself. Her approaches to him only seem to close him off to her even more.

*

MOSHE Let me understand. You got married and Lorraine was saying 'Let's go and see my parents'. You occasionally felt that you should go and see your family, but she always got her way and, as a result of this, eventually your parents gave you up as a bad job.

JACK Oh, I don't know whether they have given me up or not. We still talk.

MOSHE But they have been hurt and offended by your lack of interest in them.

JACK It's exactly the same if we come to Melbourne. (*with emphasis*) It's always that we have got to go and see Auntie Helen. We can't go to Castlemaine and see any of my friends or anything like that.

ERNIE (*softly in the background*) But you'd never take us anyway.

MOSHE (*ignoring Ernie*) Is that the case?

JACK (*emphatically*) That is the case.

MOSHE Lorraine?

*

Jack's single-minded determination to avoid open conflict at all cost has contributed to an arrangement whereby Lorraine's family is visited and his own family is neglected. He believes that Lorraine is indifferent

to his wishes on this matter. He seems to perceive Lorraine as determined to get her own way all the time and willing to start a furious row rather than take his wishes seriously.

*

LORRAINE I did my utmost when we first got married to get on with Jack's mother and father. One very good episode was, I was working Christmas Day, and the rest of the family was invited, Jack was invited for lunch. We were invited down to my parents' place for tea. I could have had lunchtime off and gone across for lunch, but Jack only visited his parents rarely. He lived in Castlemaine and they lived in Bendigo, before we got married. He rarely saw them then and I never ever refused to go down there and I never refused having them in my house or anything like that.

ERNIE They never came to see us. They always give our cousins birthday presents and that. They never do it to us.

MOSHE What was your relationship to both of them before you got married, Jack?

JACK Oh. I didn't see much of them because they were living in Bendigo and I was still living up in Castlemaine. I didn't see much of them.

MOSHE What about when you were growing up as a kid?

JACK Oh, well, they didn't worry that much about me... Dad drank a fair bit, and they were always arguing and fighting, you know.

MOSHE Does your father still drink too much?

JACK Oh no, not like he used to.

MOSHE (*gesturing towards Donna's writing on the blackboard*) Did he used to be violent, from time to time?

(*Donna giggles nervously.*)

JACK Did he used to be? Yes.

MOSHE (*again exchanging glances with Donna*) And your mother used to call, 'help'?

JACK Yes.

MOSHE (*smiling*) How did you know that, Donna?

DONNA (*quite defensively*) I didn't know. I just played on the board, just for something to do.

MOSHE I thought it was a piece of magic. (*Explaining to Jack, who does not understand the by-play between Moshe and Donna.*) I was having a bit of a private joke — because Donna wrote in big letters there on the blackboard. You couldn't see it, but I could. 'Violence' and 'Help'. It may be, Donna, that you are a very sensitive person and you know what's going on.

DONNA (*indignant*) Look, I don't know anything, except what they tell me.

ERNIE Yeah.

MOSHE (*quietly*) OK. Sometimes people know things without knowing it. They sense it.

DONNA (*softening*) Yeah.

MOSHE I think you are a girl who senses. That is a good quality.

DONNA Well, Mum tells me more than what Dad has ever told me.

*

Donna is uneasy about her private conversation with her mother. At first she responds to Moshe's inquiry as if she is being accused of something. She is embarrassed at Jack knowing what she has found out from her mother behind his back. Perhaps there is a tacit understanding between Donna and Lorraine that their discussions are secret. Both parents have been more open in their discussions about Jack's childhood with Donna than with each other. In some ways Donna has been a substitute partner for both parents in whom they can confide in an intimate and private way.

*

MOSHE Yes, I have an idea though that Dad hasn't told you a lot because I guess he wanted to protect you.

DONNA I don't know what from. We never see them anyway.

ERNIE We never see who?

DONNA His parents, Ernie.

ERNIE We never see them either, we don't go up and see them.

DONNA So, they don't come up and see us.

MOSHE I'll talk to you about that in a minute, because I have some ideas about that I want to discuss with you. Jack, tell me if you don't want to talk about it, but do you remember what it was like for you when you saw your father having a go at your mother?

JACK Do I remember what it was like? Yes, bloody frightening, terrible, I can tell you.

MOSHE And that used to happen a lot?

JACK Yes.

MOSHE What. Every night?

(*Lorraine looks at Jack and he returns the look.*)

JACK Oh, perhaps not that often.

MOSHE How often would he come home… like that?

JACK Once a week, perhaps twice a week.

*

Jack spent his childhood years under the shadow of a violent, envious, alcoholic father. He resolved that at all costs he would not be like that himself. And he has succeeded in this remarkably. We have witnessed his self-discipline under extreme provocation from Donna in particular. For him, as Lorraine says, 'there is no such thing as blowing up'. For Jack, being a good husband and father consists of being home every night, not at the hotel; of not being violent and abusive; of not having his children wondering where the next meal is coming from; of not being envious and withholding with his children. Indeed he is generous to a fault. He finds it hard to say no to anything they want, even when he knows that Lorraine expects this of him. Yet Lorraine longs for him to be more lively and spontaneous. Ironically, Ernie seems to be more at risk of behaving like his grandfather than his father. His tantrums are legendary, although they mostly occur in Jack's absence. We have seen one example of his rage when he did not get what he wanted. His violence, at least towards Donna, has caused concern. Perhaps Ernie is using his father as a model of what not to be like, just as Jack has done with his own father before him.

*

MOSHE Have you ever been able to talk to your brothers or sisters about that? (*The family sits motionless.*) You know about the times when your father used to come home…

JACK No.

MOSHE None of you ever talked to each other about it?

JACK No.

MOSHE Have you ever thought of why your brothers and sisters don't talk to each other about that period? (*Pause.*)

JACK (*deep in thought*) No, I don't know.

MOSHE Because it is interesting… something… it must be very frightening to a kid to see Dad coming home and really having a go at Mum. And in a way you would think that you would talk to them, and say, 'You know, they were awful times, weren't they? Why would Dad go on like that? Why did Mum put up with it?'

JACK I don't know, on account of us, I suppose.

MOSHE Yeah. In what way?

JACK She tried to do whatever she could for us all the time, you know.

MOSHE What sort of things, Jack?

JACK Oh, I don't know. They were struggling all the time. Feeding us and clothing us and that sort of thing.

MOSHE They were pretty hard times?

JACK Yes.

MOSHE And what? Your father was resenting the fact that your mother was giving you things. Spending time with you?

JACK I suppose that would be right, yes. We used to go out and catch rabbits and sell them, and the money went to buy our clothes and what have you.

*

Jack is prepared to accept the suggestion that his father was jealous of his mother's generosity. But he responds to the idea as if it has never occurred to him before. He is not one to reflect much on the details of another person's private experience. He is used to dealing with more tangible details. He remembers his childhood as 'hard times' more because of the need to catch rabbits to pay for his clothes than because

of the way people felt. When Lorraine looks to him for understanding and support in her inner struggle with illness and forced retirement, she looks to him for something he is not used to thinking about.

*

MOSHE Mmmm. So they were pretty hard times really?

JACK Mmmm.

MOSHE And in your family, who were you closest to?

JACK (*pause*) Oh, I don't think anyone really.

MOSHE You were pretty much of a loner during that period.

JACK (*stubbing out his cigarette*) Mmmm.

MOSHE And so at what age did you leave home?

JACK My parents left Castlemaine when I was fifteen. They shifted down to Bendigo. I stopped in Castlemaine.

MOSHE I see. Where were you working?

JACK In a firm in Castlemaine.

MOSHE What sort of firm was it?

JACK Motor repairs, in the trucking industry.

MOSHE And you stayed in Castlemaine until you were what age?

JACK Twenty-four.

MOSHE And where were you living when you were fifteen in Castlemaine, when your parents went to Bendigo?

JACK I was boarding with... um... I was boarding with the brother for a while, but the place was a bit small... a couple of other people later on.

MOSHE What was that like for you then?

JACK Oh... I didn't worry much about it. I minded me own business and kept out of trouble and...

MOSHE You worked in the same trucking firm until the age of twenty-four?

JACK Mmmm.

*

There was discussion in the first interview of Donna leaving home at fifteen to live in a boarding school. Jack could see no problem with the idea. Perhaps his own background influences his thinking about how and when his children should leave home. Separating from his parents

at fifteen is something he takes for granted. It did not cause him any particular worry. In fact his parents' move to Bendigo released him from a tense and distressing domestic scene and may have been a welcome relief. For Donna to seek a release from domestic strife by taking a similar course may seem quite natural to him.

*

MOSHE And then what?
JACK Well, I shifted down to Bendigo, then.
MOSHE By yourself still?
JACK Mmmm.
MOSHE What did you do then?
LORRAINE That's when we got married.
JACK That's when we got married.
MOSHE You met in Castlemaine?
JACK and LORRAINE (*in unison*) No, we met in Bendigo.
MOSHE But why did you go to Bendigo then, at twenty-four?
JACK I was going down to Bendigo every second weekend, or once a month or something like that, you know.
MOSHE To see people?
JACK Down home… see Lorraine, that sort of thing.
MOSHE So you knew her by then?
JACK We'd met about twelve months before.
MOSHE So at twenty-four, twenty-five, you met Lorraine and then you used to go to Bendigo from time to time courting. And so you shifted to Bendigo and you got married and what did you start working as?
JACK I was a motor mechanic, at Bendigo.
MOSHE Right. Working for somebody?
JACK Mmmm.

*

Jack is responsive when Moshe talks to him about the factual details of his life. The facts are of course emotionally significant, but Jack is content to leave that implicit. Lorraine has trouble talking with him, partly because she prefers these things explicit.

*

MOSHE And at one stage you started your own business?

JACK Yes, four years ago.

MOSHE Just four years ago, you started your own business. And prior to that, the whole time, you were working for somebody else? (*Jack nods.*)

LORRAINE He worked himself up from just a labouring job, to leading hand, foreman. He is a self-taught estimator. He taught himself estimating in the office of the other place. And in the other place where he was working, he got the first Public Works job that they ever got in the time that they had been working. They went out, leased a factory, when he started off on his own, another one and himself. They had eight men. Half the building was leased and they leased a couple of rooms for the office and within four years, they bought the building, the whole of it. They built new offices and, one of the first works they got, after they went out for contracts, he got Public Works. And to get into Public Works, you've got to be good. And he was the first one who ever cracked Public Works. And yet he left school in Form Two!

MOSHE Do you know what I think?

LORRAINE A self-made man!

MOSHE And you have a very proud wife there. She is very proud of you. She is very proud of you. She may have very good reasons, too. You obviously started well behind scratch. (*Lorraine smiles.*)

JACK Pardon?

MOSHE You started behind scratch? Is that the term?

JACK Mmmm.

LORRAINE Educationwise, everything.

MOSHE Jack, when was the last time you saw your parents?

JACK Oh, perhaps a month ago, was it? (*Lorraine wipes her eyes.*)

MOSHE What were the circumstances?

JACK It was only Dad actually, down the street, I think. We only spoke to him for a couple of moments, I think.

MOSHE When was the last time that you went to their place?

JACK I don't know.

MOSHE Years?

JACK Yes.

MOSHE When was the last time they went to your place?

JACK The same.

LORRAINE No, Jack, they came when I was sick. I told you, they both came, when I came back from Melbourne.

JACK Oh, yeah. It was about twelve months.

MOSHE When was the last time they both showed any interest in Ernie and Donna?

LORRAINE (*wiping her eyes again*) Never!

MOSHE Never! Really?

LORRAINE They always... when I had Donna... Donna came along very unexpectedly. I wasn't supposed to be pregnant.

MOSHE She is fast, isn't she?
(*Donna giggles.*)
She always takes you by surprise.

LORRAINE (*smiling*) Yes, she was very special. And then I can never remember my mother-in-law nursing any of my children or having a nurse of my sister-in-law's children. When Ernie was born they never came near him, they never came to see him at all and yet they only had one grandson, other than Ernie.

ERNIE Who was that?

LORRAINE It was Roger, at the time.

ERNIE Oh.

MOSHE They are missing out on a lot, aren't they?

LORRAINE Well they lived down the road at the time and when Donna was little I would take the pram down to visit them. But as soon as she started crying, we had to go home.

MOSHE Ah. Ha. Let me check with Donna and Ernie. When was the last time that you saw your grandmother?

DONNA Can't remember!

MOSHE If you bumped into her in the street, would you recognise her?

DONNA Oh, yes.

MOSHE Mmmm. Did you ever talk to her?

DONNA No, I just say hello and that's it.

MOSHE What do you think she is like as far as you are concerned.

DONNA I don't know. I don't know her. I can't say.

MOSHE And your grandpa?

DONNA I don't know, I don't know him.

MOSHE What about you, Ernie?

ERNIE I don't know. I've seen them sometimes at my cousin's house.

MOSHE What do you think they are like?

ERNIE I don't really know my grandfather. I know my grandmother.

MOSHE In what way do you know her?

ERNIE I don't know. She just talks to me and that.

MOSHE Is she interested in you sometimes?

ERNIE I don't know.

MOSHE I see. Let me check with you, Jack, and with Lorraine. If Donna and Ernie came to their grandparents one day and said, 'We came in because we wanted to see you, we wanted to say hello to you', how would they react?

JACK (*long silence*) Oh, I think they would make a fuss of them.

MOSHE Yes? If, for example, if Ernie plays football. What would happen if Donna and Ernie went up to them and said, 'Ernie is playing this match tomorrow, we'd love you to come and watch'. They'd be pleased; they'd come?

ERNIE Yeah, they would come.

JACK Well, I don't know if they would go or not. I think they'd be interested, yes.

ERNIE Yeah, when Roger and I used to play on the same team, he always used to ask us how we went and that.

MOSHE Roger is your cousin?

ERNIE Yeah, anyway, they always ask us how we went and that.

MOSHE Who asks you?

ERNIE Pop.

MOSHE Yeah? So he's a bit interested in you. (*Turning to Lorraine.*) What's your assessment, if the kids initiate something?

LORRAINE I think they would do little things like that, talk to them and things like that, though they never have. It's been a very awkward situation. When Jack's mother was in hospital having an eye operation, I went over to see her. I had to nag Jack, literally nag him to go. It is not my place to nag him to go and see his mother.

MOSHE So why did you?

LORRAINE Well, they're still his parents. It is the same when he says that it was always my way for ten years. Before we had the children, we had the house and Jack's relations, Jack's brothers, they came and stayed there. They always stayed there on weekends and things like that. His sister, Rhonda, I got to know better than Jack knew her, and I brought Jack and Rhonda together. Jack and Rhonda didn't know one another. Rhonda had left, left home, she was fifteen, she was kicked out at fifteen. She lived in Bendigo at the same time as Jack's mother and father did. And I found out a lot from Rhonda. Rhonda has told me a lot that Jack had never told me.

MOSHE She's the youngest?

LORRAINE She's the second youngest in the family.

MOSHE (*to the children*) Do you know Rhonda?

DONNA Yes. They just live around the corner from us.

MOSHE Is she Roger's mother?

ERNIE Yeah.

LORRAINE Yes, we mix with them a lot.

MOSHE (*to Jack*) And how do you get on with Rhonda?

JACK Good.

LORRAINE Very good.

MOSHE And how do you get on with Roger?

JACK Good. Mmmmm. Very good.

MOSHE In your opinion, Ernie, is your father a good uncle to Roger, or not?

ERNIE (*giggling*) Oh, yeah.

LORRAINE When Rhonda and George want to go away for the weekend, we take the children and they come and stay with us. And if one of ours is not round there the other one is. If Rhonda's sick, she sends for me. And if the children are sick she brings them round to see whether or not she should take them to the doctor. Roger is four months older than Ernie. Rhonda and I spent a lot of time knitting and getting things ready for both the babies. Roger stayed with us when Sarah was born. The children always go to birthday parties together. Rhonda and George always... we would always meet for Christmas. We always have a drink for Christmas, and for our birthdays.

MOSHE What do you as a family do for Christmas?

DONNA (*laughing*) Eat dinner!

MOSHE Just the four of you, or...

LORRAINE My father comes. My mother is dead now. My father generally comes for Christmas. My mother died at Christmas six years ago. (*Her voice is breaking.*) So my father comes for Christmas.

MOSHE And you are still grieving.

LORRAINE (*trying to suppress her tears*) No! (*Moshe smiles at her and gestures. Lorraine smiles back through her tears. They each know that she really is trying not to cry.*)

DONNA Can I say something? (*Moshe holds up his hand to delay her.*) Can I say something?

*

The question about how the family spends Christmas together reminds Lorraine about the death of her mother on Christmas day six years ago. At first she denies the tears in her eyes. One of the children can be relied on to create a diversion when Lorraine is distressed. This time Donna leaps into action and is not easily restrained. Lorraine does not cry or acknowledge her grief until Moshe forestalls the interruption.

*

MOSHE (*to Donna*) Hang on for a minute. Hang on for a minute. (*To Lorraine*) It might help you if you cry.

LORRAINE (crying as she talks) Mum was good with us. And she was good to Jack. She was very, very good to him. And I can't say he hasn't been good to Dad since Mum died. He's been excellent. He always goes down to see if he's all right and does all those sort of things, more so than any of my brothers do. He's been very good. (*She wipes her eyes.*)

MOSHE (*tentative, searching for words*) Is that what makes you cry when you think about your mother?

LORRAINE No. I just think that it is a terrible thing that Jack's parents live in the town. We never see them. That my children have never known them as grandparents. (*She wipes her tears.*) We went away just after my mother died. Ernie was very small and Donna was very small. They remember her, they used to spend a lot of time down there and we were coming back from Portland at the time. I just had my appendix out. (*She blows her nose.*) We'd just been to Portland for the weekend. We were sitting in the front of the car and the children were in the back. And Donna... I think it was Donna... I can't remember who... but someone said, 'Isn't it a pity it wasn't Daddy's mother that died, instead of Granny? It's not fair, is it?' What do you say?

*

Lorraine is very distressed. She begins to talk about the present, but then jumps back to six years earlier as if it were yesterday. Time has not healed her grief. When her mother died, she had been married to Jack for fifteen years. Jack has complained that after they were married, her primary loyalty remained to her parents and he and his family took a back seat in her affections. In the anecdote about the conversation in the car with the children, we catch a glimpse of Donna as a little girl already speaking Lorraine's thoughts for her. Lorraine has come to rely on Donna for this, so that when she recalls that painful Christmas of six years ago, she remembers not what she felt but what Donna said. She does not call to mind that she was resentful that Jack's parents lived

on when her mother did not. She recalls only that Donna had this thought in her mind. After her mother's death, Lorraine did not or could not turn to Jack for comfort. Her conviction that Jack cannot or will not talk may have been already strong by then. But what she recalls when she thinks about that painful time, is not her conversations with Jack, but with the children. Lorraine did not find her mother-in-law approachable and could not turn to her for support. Mrs Black senior lives on, just around the corner yet always out of reach, a bitter reminder of what Lorraine has lost. The family she has married into, including Jack, is a disappointment to her. They so lack the qualities she relied upon in her mother.

When Lorraine says that Jack needs to talk about his past, she is saying many things at once. One is that Jack is deeply influenced to this day by the past, to the degree that any display of feeling alarms him, so that he is very lifeless and constricted, and very disappointing to her as a husband. But at the same time she is revealing that she, too, is haunted by the past, and in particular by the injustice of it all — that her mother should die, while Jack's parents live on hale and hearty. She also alerts us to the truth that she cannot talk about the past. This is partly because the rest of the family cannot tolerate it.

*

MOSHE What can you say?

LORRAINE You can't say anything.

MOSHE That's one of the things that we may want to talk about. Of course, it's a bit unfortunate that there are grandparents in town and Donna and Ernie can't...

ERNIE (*interrupting*) Dad can't tell them to come and see us, and that.

*

After Donna's interruption is restrained, Ernie steps in and tries a different approach to distracting Lorraine. He scolds her, interpreting her words as a rebuke to his father. The children work in tandem to protect Lorraine from her distress. She is not comforted or her grief acknowledged, but rather the undertow pulls her into the old familiar bickering. We have seen this sequence a number of times now.

Perhaps the children, too, avoid any experience of sadness at losing their grandmother.

They all would prefer to argue than to cry. At the same time Ernie is alert to any hint that his major ally is under attack. He seems to see Moshe's comment as a rebuke to Jack, that his parents are so distant. Again it is taken for granted that if Jack is under censure, he cannot deal with it and needs an advocate. Lorraine's convictions about the damaging effects of Jack's 'poor childhood background' have certainly gained a foothold in Ernie's thinking. The familiar style of discourse threatens to intrude, with blaming and the denial of blame taking precedence over everything else.

*

MOSHE Sure he can't... But maybe we could look at other ways of doing it. For example, I was wondering if... who has the next birthday?

DONNA I have.

MOSHE When?

DONNA November.

MOSHE November. What would happen if you were to organise a birthday party and the two of you went and invited your grandparents to come.

ERNIE They'd come.

DONNA I don't have a birthday party. I just have a friend up for tea.

MOSHE What would happen if you organised a birthday party?

ERNIE They'd come.

DONNA Oh... I don't know.

MOSHE You think that you are too old for parties?

DONNA Yeah.

MOSHE Because...

DONNA (*interrupting*) I don't like it anyway. It's my birthday party. I don't see why we should have to get families together on my birthday party. If they want to do it, they can do it on their own birthdays, not on mine.

MOSHE That's fair enough, if you don't want them to be there. Why should you have people you don't want? If on the

other hand you do want them, it would be different. It's just an idea that I wanted to throw in for you to think about. Birthday is just an occasion for…

DONNA (*decisively*) I don't see why me and Ernie should come here any more because it's really Dad and Mum that need it, it's not me and Ernie that need it any more.

*

Donna abruptly changes the subject, and not just out of rudeness. She is unwilling to have her birthday appropriated and used for her parents' benefit. That is, of course, not Moshe's intention. Donna and Ernie may have a lot to gain from seeing more of their grandparents. But Donna is set on the constructive course of staying out of her parents' difficulties at all cost. Moshe has encouraged her in this ambition.

Donna indicated earlier in this interview that she and her brother are much better off now and that in her view, the remaining problems are between her parents. She goes further now saying not only that they are better off but that she and Ernie have no need of any further therapy.

It is interesting to reflect on why Donna is more outspoken at this moment. Of course she realises that the interview is near its end. But also it seems that she interprets Moshe's suggestion about her birthday party as threatening to involve her in a further task as therapist. She has just extricated herself, with Moshe's help, from the role of marriage guidance counsellor. She is wary about taking upon herself the role of helping Jack sort out his problems with his parents. Perhaps she is no longer willing to take responsibility for the older generation. It does not occur to her that Moshe's suggestion about the birthday party could also benefit her by leading to a new friendship with her grandparents.

Donna has appropriated the results of some of the earlier discussions. She has laid hold of the idea that it is not in her best interests to be embroiled in her parents' disputes and is making resolute and single-minded use of it. She may foresee that any plan like this could be side-tracked by the bitterness between the adults. At the same time, in suggesting that she and Ernie absent themselves from further sessions, she is leaving Moshe and her parents with nowhere to direct their attention other than the marriage.

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MOSHE All right. Things are going all right for you, Donna, are they?

DONNA Yeah. And Ernie.

MOSHE If I can take care of your parents, you'll be happy?

DONNA I don't know if you can... Mum said to me that she was going to just call it quits.

MOSHE Lorraine?

LORRAINE I can't see much future in Jack and my relationship.

*

Earlier in the interview Moshe put to the family that all of the relationships in the family have improved with the outstanding exception of that between Jack and Lorraine. He asked both the parents to comment and they agreed with his assessment. Donna is now offering the same assessment. No one in the family raises doubts about her appraisal. Lorraine takes it for granted that what remains to discuss is her future with Jack.

Donna may still leave home in the near future to live in a boarding school. The proposal remains but not the bitterness and intimidation. Donna is now on friendly terms with her father and there is no remnant of her threat to cut him out of her life for ever. At the same time Donna and Lorraine have begun to question Donna's place as custodian or caretaker of the marriage, which is the role that she has in their private discussions.

The picture is now more complete. We can see that her mother's death left a vacuum in Lorraine's life which Donna has come to fill. She has been a friend and confidante for Lorraine, quite apart from any problems in the marriage. Lorraine and Donna are beginning to negotiate a change in their relationship, but they treat this as a private matter and not one to involve Moshe with. Such a change is inevitable if Donna is to leave home and go to a boarding school.

One clear implication of the discussion at this moment readily escapes attention. This has to do with Ernie. Lorraine spoke of him several weeks earlier as 'hyperactive', spiteful, aggressive, greedy, selfish and very difficult to manage. Although Ernie has never stayed in the spotlight for very long, these ideas about him have faded away into the

background. Lorraine now only speaks of Ernie with amusement and fondness. She enjoyed his company on their day out on the town. His supposed long-standing and deeply ingrained character defects have not been alluded to and are not in evidence. This must mean that Ernie's violence towards Donna has disappeared. No one questions Donna's opinion that Ernie has no further need of professional help.

*

DONNA It is no good going on with it how it is!

ERNIE (*to Lorraine*) Yeah, Mum, but before you did, didn't you?

LORRAINE But I said I would try.

ERNIE (*whining*) Yeah, Dad has too, hasn't he? We've all tried. But you just don't see that. Like there's Dad and me and Donna, and you've tried. So…

DONNA It is not us involved, Ernie. It is just Mum and Dad by themselves, not us. The other way everybody has tried and it is working out. (*meaning the other relationships in the family*) But it is not us. It is just them two that isn't working out.

*

Donna is negotiating with Moshe the terms and conditions under which she can hand over her duties as custodian of the marriage. She briefly confers with Moshe, over her parents' heads, about the difficulties of the case. The immediate effect of her imminent withdrawal is that Ernie tries to take up the mantle displaying his limited skills as a counsellor. He is firmly and promptly discouraged by Donna.

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MOSHE (*to Jack*) What do you think of Donna's suggestion, that maybe we would leave the two of them out for a while, and I just meet with the two of you?… What do you think, Jack?

JACK Yes.

MOSHE Lorraine?

LORRAINE (*her arms folded, her face set*) I don't think we'll get anywhere! (*Looks defiantly at Jack.*)

MOSHE (*softly*) You may be right. But then again the record to date suggests to me that you are not yet justified in your pessimism. There have been some very, very, very dramatic changes.

DONNA But that's between like me and Ernie, and me and Mum, and me and Dad, and Ernie and Dad, and Ernie and Mum, but not between Mum and Dad.

*

Donna steps into the fray again on her mother's behalf, quoting Moshe back to him. Her words are almost a repetition of Moshe's account of the changes earlier in the session. Of the six twosomes in the family, five are more harmonious. Donna is satisfied with that.

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MOSHE OK, but these changes could not have occurred unless there has been some improvement in the general feeling and atmosphere. It would have been impossible for you to get on with Dad if Mum was sending barbed messages through you; poison arrows to Dad through you.

DONNA (*not comprehending*) Ummm. In what circumstances?

LORRAINE (*explaining for Moshe, but putting her own construction on the comment*) Well, if you ever say anything about your father, I always try to point out to you that your father didn't have your opportunities or my opportunities. Haven't I?

DONNA Yeah.

LORRAINE What if I turned around and said that your father was a no-hoper? That's a barbed message. I run your father down behind his back.

DONNA Wouldn't worry me. It's not me that's being talked about. (*Ernie stands up and moves away from the circle.*)

LORRAINE Yeah, but after a while, the barbed message gets in, doesn't it?

MOSHE You see, Donna, what you told me when you first came here is that you were the messenger girl, you were sent with messages from Mum to Dad.

DONNA Yeah.

MOSHE I guess they must have stopped that.

DONNA Yes, they have.

(*Ernie moves back to the blackboard in the corner.*)

MOSHE OK. So that's a big thing in my book. I sometimes work with a family for months, for years, just to have that stop. You have done it overnight. It is a very big thing. So I'm not ready to give you up as a bad job. So if you want to give them up as a bad job, I guess... you are a big girl.

DONNA (*laughing*) She tries to do that all the time, but she can't. So she'll never make her mind up.

MOSHE (*gesturing to Lorraine and Jack*) So how would it be... can we just leave it that... if we leave it that next time just the two of you come down?

LORRAINE Yeah, I'll come down. (*She sounds resigned.*)

MOSHE Jack?

JACK (*nodding*) Yes.

(*Ernie comes back and sits down.*)

MOSHE You have to expect that it will bring the temperature up at home, because this involves feelings that are deeply felt. I can see it. (*Ernie stands behind his father's chair with his hand on the chair.*) So you can expect that the temperature will go up. So don't get too frightened, Ernie, if you see the temperature going up.

ERNIE Eh, what? Between Mum and Dad?

MOSHE Yes. It might be difficult because they might have to come and talk to me about things that may be difficult. But you just keep having your fights with your sister. I'll look after your parents.

LORRAINE (*to Moshe*) Do you feel that it would be a good idea for Donna to go to boarding school for the last term? It would save her several hours of travelling each day.

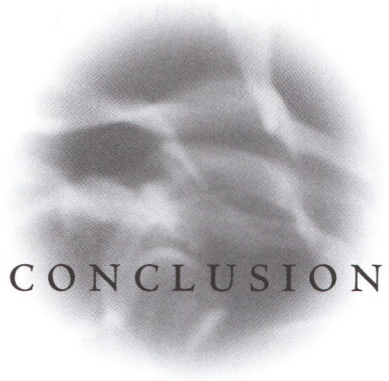
MOSHE I think that's a separate issue, that's a minor issue.

LORRAINE Yeah.

MOSHE The major issue is that Donna's life is now pretty much on course, I think.

LORRAINE At the school, the headmaster said that we were to talk to you about it first. He wanted the family to come down. He didn't want her in and out of school all the time.

MOSHE I see, but unfortunately we have run out of time and we have to stop. So I suggest you discuss it between yourselves and see if you can work it out. If there are any problems we can talk about it next time. But I really think you could work it out together.



# CONCLUSION

The first three sessions centred on the present. Now that the initial crisis has lost its heat, everyone is more relaxed. There is time to explore how they have come to be where they are with each other which makes many aspects of their current way of life intelligible to us for the first time.

Jack begins to come alive in this session. We can see him in three dimensions. Lorraine is right that the past holds a clue to Jack's enormous self-discipline and restraint. What once seemed incomprehensible and stubborn about him we can see as the result of an iron resolve to avoid being like his father — a resolve that in Lorraine's view costs him dearly in spontaneity and enjoyment of life.

Unwittingly Lorraine leads us also to realise that memories of her own past are very painful, and that she cannot talk about this. When she tries, the children artfully lead her away, and back into the old familiar round of blame and counter-blame. She is very lonely. Her parents-in-law, although they live in the same town, might as well be on the other side of the world. She still misses her own mother acutely. For a while she was occupied with her career. But this is behind her now. Donna

must often have been her only consolation. And all the while Jack seems oblivious of her distress. He does not begin to do for her what her mother did. So she cannot stop herself from railing against him.

Meanwhile Donna is still considering leaving home. Many separate motives come together in this one proposal. It means escaping from the misery of discussions with her mother about 'that impossible man'. It means taking an active step rather than ruminating about what is worrying her. It means growing up and moving out into the world. It means setting an example for her mother of how to be active and decisive and how to avoid centring her life so much on Jack.

Donna as an adolescent is not angry with Jack. He has not been a bad father to her. She has enjoyed his company on many occasions, the most memorable in recent days being her trip to the football with him. It is only as a failed marriage guidance counsellor that she rages at him. His passivity and insensitivity as a husband have defeated and frustrated her beyond words.

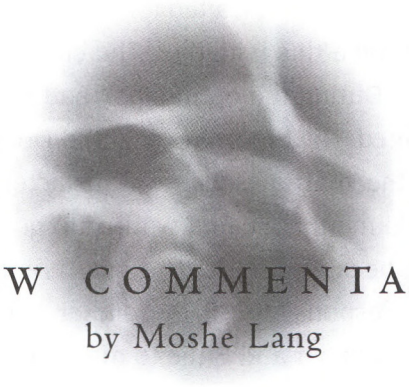
At times Donna sounds confused. It seems to distract her when she hears Lorraine reporting to others what her daughter has said. Several times she tries to push her mother into speaking for herself, but in the end she reports to Moshe what Lorraine thinks. She is caught in an arrangement whereby each of them is representing the other more than themselves. But by the end of the session she seems to have disentangled herself (at least for the moment) from any role in life other than teenage girl ready to get out in the world. As daughter and nothing but daughter, she can be relaxed and cheerful with Jack.

And Ernie is no longer being criticised for his violence or his uncontrolled temper. He has had to endure Donna and Jack going to the football without him. He has been ignominiously left behind by his parents when they went out to tea (almost unheard of before). His consolation is that he wheedled another new bike out of his indulgent father. He still has some power to override the plans of the adults in his world. But there are some signs that he has more self-control.

Towards the end of the session, Donna declares herself in no further need of therapy. She is set on enacting her separation from her parents' affairs, rather than continuing to talk about it. And no one questions the wisdom of her proposal. Her depression is no longer evident, and

the risk of another suicide attempt is not even worth discussing. Also Donna is telling Moshe about her mother's complaints and in so doing signals her resignation from the role of her mother's confidante. She is leaving her mother to Moshe (and to Jack).

So nothing remains to distract attention from the marriage. And curiously, Jack, who we are told did not want to come to the first session and 'won't talk' no matter what you do to him, agrees without a murmur to the further expense in money and time involved in another session without the children.



# NEW COMMENTARY

by Moshe Lang

Isn't hindsight a wonderful thing! On reviewing the fourth session it is obvious that I made my life and the life of the family much more difficult. If only I had simply listened to everyone in the first session and secured their agreement to come again, I would not have had to work so hard.

In the second session they outlined their desire to have family dinner together, uninterrupted, and set limits on the children. I should have explored that further and encouraged them to implement their plans.

In the third session I should have discussed and congratulated the whole family on how successful they had been in carrying out those strategies. I should have probed and praised the parents for how well they had worked together as a team and left them with the task of continuing their parental teamwork and enjoying some activity with the child of the opposite sex.

If all this had happened, the fourth session would have been so much simpler and easier for us all. We could simply have established how the family meals were going, how well the parents were cooperating, and whether the activity with the child of the opposite sex had been easy and fun. Then we could have talked about the merits of Donna going to boarding school, suggested that there were marital issues that should be discussed

and arranged for Lorraine and Jack to come without the children for further sessions. Instead, by introducing the idea of the parents going out or away in the first session, pushing it hard in the next and raising it briefly in the third, as well as noting that they had failed to do it, I had created a confusing situation for this fourth session.

Both the family and the therapist now had a lot to celebrate, but also much of concern. Lorraine's and Jack's dinner outing was unsatisfactory, particularly for Lorraine. She had waited for Jack to ask her and organise the dinner and he did not take this initiative. The children had made it difficult by protesting about it. During the outing Jack had not been communicative the way Lorraine wanted. Next morning she told Donna that the dinner had been a failure, that the marriage was unsatisfactory and that it couldn't continue. Lorraine told me that Donna wanted to go to boarding school but thought she couldn't because she had to stay home to help preserve the marriage. Donna felt responsible for the dinner being a disaster, perhaps partly because I had urged her and Ernie to make sure it happened. Lorraine may also have felt she had to report the results of the outing to Donna because I had involved the children in this way.

I also wonder how much the failure of the parents' dinner contributed to the deterioration in their ability to cooperate, as evidenced in the bike incident.

The only redeeming feature of my mistake was that the outing took place while Donna was in regular contact with me. Thus she could dob in her mother and hand the reins over to me as the custodian of the marriage. While the children were still involved in therapy, Lorraine could tell me about her alarm at realising how responsible Donna felt for her parents' marriage. The extent of my mistake is revealed by my words, 'I am happy at least I got my own way.' Since I had made the recommendation while Donna and Ernie were present, I failed to explore why the outing had been so painful for Lorraine and Jack, because to do so would have exposed the children to details of their parents' relationship — the very thing we wanted to avoid.

The Black family is a clear example of how families come to therapy because they feel they have failed and are demoralised. They suffer from a diminished capacity to recognise their strengths, positive abilities and achievements. So it is necessary for the therapist to be a memory bank and an observation post of their successes. Lorraine was despondent because of the bike episode and the failure of the dinner evening and felt that it might

not be worthwhile to go on. For her, the impressive changes the family had already made over a short time had evaporated. The problem was not just to achieve changes, but also to recognise and hold on to the changes when the going got tough, and to give all members of the family credit.

By challenging Lorraine's view of reality, I came closer to Jack's view. Perhaps until then the attention I had paid to the marriage was more in response to Lorraine's wishes than Jack's. My tacit agreement with Jack hopefully made me seem more even-handed. It is of paramount importance for the therapist to ensure that positive changes are not overlooked — as I have learned from studying this interview.

In retrospect, I believe Peter and I were harsh in our judgment of Lorraine's complaint that, 'The children have never seen us fight... There's no such thing as blowing up' (pp. 173–174). Millions of people may long never to fight, but most fail. Because Jack's need to avoid fighting was so extreme, there was no conflict resolution. Thus Lorraine felt resentful and lonely and the children never had the opportunity to see their parents fight, survive it and perhaps even make up. Lorraine's depression may have been partly to do with the taboo on fighting that Jack imposed. This made it impossible for her to express her anger towards him directly, leaving her no choice but to turn it against herself.

This interview can be divided into two parts. Firstly, the family recounted what had happened since the last meeting. Lorraine then started discussing Jack's background, which led to an exploration of the extended family.

Lorraine believed that it was essential to discuss Jack's family-of-origin issues — something she had tried and failed to do many times. The discussion failed again in this session and I was caught in the crossfire, as Donna used to be. Jack believed that it was all in the past and should remain so. He resented what he saw as Lorraine's continual harping on his background.

I described their conflicting views and wishes in the hope that making the conflict overt would lead to a resolution acceptable to both. This failed. I tentatively approached Jack and asked if he would mind talking to me about his background. We proceeded to do so. I hoped that, if I approached him with a different attitude, it might make him feel differently about revisiting his past and the discussion would perhaps be more productive than when done under duress. Reviewing the tape, I remain uncertain about how Jack experienced this. Did he feel I was siding with Lorraine and putting

him under pressure to talk? Or was he relieved to have the opportunity of discussing his background with an interested and open-minded person? I now believe he felt ambivalent, but probably more positive than negative. The episode also revealed that Lorraine's claim that Jack never talked was too black and white. Clearly he had told his children something about his background, apparently with some pleasure. I think, on the whole, he appreciated the opportunity to tell me that some of the difficulties with his parents were of Lorraine's doing. This revealed another reason why it was harder for Lorraine than for me to get Jack to talk about his background.

Perhaps Jack was reluctant to talk because he felt there was no point in discussing the past, but he may also have felt that it would be damaging to his children, or that it would make them more antagonistic towards his parents. In retrospect, I should have clarified his reluctance with him. Today I would make some comments about his discomfort and wait for his response. If necessary I would say that I would be interested to hear about his background and that it might prove useful for him to talk about it. Nevertheless, I would tell him that I wouldn't inquire unless it was acceptable to him. Nowadays I would only be happy to push Jack if I made it clear that I was helping him to overcome a difficulty rather than coercing him.

Instead, I pressed ahead and asked him to talk, indirectly communicating that I thought it appropriate and probably helpful for the children to hear it. Perhaps Jack went along with me for the children's sake — since it was happening in therapy and I was the expert, he felt it must be OK. In the process he discovered that his children knew more about his background than he had realised, that this had been helpful for them and that they were obviously keen to know more.

Both Donna and Ernie had suffered the consequences of their parents' painful backgrounds. They had grown up in a family where there were tensions and conflict, with parents who were unable to resolve their difficulties. They had also suffered social consequences because of the rift in the extended families. Though they lived in the same town as Jack's parents, they had very little contact with them. All this occurred without the children having the benefit of knowing what had caused this situation. I was telling Jack and Lorraine indirectly that it would help the children to hear a more detailed account of their parents' backgrounds, because this would enable them to understand both their parents and the family situation better.

Once they knew the circumstances of Jack's upbringing, for example, the children would realise what Jack had achieved, not just as a successful businessman, but more importantly as a family man. He was a much more caring and concerned father and a better husband than his own father had been. In spite of his lack of education and the poor example of parenting his father had provided, he had still found a way to be successful and a 'good-enough', highly motivated father. I should have commented to the family about all this.

The fourth session was a crossroad in the therapy. There seemed to be agreement that the children 'didn't need it any more'. One option was to end therapy; another was for the parents to have marital therapy. A third option was explored: that all four continue to meet to talk about family-of-origin issues and ways of improving the relationship with the extended family. I tentatively tried to explore this by making some suggestions, such as that Ernie could ask his grandparents to watch him play football or Donna could invite them to her birthday. The family wasn't interested in this idea, however, and opted for marital therapy.

Jack believed that you should not dwell on the past and you should keep your feelings to yourself, since 'actions speak louder than words'. This attitude had been entrenched since his childhood, when he had felt alone in a violent and unpredictable family. These core beliefs of Jack's were contrary to the basic assumptions of psychotherapy and family therapy, and they go a long way towards explaining our difficulties in working together. They also made our successful cooperation more significant.

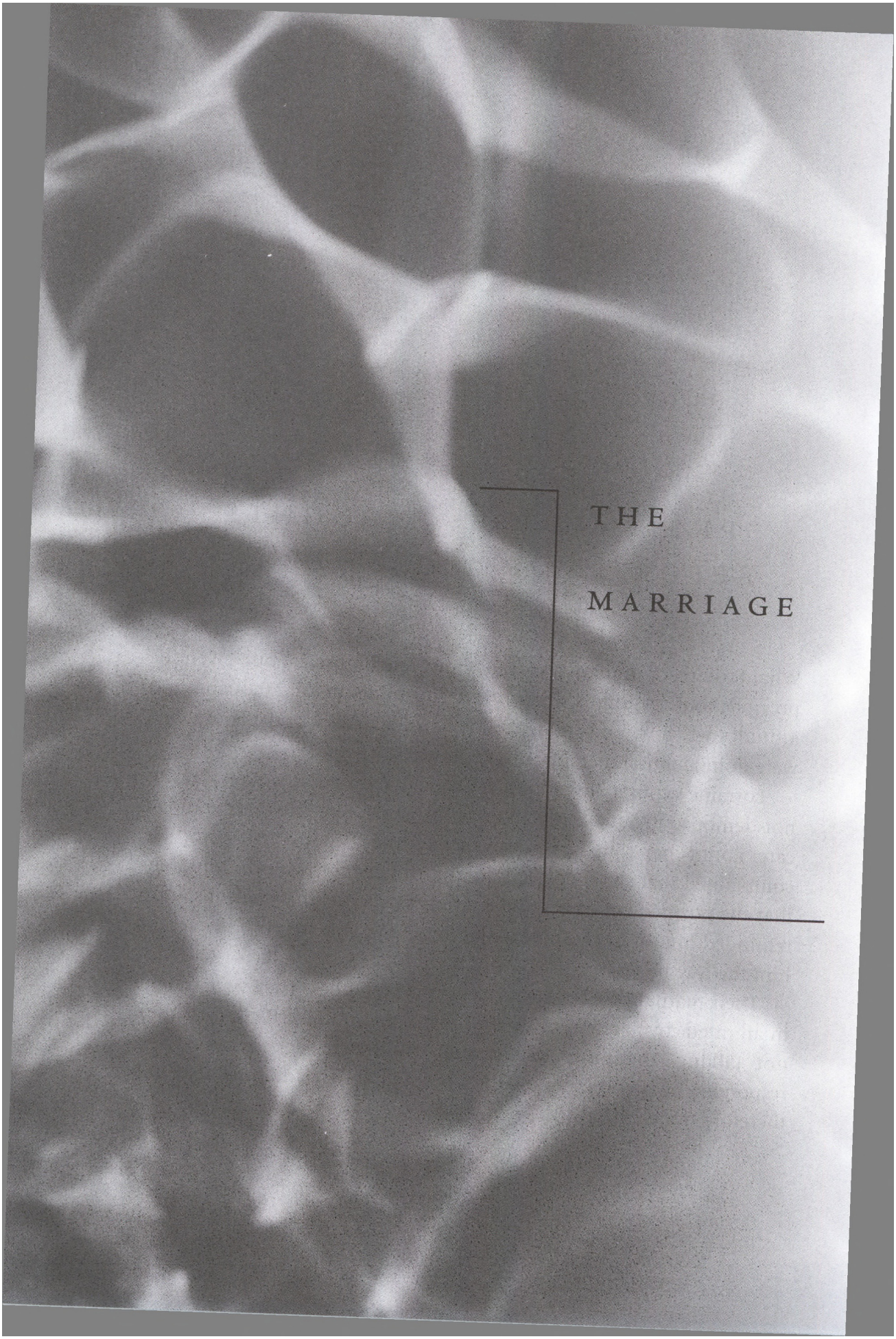
Finally, while I was engaged in conversation with Jack about his background, Donna wrote on the blackboard in big letters: 'VIOLENCE' and 'HELP' (p. 183). I tried to talk to her about what she had done, asking how she knew those words were descriptive of Jack's background. She responded by saying, 'I didn't. I was just writing words' (p. 176).

I saw it differently from Donna. I thought those two words were rich, subtle and multi-layered in their meanings. All the various themes of therapy came together at this point. In the first place, Donna had let me know, without acknowledging it, that she knew about Jack's background. At the same time she let her father know that Lorraine had told her about it. In so doing, she provided another example of her mother putting pressure on her, not only by sharing her marital distress but also by telling her about the

conflict and violence in Jack's family of origin. Donna was also telling Lorraine that she, Donna, could not be trusted any more. She was dobbing her mother in by revealing to me and her father that Lorraine had confided the sorts of things that Jack didn't want his daughter to know. In so doing, she was implementing something I had recommended to her in the first session: resigning from her go-between position. She was letting it be known that she could no longer be relied upon to keep secrets. She was unburdening herself and assigning the role of marital arbiter to me. At the same time she was appointing me as the person who was going to deal with Jack's childhood difficulties. She was also hinting that her attempted suicide had another meaning. If, until then, we had thought of it as a two-generational phenomenon — that is, that Donna was suffering the consequences of her parents' marital conflict, she was now showing us that it could also be understood as three-generational. Donna's problems were the result of a social process that had developed over three generations. This needed to be recognised, in terms of both understanding and resolving the family's difficulties. She was burdened not only by her parents' conflict, but also by knowing what had happened to her father and not being allowed to show him that she knew. The family-of-origin background of both mother and father contributed significantly to their marital difficulties, their parental styles and the general family culture. All of this impacted greatly on Donna and contributed to her attempted suicide. Writing 'VIOLENT' and 'HELP' was her way of telling me that she was the custodian of family secrets, of resigning as go-between and handing the problem over to me.

When Donna took some tablets on the bus on the way to school, she was telling us she was determined to make her problems, and those of her family, public. She was saying, 'Even if it kills me, I am not prepared to go on.' When she told me at the end of the first session that she was still very angry and upset, I said, 'I guess if that is how you feel, I have heard very little of all the thoughts and feelings about the things that have happened. You told me just a fraction' (p. 41). Her writing of 'violent' and 'help' made some things clearer. When she told her father that she did not want to see him any more, she may have been angry with him, not only for what he had done to her, but also for remaining silent when his father was violent towards his mother. She may have resented him for being too passive in accepting Ernie's bullying of the family. In a sense that made her a caring daughter, not a

rejecting one. In all probability she shared her father's anger and distress about his passivity and silence — indeed, what else could he have done as a child observing his father's violence? Perhaps it was not only her family's problems that she wanted to make public but also her grandmother's distress and her father's as a child observing violence. She may also have been burdened by the conflict between her grandparents and the effect that conflict had on her father and herself. Her loyalty to her family ran very deep, and over three generations.


THE
MARRIAGE



# PRELIMINARY THOUGHTS BEFORE MARITAL THERAPY

by Moshe Lang

What took place in marital therapy must remain private but, given the previous four sessions, I think it is useful to discuss the thoughts and attitudes which would influence my work with Jack and Lorraine if I were doing marital therapy with them today.

Lorraine's complaints about Jack were that he wouldn't talk and was not demonstrative with his affection or anger. She felt that he didn't care about her. She was also deeply hurt by his criticism. He complained that she didn't kid around or have fun with the children; that she pursued her career at the family's expense; that she constantly reminded him of his humble beginnings; and that she couldn't accept him the way he was.

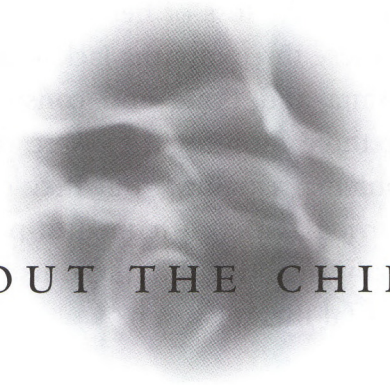
Their marital problems were very common ones. They were caught in an interactive pattern in which the more Lorraine criticised Jack for not talking, the more sullen and withdrawn Jack became. She responded by becoming more disappointed, lonely and frustrated and therefore more critical.

This pattern, sometimes referred to as 'circular causality', had significant practical implications. If Lorraine had understood that her solution to the problem was the problem, that would have provided an immediate road map of how to change. The difficulty for Lorraine was Jack's silence. Her solution was to tell him to talk more and as a result he withdrew. There is nothing wrong with what she wanted, of course, but the way she went about it was self-defeating.

In the fourth session, Lorraine complained that Jack had failed to organise their dinner outing. She had waited in vain for him to take the initiative. This was an example of how she habitually held Jack responsible for her happiness. She needed to take responsibility for it herself. Jack, in turn, may have needed to change, as well as accepting the change in Lorraine as appropriate and positive, rather than as a threat to him and the marriage. He saw her career as a problem in the family's life, rather than as a significant contribution. In the fourth session, Jack also complained that they always visited Lorraine's family and never his. The possibility of visiting separately appears not to have occurred to either of them. In marital therapy, we could explore how much separateness they would like in the marriage and what to preserve as shared.

These patterns of behaviour may also be understood partially as a result of Jack's and Lorraine's upbringing. The fourth interview provided information about their backgrounds, and today I would continue to explore how their families of origin had influenced the way they were as individuals, their expectations of the marriage and their parenting. Jack and Lorraine were aware of how they were different, but it would probably have helped them to become more aware of how similar their experiences of the marriage were. Both felt lonely, unappreciated, criticised and resentful. They both saw their differences as a major source of their difficulties. For their life to improve, they would have needed to accept their differences and even recognise the potential benefits that could be derived from them. Jack would have been better off if he had seen Lorraine as a friend who was keen for him to become more feeling and communicative. Lorraine would have benefited by welcoming Jack's requests that she complain less and be more appreciative of him and of their life together.

From time to time I would check with Lorraine and Jack on how the children were and would continue to help them maintain parental unity. In principle I would have liked to be open-minded about whether they separated or stayed together, even though in practice the words and the music of the last four sessions suggested that their commitment to the marriage was profound.

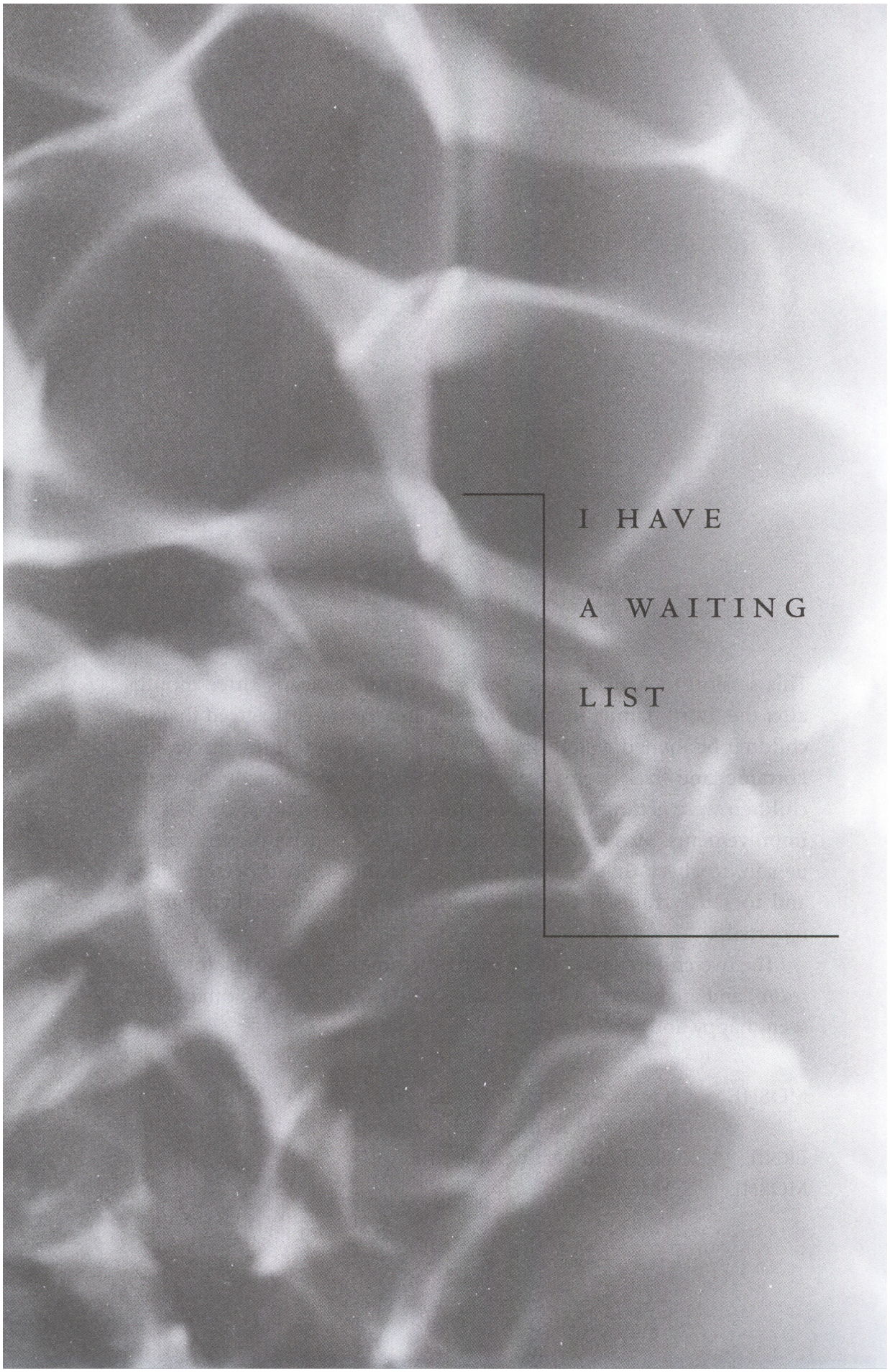


# WITHOUT THE CHILDREN

After the fourth family meeting, Moshe met with Lorraine and Jack six times over a three months period. These sessions were not videotaped. Moshe felt that the intimacy of marital life is such that videotaping might be too intrusive. What happened in those six sessions is not the subject of this book, but we want to offer the reader a few comments to make what follows more comprehensible. Jack and Lorraine wanted to see why their marriage had got into trouble. They wondered how their own parents' marriages and their own family life had influenced them and their relationship to each other and the children. They both sought ways to improve their relationship.

Jack remained committed to therapy and contributed more and more of his thoughts and feelings. They both recognised that Jack's reticence was not just his preferred way of being, but was due to his upbringing and to his being a man of action. It was also in part a response to his wife's criticism, just as Lorraine's frustration was partly due to Jack's withholding and distance. They were caught in a vicious cycle. They were delighted to discover that 'entrenched personality features' can change. Most reassuring to them both was the mutual

commitment they made to continue to talk to each other on ways to improve their relationship. As some of their expectations were realised they understood that some of what they wanted from each other, they could not have. No matter how much Jack promised to try to talk and show his feelings, he would never be as Lorraine hoped. And Lorraine could never learn to 'kid and joke' about things the way Jack liked to do. They both realised that Lorraine's feeling of emptiness after the death of her mother and the loss of her career could not be filled by Jack alone. During these three months Jack and Lorraine kept Moshe informed about Donna and Ernie and consulted him on how to manage them. After three months, they were ready to stop therapy. They knew that problems remained. But they chose to continue the struggle of being married, without frequent trips to Melbourne to see their professional therapist and without recourse to Donna, their long-standing resident marital therapist.


I HAVE
A WAITING
LIST



# SESSION 5

This session took place on a Thursday morning nearly three months after the fourth family meeting. Moshe and the parents agreed that the children be invited to join in at least the early part of the discussion. Lorraine and Jack were keen for Moshe to see directly how the children were getting on, because they were proud and pleased at the improvements. Moshe was interested to follow up with the children in person, to check that their expectations of therapy had been fulfilled and to satisfy himself that they were doing as well as their parents reported.

The two children have raced each other up the stairs to the interview room, and are boisterously discussing who got there first. Both parents seem happy and relaxed.

*

MOSHE I want to start. (*To Donna*) First we will establish, you are the fastest in the family, are you?

ERNIE No, I can beat her any time.

MOSHE Yes? You can?

ERNIE Yes.

DONNA (*laughing*) No, you can't.

MOSHE Well, we'll just leave that between the two of you and we won't involve your parents. Now having done that, I now want to tell you the true reason why I wanted you to come. (*Teasing*) That is, did you pay me the two dollars that you owe me?

DONNA No. (*laughing heartily*) I haven't. I forgot all about it. I'll give it to Mum, how about that?

MOSHE So you admit that you owe me the money? Will I get it?

DONNA Yes. Next time they come to see you, I'll give it to Mum.

MOSHE Ernie, can I trust your sister? You reckon? Can I trust her? Will I get my money?

ERNIE I don't know.

MOSHE (*to Donna*) Do you remember what it was about?

DONNA Yeah. It was the footy.

MOSHE You went to that match?

DONNA Yeah.

MOSHE What one was it?

DONNA Carlton and who, Dad?

ERNIE North Melbourne.

JACK North Melbourne, yes.

DONNA North Melbourne won.

MOSHE I see, so it wasn't a very happy occasion for you.

DONNA No. Not for me anyway.

MOSHE Did you meet the players?

DONNA No. Girls are not allowed into their club rooms.

MOSHE I see. But at the time you thought that you would be able to?

DONNA Yeah.

JACK Yeah, but it was at the MCG though. They were not playing on their home ground.

DONNA Yeah, they usually play at Carlton.

MOSHE You can at Princes Park?

JACK Yeah.

MOSHE Another thing, (*to Ernie*) I wonder if we checked at the time, because I remember when I made the bet with you, you got upset as if you thought that you were missing out on something. So I then said, 'You do something with your Mum'. The question was whether you and Mum could have a good time together.
(*Donna giggles.*)
Do you remember?

ERNIE Yeah.

MOSHE Did you have a good time together?

ERNIE Yeah.

MOSHE What did you do?

ERNIE Oh, we stayed home and watched this funny movie. We went out to my aunty's. We went to the market.

MOSHE You had a very good time?

ERNIE Yeah.

MOSHE With your old mother?

ERNIE Yeah.

MOSHE Gee. I really wanted us to get together because I just wanted to know how things are. But if it's OK I would like to ask you some very specific questions. Is that OK?
(*Both the children nod.*)
First of all, did you have a hair cut?

DONNA Yeah. I had one on Saturday. I didn't like it the other way.

MOSHE And you decided yourself?

DONNA (*playfully*) Yeah.

MOSHE And you went and had a haircut?

DONNA Yeah.

MOSHE I think that new haircut suits you better.

DONNA Thanks. (*Laughs.*)

MOSHE (*to Lorraine*) Do you agree with that, Lorraine?

LORRAINE You ask her what I said when I saw her.

DONNA She reckons that it looks great. I'm the only one who doesn't like it.

MOSHE You don't?

DONNA No, I don't like it.

MOSHE At least you know it will grow again.
DONNA Mmmmmm.

*

Lorraine is dressed more brightly than before. She looks more relaxed and cheerful. Jack is all smiles. He seems to have lost weight. The couple are looking at each other and smiling, in contrast to the aloofness and hostility of three months earlier. Donna seems frivolous and giggly. She has her hair cut short and looks younger. She certainly is not the serious, precociously mature marriage counsellor any more. Ernie is happy and relaxed, but remains somewhat limited as a conversationalist.

*

MOSHE OK. Can we start? I would like to begin by asking you, Donna, how have things been for you since I saw you last?
DONNA Oh! OK.
MOSHE You've been at boarding school for a while?
DONNA Yeah.
MOSHE And you've been coming home every weekend?
DONNA Most weekends, yeah.

*

This is the first time Moshe has seen Donna since she went to boarding school. He has heard from the parents that, straight after the fourth session, a family conference on the boarding school proposal quickly led to agreement, and the arrangements were made immediately. For the family to reach a harmonious consensus so easily is another piece of evidence that conflict between Jack and Lorraine no longer intrudes into every conversation and interferes with decision-making.

Donna began at the new school after the spring vacation and has been there for two months. The boarding school is a half-way house on the way towards leaving home. For some families, the first child growing up and leaving home, particularly if it occurs by the tender age of fifteen, is a major crisis. Certainly Donna's adolescence has been a turbulent time for the Black family. But the crisis seems to be well and truly over now. The shock waves have subsided and all is calm.

According to Lorraine and Jack, Donna is happy with the new way of life, and particularly with the large number of friends she has made at school. Donna has taken this in her stride. She separated from her parents for the duration of the school week without anxiety. Presumably this means that she is now happy for her parents to be alone together without her and that she no longer worries about them harming each other or splitting up. It also means that she is confident that she will be welcome at home, now that she has left the parental nest.

Jack and Lorraine seem delighted with the arrangement in the family, and with the way Donna has coped with boarding school. Conspicuously absent is the kind of nit-picking criticism of the child, or complaint about inadequate supervision or lack of respect for elders, which in some families signals the strain that parents feel at their child growing up and moving away. Lorraine has no difficulty complimenting her daughter on her new hair-do.

The discussion is almost superficial. Donna shows no sign of wanting to seize the opportunity to resume therapy. She takes it for granted that she will not need to come to the next appointment, and is relying on her mother to pay her debts to Moshe. She is not forthcoming at all. She says in effect, 'I don't have anything much to say. I am happy to see you and I like laughing at your jokes, but I do not need professional help.' The absence of serious or worried discussion about the move to boarding school is noticeable.

*

MOSHE And when you came home, what was it like for you?
DONNA Oh... well, I don't know.
MOSHE Was it terrible? Was it like hell?
DONNA Well, I wouldn't say that.
MOSHE Was it good?
DONNA (*smiling*) Oh, yeah, sometimes.
MOSHE Do you come home by yourself? I understand you often bring your friends home with you?
DONNA (*nodding*) Yeah.
MOSHE And what do your friends say about being at your place?
DONNA (giggling) They like it. They think it's good fun.
MOSHE How come?

DONNA (*proudly*) I don't know, they just like it.

MOSHE They don't say to you afterwards 'I don't want to come with you because you have awful parents?'

DONNA No, most of them want to come back. I've got a waiting list. (*She laughs heartily.*)

*

The Black residence must seem like a friendly place to visit. Donna's new friends are voting with their feet on this question.

The early sessions contained only sparse references to people outside the household. Those people who were mentioned were usually brought to notice as a source of irritation or frustration. Now the family seems much more open to the outside world. Constant traffic in and out of the doors is the order of the day. And the outsiders bring excitement and stimulation rather than disappointment. The family has not just survived the crisis of Donna leaving home, but transcended it and there are unexpected benefits flowing to them all as a result. Even Ernie is better off. He now has a constant succession of young women through the house that he can refuse to speak to.

*

MOSHE So may I put it to you that your parents must be doing something good, if they all want to come back?

DONNA (*giggling*). Well, I suppose so, yes.

MOSHE They all like coming to your place? So there is a waiting list. Do you mean it, when you say you have a waiting list?

DONNA (*giggling*) Yes.

MOSHE Yeah. What are the comments they make about what they like?

DONNA I dunno, they just like it. I dunno.

MOSHE (*pointing to Ernie*) Including him.

DONNA No, they don't like him.
(*Even Jack laughs at this.*)

MOSHE I've heard he's a terror, isn't he? He bashes young women up. Does he bash your girlfriends?
(*Jack is amused and pleased.*)

DONNA No, because he's never home.

MOSHE I see. What do you do, Ernie, when you are not home on the weekend?

ERNIE Oh, I don't know… I'm out somewhere.

MOSHE Is that because you are scared of the young women?

ERNIE Nup.

(*Donna laughs heartily.*)

MOSHE So do you ever spend any time with your sister?

ERNIE Sometimes.

DONNA Not very much.

MOSHE And when you do get together over the weekend, do you fight?

ERNIE No. Not really.

DONNA Oh, you know.

MOSHE You have good times together?

ERNIE Oh… sometimes.

DONNA Sometimes, yeah.

MOSHE Like when was the last time you had a good time together?

DONNA and ERNIE (*together*) Don't know.

MOSHE (*to Lorraine, who is rolling her eyes in disbelief*) That's not true?

LORRAINE I thought it was shocking!

DONNA When?

LORRAINE For your birthday. Didn't you both go down the street and come back on the bus?

DONNA Yeah. But he wasn't hanging around with us. He goes with his own friends. I wouldn't be seen dead with him.

ERNIE And I wouldn't be seen dead with her.

MOSHE (*to Ernie*) What would your friends say if they saw you with your sister?

ERNIE They'd kill me.

MOSHE They'd kill you? They wouldn't make any comments?

ERNIE No. They'd just say hello and go on.

MOSHE (*to Donna*) What would your friends say if they saw you with him?

DONNA (*laughing*) They'd tell him to nick off.

ERNIE They always do.

MOSHE It sounds as if you are working it out. Have you had any pillow fights lately?

MOSHE No, only the one.

MOSHE Only the one. And you had a bean-bag fight?

ERNIE Lots.

MOSHE You've had lots of them?

DONNA Yeah.

MOSHE (*enthusiastically*) Really. That's good!

DONNA We can't have any more of those now. Because now I'm at boarding school.

MOSHE How come?

DONNA And at the moment our bean bags are all locked up while the house is being painted.

*

Donna and Ernie see less of each other now. But when they are together they are friends. Ernie's violence towards his sister seems to have evaporated. It would not be surprising if Ernie was envious of Donna's new and exciting life, and was making her weekends as uncomfortable for her as possible. This is not the case.

*

MOSHE OK. The other thing I wanted to check with you, first of all you, Donna, how do you feel you and Mum get on?

DONNA I dunno.

MOSHE (*after a long silence*) You need to think about it?

DONNA Oh, I suppose we get on all right.

MOSHE Have you any complaints about Mum?

DONNA No.

MOSHE Have you had any good times together lately?

DONNA I'm never home, I don't know.

MOSHE What's it like for you, Lorraine, when she comes home?

LORRAINE Well, she thinks I'm a taxi service. She's always got a list of things she wants to do and go backwards and forwards at the moment.

MOSHE Is it a pleasure for you or a terrible nuisance?

LORRAINE (*laughing*) No. I don't mind taking her. I took her to a Blue Light Disco with a friend and I went to the pictures while they were at the Blue Light. And then walked back round and caught a taxi back home. This was while Jack and Ernie had gone to a wedding. And we did have a good time, even if we did sit on the steps outside waiting for the taxi, didn't we?

*

The family has divided again along the old familiar sex lines. But this time Lorraine and Donna show no sign of feeling they are at a disadvantage because they are excluded from the more interesting or more important world of male activities. They report their own outing as entirely satisfactory. Likewise Ernie does not raise any protest at being excluded from what the females have done.

*

DONNA Yeah.

LORRAINE (*in a good-humoured but challenging tone*) You and your friend trying hard not to giggle and stop eyeing the boys off in the car sitting over the road.

MOSHE She was doing that?

DONNA (*giggling*) I was not. Leonie was. I wasn't.

MOSHE You were too?

DONNA (*with mock indignation*) I was not, Leonie was.

Lorraine (*laughing*) She tells me to stop it.

DONNA Yeah. Mum was looking at 'em, too.

MOSHE (*smiling*) Jack, I told you not to let Lorraine go out alone too often. She'll start going to the opera, then she'll go out to dinner and the next thing you know she'll start eyeing those young men.

Lorraine Oooh!!

DONNA (*laughing uncontrollably*) Nonsense, Mum doesn't like them.

MOSHE Look, you see, already she is blushing.

LORRAINE The young ones? I'd have to be kidding.

*

For a middle-aged married woman, with adolescent children, to go to the pictures alone at night, and to enjoy herself, must be quite unusual in a Victorian country town, even in the 1970s. Lorraine no longer acts like a bitter person whose life is empty. She does not seem depressed. Neither is she passive. She can find her own pleasures, rather than waiting for Jack (or someone else) to provide them for her. She seems like a woman with initiative, who is prepared to live by her own standards.

*

MOSHE OK. It sounds very much to me, Donna, that you are a young girl who is very excited about lots of things, and you were having a good time.

DONNA I suppose so.

MOSHE Tell me, how are things between you and Dad?

DONNA Oh, all right. I don't really see him that much.

MOSHE When you see him, what's it like?

DONNA Well, it's, hello, how are you? goodbye. See you tomorrow morning, or something. (*She is laughing happily.*)

LORRAINE (*smiling and imitating a gesture asking for money*) And what else?

DONNA Oh, yes, I ask him for money.

MOSHE So you have enough money to pay your bets?

DONNA Yeah, I do.

ERNIE Dad's mostly talking to his garden.

DONNA (*laughing*) Yeah, Dad talks to his garden.

MOSHE Really?

DONNA (*laughing*) Yeah.

MOSHE You're kidding?

DONNA (*laughing*) No!

MOSHE Really? Jack, what's it been like for you with Donna in the last few weeks?

JACK I think it's quite good.

MOSHE Yeah?

JACK Except for the running around and the money.

MOSHE Mmmmm.

JACK Yeah, I think it's good.

ERNIE (*interrupting*) You…

JACK A lot better.

ERNIE (*interrupting again*) You accept it.

MOSHE Do you think your father is a bit too soft with money? Does he spoil the two of you with too much?

DONNA (*laughing*) No.

ERNIE Oh! Sometimes, yeah, he does a bit.

DONNA Ernie, oh! shoosh. (*She is hamming it up.*) He won't give us any more now, shoosh. We've got hopes for this weekend and it's a long weekend, now be quiet.

ERNIE We got twenty dollars from him.

*

Not only are Jack and Donna on cheerful and friendly terms with each other, but also Lorraine draws attention to his generosity with money with pleasure and approval, rather than seeing it as evidence of spoiling or bad parenting. His giving to the children does not seem now to have any element of defiance or thwarting of Lorraine as happened before.

*

MOSHE All right. Donna, there's one other question I want to ask you. When I saw you first, I don't know if you would remember, but one thing that bothered you greatly was that you thought that you were the go-between for your parents. They sent their angry messages and critical messages through you.

DONNA Yeah. (*more serious now*)

MOSHE And you didn't like it much?

DONNA Mmmmm.

MOSHE Has this been happening or not at all?

DONNA No. You see, I'm never home.

MOSHE And when you are home?

DONNA No, it doesn't happen at all.

MOSHE You don't get any messages?

DONNA Oh! Mum told me though what makes her mad about Dad, but that's about all.

MOSHE Really? Like what?
DONNA Oh! I don't really know. I don't take much notice.
MOSHE So it doesn't bother you one way or the other?
DONNA No, not really.
MOSHE So it's not a problem for you at all any more.
DONNA No.

*

Donna cannot be bothered getting involved in discussion about what is wrong at home. She is having a good time and is determined to keep doing so. Three months earlier she saw the central problem in her life as 'everyone putting their pressures on me'. Now she does not pay much attention, even when her mother tries to involve her in the old way. She copes effortlessly with her mother's comments about what is wrong with Jack. Once these comments caused her a great deal of anguish and struggle. Now it seems that she cannot even recall the details of what it was that Lorraine said to her.

She is more concerned with her girlfriends than with her parents, although she clearly enjoys coming home and going out with her mother. She was worrying about the effect on Lorraine of her leaving to go to boarding school. This anxiety has disappeared. Presumably, as the weeks go by without any catastrophe, she is reassured that her parents can manage without her. She shows no sign of resenting the loss of her burdensome yet privileged position in the family.

*

MOSHE OK. That's good. (*To Lorraine*) What do you think about it?
LORRAINE Ernie's just doing his usual tricks, won't leave us alone.
MOSHE He's getting a bit restless, is he?
LORRAINE Mmmmm.
MOSHE It could be a bit boring for him — a chap like Ernie doesn't like talking. Talking is like doing nothing. So maybe I should talk to Ernie next and explain to him that if he is finding things a bit uninteresting or feeling a bit restless, that he should go and do some drawing or something.
ERNIE (*interrupting cheerfully*) Can I put the video on?

MOSHE Or look at the video. Ernie, first of all, how have things been for you since the last time I saw you?

ERNIE (*rubbing his hands together*) Oh! good!

MOSHE Yeah?

ERNIE Yeah.

MOSHE How are things between you and your mother?

ERNIE Oh, all right. Yeah, pretty good.

MOSHE No complaints at all?

ERNIE Oh! No. We're still happy.

MOSHE (*smiling*) You are one of the few mothers I've seen whose son has no complaints. You must be a remarkable mother. You might end up winning the Mother of the Year Award.

(*Lorraine interrupts with laughter.*)

Ernie, so you are happy with Mum? (*He nods.*) What things do you do with your mother?

ERNIE Oh! What's for tea, you know?

MOSHE Yeah?

ERNIE She let's you choose everything.

MOSHE Mmmmmm. Is she a good cook?

ERNIE Oh! not on the vegetables, everything else, but.

MOSHE What is she good on?

ERNIE Chips.

MOSHE So she's good on the chips. What else is she good on?

ERNIE I dunno… steak.

MOSHE She's good on the steak, yeah. What else?

ERNIE That's about all.

DONNA (*interrupting with laughter*) That's all Ernie likes.

ERNIE Oh! I get to eat baked beans.

LORRAINE (*interrupting*) Cakes and biscuits…

ERNIE Oh! Cakes, I don't mind them.

LORRAINE Oh! I know you don't.

MOSHE What's it like for you without your sister at home?

ERNIE I don't know. All right.

MOSHE Mmmm, OK. Tell me, what's it like between you and Dad?

ERNIE Good.

MOSHE Yeah?

ERNIE Mmmm, OK.

MOSHE The other thing, Ernie, I would like to ask you — remember when you came to see me there was a problem about whether you would have family dinner together. How's that working out?

ERNIE Oh! good.

MOSHE Yeah, so you had dinner together?

ERNIE Well, you can't really because we're all painting and so we usually have it in a hurry now.

MOSHE Ah! But before the painting started.

ERNIE Oh! Yeah it was all right, yeah.

MOSHE Yeah?

ERNIE Yeah, we usually have it at news time and want to listen and can't talk much.

MOSHE Is Dad still falling asleep all the time?

ERNIE No, not much.

MOSHE You keep him entertained?

ERNIE Yeah, a bit.

MOSHE All right. There was something else I wanted to ask you, but now I've forgotten. Yes, now I remember. When your parents have come to see me a few times without you, I hear that when they come back you ask them how they've been. I thought that I would now like to ask you and Donna, too, how do you think your parents have been?

ERNIE All right, yeah. Oh! all right, they never came back cross or nothing.

MOSHE They don't come back cross?

ERNIE No.

MOSHE Ahhh. So they come home sometimes sort of happy?

ERNIE Yeah.

MOSHE Do you feel that your parents have changed at all?

ERNIE Yeah.

MOSHE Do you mind telling me in what way?

ERNIE I don't know. They talk a bit and that, you know. And Mum lets you out, you know. She doesn't say, 'If you get

your homework done', or that. Sometimes she does, but not often. But when she doesn't do that, I still get it done.

DONNA It's all right when I come home.

MOSHE Yeah.

DONNA Yeah, but otherwise I wouldn't know.

MOSHE Yeah sure, but I'm asking you from what you have seen of your parents. From what you have seen it's good, is it?

DONNA It's OK, yeah.

MOSHE Yeah, Mum and Dad occasionally talk to each other?

DONNA Yeah.

MOSHE Yeah, they're friendly?

DONNA Yeah.

MOSHE Yeah. You noticed any other changes?

DONNA (*laughing*) No.

MOSHE Really?

DONNA I'm not home that much.

ERNIE (*interrupting*) When she is home we're always painting.

*

The children (Donna in particular) were once addicted marriage-watchers, but now they refuse to offer comment, even when directly invited.

*

MOSHE Can you notice any change in your mother?

DONNA (*giggling nervously*) Can't really say.

MOSHE Really. (*Gestures towards Lorraine.*) Have a look.

DONNA (*light-heartedly*) She's had her hair cut and she's had her hair dyed. Apart from that, nothing. (*To Lorraine in a stage whisper*) I dobbed you in, didn't I?

*

Donna is reluctant to return to the role of parent-watcher even for a moment. She contents herself with complimenting her mother on her hair, just as her mother complimented her a few minutes earlier.

*

MOSHE I want to tell you something, Donna, and I want to get your opinion on it.

DONNA Yeah.

MOSHE And also yours, Ernie. I think your parents have changed a great deal and things are much happier between them, I think. And I also think that, for example, your mother was very angry a lot of the time and may be very unhappy, and now, she's a much happier person. Much more relaxed and much happier. I want you to tell me, would you agree with that?

DONNA Yeah.

ERNIE Yeah.

MOSHE Would you agree with that? Or are you just being polite?

DONNA No.

MOSHE (*to Ernie*) Do you agree with that?

ERNIE Yeah, she's not as nasty. She doesn't say, 'No, you're not going to the shop'.

MOSHE You mean, she used to be a grump?

ERNIE Yeah, every time she would get in bad moods, now she just takes us down.

MOSHE So she's a much nicer and happier mum?

ERNIE Yeah.

*

Ernie is offering a different interpretation of events from the one Lorraine presented in the beginning. He understood his mother's restrictions on his freedom of movement as reflecting not on his character (his supposed hyperactivity, for example), but on her own unhappiness.

*

MOSHE OK. Is there anything else that the two of you would like to tell me?

ERNIE No, not really.

DONNA No.

MOSHE If not... (*it may be difficult for you to talk about this Donna and if you don't want to you don't need to*) when you originally came to see me as a family, it was when you took some tablets, wasn't it?

DONNA Mmmm.

MOSHE Do you remember now what it was that made you take the tablets? What is the way you think about it today? Do you remember?

DONNA Oh, no... Like Mum and Dad weren't talking and I was always getting blamed for things I wasn't doing, and just things like that.

MOSHE And these were the main things?

DONNA Yeah.

MOSHE Was there anything else that is worth mentioning?

DONNA No, not really.

MOSHE All right, then, from what you say, that is all very far behind you now.

DONNA Yeah.

*

Donna could conceivably have welcomed the chance to talk over the occasion when she took an overdose. She must have been frightened to realise that she could reach such a state of extreme distress. Some people might be fearful about the possibility of this state of mind recurring. Others might want to explore how to deal with feeling miserable in the future. But Donna is content to let it rest. She seems confident that she can rely on her own resources. She is happy to attribute the problems in the past to her environment rather than to herself. She does not seem to believe that any permanent damage was done to her by living through that troubled time.

Some parents are unable or unwilling to talk to a professional person at all, after their child has attempted suicide. Others can talk but only about what is wrong with the child. Jack and Lorraine (and Ernie) were willing from the outset to talk about what went wrong for all of them, and how each one of them may have contributed. None of the others wanted to dismiss the problem as due to Donna being sick, weak or bad. If the family believed Donna was abnormal, she would presumably be more susceptible to anxiety about this herself.

*

MOSHE I would like to talk to you all as a family about this. (*Ernie is now very attentive.*) When you came to see me things were really very bad, very, very, very bad. Or at least that is how it looked to me. And today, you look a very, very happy family. But there are still some problems left. It's not as if it's all gone. But there have been some remarkable changes. Where do the differences stand? How did they happen? (*To Ernie who is looking out the window now.*) Do you have any ideas, Ernie?

ERNIE Well, they're taking your advice.

MOSHE They are? Which advice, Ernie?

ERNIE I don't know.

MOSHE Advice on what?

ERNIE Oh! I dunno, advice on what you're saying.

MOSHE Do you remember any of the advice that I gave? (*After a long silence*) OK, fair enough. I think Ernie has had enough of this. Donna, have you got any ideas?

DONNA No.

MOSHE None at all?

ERNIE We have talks over the dinner table.

MOSHE So you have talks over the dinner table. Anything else?

DONNA (*laughing*) Oh, Ernie and I used to have play fights.

MOSHE Which was a good idea was it?

DONNA (*laughing*) Well, if you reckon.

MOSHE Is there anything else that you remember, Donna, that may have been useful?

DONNA No, not really. Not for me, anyway.

MOSHE So as far as you…

DONNA (*interrupting*) Yeah, but I wasn't really there when they did that.

MOSHE That's very good. I'm very impressed. Now is there anything else that either one of you particularly want to say?

DONNA No.

ERNIE No.

MOSHE Do you want to go and watch the video?

DONNA Yes.

MOSHE Or the other possibility of what you can do is — you can play pool. Do you ever play pool?

DONNA and ERNIE Yes.

MOSHE Well, maybe the two of you would like to go downstairs and play pool while I talk to Mum and Dad.

DONNA and ERNIE Yeah. (*They leave the room together.*)

MOSHE (*to Jack and Lorraine*) I was partly trying to get them to go and play pool so that we could talk without them. In fact, I'll go and see where they have gone because I don't want them to go next door. (*implying that they might listen in next door to the subsequent discussion*)

LORRAINE Well, they would have gone down to play pool.

MOSHE Yeah.

LORRAINE They won't go in next door. Not unless they were given permission.

MOSHE Yeah?

LORRAINE No, they would never do that.

MOSHE Wouldn't they?

LORRAINE No, they would never go in next door unless they were given permission to. You could guarantee it.

MOSHE All right, you know your children.

LORRAINE I've never known them to… they do mischievous things, but I mean they've never really been disobedient when they have been told to do something.

*

This is a remarkable statement from Lorraine. Ernie had a reputation for being uncontrollable and 'hyperactive' since early childhood. In the third session there were hints that Donna was defying her parents' attempts to supervise her social life. But here Lorraine says that both her children are reliable and trustworthy, and they have never been anything else.

*

JACK Maybe you might just have a look.

LORRAINE The pool table will win.

MOSHE Yeah, if I had a choice between the two I would go there, too. Do you know, I am very glad that I got you to bring Donna and Ernie because she is such a different girl. Have either of you noticed?

LORRAINE I have noticed. This is what we've said, a couple of times, both of us, about that look on her face; that terrible strain. Well, she's giggling now. She sits and giggles.

MOSHE She seems to me to be very energetic. And lively.

LORRAINE Mmmmm. She's just finished her exams today. She finished her exams this morning. She sat an exam yesterday instead of playing sport, so that she could come this afternoon.

MOSHE Mmmmm.

LORRAINE Jack went and picked her up at lunchtime. And there were four girls waiting for her upstairs. She has got a list of girls waiting to come home.

MOSHE Which then shows something else, doesn't it? It shows that she is a very popular girl.

JACK and LORRAINE Mmmmm.

MOSHE You are not popular unless you have good things to offer.

LORRAINE Girls who have come home with her want to come back again. Even with a pest like Ernie, but they're used to boys, too, and they tell him to get lost.

*

Sibling relations have taken a turn for the better. Is this because Ernie is no longer upset about the family disintegrating or his mother disappearing, and so he is not as aggravating to have around? Is it because Donna can follow her girlfriends' example and refuse to be bullied any more? Or is it that Ernie and Donna now find their parents more attentive? Maybe it is all three. Certainly, the relationship between the children seems to run parallel to that of the adults.

*

MOSHE She obviously isn't prepared to put up with any (excuse the expression) bullshit any more.

LORRAINE Yeah.

MOSHE Well, I think obviously she has come a long way and she is very proud of you two. Do you agree with that? (*Lorraine refers the question to Jack.*)

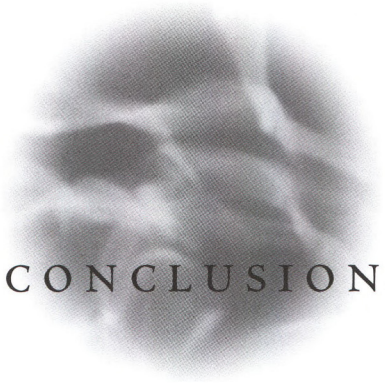
JACK Yeah.

LORRAINE I think she's back to where she wants to do gardening more. She says that is something that she likes, the garden. Jack's got a few vegetables in the garden and first thing in the morning he goes down and has a look at them. But Ernie started it. Ernie put the potatoes in. Jack does the looking after it and shows him what to do. But they're practically down counting them as they come up, to see how many missed and how many didn't. So it's become a bit of a joke that Dad talks to the garden, that's why they're growing so well. (*She looks mostly at Jack and occasionally glances at Moshe.*)

*

Lorraine once described Jack as a man who does not talk. Now he not only talks to his wife and children, he even talks to the potatoes. Not only does he talk to the potatoes, but his words are very potent in promoting their growth. It is amazing what a little therapy can do. Perhaps it is not just vegetables that are coming to life in the Black family.

The interview finished a few moments later and Moshe farewelled the two children, who were playing pool in another room. That was the last time the family came together to a session.

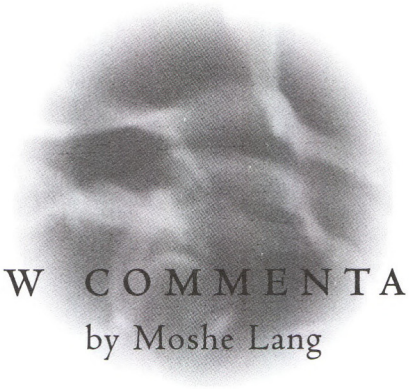


# CONCLUSION

Moshe has asked the children to describe the changes in their lives in the three months since he last saw them. He is double-checking that the contract he had with the family as a whole has been fulfilled. He believes that asking the children to enumerate the changes will help to consolidate these improvements. Further exploration of the means by which these changes came about is likely to enhance the resources of the family to manage similar difficulties in the future. He is interested to see if there are any difficulties, new or old, which the children would like to discuss.

The children, however, are in another world. They really did leave therapy behind three months before. They are stimulated enough by life in the present to feel that raking over the past is tedious and unnecessary. They are pleased to see Moshe again, but not as a therapist. They co-operate with the interview out of politeness, but their hearts are not in it. Their uninterest is the strongest evidence possible that therapy has been effective. The therapist's job is to make himself redundant; this has clearly been achieved.

While the two children are happy and relaxed, it is obvious too that Jack and Lorraine are working co-operatively as parents. They have accommodated Donna coming and going at weekends, bringing a string of girlfriends in tow, without any disharmony or ill-feeling. There is not one occasion in this long discussion with and about the children that marital business intrudes. Indeed Jack and Lorraine sit throughout the session with obvious pride in their children and content for Moshe to satisfy himself that all is well.



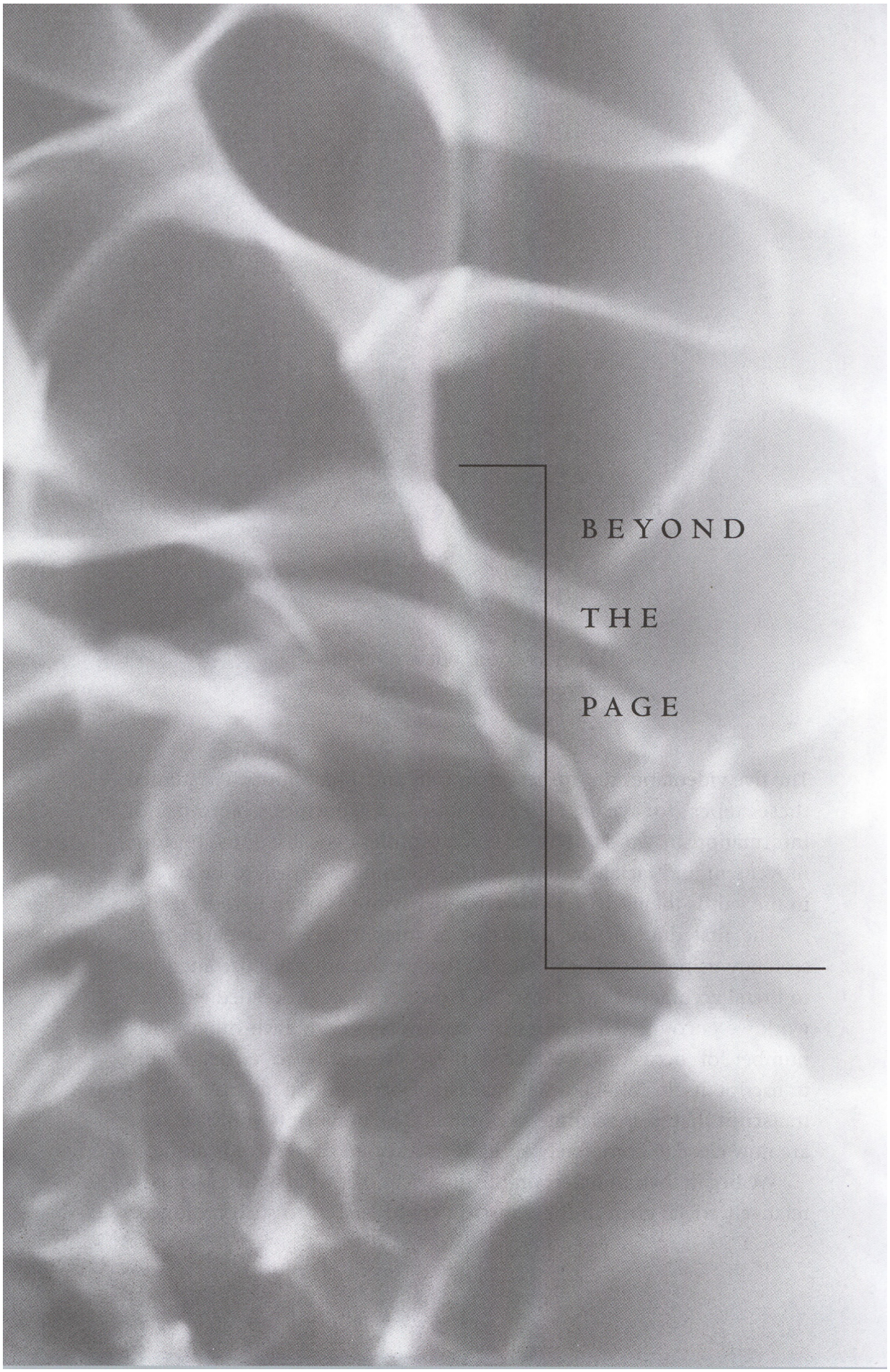
# NEW COMMENTARY

by Moshe Lang

The main reason for this session has been stated. There is little to add. I was trying to orchestrate a family celebration, a ritual in which the achievements of the last three months were detailed and credit was given to all. An exploration of those achievements may have deepened the family's understanding and stood them in good stead in any future crisis.

The mood of the session was joyous and celebratory. All five people seemed happy to be together and were enjoying each other's company. In terms of verbal output, Donna and Ernie made me work hard. They were not enthusiastic about my plan of acknowledging their achievements. They wanted it over and done with so they could go and play.

My gift from the Black family is that I can review the videotapes and learn from them. In the second session Lorraine told me how, when she turned to Jack in bed seeking warmth, affection and sex, he responded by saying, 'It's too cold'. The fact that she related this in front of her children always struck me as a painful loss of dignity and was more disturbing to me than the depression, loneliness and tension so evident in the first session. The pleasure, pride and dignity that permeated the final session, particularly Lorraine's, was a marked contrast. It is deeply satisfying to me now that I played a part in the restoration of this family's dignity and general well-being.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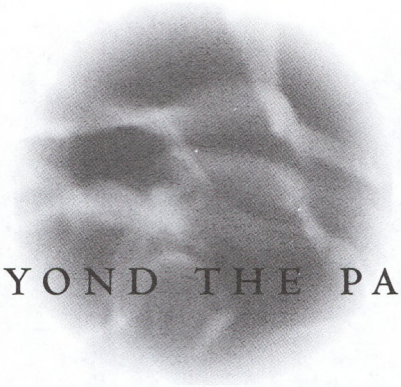


# BEYOND THE PAGE

Theory is good, but it does not
prevent things from existing.
*Charcot*

The five videotapes run for less than four and a half hours. We studied these tapes for years. They contain an enormous amount of information in words, tone of voice, wordless vocalisations, posture, movement and facial expression. The meaning is easiest to be sure of in the words themselves. Non-verbal behaviour is often hard to read.

The first draft of the transcript of interviews was prepared by a secretary using a word processor. At first we did not pay close attention to literal accuracy in the transcript. However as we proceeded with our work we encountered a series of controversies with each other. On a number of occasions we traced these eventually to errors in the transcript itself. We became increasingly committed to preparing a transcript that is as accurate as possible. The transcripts you have read are now close to completely accurate as a record of the words alone.

We began then to reflect on the discovery that what at first seemed a relatively trivial error in the transcript could lead us to such prolonged

disagreement. We came to appreciate that there is an extraordinary internal consistency in this material and that any apparently minor distortion creates a sense of incongruity or confusion. At first it seemed to us pedantic to worry about one word out of place. But as we continued we became more aware of how even a few words could alter the balance of a whole conversation.

For example, in the fourth interview, Moshe talks with Jack about his painful past. We found ourselves arguing at length about whether Jack had consented to this discussion. We debated the possibility that his privacy was being intruded upon, and that he was too nice (or too passive) to protest. The argument evaporated when we listened again to the videotape and discovered minor distortions in the transcript we were working on at the time. We are now satisfied that he was happy with this exploration, and quite prepared to actively co-operate, so long as the purpose was to understand (which was Moshe's interest) rather than to gather evidence of his supposed personality defects (which was his wife's pre-occupation at the time).

Even when we had an accurate record of the words, we were very aware that important meanings had escaped. So we turned our attention to noting what else we could hear in the sound track. The speech of the participants, when reduced to print, did not adequately convey the intensity of feeling or the fluctuation of mood in the room. Our description of what we can hear in the soundtrack, apart from the words themselves, is very scanty. The subtlety and fine balance of what is actually happening on the videotape seems to elude description. Or perhaps it is that our command of language or even language itself prevents us doing justice to the material. Despite our best efforts, the intensity of feeling, ranging from animosity and despair to moments of excitement and pleasure, seem pale and anaemic in the written record.

Quite apart from the auditory channel, we can see on the video screen constant changes of posture, facial expression and gesture and we rapidly despaired of capturing these in an adequate way. We have contented ourselves with sketching the outline of the more important changes in posture and other physical movements that can be seen on the video screen.

Of course what actually happened in the room was in one sense lost forever the moment it was over. The videotape, which allows us to revisit it years later, does not capture a total record of what actually occurred.

Historians have always faced this problem. No matter how rich and detailed the records available to them they can never attain total or certain knowledge of what happened in the past. But the record that we have of what occurred in the therapy with the Black family may be as good a record of past events as anyone has ever had to work with. This book would not have been possible without the video recorder and the word processor.

Interspersed with the transcript are a series of annotations. These were arrived at after extensive viewing and reviewing the tape and lengthy discussion about how to understand what we were seeing and hearing. These annotations represent the consensus we reached at the end of our discussions.

On some occasions we found that disagreements arose between us that resulted from a priori theoretical assumptions. Once again when we returned to a detailed study of the text itself we found that our uncertainty about what had taken place gradually subsided and we arrived at a 'joint communiqué' which reflected a genuine consensus which transcended the initial controversies about theoretical questions. In the end the theoretical questions themselves subsided into the background of our attention, to be replaced by an increasing fascination with the material of the transcript itself. The family, the internal consistency of its life and the way in which it was able to change while remaining true to its initial integrity occupied our thoughts more and more.

On many occasions we made an observation about the sequence of events in the therapy at a particular moment. Later we discovered another instance of the same pattern. We reached a point of being able to say, 'Ernie will speak next', even though Ernie had been silent for many minutes. We 'knew' that Ernie always talks at a moment like this. This kind of conviction became increasingly strong as repeated instances of it came to our notice.

The result was that, as we proceeded, we became more aware of 'the truth' about this family. This came to dominate our attention at the

expense of our previous fascination with various theoretical controversies about the nature of family therapy. We came to marvel at the way the clinical data itself is entirely adequate to settle most theoretical disputes between us. We began to wonder how much the theoretical preoccupations and controversies that have existed between us were entirely due to our previous neglect of the detail of the clinical data itself.

Having reached that point we became anxious about how the reader would approach the work. We were keen to comment in such a manner that our comments would not be simply incorporated into the existing thinking of the reader and used either to confirm or refute a pre-existing body of belief about what happens in therapy. We found ourselves striving to avoid language that resonated with the existing debates within the community or the existing controversies between various schools of thought. Sometimes we almost gave up hope of finding ways to express ourselves so that the reader would not be tempted to recast what we had said into more familiar language and thus lose the perspective we wanted to convey. The central theme in our thinking had become that of allowing the data to dictate to us rather than us to the data.

We did not believe we could study the data of the work with the Black family without any presuppositions or theoretical beliefs of our own. We did not claim that we had found, or that anyone else could find, a truly objective vantage point from which to view the material. However, we came to the view that the method which aims at identifying the presuppositions and theoretical prejudices which we held and which systematically attempted to lay these open to confirmation or refutation by the data itself, was much to be preferred.

The sceptical reader might say we simply spent so many hours conversing that we eventually colluded together to agree on 'the truth'. But, a major strength of this work is that we have made available to the reader the detailed raw data and we invite the reader to bring his or her own opinion to be tested against the data itself.

We believed that a serious defect in almost all of the literature about psychotherapy was that it largely relied on a very abbreviated and often highly selected account of the therapy couched in abstract or

theoretical language, which hid the immediate raw data. Within the family therapy literature, there are several publications which provide detailed accounts of therapy. Napier and Whitaker's (*1978*) work with one family is reported in *The Family Crucible.* Peggy Papp (*1977*) has published a book of case histories provided by various therapists. Haley and Hoffman (*1967*) have provided transcripts of parts of family interviews by five different therapists, interspersed with interviews with the therapists. And Lang and Lang (*1981*) published a complete transcript of a first interview, together with comments. But there had been no publication before *A Family in Therapy* which provided the complete raw verbal data of therapy over a number of sessions.

This provides an opportunity for study of themes in therapy as they change, while remaining the same. We can see the way the family struggles to resolve its problems, while remaining in many ways the same family. Even by the end of the first interview, certain sequences of interaction can be discerned, which seem characteristic of this family. These recur throughout the interviews, against a constantly changing background, always the same, and yet always taking on a unique quality against the new background. The family can be seen by the third interview in three dimensions. Yet they are still by then frozen in the present.

In the fourth session, a fresh perspective emerges as the family discusses the past in some detail. The historical depth available to the onlooker allows a remarkable four-dimensional view of this particular family at a critical moment in its evolution. This view is further enriched by the glimpse that is afforded us of the extended family, and hence of Jack and Lorraine as children of their parents, as well as parents of their children.

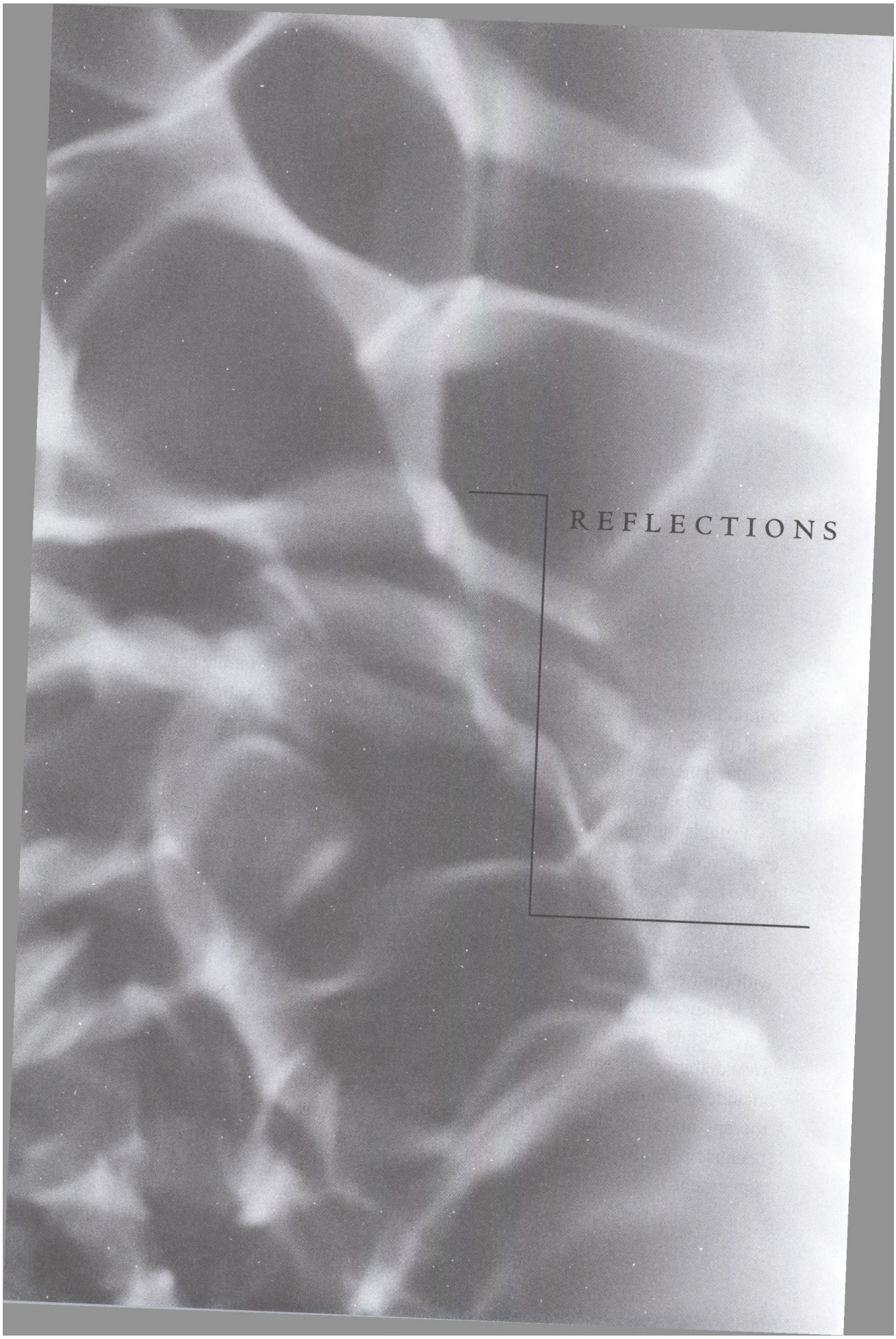
The reader is provided with a very detailed background against which to appreciate more fully how the family has changed, but also to see how it has not changed. At the end the family is different, but there is not a total disjunction between the old disorder and the new, more harmonious, arrangement.

We both had the curious experience of revisiting our work of years ago to discover that we were reasonably satisfied with the therapy itself but the way of explaining to ourselves how it took place was what we

wanted to alter. Some aspects of therapy seemed out of date, to be due to fad or fashion or flavour of the month. Other parts seemed timeless, as if they would always be appropriate. This book provided a record which could be revisited at any stage in the future. Perhaps in time it will become damning evidence of the inadequacies of therapy at a particular time in history.

We became increasingly wary of the complex technical language that is often used in discussions about therapy. We saw the use of particular language games as characteristic of particular modalities of therapy or particular theoretical frameworks. We recognised that the use of the appropriate language system was one of the badges of membership within a particular school of thought. We also believed that a technical language could, in the hands of certain writers, serve as much to conceal or confuse as to clarify.

We tried to write in plain English to make our work available to the ordinary reader, rather than restrict our audience to those who had time to master the language games of a closed and elite community. In so doing we hoped to promote serious debate in as wide an audience as possible.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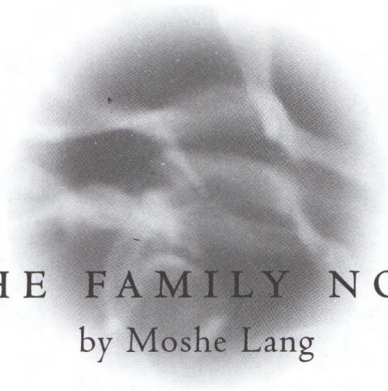


# THE FAMILY NOW

by Moshe Lang

I assume that the reader, like me, is curious to know how the family is now. Donna is now forty. Is she married? Does she have children? Is she different as a mother from her own? Is she burdened and conflicted, as she was on the day she meet Moshe? Has she retained the glitter in her eye and the bounce in her step that she had at the last family meeting?

Ernie is thirty-eight. What about Ernie? Do he and his son go to the footy every week to see St Kilda get beaten like I still do? Does his son now play in the back pocket like Ernie used to do? Has he joined his aging father in the family business?

What of Lorraine and Jack? Did they stay together? How did they cope with their children leaving home?

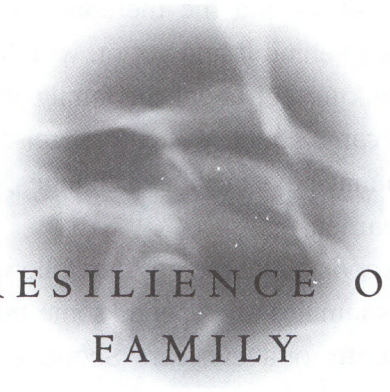
If they read *The Answer Within*, would they be pleased? Would they be hurt? Would they regret having given me permission to publish the book? Would they be pleased by this re-examination? It was very tempting to include a follow-up of the family, an account of their perspective on the therapy and their citique of the original book. But I resisted the temptation because a follow-up would be against both the letter and the spirit of our agreement.

The family saw me because life had become intolerable. In collaboration with me they discontinued therapy when their goals were achieved.

When they gave me permission to publish my work with them, the family agreed to the risk of compromising their privacy. That decision cannot be reversed but, when they made it, they accompanied it with the hope that their suffering would be of help to other people. My side of the bargain was to write their story as well as I could and to make it available to those others.

After therapy, the family and the therapist have different tasks. The family must put therapy behind it and get on with life. The therapist is left with the chance to think further about the family, its pattern of interacting and how its problems came about. You can appraise your relationship with them and the way you may have facilitated changes, the mistakes you made and the lessons you learned.

I wished to write a book about therapy, not follow-up research. Typically, a therapist encounters families and spends some time with them, whether it's six weeks, three months or a few years. Sooner or later they go their way and you go yours, and in most cases you do not see them again. If you do, it is trough their choosing, not yours. I wanted to write about what I know best — the life and thoughts of a therapist. What i wanted to share with the reader was my thirty-five years of professional experience and its effect on my thinking about the Black family's therapy long after the event. Had I included a follow-up, this would not have been a book about ordinary therapy.



# THE RESILIENCE OF THE FAMILY

Two years after *A Family in Therapy* was published, I was in Israel checking the Hebrew translation of the book (McCallum & Lang, 1991). To my surprise I realised that it was the first time I had ever been able to read the book properly. On all previous readings I had been too caught up in the parts to be able to get the overall feel and flow. I was unable to see the wood for the trees. Perhaps this was so because of the distance another language gave me. In any case, this experience highlighted a number of things for me.

First, the integrity of the book was revealed by the fact that, when translated, some very significant meanings in the transcript got lost. To give just one example, we chose to call the family 'Black' because their mood was 'black', Jack was a black-and-white man — there were no ifs or buts about him, Donna talked about blackmail being against the law and I talked to the family about their 'black humour'. Of course, when translated into Hebrew many of these words and expressions have no reference to black. The Hebrew equivalent to 'blackmail', for example, means something like 'squeeze'.

What impressed me was the transcript itself. Here was a very ordinary Australian family who found itself in extraordinary difficulties that led to the threat of a double suicide. Yet they had the language and resourcefulness to create an impressive story, with drama, richness and complexity.

This, of course, is not the only example of their resourcefulness — the fact that they had the answers to their own problems is the most striking expression of it. Jack's ability to overcome a harsh background; Lorraine's capacity to work through her depression; Donna's achievement in extricating herself from her complex, difficult position in the family and then making so many friends; and Ernie's ability to develop unique ways of diverting his family from their pain — these are all powerful examples.

My criticism of my own work can be summarised under two headings:

**1** Failing to identify and comment on the family's resilience from time to time.

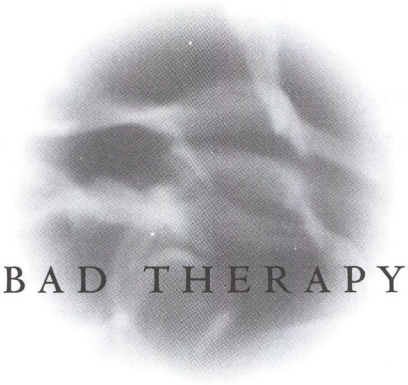
**2** Trying to push my own solutions when theirs were sufficient, if not better.

Some readers may think I am hard on myself, but I do not see it that way. Studying my work with the Black family has been a humbling experience. I was confronted with the reality of how limited an instrument is the mind — the capacity to hear and attend to all things is finite. No matter how hard you try, there is an untold amount of information that you simply cannot absorb.

Another striking example of the family's resilience was the way they dealt with my mistakes by establishing their own priorities and implementing changes in the their lives.

In 1996 I published a book with my wife Tesse, which we wished to call 'The Long Shadow'. The publishers prevailed on us to change the title to a more 'positive' one, so the book became *Resilience* (Lang and Lang, 1996). I was reluctant to use this title because I thought readers might think it referred to the resilience of the therapist rather than the people we wrote about, and to some extent this did happen. When presenting my work on *Resilience*, I often find that the audience asks about the resilience of the therapist. I have been manoeuvred into a position where I have become more and more engaged in reflecting on what it is that makes it possible for a therapist to continue year after year and still find the work challenging and satisfying. I believe that the answer lies in listening to the family as well as you can, paying attention to their own solutions, freely sharing with them

your thoughts, ideas and feelings about what they tell you, and leaving it to them to decide whether they wish to follow your advice. You need to join with the family and suspend your ideas and theories about what is going on. If you do that, you can rely on the family's energy and motivation to implement their own solutions. Doing this allows you to be more relaxed, so you can absorb the family's language and humour, be more self-sustaining and find the work more energising and satisfying.



# BAD THERAPY

For me the central mistake in my work with the Black family was recommending that Jack and Lorraine go out to dinner or away for a weekend in the first session, urging them to do so in the second and reminding them in the third. But is it possible that this mistake also had therapeutic effects?

Some years ago I published an article called 'Bad Therapy — a Training Technique' (Lang, 1982; see also Lang, 1980; Lang, 1984). In this technique the therapist, with a role-playing family, is instructed to do 'bad therapy' — to make the family worse. Usually the 'patients' and observers regard the 'bad therapy' as beneficial.

There seems to be general consensus among patients and observers that the therapist doing 'bad therapy':

- is in control of the therapy, but at the same time hands back responsibility for their own lives to the patients;
- communicates more directly and clearly;
- relates to the patient as if the latter is strong and capable rather than weak and ineffectual.

In return the patients report that they:

- experience an increase in strength and assertiveness;
- feel freer to express their feelings;
- feel more hopeful.

'Bad Therapy' doesn't occur only in role-play. I believe it happens daily, as a very important event in the work of most therapists. Unfortunately, its importance is often unrecognised. In meeting and discussing work with therapists, the most interesting experiences take place when I encourage them to tell me about the 'bad interventions' they have made that have worked — interventions which they are usually too embarrassed or ashamed to admit publicly. Once they begin, a wealth of stories gushes out (Lang, 1982, pp.455-456).

The 'Bad Therapy' role-play is often deeply reassuring to therapists, who find that most of their worst fears are not realised. In fact, they find that their 'patients', and their relationships with them, are much more resilient than they thought, and this gives them more courage in similar situations (Lang, 1982 p. 457).

The *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Family Therapy* published an article reporting on an empirical study that gives experimental support to what I described in 'Bad Therapy' (Cross & Gaffney, 1984). Both in *Corrupting the Young* and *Resilience*, we recount a number of stories in which patients improve in spite of the therapy and in spite of therapists having done things that, in hindsight, they should not have done. Unexpectedly, and often to the therapist's surprise, the individual, the couple or the family gets better. Is this what happened to the Black family? To be clear, in 'Bad Therapy' I have created an artificial situation in which I invite the therapists to try bad therapy on their unsuspecting colleagues. In the stories, the aspects of the bad therapy are often described without the full details of the therapy as a whole.

With the Black family, the reader is offered the full transcript of everything that was said and done, and what we can observe are mistakes intermingled with good therapy.

But how did the bad therapy work here? To begin with, it was bad in my eyes. Not in my eyes then, but in my eyes now. Today when I observe myself working on the tapes, I cringe. In the fourth session I observe that my intervention has a detrimental effect on the family. There is no evidence,

however, that the family regarded what I did as wrong or inappropriate, except for Lorraine's comment that there were more important things to do first, before implementing my suggestions. Is it possible that my intervention had a positive effect, notwithstanding what we observed in the fourth interview, and if so, how?

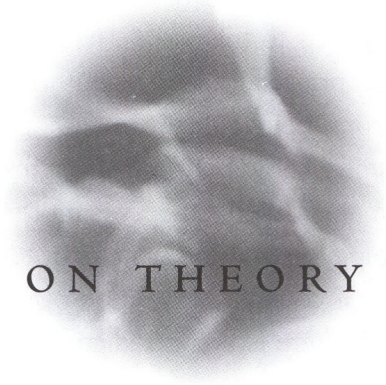
One possibility is that the 'going out' intervention, and asking the children to ensure that it happened, is a good example of paradoxical therapy (Selvini, Palazzoli *et al.*, 1978; Weeks & L'Abate, 1982) in which I prescribe the family's 'symptom'. By adopting my suggestion they are no longer out of control, no longer behaving in ways they cannot help — the situation which has been making their lives a misery. But the facts that the parents went out and that Lorraine reported the failure of the outing to her daughter kept Donna entangled in the marriage. This happened because they were good, compliant patients. The responsibility for their dysfunctional behaviour was therefore shifted on to me. Perhaps any associated guilt was removed or reduced, since it was no longer their fault but mine. Because it was prescribed and then checked and rechecked by me, what happened around the problematic behaviour became public — it was openly discussed and explored.

Perhaps the family did not see my intervention as inappropriate because they felt it was my way of trying to find some balance between dealing with Donna's needs and responding to Lorraine's pain and urgency about her marital problems. They may have felt that my prescribing marital remedies so prematurely, without exploring the marriage further, was a recognition of the fact that we needed to deal with Donna's difficulties first. So I offered remedies, even though I did not have time to explore the situation, simply because I recognised and responded to Lorraine's pain.

By 'dealing with the marriage', I provided relief for Donna, and perhaps for Ernie too, by stepping in to take over their role and, like them, I was not an adequate or successful marital therapist. In the past, Donna had tried to be the marital therapist and failed, and this time she could observe me failing. Though I prescribed going out and attempted indirect marital therapy without getting Jack's consent to do so, I was at no point critical of Jack's behaviour. I did not take Lorraine's side and accept her description of him as behaving badly. This is perhaps why Jack, not Lorraine, was the first to agree that we should continue with marital therapy after the fourth session.

What is the moral of the story? Of course, as therapists, we try to do the best we can, to eliminate any mistakes. But no matter how hard we try, the reality of life is that we will sometimes do 'bad therapy' and, even when we think we are doing the right thing, we may later come to see it as a mistake. But what we see as a mistake is often not experienced by the family as such — it may even have a beneficial effect.

Is that an argument for making mistakes? Not at all! It is an argument for paying minute attention to what happens in therapy, because when mistakes have a beneficial effect it's better that we are aware of it. Knowing the impact on the family of what we say and do refines our understanding. One of the things I have learned, particularly in relation to the Black family, is that families are usually much stronger and more resilient than we think, especially if our inappropriate interventions occur within a caring and listening relationship. Perhaps, at the end of the day, the relationship between the therapist and the family is more important than what is said or done, and weathering mistakes together can strengthen that relationship.



# ON THEORY

A number of readers of *A Family in Therapy* commented on the relative lack of attention to theoretical issues (e.g., Bloch, 1989). When I presented the videotape to professional audiences, at the end of an exhaustive and detailed presentation which included lengthy discussion and explanation of my thinking, someone would often ask, 'But what's your theory?' At first I tried to avoid answering this question, fearing that declaring my theory would cause me to be pigeon-holed, reducing complex thoughts to some label. Such considerations led Peter McCallum and me to quote from Pushkin's 'Egyptian Night' at the beginning of the book: 'The bitterest evil of all and for the poet the most intolerable, is the name and title with which he is branded and from which he can never break away.'

More recently I have responded to the question by saying that I am a mongrel. Mongrels are more common and more robust than the purebreds that get invited to all the shows, win all the prizes and get all the attention. So far I have managed to get away with this answer. Nobody has ever challenged me with the observation that even mongrels have parents. I also decided that the question should be recast, not as, 'What is my theory?', but rather 'What ideas have influenced my work with the Black family and my subsequent thinking?'.

A few general comments might help. I could never understand how anybody can remain theoretically pure, how they can go through life without being open to different ideas, techniques, theories and life experiences which impinge in a way that influences their thinking and their work. When I was first introduced to 'personality theories' as a psychology student, I thought them over-inclusive or imperialistic. They claimed more territory than was appropriate. Psychotherapy in general, and family therapy in particular, are no exceptions to this view. Theories inform about what and how to see, and can be practically very useful. However, they also have a way of preventing us from seeing. Ideally they should be used as conceptual tools, and wise tradesmen know both the strengths and weakness of their tools. Often though, what is called a theory is more like a theology, and one of the dangers of theology is that the belief can take precedence over the welfare of the patient. Of course, the welfare of the patients should come ahead of theory (though there is a contradiction in that, because how you assess the welfare of the patients also depends on your theory). Many patients have told me how hurt they were when their therapists did not listen to them. They felt used when their experiences were made to fit into preconceived ideas. Observing therapists often led me to think that adopting a 'pure theory' is a way of reducing or avoiding personal responsibility and involvement with patients.

Psychotherapy and family therapy are fashion-driven (e.g. Lang, 1981). Theories come and go with increasing speed, with little relation to the welfare of patients or empirical evidence and much to do with the market place. This also explains the need to denigrate other people's products while promoting your own.

I always believed that therapy, like life itself, is much richer and more complex than any theory. In fact when you observe actual therapy, much of what happens cannot be explained by theories. My work with the Black family is a powerful example of this. When I identify various theoretical ideas that impacted on my work, they account for only a small percentage of what took place between the Black family and me. I believe that the best therapy occurs when therapists have access to unlimited theories and are flexible enough to change and vary the mix, depending on the specific family, the specific situation and the specific time.

Often overlooked is the fact that our clients, patients and families also have theories. The problem is that their theories are different from ours. Further, as in the case of the Black family, different members of the family can have different theories. Lorraine's theory was that communication in the family was important and that it was essential to explore history and background. Jack rejected this theory and believed instead that 'actions speak louder than words', that feelings should be controlled, not expressed, and that there is no point in dwelling on the past. Lorraine's position would be more congruent with certain schools of family therapy, such as that of Virginia Satir (1967, 1972), which encourage communication of feelings in the family, or Bowen (1978) and Boszormenyi-Nagy (1973), which would see great value in exploring family-of-origin issues. Strategic, structural, problem-solving therapy, or focal therapy (e.g. Haley, 1976; Minuchin, 1974), would be more to Jack's liking. My view is that a wise therapist is comfortable within a range of theories, taking into account those of the patients and offering an approach which includes the different positions of the family members, rather than imposing a way of thinking that is comfortable for the therapist but foreign to the family. When confronted with contradictory theories, the therapist must find an appropriate solution which is creative and unique.

One of the most common criticisms of the eclectic approach to therapy is that the therapist's work suffers from lack of coherence, that it can be like a dog's breakfast. When various influences are integrated, it is more like the tributaries of a river I have mentioned earlier. Seeing the river, you can't tell where the water came from, but the river flows freely and more powerfully than its tributaries. My work with the Black family supports the river theory. The family and myself had co-created, out of our collaborative conversation, a way of working together that made sense to all. A truly collaborative relationship is one in which the participants are allowed to be themselves. They negotiate a way of being together that allows them to be authentic.

In answer to my question 'What ideas have influenced my work with the Black family and my subsequent thinking? — I can detect a range of influences, and will try to identify some of the more significant ones.

Foremost is the influence of the family itself. The way they saw and expressed their problems in the first session encouraged me to think in terms of structural family therapy (Minuchin, 1974). I was comfortable about

doing that because at the time it was a prominent theory, but I deviated in a number of significant ways. The first qualification, and the most important one for me lies in the fact that structural family therapy has been criticised for being normative (e.g. Luepnitz, 1988) in that the therapist imposes a view of how families should function. I believe this did not occur here, in that it was the family who thought of themselves in such terms and I went along with it. Structural family therapy provided the language for us to speak together, and some of the techniques that I used. Unlike structural family therapists, though, I always gave the family the reasons for my recommendations. I paid minute attention to their feelings and in the fourth session I explored family-of-origin issues in detail. Had I followed structural family therapy more strictly, I would have avoided the mistake of prematurely embarking on pseudo-marital therapy.

If I look at the overall manner in which I interact with the Black family, it seems that the most pervasive influence on my work is that of Harry Stack Sullivan. It was he who asserted that therapy is a dialogue, and that this dialogue is an alert, brisk process. The therapist is not an aloof, detached observer who occasionally makes interpretations, but an active participant in the ongoing process, using personality and special skills to help the patient. From the first moment the therapist, by word and attitude, affects the course of the therapeutic process, and psychotherapy is always ongoing and interpersonal. Therapists should not assume that they know what the patients are talking about; neither should they assume that the patients understand them. Everything needs to be verified. Therapy proceeds by exploring hypotheses and facts in a vibrant dialogue. This requires intense concentration and much hard work. The therapist who sits back and lets the patient talk without detailed investigation lets ninety per cent of the important material escape. As a result the therapist and the patient rarely come to a well verified conclusion about anything. (Chapman, 1978)

I take particular pleasure in acknowledging the influence of Sullivan on my thinking and my work, because family therapy has done him an injustice in not according him the place that he deserves. To me, he is the father of interpersonal psychotherapy, and therefore of family therapy.

To a smaller degree I can detect the influence of Carl Rogers (Rogers, 1951, 1961). Throughout the therapy, no matter what the subject, I paid minute attention to the family's feelings and to each member's subjective

experience. Carl Rogers advocates that for therapy to be effective the therapist needs to be genuine, listen with empathy and offer acceptance and unconditional positive regard.

My interest in the parents' backgrounds — in the time and place in which they grew up and their families of origin — is consistent with the family therapy work of Boszormenyi-Nagy (1973) as well as Bowen (1978). Even though I was well aware of their work, my interest in that way of thinking developed independently. My thinking on this subject is more fully described in my work with Holocaust survivors and their families (Lang, 1994; Lang, 1995; 1995; Lang & Lang, 1996).

Other significant ideas, theories and practices that influenced me with the Black family come from my work as an individual psychotherapist and in assessment of children. That work allowed me to develop a whole range of skills in talking, playing and kidding with them. Those skills made it possible for me to assess Donna's strengths and weaknesses and perhaps sense, by the end of the first session, that she was a low suicidal risk. This range of influences made me pay attention to Donna's feelings of self-esteem, guilt, anger, and so on. My interest in childhood depression provided me with the language to talk to Donna about her attempted suicide and the potential risk of her doing it again. Years of working as an individual psychotherapist, employing psychodynamic concepts, and familiarity with psychopathology made me interested in connecting the depression in the family with the concept of loss, guilt and anger that turns against the self (Lang & Tisher, 1978, 1983; Lang, 1982; Tisher et al., 1992).

I could also detect the influence of Gestalt psychotherapy (e.g. Kempler, 1981) and Virginia Satir (1967, 1972), which encouraged me to try and promote direct, open and full communication between family members.

Throughout the therapy there were structural moves, strategic interventions and exploration of family-of-origin issues, but the overall feel of the therapy is that of an ongoing conversation from which we deviate from time to time.

In the last ten or fifteen years, the notion that therapy is a conversation became a formal theory of family therapy (e.g. Anderson, 1997), but my work with the Black family pre-dated this. I never thought of it as another theory. I always thought that this was the way it should be. It is interesting in this context to note that my native tongue is Hebrew, and in Hebrew the common

word for a therapeutic interview is 'conversation'. Psychotherapeutic theories often have complicated words to describe the obvious.

By and large, I rejected the mantra that we were compelled to repeat daily as psychology students: 'Psychology is a science', but I always felt that psychology suffered from physics envy. Unfortunately, it tried to fit the whole range of human problems to the methodology, rather than finding appropriate ways to study those problems. What I can observe in my work with the Black family is the profound influence of an empiricism different from the conventional empirical approach. For thirty-five years I have carefully monitored the effect on my patients of what I say and do, whether they are individuals, couples or families. For example, the questions I asked Donna when I tried to assess the degree of her suicidal risk are questions which I have checked and rechecked with a large number of suicidal children and adolescents. Similarly, when I engaged Donna and Ernie in playful exchanges, based on years of experience, I tested the limits of my idiosyncratic way of interacting with children. All sensible human beings and therapists have no choice but to monitor what works and what does not work for them.

No matter what theoretical motivation I had for saying and doing something, and no matter whether I now feel comfortable or uncomfortable with what I said and did, I am still committed to empiricism — to carefully monitoring the effect of what I do on the people I work with. This monitoring has different dimensions that are worth elaborating.

I usually start a session by inquiring about how the last meeting impacted on the patients. As a result I am regularly informed and try to cultivate an open relationship in which, hopefully, the family are comfortable about telling me what they really think and feel. I once used audiotaping, but for years now I have videotaped and played and replayed my work in order to monitor the impact of what takes place in therapy.

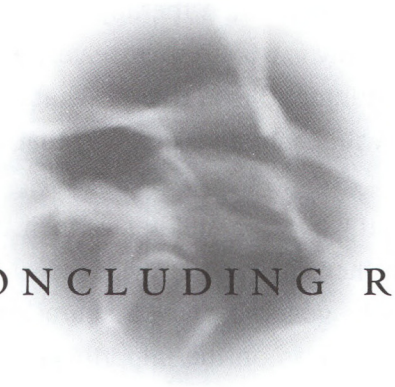
To provide further assessment, I have had other people review my work. Finally, writing about it is another way of keeping the assessment process going. These considerations are underpinned by the belief that psychotherapists in general, and family therapists in particular, need to develop a different form of awareness — not self-awareness but interpersonal awareness. It is not enough for them to know the theory or what the empirical evidence is. They need to know how their behaviour impacts

on the people they work with. I believe there are no short-cuts, and this process requires a different empirical approach from the one I was taught as a psychology student. The message transmitted is not necessarily the message received, and what we do may not have the impact on others that we expect. We have to check out and verify that impact, because the meaning we give to something is not necessarily the meaning someone else would give it. We have to be constantly alert to that reality.

Finally, I also believe that when therapy works well, the therapist and each member of the family is true to themselves, and when this occurs the result is a unique encounter. This is true of what happened with the Black family. We interacted with each other in a way that was unique. This is true of all good therapy.

Just as Lorraine and Jack were children of their time and place, so am I. Throughout the book there is a lot of evidence of the influence of family therapy in the 1970s in general, and structural and strategic therapy in particular. The emphasis was on the importance of the therapist being in control, using 'interventions' and 'strategies', as if the family was the enemy of the treatment. Likewise, my criticisms and reservations today are an expression of me as a child of my time and place, part of the current family therapy movement and its critique of the seventies.

But the opposite is also in evidence. My disregard for these ideas is apparent in the attention I paid to the family's feelings, thoughts, aspirations, language and metaphor; the effort I made to find a way of working that suited the family's unique culture and way of relating to me; and the care I took to ensure a truly collaborative relationship. Although I have many problems with the therapy of the 1970s, I am still satisfied that much that was done in these sessions is as valuable today as it was then.



# SOME CONCLUDING REMARKS

All my professional life I have been fascinated by details of the clinical encounter and convinced of the importance of maintaining a clear separation between the raw data of therapy and subsequent theorising. Writing these commentaries so long after the event has reconfirmed this set of beliefs, but in unexpected ways. The availability of the raw data made it possible for me to study the material and see, with unexpected clarity, the mistakes that I made. I was able to confidently decide what I should have done.

I had long been fascinated and puzzled by the dramatic change the family achieved between the first and second interviews. The availability of the raw data has made it possible for me to explore the reasons for that change continually. Of course, having the actual transcript makes it possible for readers to reach different conclusions from mine; indeed some may not agree that the family made dramatic changes. What readers can do is exercise their independent judgment rather than relying on my assertions.

In my thirty-five years of practice, I have seen many families in which one member has attempted suicide, but only two, including the Blacks, in which two have done so (Lang & Lang, 1996, p. 177). The family presented with severe and unusual problems. In spite of this, their daily difficulties

were very much like those of any other Australian family. There are many ways in which this family is a product of its time and place. These range from the frivolous — as in the first session where they were smoking, something that would be unheard of today — to the profound, as in Jack's opposition to his wife's career. The extreme violence and hardship of Jack's family of origin can be understood in terms of the time and place in which he lived. The reader who is interested in this aspect is encouraged to refer back to the original book (McCallum & Lang, 1989, pp. 233–288).

The changes that occurred throughout therapy, but particularly between the first and second interviews, demonstrate the profoundly therapeutic and transforming power of listening, particularly when it occurs in the context of a family meeting.

I had always believed that the family knows best, and working with the Black family reinforced this. In spite of the deep pain and distress of their circumstances, they still had their own solutions to their problems. I was simply a facilitator helping them to implement those solutions. Looking at the totality of their therapy, I realise that they healed themselves in the following ways.

The parents concluded that they had to set limits on Donna's behaviour and managed to do so. Donna decided that she needed to extricate herself from being the go-between, the marital and individual therapist for her parents, and she implemented that. They all decided that they should have family meals together and they did. Donna extricated herself by going to boarding school. Her doing so demonstrated that her father was both a success as a businessman, in that he could afford the fees, and a good father in being willing to pay them for her sake. Finally, they agreed to come to marital therapy to resolve the marital difficulties they heralded in the first session, thus relieving Donna of this long-held responsibility.

The belief that the family has the answer to its own problems has profound practical implications. It should lead to therapists improving their listening skills, so that they can help the family express and recognise their own solutions. This belief also diminishes the need for therapists to be in control or to suggest their own solutions, so it is less likely that the therapy will be abrasive or that the therapist and the family will work against each other. Thus the therapist will feel more relaxed and the therapy itself will be simpler, gentler and kinder.

Although the family often have the answer to their own problems, this does not mean that all their solutions are equally valid. It is one of the tasks of therapy to help families explore the relative benefits or disadvantages of their own solutions. The Black family came to therapy because some of their solutions would have had dire consequences — the attempted suicides of Lorraine and then Donna, and Donna's threat of leaving home and never seeing her father again. Some may be horrified by my referring to her suicide attempt as a 'solution', but I think it is the correct way to think about it. Donna's suicide attempt was her way of trying to resolve what to her was an intolerable situation. My refusal to see this as simply problematic or pathological helped the family. When I tried to explore and see the positive motivation in Donna's solution, it became clear that Donna was saying, 'Even if it kills me, I am not willing to put up with this intolerable situation.' Therapy provided the family with an opportunity to reconsider the idea of Donna going to boarding school and never seeing her father again, so that eventually her going was implemented in a manner that was much more appropriate and beneficial to all members of the family.

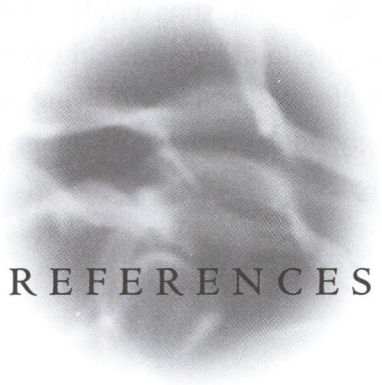
What I am calling for here is for therapists to be willing to entertain and explore the positive aspects of problematic solutions so that, rather than being discarded, they are recast in a different shape which is beneficial to the family.

Until now, my new commentaries have been written from the perspective of a therapist. I would like to make the following point as a teacher of family therapy.

When showing my work with the Black family to mental health professionals, I am struck by the relative ease with which they notice how the family stays the same. They are very good at picking up on the evidence for problems and pathology. What is relatively undeveloped is their ability to notice the positive changes in the family — their inherent strength and resilience. This failure could make them much more likely to be over-anxious in their work with families, with the likely result that the therapist will reinforce the negative perceptions the family has of itself. It is observations such as this that make me reply to the question, 'What is a normal family?' by saying, 'One that has been inadequately assessed.' The implication for teaching family therapy is obvious: we need to help students develop the capacity to recognise strength and notice positive changes. To see how people stay the same is easy. To see how they change is much harder.

When therapy works well, the ripple effect goes beyond the family's original expectations. A good example of this is Donna's 'waiting list'. Her social life had improved beyond her expectations. Her friends were happy to come into her home and were welcomed by her parents. Lorraine had improved her relationship with Ernie, as Donna had with her father, contrary to what they expected in the first session.

Finally I am left with an indelible image of a family in great pain and despair in the first session, contrasting vividly with the light and cheerful atmosphere in the last. The fourteen-year-old Donna, deeply troubled and burdened, feeling that life was not worth living, was transformed into a cheerful, carefree, giggly adolescent whose main preoccupation was her friends and her 'waiting list'.



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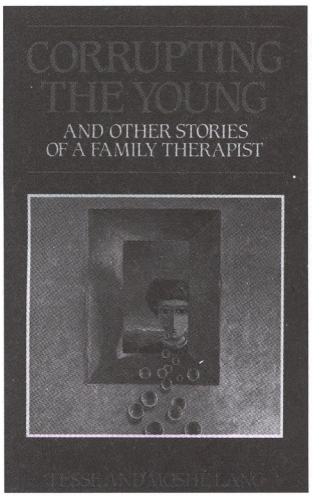

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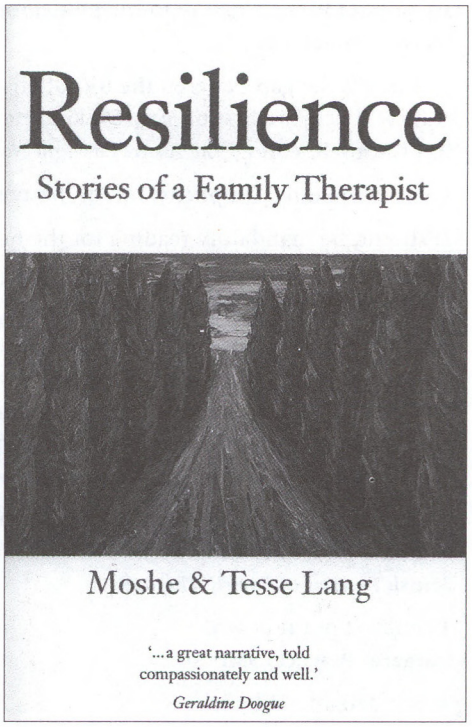
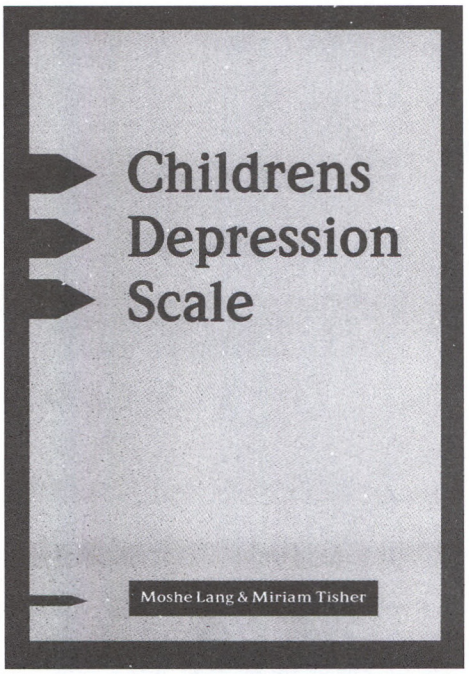


## CHILDREN'S DEPRESSION SCALE (CDS)

### Moshe Lang & Miriam Tisher




First published in 1978, the *CDS* is an invaluable tool for identifying depressed children. Six sub-scales measure affective response, social problems, self-esteem, preoccupation with own sickness or death, guilt, pleasure and enjoyment. Children post responses into one of five boxes — "Very Right", "Right", "Don't know/ Not Sure", "Wrong", or "Very Wrong".

A parent's questionnaire allows for others to report on the child's behaviour and feelings. The questionnaire is intended for use with parents, siblings, teachers and relatives of the child to provide another index of the child's depression or well-being.

The *CDS* is used by clinicians for therapy as well as assessment. In counselling and psychotherapy the *CDS* helps children acknowledge their sadness or depression. It is also used in family therapy to help children and parents talk to each other about their feelings. The scale has a game-like quality which facilitates the children's ability to communicate more fully their experience.

For assessment of depression, the *CDS* provides an indication of the child's depression along 2 continua: depression and the capacity to enjoy life.

This scale has been extensively used in many countries to research depression in children, and has been translated into several different languages, including Spanish, Italian, Dutch, Japanese, Hindi and Arabic.