James F.T. Bugental, Ph.D., A.B.P.P., died age 92, September 18, 2008. He left a full bodied legacy for psychology. Some of his professional accomplishments include former professor of psychology at the University of California at Los Angeles, Georgia Tech University, and Saybrook; Emeritus Clinical Faculty at Stanford University School of Medicine; Rockefeller Scholar at the California Institute of Integral Studies; professor emeritus of the international Institute for Humanistic Studies; first President of the Association for Humanistic Psychology, Division 32 of American Psychological Association; first recipient of Rollo May Award, given by Division 32, Humanistic Psychology; honored as a pioneer in humanistic/transpersonal psychology by the Association for Transpersonal Psychology in 2005; author of over 60 articles and chapters on Existential-Humanistic psychology and psychotherapy; author of five books: *Search for Authenticity*, *Psychotherapy and Process*, *Intimate Journeys*, *Psychotherapy Isn’t What You Think*, *The Art of Psychotherapy* and editor of two versions of the *Handbook of Humanistic Psychology*. His books have been translated into many languages and all continue to be used widely in undergraduate and graduate schools of psychology and psychotherapy.

In this issue devoted to Transpersonal Gerontology, I am honored to share Jim as I experienced him close to thirty years as his student, colleague and friend. He was my teacher and mentor as he was for countless students and colleagues who each in their unique voices continue to expand his love for truth, for knowing and not knowing, for searching and for being present to the actual moment. He yearned for something more for himself, his family which he so dearly loved, students, colleagues, and all of humanity. This yearning was ever present when I would call him on the phone. Opera or classical music could easily be heard in the background when he picked up his phone, “Hi, just a minute, let me turn the music down.” There was outer music which he dearly loved but the “music behind the words” was his passion. His presence to the hidden potential inside me is what these calls and in person consultations were about for me and for countless others whose lives he profoundly touched.

The first time I met Jim was in his very small office in Santa Rosa, CA in the early 1980s. I had no idea who this man was but totally trusted my friend and colleague, Ann Dreyfus, saying he was “the best.” He was very willing to meet with me when I told him I had not read anything he had written. Of course I remembered his name from textbooks in relation to existential-humanistic
psychology but at that point in my career I was more interested in how far I had to drive for another leg of supervision. Santa Rosa was close. We met and I promised not to read anything he had written for one year while he supervised my cases. He wanted to train someone to follow the subjective life of the client without the use of theory. I liked this idea of not reading very much and was full of curiosity how Jim would follow the client’s subjective world.

He asked if I had any questions toward the end of the interview. I had been drawn to a photo behind him of a man with a wonderful smile. So I went for what was “real” for me, which I quickly learned was of great value to Jim.

“Yes, who is the man in the picture?” Jim reached back to the photo, picked it up, and tears began to moisten his cheeks.

“This is Al Lasko, my best friend. He died recently.” Jim looked up from the photo and looked into my eyes with a presence rich with the truth of what truly matters in being: human - human relationships. I was experiencing authenticity in the moment. This is how he followed everyone’s subjective world. He lived it fully with vulnerability and honesty.

Jim taught me through tears, humor, storytelling, silence, intellectual discussions, disagreements, writings, walks, lunches and any opportunity he could take to question, to explore, to follow his insatiable curiosity of the subjective world in the actual moment. Case consultation was not “about” the client but rather the lived moment of consultation. Essential to my consultations was what happened inside of me when I brought the client into discussion. For example, Jim invited me to pace in his office as I shared that my client often paced during sessions. This client had been labeled schizophrenic for many years. As I paced in Jim’s office I felt the isolation and fear of this label and tears streamed down my face. Words were not needed. I returned to seeing this client with a depth of presence to his pain that would be what Jim called my “pou sto” for our long work together. Pou sto, a Greek term meaning a place to stand, in psychotherapy is a steady inner stand with the client while exploring the struggles of being human.

This experience of walking in another’s shoes happened in so many different forms with Jim. After group consultations we would often go to lunch. Jim liked a certain restaurant with a waitress he nicknamed “giggle box.” She had an infectious laugh and no matter how many struggles we had listened to that morning in consultation, listening to giggle box was just as important to Jim and all of us. Balance was always important.

In his later years he lost a lot of his memory and took his loss as an opportunity to live fully what he had valued so deeply all of his life - the actual moment. His later years were mostly spent with his amazing wife, Elizabeth, enjoying the beautiful blue herring in their backyard, softly stroking his beloved cat and sharing so many other amazing moments of love and joy.

I struck a deal with Jim toward the end of his life. If there was a life after death he would send me a message I could not mistaken. About a week after he died I
was waiting in my office for a client and a picture fell off my office wall and landed at my feet. It was a poster from an International Transpersonal conference, with the words “Individual Choice and Universal Responsibility.” I found tears welling up. I was not sure but it seemed to be the promised message. Being a stubborn student, I had to get one more message. Later that day there was a letter in my mailbox from a local mortuary with the following message:

“You too will die one day! Today and only today you can purchase your cremation for 50% off.”

Ok, I got it. These words reminded me of one of Jim’s frequent phrases, “pointing with your elbow,” which Jim used to emphasize the necessity yet limitation of words in attempting to describe one’s subjective experience. Thank you Jim for gently and humorously “pointing with your elbow” to the truth. Jim’s teachings are alive in me and I dearly miss calling him to hear, “Hi, just a minute, let me turn the music down.”

The Author

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