

The Roots and History of Humanistic Psychology in the UK: An Autobiographical Perspective

Ursula Fausset

SYNOPSIS

The following is taken verbatim, very lightly edited, from Chapters 20–22 of Ursula's Autobiography *Much Ado about Me: An Unreliable Autobiography*, self-published in 2009,¹ and is reproduced here with her kind permission.

A Shift in Direction

When we moved to the vicarage, hearing that we were artists, we [Ursula, her husband and four children] were asked to the private view of an art exhibition at the local library. There we met the painter, Albert, who lived in a nearby village. He told us that their discussion group had a space, and invited us to join. I was excited and managed to drag Shelley along. There were twelve of us – six couples; amongst us a lawyer, an economist, two other artists, two architects and several teachers. We took it in turn every Friday evening to be hosts and to introduce our subject. I was anxious when my turn to speak came but enjoyed the stimulus and the contact with other enquiring minds.

When Martha was a year old and we had been regular members for a few years, one of the couples invited us to their daughter's wedding. It was a glorious June day and on the lawn, I met a lively woman in shimmering silk who had been at school with the mother of the bride. She lived in

California and was, coincidentally, in England, as a member of the Esalen Institute. She and her colleagues were introducing the Human Potential Movement (also known as the Growth Movement) to Europe. They had organized a meeting for several hundred people at the Inn on the Park, in London's Park Lane. After I had listened with curiosity she said, 'Why not come along?' Me? I had never been inside a hotel.

Eyeing me up and down, she began getting personal, 'Where d'ya get those clothes?', she asked, in her bold American accent. Damn it! – I already felt uncomfortable in my borrowed suit, but had nothing of my own that was smart enough for a grand wedding. 'They don't express who you are', she explained, with a suggestion that I was more interesting than these clothes. She asked me if I had dreams. I suddenly remembered and merely replied, 'Why, yes! Last night I dreamt there was a chair...! Before I could tell her my dream she interrupted with, 'Be the chair.' What nonsense was this!

'Go on, just make it up, imagine you *are* this chair.' She was persuasive. I couldn't come to harm with such a silly game. 'Well. As the chair I'm a bit wobbly, yet people keep sitting on me', 'Say that again', she interrupted sharply. 'I'm a bit wobbly, (I began to feel it) yet people keep sitting on me', and I burst into tears, apologized and rushed shamefully to the bathroom.

Had I been hypnotized? Was it the champagne? I remained puzzled and pondered over the words. Yes. I could see myself as 'wobbly,' unsure, nervous. And of course my mother always told me I was weak. The only 'weight' on me I was feeling at the time was being over-powered by this woman! But later in that dream a man was on the chair – he was a bit like Shelley and a bit like my father. Mysteriously my heart was moved by a touch of truth. Since that incident I have learnt that at a turning-point in our lives, a dream often discloses a significant layer of the psyche, which is ripe for change and, if listened to, will help us dissolve a bit of our out-worn familiar selves.

Before we left the party, I discussed my experience with another member of our discussion group called Valerie and, like a couple of adventurous school girls, we decided to go to this Human Potential meeting.

Perhaps this time, 1970, when I was nearly 42, might now be called a mid-life crisis. I had a devoted husband, four lovely children, a grand house and a dream holiday cottage. We also enjoyed an old VW camper and a bright red Mini. What is more, my identity as an outsider was nicely propped up by my status as an artist. But I wasn't satisfied. I felt trapped, and I needed something; I didn't know what, beyond my present life. Thus, I was excited, as well as apprehensive, about this expensive day in London.

The great ballroom was full; many people were already sitting on the floor, in the comfortable clothes we had been advised to wear. We were a very mixed crowd, amongst us many psychologists and academics and a scattering of exotic strangers. I was intrigued to meet Alan Watts (in purple robes), as I had recently read his book *The Wisdom of Insecurity*. R.D. Laing was there, and no doubt many others whose understanding of our human condition I had already imbibed.

On the platform was a man called Bill Schutz, in baggy trousers and a Mexican shirt. He first spoke of their work in the context of the counter-cultural movement of the sixties, placing it alongside civil rights campaigns, the environmental movement, rock concerts and the influence of Eastern religions. He explained that in the West we live in our heads and miss the joys of feeling fully alive, that the actual experience of this very moment is all we really have. (While

he spoke, a woman was cheerfully massaging his shoulders. When asked why, she just said, 'he needs it!'.) Although this approach to tapping our potential (he went on) was being used successfully in education and psychotherapy, it was for everybody who was interested in knowing themselves and in developing their God-given potential. We had a chance to move from our habitual inhibited lives, to freedom. This would require taking risks. Were we ready?!

To begin with we were to introduce ourselves to one another – no 'how-d'you-dos'! 'Mill around in silence, making eye contact with every one you meet.' After 10 minutes of this:

Now close your eyes and continue meeting people with your hands. Go slowly to get a sense of the other and keep breathing... be curious. Dare to be a little more adventurous; hold their hands; feel their face. Now, keeping your eyes closed, stand still and notice how you feel.

For about four hours we followed the instructions. We were to pick someone to do an exercise with and then tell them why we chose them. We shouted 'Don't touch me!' to everyone we met and then changed it to 'I like you'. We did 'trust' exercises, such as falling backwards while others caught us. And between the challenges we gathered in small groups to talk about how we felt, both in ourselves and towards each other.

The group energy intensified as we all opened up. Near the end we were asked to lie on the floor and, with our arms outstretched, call for our mummy. I became one with a helpless infant wail. The man next to me began to sob. And I was reaching an unbearable sense of abandonment. I don't know how long this 'exercise' lasted, but a voice encouraged us to slowly come back to the room and as we did so, to comfort one another. The hugs elicited more crying and then my own floodgates opened and ancient pain began pouring out. I was afraid it would never stop.

We finished as we began, with moving around the room, pausing awhile with each person and, with soft eyes, seeing their eyes. In the background, imperceptible at first, warm liquid music was playing. The intermittent words of the facilitator were slower and mellower now:

The Being you are meeting is just like you. They too can be hurt, frightened or lonely. They too can feel small and helpless. We all need to feel safe – and to know we are valued and loved. Everyone of you is precious.

The pauses between the guidance grew longer and longer. We lingered with each other in a timeless flow.

The rhythm of the music was gradually changing. It grew louder and faster. Smiles turned into laughter, bodies began to move to the beat, until the whole room was alive with ecstatic dancing.

Before Valerie and I left, I looked at the table of books. I bought *Encounter Groups* by Bill Schutz – also, *Lose Your Mind and Come to your Senses* and *Turning on without Drugs* (the flower power, commune and drug culture around San Francisco was losing its magnetism). And I signed up for a weekend group run by an English couple who had spent several months at Esalen.

As I emerged into the 'real world' I reflected on how I had been encouraged to *express* my feelings instead of a life-long injunction to control them. People had said lovely things to me that I'd never heard before; I was beautiful; my voice melodious; I was kind and courageous and perceptive. I was left intoxicated.

Back in the Old Vicarage, my husband seemed more loveable, my children more precious, and I hugged them all. I had an unfamiliar sense of confidence and freedom and a heightened awareness. I felt that life could never be the same again. It wasn't.

The Human Potential Movement

From the day I went to that big meeting in the Park Lane Hotel, I became an ardent participant in Human Potential groups. Most of the leaders were from the fledgling schools of Humanistic Psychology in America that were radically challenging the wordy distancing of analytical approaches and the cognitive and behavioural methods of the time. There were many methods used, skilfully addressing our inhibitions and unresolved issues. I was soon to realize that even the most seemingly balanced and functionally 'normal' of us could benefit by increased understanding of our selves and one another. Also, that beneath our outer characters we all long for the same things, especially the love and feeling of specialness that we first wanted from our mummy and daddy.

I attended the weekend 'workshops' and an ongoing evening group, and I went to all the demonstration lectures and training groups run by our august visitors. During those first years my attitudes and values rapidly changed.

A lot of what was then revolutionary and experiential and suspect has now, over 50 years later, been tamed and institutionalized – eligible for MA degrees and doctorates. Freud's and Jung's work in the early twentieth century showed us the importance of 'the unconscious' and repressed sexuality, and was enshrined in the methods known as psychoanalysis or analytical psychology. What we were doing completely broke the moulds of that era.

In this powerful new wave of psychological and cultural history, we played our part in the language and beliefs that now influence our daily lives. For instance, schools and the

workplace now recognize the need for communication skills and emotional sensitivity. We also hear a lot more about the virtues of transparency today (in our seventies' groups, even the trust built by respectful confidentiality was eschewed). Men are now allowed to cry and women are more assertive, and we recognize that physical contact can be life enhancing for adults as well as for children.... There are a lot more hugs all round!

Throughout recorded history a rare number of people, mostly philosophers and monks, have valued self-knowledge and paths to inner freedom. Following the destruction and suffering of two world wars and then Vietnam, there was a mistrust of governments and a thirst for a brighter world. As the outer powers had not brought peace or freedom, we began to look within. Our little branch of seekers went along with rock concerts, environmental concerns and the influx of Eastern religions to form this New Age.

Today we seldom hear of Encounter Groups, Sensitivity Training, or groups entitled 'No Limits,' or 48-hour nude marathons (heaven forbid!). We took to extremes a dubious idea of freedom, influenced by the flower-power love-ins and drug culture of the Californian sixties. It wasn't just a learning process but, for me anyhow, a lifestyle and a colourful hot-house for rapid growth.

You may remember that I was already counselling people who had marriage difficulties, under the auspices of what we now call 'Relate'. I wanted to expand and deepen my work with people. I have always found it very difficult to absorb information, except when studying what interests me, and I was given to believe, at school and from my husband, that I was not intelligent. So this potent experiential and experimental approach felt just right, and gave me more sense of my value. The book title phrase, 'Lose your Mind and come to your Senses' was balm to my ears.

The mind, we were told (contrary to all we had been educated to believe), had only second-hand knowledge, sustained by the past, and was the biggest cause of our suffering. We could only become free of the repressions and fears imprinted in our childhood through our here-and-now experience. Analysis would just keep us trapped in the prison of our minds.

Based on this philosophy, we shared our fears, expressed our feelings and became conscious of how we felt towards others in the group. Then we could give feedback. When pairing for an exercise, did we choose or want to be chosen? Naturally we were sometimes hurt when hearing others' opinions and preferences. The only rule was: do not physically harm yourself or anyone else.

We wrestled with one another in power contests. We

crawled around like infants, calling, 'Mummy, mummy...!'. We danced and painted pictures – all to help us freely express both negative and joyful feelings. Sometimes we closed our eyes and the leader guided us on fantasies: beneath the sea for treasures, up the mountain where we met a special Being who gave us words of wisdom.

Some structures were really scary. I remember one in which we were asked to imagine ourselves going mad: what form would our madness take? Then we all acted it out at once.... The room was in bedlam! My own horror was of a downtrodden old lady going around muttering to everyone 'Cupp'a tea, dear...?' – still crazily trying to get acknowledgement by being helpful.

In some groups we worked alone, with the guidance of the leader. If the work revealed a traumatized area of our psyche, releasing a lot of old pain, we might be offered a group rock, even a lullaby for our inner child. Everyone present made a field of support and, through identification with others, we learnt about similar aspects of ourselves. All these methods may seem excessive today, but the results were often profound.

We were to be our own authorities and, as we opened our hearts and actualized our potential, we would pass the good news on to others. I continued to consider myself an artist, and I could now use all my creative and intuitive skills in the service of self-discovery. This would be my new art, the art of helping others to live a real life: a midwife to the truth. Each of us can help to build peace and love in this destructive and greedy world, for we were all born to be joyful and to contribute to the evolutionary force of life and its wonderful gifts. I have never lost my vision of how our lives could be, or my curiosity about our psyches. This era touched some truth in my soul. Decades later, through many different teachers and practices, I now experience the fruits of my inner work and am grateful for all my years as a seeker.

Of course groups cost money, but I learnt to wait until a few days before the event and then got offered a half-price place. Or, as I was a regular and risk-taking member, I was sometimes invited to go free.

Quaesitor, which was the first London Growth Centre, near Regent's Park, wanted to train English leaders. One evening, when we had all become very familiar with each other, we assessed our qualities for the work. I was considered to be the most perceptive, honest and compassionate person in the group. However, our leader said, 'Unfortunately Ursula, you would never be strong enough'. (I was inclined to shrivel under attack.) This message of weakness was the same one that my mother gave me – one that I disliked and denied. It was all I needed to fire my

Leo pride and determination. There and then I decided: *I will be a leader!*

From that moment on I devoted all the time I could to my new work. Our house was large and we had four children. I got extra help and stopped sewing and ironing and most baking. We did not have a television, but I no longer read newspapers and novels or listened to the radio. I continued to enjoy time with my loving family who, in the early days, were benefiting from my loosening up. Shelley, my husband, was very supportive, as he could see how I was blossoming and he enjoyed having the children to himself while I was away.

There was no selection process for the groups at this time; they attracted the curious of all ages and all walks of life. Many people were professionally interested: analysts, clergy, doctors, social workers and teachers. Many others were ordinary well-heeled citizens who had already learnt that money and fame cannot buy lasting happiness.

'We' represented an alternative to the prevalent culture. 'They' indulged in alcohol and cigarettes, ignoring the health hazards and making big profits for industrialists. (Things have moved on now regarding nicotine.) 'We' didn't drink or smoke! Medicinal drugs were also suspect: they suppressed symptoms, had nasty toxic effects and had little to do with real healing. (This supported my already deep-seated distrust of orthodox medicine.) We were encouraged to eat wholefoods, and to use long-tried remedies such as homeopathy, or Chinese and Indian treatments that engaged the body's natural recuperative powers. In those days this was all new; now such options are open to all who can afford them.

Along with the activities came pervasive attitudes: some taught, many just presumed. Clever people and qualifications were disdained; and people were persistently judged for being 'in-their-heads'; a defiance of the culture that conditions us to achieve clever brains in preference to a good heart.

Alan Watts, a great interpreter and popularizer of Eastern philosophy and psychology for the West, wrote a book entitled *The Wisdom of Insecurity* which encouraged us to take risks in our lives.... It is hard to grow to your full potential when stuck in a stale marriage or an unfulfilling job.

Mind-altering drugs were another part of the counter-culture. I first heard about psychedelics through my learned father-in-law, who lent me Aldous Huxley's book, *The Doors of Perception*. After taking mescaline, Huxley entered a whole other dimension of his being and was awestruck by his experiences. From the counter-culture I learnt that cannabis, or an occasional acid trip, could help to expand our consciousness. There was not widespread misuse of drugs in the seventies, but most were already illegal. Groups were

strictly no-drug zones. With Martha still a toddler I found myself too busy with the family and my new work to join in with any 'alternative' social life.

Soon the workshops began to specialize and, through the years, I explored endless new Mind, Body and Spirit methods, as they landed on our shores. In those first years I went to Primal (Scream!), Regression and Re-Birthing groups, to heal my life's early traumas. It is now widely recognized that birth and the first months of life (even pre-birth) have a powerful formative influence on people's character. It can be a tough start for tiny humans.

Because of the unfamiliarity, I have strong memories of the first groups. I will end this chapter by telling you about one of them. It was entitled, 'Sensory Awareness'. I arrived a little late. There, in the entrance, stood an old pacifist friend of Shelley's, whom I had only seen before in his city suit. He had nothing on but socks. His great big tummy, tiny acorn willy and obvious embarrassment made him look like a shy 3-year-old. We simultaneously said, 'What are *you* doing here?!'.

I was welcomed by our attractive group leader, Peter, who was naked, but for a purple scarf tying back his dark curly hair. Some people chose to be partly dressed, but I was used to nudity and proud of my youthful body. I stripped at once. Having no clothes on was equalizing and I was surprised by the lack of sexual energy in the room. Thank goodness I had worn decent knickers! – for I soon found, as others did, that unless we were doing specific bodywork such as massage, it was easier to participate with them on.

When everyone had arrived, we sat in our cushioned circle. The leaders seldom gave talks, but Peter was sensitive to our English inhibitions and introduced the subject gently, something like this:

Our senses have been deadened. We invite more and more stimulus and speediness into our days, forever rushing towards the illusive happiness of tomorrow. We lose touch with the simple riches of life, the little things that feed the soul. When did you last listen – really listen – to the song of a bird? When did you breathe in the delicate fragrance of a wild flower? Do you look up at the sky, that ever-changing show of light and colour?

I enjoy his mellow voice, in that loose Californian accent. And he is in tune with my own values. Why not read this slowly, so that you too can relax?

'Our whole bodies are a sense organ', he goes on. Close your eyes and notice what you are aware of now. Notice the ground supporting you, the sounds in the room, perhaps a smell or a taste in your mouth. What is the sensation of your in-breath and your out-breath? Where does the air touch your skin?

Then, after a long silence, 'Notice anywhere in your body that feels uncomfortable, perhaps a tense shoulder or a contraction in your solar plexus... Now place soothing hands where that unease is – touching that place... Do you feel touched?... – a long pause.

When you are ready, slowly open your eyes and look around the room. See the other people, each with their unique bodies and histories. Are you critical? Or admiring? Or are you afraid that others might be judging you? – Sense into your feelings. – Remember – there is no right or wrong – only each individual's present experience.

Having settled, at last we introduce ourselves: first our name, or what we would like to be called. (I choose Carmen – it sounds strong and sensual.) Then we share what we feel. There is a myriad of possible feelings, such as anxious, angry, joyful, impatient, excited... but 'relaxed', or 'nothing', 'I don't know', or 'I was thinking?'. These poor people are cut off, in their heads, or hiding something!

Over this long weekend, Peter takes us through one process after another, many of them in silence. We pair up to learn about trust, one blind-folded and the other guiding. With partners we learn a simple massage. Then we lie down in a circle with our heads on one another's tummy. Inevitably, the gurgles result in a room full of laughter. After each exercise we have a chance to say how we feel. Sometimes childhood memories arise from a deep well of feelings; then we need the leader to help us tell the story and bring about some healing. This sort of process usually leaves the person feeling light, free, trusting and grateful.

In this Sensory Awareness group I was being taught to live life with relish and to go with my feelings; to be creative and to play and enjoy my body. Until this time I had learnt that life was about duty and sacrifice, not pleasure! My world was being turned upside down. Who am I? What is my life for?

On the second evening we paired up for a feet washing ritual. As we were an odd number Peter said he would be my partner. The scene was set; out of the soft candlelight came the music of a flute, and the sweet scent of jasmine filled the air. There was an atmosphere of reverence. By this time Peter had reached a pinnacle of glory in my eyes and washing his feet was bliss.

After this tender experience it was sleep time. With a full heart I lay on the carpet in my sleeping bag. Some of the other group members were cuddling up to enjoy the freedom, comfort and delight of their bodies. The group leader had a private space upstairs. He bent down and whispered in my ear, 'Come up to me'. Nothing on Earth could have been more tempting. I spent a restless night; my mind convincing me this way and that – 'Nothing need happen!'

– ‘Don’t delude yourself!’ – ‘And why not?’ – ‘You’re playing with fire!’.

Just before dawn I slept, repeating the words, ‘I am a happily married woman’.

My New Work

Within two years of starting in groups I was running my own: at first as an evening class in Colleges of Further Education, where I had once taught art. These state-supported ‘Awareness groups’ expanded rapidly. In order to have more freedom I sold my pottery wheel and kilns, and carpeted the room for groups. I dropped my work with ‘Relate’ and developed a one-to-one practice in my house.

A few people stand out in my memory of these early times. I shall write about them to illustrate our methods. Because of the personal nature of the work I will disguise each one. First there was Bill; a middle-aged man from a nearby town who had joined my ongoing evening group. His wife had said she would leave him if he didn’t come, because he was violent and threatened to murder her, and I was her last hope. He had a grim, motionless face and hard, darting eyes. I was scared. I vowed to tighten up my acceptance strategy.

One evening, when we had just done some heart-touching group work, I led them for about 20 minutes with their eyes closed on a guided visualization. First they remembered the pain of feeling unloved; then a moment of blissful love; and, at last, how they would like to be loved now. Finally I said, ‘Let a symbol arise for your heart’. Afterwards, they shared their inner process. It was wonderful how each individual brought up a different picture; a rose, a valentine card, Christ’s bleeding heart. Some we explored further. Bill said, in a cynical way, that he had an image of a sheep’s heart that he had seen in a butcher’s. He said, ‘You see, I’ve never seen a human heart’. I invited him to repeat this sentence slowly, over and over. Gradually his face began to crack, his lips to quiver. I sat near him, following his breath with mine. At first shallow and high, then a gasp, as though life was entering in. The room was silent, full of supportive compassion. ‘I have never seen a...’. At last choking tears, as though an ancient drain, blocked with agony, poured out his broken heart. The desperate crying of a little boy and the relieving sobs of a man. Nothing was with us but this beautiful truth. He looked so soft and innocent. Many present were trickling tears of empathy and awe, and felt pain and compassion in their own hearts.

Much later, he said it was the first time he had cried since he was four years old. He had then been sick on his teddy and his mother had burnt it. Poor little boy, ill and sobbing while his mother was struggling with a new baby. In

exasperation she said, ‘Shut up! Stop crying or I will *kill* you!’. He cried some more as he told us this memory.

Bill learned to express his hate and anger in the safety of the group environment. He wrote up the story of his mother’s own terrible life, and before he left the group he found a little forgiveness for her. He stopped threatening his wife, and I worked with them as a couple. Of course this was only a beginning, but a vital opening for his healing.

In my private practice I had a psychiatrist called Dominic, an ex-public school man who had incapacitating sexual inhibitions that were destroying his marriage. Because of his mother’s attitudes and some horrible school experiences, he felt that his genitals were disgusting and shameful. After a number of one-hour weekly sessions, in which stories of the past were spoken of for the first time, he asked to do some reality testing. We looked at his penis. We touched it. I said positive things about it. It was soft and warm, and then magically grew big and strong. He gradually began to feel proud of his manhood, and was able to use his god-given power to give and receive deep pleasure with the wife he loved. Our work would now be considered utterly out-of-order. Not that this was a quick fix: real change needs a great deal of compassion, understanding, courage and, above all, *time*.

Years later, when he had given up being a doctor and had his own psychotherapy practice, he told me that it was the most healing thing he had ever done for himself. This is often the case when it is the first experience we have had of personal inner work. Remember; in the early seventies, this work was nothing special. Body parts were discussed in groups; men compared the size of their penises and women joined in with curiosity about their own genitals. In fact these very personal disclosures still go on in Tantra and sexuality groups today.

The other person who will always stay in my memory is Betty, a young woman whose identity was stamped with ‘mental hospital case’. She was in and out, mostly from suicide attempts. Joining my group demonstrated her firm intention to change. To begin with she hid her miserable past, along with the slashing scars on her wrists, so that I would accept her.

Betty was bright and sensitive, and contributed courageously and openly to the group. This was made easier by the fact that so much of our work was structured, or focused on what was arising between group members, rather than on individual issues from the past. We only discovered her damaged history when she missed a group and confessed that she had relapsed and been in hospital. Then the whole story poured out. However, prior to this regression

she had experienced the longest spell out in the world since she'd left school.

This courageous woman remained with us for years, and I admired her determination. In this early seventies culture there were no rules and no panels to judge ethical behaviour; I largely worked by intuition. I asked her to telephone me if she felt the urge to harm – but if she had already harmed herself, then I didn't want to know. Just ring for an ambulance. This worked wonderfully. I would actually take her into my bed; a real re-mothering. Betty never went to hospital as a patient again. She trained as a conventional psychotherapist in the National Health Service, keeping her past a secret. She also married and had children. I was always grateful for having been used in this way, and it helped me build my trust in the work. However, I never sacrificed my private life in the same way again.

This next brief story illustrates how I demonstrated taking risks in the early group days. Members committed to my ongoing group by paying for three months in advance. One time, when I had collected the cash, I put the pile of notes on the mantelpiece above an open fire. People began to worry: the money may fall in the fire, get lost... would I put it safely away? I picked up the wodge of notes and threw them high into the air! Shock! Horror! After that we experimented with giving and receiving money and how people felt about it.

There must also have been some people who did not appear to benefit from the work. As an educator in this personal field, my job is to do the very best for my clients, to be constantly open to learn, but not to be attached to the results.

The method that satisfied me most was Gestalt. I met it in my first year and made it my central discipline. We believed that the door to finding our potential is available in every moment. We learned not just through content of speech, but by subtle awareness of voice, movement and posture. The method encouraged each one of us to be responsible for our lives, and discouraged the inclination to analyse. I found it magical, and use it to this day, especially to gather meaning from dreams. Although Gestalt became established as a therapy, it is far too life enhancing to keep for solving problems or personal difficulties. It is a learning process. I continued to consider myself an artist, and this was my new creative medium.

I sought out the top trainers of the day. Usually they came to England, but I also spent a summer training in Gestalt with famous leaders in California. Soon I was specializing, and was invited to use my skills in city Growth Centres.

During the early seventies I also did a tough three-year course in 'Applied Behavioural Science' at North London

Polytechnic. I wrote my thesis on Group Dynamics. Next, I spent three years immersing myself in Psycho-synthesis – a form of 'transpersonal' therapy (known as such because it includes a 'higher self' or soul in its view of human beings). This was enriching, but did not address the dark side of the personality in a gutsy enough way for me at the time.

All through the seventies I was discovering my potential and improving my Gestalt skills. By 1980 I was running Gestalt Training Groups in seven different countries, including the USA. I had also founded The London Gestalt Centre, which offered the first Gestalt training in this country. Its home was in my home.

This looks like success, but in fact I have never felt ambitious. I happened to be there at the time when the many forms of Humanistic Psychology were new in Europe. I have always freelanced. I never had insurance, nor had one official hour of supervision. As a pioneer, who was there to supervise me? I was just deeply involved. I read, experienced and wrote articles about our work with passion.

In the early eighties, when the Gestalt Centre was well established, I left it in the good hands of others. I was spending too much time on administration, and also the 'weakness' that I had been warned about began to show up in my health. I am grateful to my colleagues for keeping the good name of the Gestalt Centre to this day. I returned only once, to present diplomas: ironic, since I have no paper qualifications myself.

I have needed to change the names of people I knew and hide their identity in an attempt not to upset anyone. On the other hand, for myself I have only my crumbling ego to protect, so that I am as truthful about my own experiences as memory will allow. ⑤



Ursula Fausset was born in 1928 in the New Forest. She endured a Nurse's training, delighted in years at The Chelsea Art School, and married a sculptor. After 25 happily married years as an artist and mother of four children, in 1970 she met the Human Potential Movement. She was an early contributor to *Self & Society*. After many years of experiencing this exciting new work she founded The London Gestalt Centre, which is still flourishing. Ursula now lives in Totnes, and is a student of the Diamond Approach (Ridhwan).

Note

1 *Much Ado about Me: An Unreliable Autobiography* is available from Karnac Books at: <http://www.karnacbooks.com/Product.asp?PID=29897>