

Obituary

In memory of Kenneth Evans: a tribute

Maria Gilbert

Ken Evans died of heart failure on 15th July 2015, shortly before his 69th birthday. He is deeply missed and deeply grieved by many people: family, friends, grandchildren, colleagues and students.

I knew Ken Evans as creative, innovative and energetic. He enjoyed initiating new projects. This was balanced by a compassionate, kind and committed energy to his students. He loved his teaching, which was evident in his lively warm presence in the training room. In the words of his wife Joanna, 'He was so loved by trainees all over Europe. Wherever I go people want to tell me stories about the work he did with them, the meaning he had for them in their lives and how seen and supported they felt by him.' This dedication to the welfare of his students was immediately evident in his commitment to his work as a teacher when he talked or wrote about psychotherapy and supervision. Ken regularly moved on to new projects throughout his professional career with a speed that left me breathless at times; and at the same time, I very much appreciate the significant contribution that he has made to the development of psychotherapy in Europe.

I first met Ken Evans thirty years ago when I arrived from South Africa at Metanoia in West London where he was engaged in doing the Gestalt Psychotherapy Training programme that had been established there just before my arrival. I did some teaching on the programme and got to know him first in that capacity. He was certainly amongst the first graduates from that programme. I have some photographs from that time of a young, enthusiastic Ken Evans entering a new field of interest. Ken's enthusiasm remained unabated over the years of our acquaintance, as the man grew older and wiser!

Once a graduate, Ken started the Sherwood Psychotherapy Training Institute (SPTI) where he developed a range of training programmes from Gestalt to Integrative to Supervision. I recall being intrigued by the choice of name. It was certainly distinctive and immediately memorable and most people would instantaneously associate it with Sherwood Forest and so with Nottingham. There was also for me, with my literary back-

ground, the other association with Robin Hood of Sherwood Forest. I could then, and now, see some validity in the metaphor. Ken was committed to assisting the disadvantaged, those who needed support and encouragement to own their authority and their rights as people and as professionals. This commitment persisted through the time that I knew him.

I was at that time involved in developing the Metanoia Institute with the three original South African founders. However, Ken managed to persuade me to come and do some teaching at Sherwood at the same time and supervise some groups. This experience gave me a very good sense of the ethos of the SPTI training as a place where students were offered an in-depth experiential growth experience linked to good, sound teaching. What I recall most vividly was the interface between a focus on the immediacy of the encounter, a focus on the present moment in the room, and Ken's interest in the person's developmental history as that unfolded in the process. I enjoyed my supervision groups at Sherwood, which gave me a good sense of Ken's capacity to engage his students in self-reflection and phenomenological enquiry as professionals. This fits for me with my experience of Ken as a person, a teacher, and a writer; his focus on the immediacy of the here and now, the process unfolding between him and the other. In all his interactions, this was always in evidence. In my years of relating to Ken in a variety of contexts, and my experience of being a co-author with him, this focus remained central for him in his philosophy of practice.

At first when I went to Nottingham I used to stay with Ken and Marie, his first wife, who welcomed me into their home. I was sadly also around when she contracted cancer and then died after extensive treatment. At this point I stayed elsewhere as Marie needed the space both literally and figuratively in their home. Ken supported her through that painful time involving cancer treatments with some remission but finally ending in her death. He wrote about this experience in his poignant article *Living with Dying*, published in the *British Gestalt Journal* in 2000 (Vol 9, no 2, pp. 87–97). My memory of her funeral remains with me – the grief of the family so in the field and the deep loss to all those present. As an Afrikaans South African by origin and with my experience of the African culture, I was used to much singing and wailing at funerals as people expressed their grief very overtly. What struck me first at Marie's funeral was the silence as she was buried.

Then the family members paid oral tributes in a very subdued and contained and deeply moving manner. This is one of my most memorable first experiences of living in a different culture from my own, especially as I had been ready to join in expressing my grief through singing and expressive grieving!

Ken stayed on at SPTI for a while after Marie's death and then later he moved to Scarborough from Nottingham where he was involved with Scarborough Psychotherapy Training Institute (SCPTI) for some years. Again for me there was that sense of constant movement into new projects where he made his contribution and then moved on. I recall wondering whether he would ever settle in one place and enjoy the sense of peace! Ken bought and became director of The Scarborough Institute in 2002, running both Gestalt and Integrative Psychotherapy programmes, a Therapeutic Counselling programme and a Supervision programme. I believe he stepped back in 2005, in the sense that he became Director of Training, although he was still teaching on all the programmes. Ken enjoyed living in Scarborough, living by the sea and building up the Institute, and made many good connections there. He then moved on to new pastures.

Ken and Joanna were married in August 2007. In 2009, Ken began building up a flock of sheep at the farm he had bought in Normandy. This gradually became their main home and was always open house to many visitors. He mentioned to me very recently that he wanted to retire and become a full-time sheep farmer. I expressed some amazement at this decision, such a contrast to his other activities.

Ken was active in Europe in the European Association for Gestalt Therapy (EAGT), the European Association for Integrative Psychotherapy (EAIP), and latterly the European Association for Psychotherapy (EAP). He was also very active generally in the politics of psychotherapy developments in Europe. Ken contributed to developing psychotherapy in Europe both on the Gestalt and integrative fronts. Ken was the EAGT President from 2002 to 2008. I believe that his most important contribution to the EAGT was to change its structure: he had the vision of creating a large governing board constituted by the Executive Committee and the representatives from the different countries (that have a National Association). Before that the national representatives were a consulting and not a governing board. Another important action was to create the Human Rights and Social Responsibility Committee. In 2009, Ken was awarded the DPsych in Public Works from the Metanoia Institute, a doctorate validated by Middlesex University. His thesis, which was a reflexive account of his achievements, was entitled *Contributing to the Development of Psychotherapy as a Profession in Europe 1987–2008*.

Ken and I were instrumental in starting the European Association for Integrative Psychotherapy (EAIP), the first organisation to be recognised as a European Wide Accrediting Organisation by the EAP. He was the first President of EAIP and then recently returned to the post of President to inject new energy into the association. He very actively recruited and supported new members to join the EAIP, which continues to flourish under the leadership of Bruno Van den Bosch. His contribution to EAIP has been valued and appreciated over the years. I respected the energy with which he committed himself to developing the organisation over many years with the support of the other dedicated members.

Once in Normandy, he also developed the European Centre for Psychotherapeutic Studies (EUROCPS) in Jersey where he ran an Integrative Psychotherapy Training Programme, and then later in Serbia. He also latterly ran supervision programmes and children's psychotherapy training programmes across Europe. He very actively supported the development of institutes across Europe, particularly in Romania and also including Croatia, Bosnia, Malta, Greece and Norway. He was a visiting trainer in many countries. He was particularly keen to develop the thinking he had around 'You are therefore I am'. He also founded and was passionate about the European Interdisciplinary Association for Therapeutic Services with Children and Young People (EIATSCYP) and was president of this organisation as well as EAIP when he died.

Joanna Hewitt-Evans, Ken's wife, was a very active supporter of Ken in all their joint training activities. Although she did not fully share his enthusiasm for sheep farming she did support him at busy times like lambing, checking the lambing shed during cold April nights. During the lambing season Ken made sure that he was around to 'deliver' the lambs and make sure that they were safely born into the world. I imagined Ken sitting there with the ewe patiently through the night awaiting the delivery. This required a devotion to lambing that amazed me! I admired this as an activity that was very far from my range of preferences.

Once the programme in Jersey was up and running, Ken applied to have the European Centre for Psychotherapeutic Studies (EUROCPS) recognised as a European Accredited Psychotherapy Training Institute. At that time I was the only Integrative Psychotherapy assessor on the EAP Training Accreditation Committee (TAC) so I was asked to be one of the assessors for this assessment, which required an Integrative presence. This was a really interesting experience for me as one of my remits was to sit in on training sessions. I sat in on both Ken's and Joanna's sessions which gave me a good sense of their very competent and relational style of engaging. I also had the opportunity of meeting some of the students and hearing directly of their rewarding

experience on this programme. I valued this first-hand experience of their competence and engagement in the learning process.

I think of my relationship with Ken very much as a kinship one. I am/was eight years older than Ken and for me he felt very much like the younger brother I would have liked. Joanna says that he also said that 'Maria is like the sister that I always wished for'. This kinship element fostered our relationship over the years, with me as the older sister and Ken as the younger brother. The 'sibling' element of our relationship gave us the space to have spats and to disagree and then to make up. We often disagreed about how to proceed, Ken wanting to move forward at once, and me pleading for some caution and reflective time before we went forward! In retrospect I can now see that this was a strategy that worked effectively, capitalising on both our strengths and compensating for our weaknesses.

In August 2005 he and I went together to a World Congress of Psychotherapy in Buenos Aires in Argentina. In addition to attending the conference, we spent a good deal of time sightseeing, dining out and relaxing. I saw the playful side of Ken at this time as we allowed our curiosity to take us to different places of interest. I even persuaded him (under sufferance) to come shopping with me, as Buenos Aires offered such an interesting variety. I still have a blouse that we chose and a pair of shoes and a handbag! It was here that I also learnt about another side of Ken. One afternoon it was raining and I slipped and fell near the pavement as I was crossing the street. I had hurt my knee and Ken started laughing. I was irritated and said 'this is not funny!' He warmly apologised and we went on to have a relaxed supper!

In retrospect I realise that he may also have minimised his own suffering in this way as a protective strategy. And then I recalled that he had written an absorbing article on Healing Shame: A Gestalt Perspective for the *Transactional Analysis Journal* in April 1994. This article is an experience-near and heartfelt account of a person's experience of shame and the treatment of shame in psychotherapy. What occurred to me then was how often what we write about helps us focus on and gradually integrate some part of ourselves.

Ken was not a person who easily took advice from others. He was headstrong, principled and sure of his position, so challenging that stance took some courage on the part of others around him. I would recognise that steely look when he was set on a path and few would interfere! What amazed me was that I was on occasion allowed to challenge him from my role as his 'older sister' and he would listen to my point of view and consider it, albeit at times with some anger and irritation. I guess this was part of a good kinship relationship, that sisters and brothers remain around and tolerate each other's foibles. I was also given the liberty to

comment on his choice of partner! I heartily welcomed his choice of Joanna as a trustworthy and emotionally grounded person. I had met her first in one of my supervision groups at Sherwood and was well acquainted with her respectful, loving style of relating to others. I celebrated Ken's choice!

Ken and I had a very productive relationship over many years as co-authors. We wrote two books and many chapters in edited series. We wrote about Integrative Psychotherapy, Gestalt Psychotherapy, and Supervision. Details of our two books are as follows: Gilbert, M. and Evans, K. (2000), *Psychotherapy Supervision: An Integrative Relational Approach to Psychotherapy Supervision*, Buckingham: Open University Press; and Evans, K. and Gilbert, M. (2005), *Integrative Psychotherapy: An Introduction to Integrative Psychotherapy*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

This collaboration as co-authors worked really well for us, especially as we would sometimes have slightly different emphases. Our last chapter was for a book edited by Divine Charura and Stephen Paul, *The Therapeutic Relationship Handbook* published in 2014, and entitled 'An integrative approach to the psychotherapeutic relationship; therapeutic challenges and successes'. What I appreciated about Ken as a co-author was the hard work that he put in to this endeavour and the immediacy of his response. I never waited long to hear from him and in that way we were well matched. I miss him very much in this role as well, as we developed such a good working alliance. I do recall him contacting me a number of times saying 'I have been approached to write a chapter on . . . and I decided it would be best if we did this together', and thinking 'not again!' I appreciated his indefatigable energy and his willingness to engage in new projects that were central to his character in all fields of endeavour. He always managed to persuade me to collaborate after my brief hesitation. Soon after moving to Normandy he also wrote a very interesting book with Linda Finlay entitled *Relational-centred Research for Psychotherapists: Exploring Meanings and Experience* which has been a significant contribution to the relational research field.

Ken was originally trained as a social worker and employed as a local authority Principal Social Worker/Team Leader for several years prior to studying as an Anglican priest in Cambridge. His career therefore involved an initial career as a probation officer and senior social worker. Ken then became a clergyman, a minister of religion in a parish setting and subsequently a Mental Health Chaplain. Once he had moved to psychotherapy and training, he always retained a sense of faith, a spiritual dimension, but this was non-institutional and his faith continued to inform what he undertook in the widest sense.

Most recently he was committed to building up the farm in Normandy as an eco-friendly centre, combining this with his devotion to his sheep! And more latterly he was involved in a commitment to the development of interspecies work. He had been invited to give a keynote address for an Integrative Association in Ghent in Belgium on 24th October 2015 when he was to receive their 'Maslow' award for his contribution to the profession. He had intended to do his keynote on 'Interspecies Psychotherapy'. I was there when the award was given to Ken posthumously. It was very moving when Joanna accepted it on his behalf. Clearly this was a community where Ken was greatly valued.

Ken had started to develop a constitution for what he envisaged as a new European Organisation for Interspecies Psychotherapy. He had been working very excitedly on this during his last few weeks. It grew out of plans to offer training in this area in the United Kingdom and other parts of Europe in 2016, built on what he had aspired to with the farm and the sheep. He was (when at home) out in all weathers building and mending fences, planting trees for the future and tending to the sheep. He was always trying to balance his love of the land with his passion for psychotherapy. He was a proud and loving grandfather and wanted a better world for his grandchildren.

What follows is a brief statement he made about

'Interspecies Psychotherapy and Building this Awareness':

A cultural shift of paradigmatic dimension is urgently needed to change attitudes and extend a life quality belief that extends I-Thou mutuality to all human beings and beyond to include the natural world and its non-human species. This requires an immediate turning away from the pursuit of a reductionist and objectifying drive for an ever-increasing standard of living. This much needed cultural shift away from ego to eco means a new consciousness, a new comprehension that the existence, well-being and flourishing of all human and non-human life on Earth has intrinsic-inherent value.

Ken was an exceptional person, an inspiring trainer and a good friend; I miss him on many levels, both personally and professionally. I consider his death as a great loss to our field of endeavour.

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