

# THE ORIGINS AND BIRTH OF THE IDHP

by Kate Hopkinson

## Preamble

There has been neither the time nor the resources available to carry out systematic research and consultation around the early history of the IDHP, on which to base this piece: so it cannot be - and has no pretensions to be - any sort of official account. Indeed, there are as many potentially valid accounts as there were people involved at the time, and in line with IDHP values and principles, the appropriate method to arrive at an account would have been to engage in a process of collaborative research on the issue. Practical difficulties, such as the protagonists being spread out over the planet, and across the incarnate/discarnate divide, mitigated against this being a real possibility. So this article simply has the status of a personal memoir, augmented by a certain amount of informal discussion (particular thanks to John Heron, Denis Postle and the present members of the IDHP committee in this connection.)

## Background

The situation has changed so dramatically in the last 15 years, that it is strange to recall that in 1976, when the ideas which became the IDHP first began to coalesce, there were traditional psychotherapy training courses of various shapes and sizes (most of which had professional and/or qualification-based entry requirements); there were academic courses on subject specialisms, such as group behaviour and dynamics; there were group therapy programmes; and there were personal growth/alternative workshops. These four categories represented a mutually exclusive and exhaustive list of almost all the possibilities on offer at the time. So it is hard to convey how odd and different and problematic seemed an enterprise which

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proposed to bridge and interweave the acquisition of conceptual maps and tools, with personal development work, and facilitator skills, all within an educational/development paradigm, rather than a remedial/clinical one.

There were fairly distinct phases in the early evolution of, first the ideas, and then the organisation itself: the first phase is the period up to September 1978; and the second runs to the democratisation of the committee. I shall look at each in turn, and then round off with a few additional remarks about its further evolution and about the organisation as a whole.

## The First Phase

The primary instigator of the IDHP was the late David Blagden Marks. David was an Anglo-American, who, among many other things, had sung in "Fiddler on the Roof" in the West End, presented the Yorkshire TV series "Plain Sailing", and crossed the Atlantic single-handed in what was then the smallest boat ever to enter the OSTAR (Observer Single-Handed Trans Atlantic Race). By 1976, when he was 32, he was also Director of the largest and best known Growth Centre in Europe, which he had built up from a tiny seed planted by Paul and Patricia Lowe. Quaesitor's success was prodigious, and the range and depth of the workshops and courses it offered, with David's creative vision and high-powered leadership, had expanded enormously from the early standard format of 2-day weekend workshops. Still, the longest single courses which Quaesitor offered were 6-month Intensives focused on specific methodologies (e.g., encounter, gestalt, bio-energetics). David had a peculiar talent for seeing round corners, and he identified a need for much larger, deeper experiences, which would cover a whole range of methods and approaches, and which would encompass a measure of skill development, as well as personal growth.

So in the winter of 1976, he invited an extraordinary collection of colleagues in the growth movement, to meet with him, and discuss ideas. The principle he worked on was that a process of self-selection would take place, as the ideas evolved, and from a large and heterogeneous mass would emerge a small and very committed team, who would bring the outcome into being - which is exactly what happened. The group met on Sunday afternoons in David's flat, to eat tuna sandwiches, and dream about the educational experiences we would like to have had, to do the work we were then doing in the Growth Movement and out of it in a variety of fields, if only it had existed.

David took all these ideas, and hammered out the basic 2-year part time, first year cover-a-range-of-basic-methods, second year give-scope-for-choice-and-specialisation format, which IDHP courses have been built around ever since. Then came the critical moment when we advertised the first course, and waited to find out if there was anyone out there who wanted what we were offering. (By this time, the team consisted of - besides David - John Heron, Tom Feldberg, the late Frank Lake, and me.) We need not have worried: with Tom as director-designate of the first course, there was no shortage of applications, and the course itself took off as we had hoped it would: I particularly remember that first course being thrown out of a temporary venue as a result of a sexuality workshop which I led, when we cross-dressed and went out into the garden, and "picked each other up" - exploring what it felt like to be on the receiving end of such behaviour. It was a beautiful, blue and gold summer Sunday afternoon, and David and I took the participants up on to Hampstead Heath, where we all had ice creams, lazed around enjoying the sun, and indulged our collective Rebellious Child by laughing about our banishment.

Meanwhile, John Heron was negotiating with Surrey University, and preparing to launch a version of the course sponsored by the University (where courses have been running continuously from 1978 to the present).

## Tragedy at Sea

Perhaps David also sensed what was to come in another way. QUAESITOR died in the summer of 1978 - which is another story - but the infant IDHP was separate and safe, and set fair to grow and flourish (and in due time, by its existence and success, to facilitate the development of the wealth of alternative training courses available in Britain today.) From there, in a sense, the IDHP never looked back (the name, however, is one of the most perfect examples of the results of letting a committee do it that I can think of): subsequently, the London and Surrey courses were joined by centres in Cornwall, Leeds and Bath - but other articles in this issue deal with the mature organisation.

That's one version of events, and true as far as it goes. But life is usually more problematic than such anodyne accounts suggest, and the early days of the IDHP are no exception: Once Quaesitor had gone, the London course was without a permanent home, and this proved to be a major stressor on both the participants and on Tom, the course director. David and I spent anxious weeks in the summer of '78 trying to find suitable new premises - no easy task in London at the time. It also became clear that it was too much for one course director to carry years 1 and II of concurrent courses simultaneously. But as far as David was concerned, difficulties existed to be overcome - his humour and unshakeable determination rose above any and every setback. And then, in September 1978, the unthinkable happened: he set off one night in our sloop, The Jain to cross from the Isle of Man to the mainland. It was the night of a storm so severe that the QE II's bow rail was damaged - 60ft. out of the water. The Jain never arrived at her destination, and both David and my Dutch friend Eleonora Jansen, who was crewing for him, were drowned.

The effect, for the IDHP, was very nearly devastating. We were all bereaved: no one was left in the team who was unaffected by what had happened: While John and David were very different people, there was a strong bond between them; he and Tom had been close friends for years, and Tom depended a lot on David. For me, the utter desolation of losing David, combined with the restimulation of earlier losses which gave rise to, precipitated me into a grief reaction which lasted for many years. (Frank's support for all of us should be acknowledged here, but since he was elderly and based in Nottingham, he couldn't be with us on a day to day basis. John's intelligent and generous support for me personally should also go on record.)

I can remember attending committee meetings at this time in a daze of misery, and willing myself to go on, thinking that the only contribution I could make was to turn up, so that the IDHP too, did not drown.

It came very close to it, and for some time, the London courses seemed to be bedevilled by problems, mistakes were made in the choice of additional course directors, which can either be accounted for on a practical rational basis - (see the problems mentioned above) - or seen as some subtle refraction, or not so subtle reverberation, of the personal and organisational tragedy we had suffered. Eventually, the only constructive way forward seemed to be in effect to offer the London

course to Fate as a propitiatory sacrifice, close it down, and concentrate on enabling the others to flourish. This we have done.

## Phase Two

Quite apart from committee members' grief over David's death, the embryonic organisation showed signs of losing direction to some extent without him. This potential slide into chaos was halted and reversed by John Heron's taking over the chairing role in the committee: under John's able and committed leadership, the distinctive educational ideology and philosophy which informs the IDHP now began to flower. Part of this ideology, of course, is that learning is reflexive, and it is not appropriate to be offering an "educational" experience to other people unless you are not only engaged in learning on your own account, but open to the specific experiences you are suggesting others may find educational.

This meant that as a principle, before we introduced anything, we tried it out on ourselves. A major aspect of IDHP's educational methodology is self and peer assessment, and I remember us setting up an experimental process, and then carrying it out one day in John's flat: it was a searing experience, since we all knew each other well enough to be able to turn what felt like a laser on each of us in turn. I don't think I have ever been subjected (or subjected myself) to such loving and inexorable truth-telling as I was that day. I've never forgotten the feedback I was given, and have drawn on it, in terms of my continuing personal development, ever since.

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Out of these hairy by exhilarating experiments, and his own multifarious and innovative experience, John drafted, on the committee's behalf, the first set of IDHP guidelines, which affirmed the ideology and methodology we were seeking to realise in the organisation: in the nature of things, practice always falls short of principle, but we were then, and are now, committed to the idea that managing the IDHP should be just as much a learning experience as being a participant on a course. So we never arrive, but continue to travel - through rich and varied, and very worthwhile, terrain. Nevertheless, by the end of John's tenure as Chair, I think the "bones" of almost all of the critical dimensions of what might be described as the "IDHP approach" were in place: due, in significant measure, to the unparalleled contribution of John himself.

After John stepped down as Chair, I took over the role for a year. During this time we were confronted with the issue of potentially "going international" : we had applications to mount courses from Scandinavia, Spain, and to our surprise, from Japan. There was something rather seductive about this, and it was with difficulty

that we resisted the imperialist temptations embodied in the possibility, and made the crucial decision to remain small and local, in cultural terms, rather than expanding to fill the space available, just because it was there : I particularly was vociferous that increasing size - and the bureaucratisation which goes with it - would undermine, in principle and especially in practice, our fundamental ideology.

### **Modern Structure**

There was another sense in which we began increasingly to question the political aspects of the way we operated, and the outcome of that was that the Directors (who were the remaining original founders - John, Tom and me) - dissolved themselves as Directors, and became simply members of the committee, like other course directors, and a more flexible, peer and participative committee structure was set up, with rotating roles, including that of secretary general - which Peter Hawkins filled with particular flair (as well as a great deal of very thankless administrative work).

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This transition point in the IDHP's history I think represents the end of the second phase, and the beginning of a third phase, which is still unfolding (dealt with elsewhere in these pages.) Some of the issues we struggled with in

the early days are no longer "live" ; tensions between the London encounter-based model, and the Surrey co-counselling model come to mind; so does the personal challenge of getting a word in edgeways in early committee meetings, with John, Tom and David asserting and counter-asserting their respective perspectives, with all the energy of three very dominant males. Others are still with us : differences of views as to how much weight to give to the facilitator training strand in the courses; ensuring there is flexibility and choice but that some strands - particularly the social change strand - don't get lost altogether; and a host of issues internal to individual courses, and necessarily entailed by the excitement and unpredictability of being embroiled in trying to create and sustain 2-year long peer learning communities.

### **Postscript**

The organisation as it has evolved, has diverged from David's original conception. But that, in a sense, is the measure of its success ; the vitality and internal momentum of the vision was sufficient to transcend the traumatic death of one of its principle founders, and "dream itself" into the future, via other hearts, other hands, and other minds ; truly an exemplar, and a celebration of human potential.