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Encounters with Steve de Shazer and Insoo Kim Berg: Inside stories of Solution-Focused Brief Therapy.

Dr. Manfred Vogt, Dr. Ferdinand Wolf, Peter Sundman and Heinrich N Dreesen (Editors).

2015. London: Solutions Books.

Review by Dr Alasdair J Macdonald

Retired Consultant Psychiatrist

Steve de Shazer and Insoo Kim Berg met at the Mental Research Institute (MRI) in Palo Alto. Their joint experiences there led them to found the Brief Family Therapy Center (BFTC) in Milwaukee in 1978. There the foundations of Solution-Focused Brief Therapy were laid. This model has had a revolutionary effect on the psychotherapies in general across the world as well as bringing about effects in the fields of management and organisational development. Terms such as solution focus, strengths-based working, the miracle question and future-focused enquiry are passing into everyday language. Every day in the media we hear interviewers asking 'On a scale of one to ten about this issue, where are you today?'

This book was originally published in the German language in 2012. The editors had known Steve de Shazer and Insoo Kim Berg for many years. Following their deaths in 2005 and 2007, they hoped to collect reminiscences and stories that would be of interest to the next generation of Solution-Focused workers. This goal has certainly been achieved. They contacted everyone in their acquaintance who might be able to offer a contribution. Many of these essays were in English and were skilfully translated into German by the editors for the first publication in 2012. This new edition in English was drawn together by Dr Mark McKergow of the UK. Much help was received from the staff of Borgmann Publishers in Dortmund with translation (where necessary) by Ms Gesa Moggenburg and proof-reading by Dr Christina Kotte.

There are 46 essays in the first publication and a closing section by Yvonne Dolan, who was a close friend of the couple. She provides Steve's recipe for Sicilian pasta sauce and her own recipe for chocolate brownies which she often made for the Milwaukee team. Mark McKergow has added an essay to the new translation from his own encounters with them.

The contributions in the text cover most of Steve and Insoo's professional

life. The earliest recollection comes from Janet Bevan Bavelas who met with them on occasions in the 1970s when all of them were involved with the innovative brief therapy project carried out at the Mental Research Institute in Palo Alto. Eve Lipchik had contact with them from 1978 and Professor Wally Gingerich was involved with the Milwaukee Brief Family Therapy Center (BFTC) from 1983. Other memories come from many fellow workers, trainers and trainees down the years. The last essay comes from Sabine Zehner Schlapbach of Bern, who never met either of them but spends her professional life working with others who quote Steve and Insoo all the time. She feels that their presence and creativity still informs her daily practice.

So some of the reminiscences come from fellow workers in contact with the MRI (such as Janet Bavelas), some come from those who shared their activities at BFTC (Dolan, Gingerich, Lipchik, Gale Miller, Scott Miller, Nelson, Weiner-Davis), some from colleagues who attended BFTC for training packages (Ahlers, Panayotov, Wolf) and many others from those who learnt from their many international workshops and training courses (Benniks, Gaiswinkler and Roessler, George, Macdonald, Ratner, Strnad, Wheeler, Visser, Vogt). Some contributions come from those such as Professor Terry Trepper who knew them socially at first, or from Steve's great friend Luc Isebaert, whose close friendship with the couple went far beyond a simple connection through work.

As the approach became more widely known, many authors comment on their own experience of absorbing Solution-Focused ideas into their own previous style of practice. Hans Benniks, Yvonne Dolan and Michele Weiner-Davis linked it with Ericksonian hypnosis, Helene Dellucci with her work using EMDR for trauma and Joachim Hesse with his work with psychological wounds. Marianne and Kaspar Baeschlin enhanced the programme in their residential special school, Heinrich Dreesen found links with his clown and juggling skills and Svea van der Hoorn used it to enhance her over-loaded mental health clinic in South Africa in the 1980s.

The book itself is a patchwork of memories drawn up by people who felt and were close to Steve and Insoo in work and in other ways. I have not space to mention every contribution but I learned something from every essay. Some of the anecdotes are work-related, while others recount personal events or shared experiences. Through the whole book the thinking behind SFBT is constantly present. Anyone interested in the history of ideas will find matter of interest in this book. One can see the process in which some of the BFTC concepts developed into active techniques. There is also evidence of the high regard felt for Steve and Insoo as people. Of course it has been impossible to include essays from every major figure in the current world of

Solution-Focused ideas. Perhaps a second volume will come, before Steve and Insoo's brilliance is diluted in the wider world of therapy advances?

The length, intensity and informality of the contributions makes the text easy to read. The device of listing the entries in alphabetical order by author makes it easy to search for authors and topics of interest. There is also a good index. There are one or two typographical errors in this book but I did not find any which affected the sense of the text.

Reference

Vogt, M., Wolf, F., Sundman, P., Dreesen, H. N. (Eds). (2012). *Begegnungen mit Steve de Shazer und Insoo Kim Berg*. Dortmund: Borgmann Publishers.

The reviewer

Dr Alasdair Macdonald is a retired consultant psychiatrist and family therapist. He continues to publish research and reflections on Solution-Focused brief therapy and to work as an international trainer and supervisor.

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