

# OLD SAYBROOK 2 CONFERENCE

John Rowan

This was held on the 11-14 May 2000 on the wooded and very attractive campus of the State University of West Georgia at Carrollton, near Atlanta. About 100 people attended, rising to 250 for the keynote speech on the Saturday night, which was open to alumni and the general public.

The plan of the conference, explained by John Adams on the first day, was an Open Space structure. This entailed filling a wall with slips of paper on which were written a date, a time, a place, a topic and a convener. People volunteered topics and became conveners. Thus the time slots of the conference on Friday and Saturday morning were filled, using six rooms in parallel. (Incidentally John Adams spent some time at Leeds University in the 1970s, and ran a group at Quaesitor in 1970 which I attended!) On Saturday afternoon four groups were set up to draw together the strands from all these smaller groups, and on Sunday these four groups reported back to the whole conference, including action plans.

In order to compensate for the fragmentation which this procedure brought about, some other plenary events were brought in. Thoner and myself. Many interesting tales were told.

Another event was the sunset ceremony out on the lawn

(temperatures were in the high 80s) where we all gathered round and wrote something we wanted to get rid of on cards. The cards were then attached to balloons, which rose up into the sky; although in deference to the environment, they were then hauled back in again, and ceremonially pricked with the pins provided.

The most moving event was that on the Saturday evening after the keynote address, when the alumni were present. Mike Arons was retiring that very day. He was the professor at West Georgia, and one of the organizers of the conference, and much loved. He was given a memento of his years at the college. A huge heart, carved from a tree which had fallen the previous year, was given to him, together with a brass plate containing a poem of farewell. He was obviously much moved by this, and it formed a fitting end for the evening.

The keynote speech itself was given by me, under the title of 'The Dialectics of Humanistic Psychology'. It was exactly the same speech as I had given one week before, at the festival of humanistic psychology held at Hillcroft College in Surbiton. It spoke of the paradoxes of humanistic psychology, and tried to show that they could be held in place by the kind of thinking – dialectical logic, or vision-logic – which Ken Wilber says is characteristic of the Centaur level of psychospiritual

development. This is a form of thought which works with paradox, opposition and contradiction very happily, and can cope with the complexity which is so characteristic of the world of 2000.

We shall have to see whether the ambitious action plans coming out of this conference are actually carried out. Those who are interested can follow the action on the Internet at the website: <http://www.westga.edu/~psydept/os2/index.html>

After the conference Sue and I were invited to Mike Arons' farewell party, which was held at his wooden country home, perched on a hill overlooking a stream. The party went all the way down the path to the side of the stream, and over a wooden bridge into the woodland beyond. It was a beautiful setting, and we felt lucky to have that experience before setting off for Atlanta airport and home.

## Self & SOCIETY

CLASSIFIED

### **Handling Complaints Through Mediation**

In Counselling Agencies & Therapy Trainings, An AHPP Sponsored Course Sat. & Sun. 21 & 22 October 2000 10am-5pm, Wimbledon, SW London Led by Ruth Smallacombe and Everald Phillips, Mediators, Counsellors & Trainers at The Resolution Partnership The two-day workshop will cover the theory and practice of mediation in dealing with complaints and difficulties through experiential approaches, role-play and formal training methods.

**CONSULTING ROOMS** to let Highgate, London. Desirable location near Hampstead Heath. Easy access public transport. Separate waiting area. tel: 0171 267 0304 or 0171 485 5013; fax: 0171 267 3210.

**THE OPEN CENTRE.** The UK's longest established independent growth centre (1977). Ongoing groups, weekend workshops, individual sessions. Primal Integration, Bioenergetics, Feldenkrais, Transactional Analysis, Psychodrama, Pulsing, Postural Integration. Free brochure - 020 7251 1504

### **ONE YEAR TRAINING in Embodied-Relational Therapy** led by Nick Totton in Leeds.

Eight weekends and one five day residential. Cost: £1000.  
Details: ERThworks, 86 Burley Wood Crescent Leeds LS4 2QL, 0113 278 0230,  
[nick@erthworks.co.uk](mailto:nick@erthworks.co.uk),  
[www.erthworks.co.uk](http://www.erthworks.co.uk).