

Joseph Berke

## THE ARBOURS ASSOCIATION

The Arbours is an association of professionals and non-professionals who have set up four households in London where persons in emotional distress can go for help and to live. Its founding members have previously worked with R.D. Laing and include Drs. Joseph Berke and Morton Schatzman, Roberta Elzey Berke, Vivien Millett and Richard Goldberg. In England the Arbours is registered as a charity and it will soon be similarly registered in the United States.

Morton Schatzman and Vivien Millet created the first Arbours community in their home. Over the next few years several people lived with them who might otherwise have been in mental hospitals. No special provisions had to be made. The community functioned as an extended family with Morton (Morty) and Vivien as a father and mother, or perhaps uncle and aunt. Others, who were not in immediate distress themselves, but who wanted to learn about our approach also joined the household.

We think that mental illness is a career, rather than an 'illness'. People become launched on this career by their family working in conjunction with the medical profession when they start to discard roles that others have allotted them. What is called 'schizophrenia', for example, may often consist of a young person's confused refusal to comply with his family's views of him. To define this as an illness is to deny that it may represent a real bid for personal autonomy.

We wish to drop the medical model for that class of behaviour or experience for which no physical cause has been found, but which is called mental illness. In our communities we try to give persons who have been, or could become mental patients a chance not to be seen, called or treated as if they were mentally ill.

To refuse to label certain experience or behaviour as ill is not to fail to see that it may be unusual. However what is regarded as odd or bothersome in some social circles may not be so in others. Many persons seen as ill need time, space and encouragement to work through their problems, resolve their suffering, and to achieve a personal stance in the world which is truly their own. Sometimes we have to go to extreme lengths to make this

possible. One young man came to us while still working as an orderly in a mental hospital. He wanted to be a helper in one of our communities. For a few months he lived with people in our second house in South London. After a while it became clear that he was the one who needed help, for he felt that his body was disintegrating and that everyone was persecuting him. About this time I sold my old three door London taxi to the Arbours so people could get from community to community more easily. It was parked outside Schatzman's house, where the young man (let us call him Tony) had moved at a moment of crisis. Within a few days of arriving at the house Tony moved into the taxi. Rather than return to the house he preferred to use the toilet facilities of a nearby park. We arranged for milk to be delivered to the taxi and for him to be able to take a loaf of bread a day at a nearby bakery. His psychotherapist, Gregorio Kohon, an Argentine psychologist who had recently joined our group, agreed to see him once a day in the taxi.

Morty argued that on several visits to India he had seen people like Tony living among villagers who treated these people kindly and even revered them. Surely it was not too much to ask that a minimum consideration be given to the young man who wanted to live in a taxi. It would be nice to say that all worked out well. Unfortunately the neighbours in the quiet suburban street where this was taking place were frightened and hostile. People projected their own sexual and malevolent fantasies onto the boy, who himself did no more than dress raggedly, mutter continuously, and walk with a jerky gait. Eventually someone called the police and he was sent to mental hospital where we continued to visit him. Now Tony is out of hospital, is somewhat more together and is welcome to continue to be a member of the Arbours network.

The network consists of everyone who lives in our communities and everyone who lives outside the communities but is actively involved in the life of the communities, about 40 persons in all. We meet once a month at one of the houses, a sort of encounter, therapeutic and social meeting rolled into one.

Most recently we have opened a short stay community which we call the crisis centre. It allows us to have an immediate and intensive involvement with people in acute distress (severe anxiety, depression, psychosis). We have developed a separate crisis crew to intervene in such situations. The crew consists of three experienced therapists; a residential couple Tom Ryan, former psychiatric social worker, and Sally Berry, former elementary school teacher, both of whom lived at our South London community for a long time; and other members of the network,

experienced and inexperienced who serve as helpers. When someone calls the centre, Tom & Sally decide whether we should intervene. If yes, they call upon one of the available therapists and a team is convened consisting of therapist, Tom or Sally, and one or more helpers.

In the first place we always try to go to a person's house and see all members of the group (often a family) from whom the crisis has developed. We find that often the person who has made the call, rather than the alleged disturbed person, is the one in most distress. Occasionally we continue the home visits and never suggest that anyone comes to the crisis centre. More frequently one or more members of the family come to the crisis centre for a period of days or weeks while we meet with them and their friends or relatives and endeavour to sort things out.

Already this year we have had an entire family stay at the centre. The members included a young artist, his wife, their 9 month old baby, their dog, and their friend, a senior medical student who had made the initial call.

On another occasion a girl called up about her boyfriend who is an engineer. Could we help him? When he came to the house at 3 in the morning he was obviously frightened and immediately began to crawl about the place on all fours saying he was a caterpillar. After a while Tom and Sally suggested he might go upstairs to bed.

*'Don't be silly' he replied. 'Caterpillars can't crawl upstairs'*

The immediate difficulties were resolved when he was reminded that caterpillars eventually become butterflies. He then heaved a sigh of relief and walked up to bed.

Eventually it transpired that the girl was in just as much distress as the man. In fact, it was their relationship that was in crisis, just as much as any single individual.

In the fall we are starting a training programme for people who wish to become psychotherapists and social therapists. This will formalize an educational programme which has been going on since the Arbours was founded. In addition to seminars in child psychology, psycho-analysis, sociology, anthropology, communications theory and philosophy, each person will have to have therapy himself, have to live in one of our communities for at least six months and have to participate in the work of the crisis centre.

We welcome inquiries about the activities of the Arbours on any level, whether training programme, helper or someone who is in need of help. (Interestingly, several people who have come to us in need of help, have graduated to the role of helper). We publish a bi-monthly magazine presenting news and views of the group which we are glad to send out at cost. People can get in touch with us by writing to: The Arbours Association, c/o 55 Dartmouth Park Road, London N.W.5

Berke and Schatzman have written accounts of their previous work in the Kingsley Hall community which Laing helped to found: **Mary Barnes: Two Accounts of a Journey Through Madness** by Mary Barnes and Joseph Berke (*MacGibbon - Hart Davis 1970, Penguin Books 1973*) 'Madness and Morals' by Morton Schatzman from '*Laing and Anti-psychiatry*' edited by Robert Bayeres, *Penguin Books, 1972*.

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## REFLECTIONS ON A THERAPIST

*So I experience the relationship  
Paradoxically  
The closer I come  
The further you are away.  
My You - composed of hope and fear  
I have to choose to fuse  
You - Here and Now,  
To compromise and find?  
Reality is a reflection in a mirror?  
Or risk never colliding  
With the possible.*

*Coming towards you,  
I throw projections,  
Which are Me  
Yet I experience  
These reflections  
As part of my  
Environment and You.  
Confronting you - Mirror -  
Touching the hard reality  
Of your periphery  
I collide with Fact.*

*Avril Ruddock*