

CANADIAN SFBT NEWSLETTER

HAPPY NEW YEAR

Happy New Year and welcome to the second edition of the Canadian SFBT Newsletter. We would like to thank you for your overwhelming support, encouragement, and enthusiasm; it has touched us deeply (how very solution-focused of you!!).

“So, it seemed a natural thing for me to just flip that a little bit from looking at solutions as problems, to not even looking at problems, and just looking at solutions that work.” – Dr. Thorana Nelson

What an amazing autumn we have had! The SFBT annual conference held in Toronto this past November was full of exceptional workshops, engaging conversations, and the camaraderie we have come to expect from this conference – wow! During the conference we had the opportunity to lunch with Ron Warner, our first interviewee (Fall edition), who announced the press release of his latest book, *‘Solution-Focused Interviewing, Applying Positive Psychology’*. We both thoroughly enjoyed it and consider it a ‘must-read’ – a review of his book is in this newsletter.

The 2014 conference on Solution-Focused Practices “Weaving Solutions”, will take place in Santa Fe, New Mexico, November 6th–9th, 2014. This year, the American Association of Marriage and Family Therapists will be holding their annual conference in Milwaukee (October 16th–19th, 2014) with a planned tribute to Steve De Shazer, Insoo Kim Berg, and BFTC. We predict that 2014 will be a year of honouring SFBT and the tenets we hold dear, so get out there and enjoy!!

We are delighted and honoured to have Dr. Thorana Nelson, Ph.D., as our second interviewee. Thorana is a professor emerita (Utah State University) and a founding member of the SFBT Association. She is the author/editor of several well-regarded SF books including two of our favourites: *Handbook of Solution-Focused Brief Therapy: Clinical Applications*

(with Frank Thomas, Haworth, 2007) and *Doing Something Different: Solution-Focused Brief Therapy Practices* (Haworth, 2010). Thorana also supervises, teaches, and trains on Supervision, Brief Therapies, and Solution-Focused work. Through her teaching and academic contributions, Thorana has promoted the field of SF into greater prominence, and we would like to express our appreciation and gratitude to her. And she remains humble to boot! We hope you enjoy the interview and, if it leaves you wanting more 'Thorana', she will definitely be in Santa Fe this November at the SFBT conference.

Geri and Dina

We can be reached at: Canadiansfbtnews@outlook.com

INTERVIEW WITH DR. THORANA NELSON

Professor Emerita of Family Therapy and founding member of SFBT

D = Dina (Interviewer)

N = Nelson

D: Thank you so much for agreeing to do this.

N: No problem.

D: Your interview is going to be our feature interview in our second newsletter, so we're really quite excited. Geri wanted to be here as well, but she's got a client, so she might join in with us. We're hoping that it's going to be about 20 minutes and just a few questions. I'm taping it, if that's okay with you.

N: That's fine.

D: And we'll send you the transcript so you can see it and edit it, if you feel you want to include something, or if you prefer us not to.

N: Okay, sounds good. You know, we've got a number of international people coming to the Santa Fe conference.

D: Amazing.

N: Vic and I were in Switzerland at the EBTA conference and really talked up Santa Fe and gave away two conference waivers. I don't know if they'll be used, but people got really kind of excited about it, and lots of people talked to us.

D: Beautiful.

N: So, it has the promise of being fantastic. And the venue is amazing. Oh, we are so excited. La Fonda Hotel is right on the plaza. It's a great venue.

D: Well, we're excited here. And I'm definitely coming, and I'm going to bring my husband

CONGRATULATIONS TO DANIELLE CLEMENT, WINNER OF DR. WARNER'S NEW BOOK!

Question: According to Ron Warner, what percentage of solution-focused interventions are required for a therapist to be considered a SFBT Specialist?

Answer: Above 70%

too.

N: Oh good. Oh yeah, it's a great opportunity for a vacation.

D: Yeah, I've never been to Santa Fe, so what an opportunity to get down there and have a fantastic meeting, and to meet with like-minded people. That's what stands out to me about a Solution-Focused conference. It's the like-mindedness.

N: Yeah, I don't think I ever thought during the conference, "How can I talk about this in a way that doesn't sound bad?" I didn't have to think about any of that.

D: On that note, I want to –

N: Now that we've used up our time chatting, how can I help you? What are your questions?

D: Well, my first question is, the first time you heard about Solution-Focused, and what hooked you?

N: The first time I heard about it was probably 1985... '83... '84. It was soon after Steve's first book came out. So I think that was 1982, so I probably heard about it in '83. That sounds about right.

D: And were you a student back then?

N: I was a graduate student. I was in my master's program. And my professor, my practicum supervisor and mentor, had read this book and he was very intrigued, so we started playing with some of the ideas in our sessions. The Formula First Session Task, for example. And we had been using Milan ideas, and so they just fit right in.

D: Absolutely.

N: They just fit right in. It was really great. We were all very big on Karl Tomm. And one of our colleagues was doing her dissertation on Milan. And then Steve came for a workshop. He was already scheduled to come for a workshop. This was in Iowa. He was the plenary speaker, the keynote address at the Iowa Association for Marriage and Family Therapy. I got the opportunity to be Steve's

personal host. So I got to know him in that way. Then, after we moved to Indiana, so I want to say it probably would have been something like 1987, '88 or something like that, Insoo came to the Indiana Association for Marriage and Family Therapy annual conference. And I had a long chat with her and I have this impression that I had lunch with her or something, and we made a really good connection. So my first introduction really was the book and then meeting Steve and Insoo at workshops.

D: And what was your first impression? I mean, what hooked you? Did it fit for you? Was it a natural fit?

N: Well, actually there was an unnatural fit, because my nature is to be pretty negative, but I also knew that in my training, I didn't like pathologizing. I didn't like pathologizing families. I was much more interested in MRI ideas about looking at patterns, and that's not pathologizing, that's just looking at patterns, and if they're not working, interrupting them in some way. It doesn't necessarily mean they're wrong, it just means they're not working. So, it seemed a natural thing for me to just flip that a little bit from looking at solutions as problems, to just not even looking at problems, and just looking at solutions that work. So, it had that kind of natural fit, and because it was opposite to my own nature of pathologizing and I didn't like that, it really was helpful. So that was one thing that really hooked me. Another thing that really hooked me was that even though Steve always claimed that there was no theory base, I saw theory of therapy in it. That fit very well with my theory of families and theory of clinical problems and so forth. The academic in me, the scholar in me enjoyed the mind kinds of things – the conversations that we engaged in about how things worked. So I think those were the two main hooks.

- D: It makes a lot of sense. And when I think of Solution-Focused, Steve didn't want it to be a model, or didn't want it to be a theoretical theory, and yet there were so much of different theories in it in some ways. Like, when I think of how he studied Milton Erickson, trying to figure out what it was and then coming to the conclusion -
- N: Yeah. And he never denied...A lot of other people will say, "Oh no, I never heard of Erickson", and it's like well, yeah you did, because you just quoted him without -
- D: Knowing.
- N: Yeah. And Steve was always very clear of his therapeutic heritage.
- D: Yes, absolutely.
- N: The Solution-Focused approach came out of MRI.
- D: Absolutely, the Mental Research Institute.
- N: A close connection with Erickson.
- D: Absolutely.
- N: And because we had studied those, they were very fresh. People were actually using them in the clinic, along with some other approaches. It was just a natural flow into Solution-Focused standing.
- D: What were Steve and Insoo like?
- N: Probably my perceptions are very similar to others'. I found Steve to be a bit of an odd duck and I was always kind of curious about that. I've only recently learned that his family lived in Omaha, Nebraska. I never knew anything about his background.
- D: Wow.
- N: It was very interesting, yeah.
- D: That's telling in some ways. Yeah.
- N: It is. And I don't know who he was personal with. I'm sure that there were a lot of people he was personal with. Because I didn't know him as well as so many, many other people.
- D: It sounds like Insoo who was the one who made these natural connections to others.
- N: Well, Steve made the intellectual connections for me.
- D: Ah. Nice distinction.
- N: I really enjoyed the intellectual connection with Steve. With Insoo, I just found her to be so interesting. She listened well. When she heard a good idea, she commented on it, even if she changed her mind later. She was very interactive. She was much more social than Steve. She just made all of these...I could just see it - and I can still see it - all of these very important personal connections. People are still saying things like, "I miss Insoo so much," and they mean that in a personal way, not just in a professional way. So, my impression was that they were a very interesting couple. I saw them together as a couple, and just found it extremely fascinating and quite a hoot, because Steve would say something and Insoo would sort of say something to argue, and then he'd say "Mmm" or one of his grunts - and then move on to something else. But those were always professional situations. I was never with them together at any personal kind of interaction.
- D: Thorana, you said if you remember correctly, that the first exposure was around 1983 when you were a graduate student. That's like 30 years ago.
- N: Yeah, wow.
- D: It is a wow, isn't it?
- N: Yeah.
- D: In what ways have you seen Solution-Focused evolve?
- N: Well, quite a bit, actually. Because when I first became acquainted with it, the basic idea of multiple perspectives was kind of key. And then some of the practices were different. Like asking people what worked, instead of what didn't work was very different at the time. Certainly different from psychodynamic things - asking people what worked. But over time, all of these

other practices that the team learned from clients and experimented with – the miracle question, the scaling questions, somewhere along the line they had the three client stances of visitor, complainant, and customer. And after they saw how that was being misused to pathologize clients, Steve always wished that he could just take an eraser and take it out of all of his publications, because it was a bad idea. So, he was willing, and so was Insoo, although Insoo was a little more adept at reframing and turning something around to make it work, whereas Steve was more likely to say, “Well, that was bad, so we won’t do that again.” So the evolution, as I have watched it, has been refining the practices that work, kind of dropping the ones that don’t. For example, he was working on a computer program that would tell the therapist what assignment to give, what task to give. He was playing with tasks all the time. The “every other day,” the “flip a coin.” There were just a whole bunch of them. So, over time, he dropped almost all of that stuff. And yet, the miracle question, the scaling questions, and the exception questions that have just really stayed, there was even more disagreement or difference of opinion about taking the break and giving the task. Taking the break, most people seem to think is quite important. Whether or not they give a task is, you know, some people say, “no let’s not do that.” But there are a number of things that it’s kind of branched off into. And then people in different places have taken the core of what Steve talked about, in terms of learning from clients and Occam’s Razor. The whittling away of everything except for what’s absolutely necessary. So I look at BRIEF in London, for example, and they started playing with things like, “Well do we really need to ask the miracle question? Do we really need to do this? What is the

least that we really need to do?” And came up with the best hopes question.

D: Yes.

N: And Steve did not disapprove of that. It’s clearly a change. It’s a big change. You know, and then he went...I mean, it came a little bit out of, “how can our time today...” How did Steve always phrase it? I can’t remember how he phrased it, but it was still “how will you know that our time together was useful?” That was a common question that Steve would ask. And BRIEF kind of turned that on its head and just whittled it away, and said, “so, what are your best hopes for our time together?” Really left out a lot of stuff. In some ways they made it more vague, in some ways they made it more clear. And then others – people who have gone to [the SFBTA] conference and to EBTA conference – and people are coming up with different practices and different ways of thinking. After it became well-known that Steve was using Wittgenstein, a lot of people, in Europe especially, really started looking at that and thinking about language and post-structural philosophy and things like that. So, one of the evolutions is that, even though Steve said this is not a theory, at the same time, people were putting philosophy to it. And I don’t think a lot of people understand the difference between theory and philosophy.

D: That’s an important distinction.

N: Yeah. Then one of the evolutions I saw is that people were saying the practices are not as important as the philosophy, the stance of the therapist. There’s a lot more room. And one other thing I would comment about that is that somewhere along the line, they were both family therapists, and they both understood systems thinking quite well, and Insoo began to realize that – at least in my conversations with her and then seeing it in her writing – that relationship was being left

out. The clients tended to be individuals, most books and so forth were written about individual clients. Some of that was the necessity of coming up with books about particular clinical populations, but she worked really hard then in the last, I would say, 10 years of her life, to bring relationship back into it. And Steve caught on to that very well. So, one of his practices, very common practices, was what he would call the “best friend question”: “What would your best friend say about that?”

D: Yes.

N: That’s not just how do you think others observe you, it really had to do with relationship. I think that’s one of the things that’s still being worked a lot is how you think about relationship and systems interactions within the Solution-Focused approach.

D: Because the Solution-Focused approach was born from a systemic mother, with MRI and all the rest.

N: Yeah. Definitely not psychodynamic. It was quite interactional. I would say it was born in the interactional movement, not necessarily systemic, but certainly the interactional movement.

D: Thorana, what are you excited about, as you look at Solution-Focused today? What’s next?

N: I don’t know. I see so many pathways turning up. So many different...I mean there’s just so many. Elliott Connie is coming up with some great ideas, and he’s writing stuff and presenting on couples. Johnny Kim has a new book out on multiculturalism in Solution-Focused work. The evidence base is huge. I think that’s something that excites me. I don’t want to be a part of [research] anymore, but the fact that there are so many people doing research and legitimizing the approach is very exciting to me. Because any more when

I hear people talking about – and I teach supervision as well, relational supervision – and so a lot of the people that are in my courses are using other approaches, and I find myself thinking, oh, your life would be much easier if you did something different. And that’s not appropriate for me to beat my Solution-Focused drum, but I think that we’re making inroads in so many different places and it’s so exciting. The research is exciting. The microanalysis work is very exciting.

D: Yeah. That’s exciting.

N: Yeah. And then the application of Solution-Focused philosophy in so many different ways: organizations. I’ve been talking with Vic about churches, coaching, different kinds of coaching – life coaching, personal coaching, relational coaching – schools, bullying. I mean, you just look at the list of conference presentations. It’s not often that I go to a conference and see a break-out session that has three things in it that I want to go to.

D: Yeah. Very true.

N: That’s very exciting to me that there’s just so much excitement.

D: Well said. That was a beautiful answer. And I can hear the excitement in your voice as you’re talking about it.

N: Yes, I’m pretty excited about it.

D: So, I guess, in closing, because I don’t want to take up too much of your valuable time, and then I’m also concerned about transcribing it all...

N: Right.

D: Okay, let me think. Any advice to developing therapists? I mean, you teach supervision, you’ve been a supervisor, you’ve been a prof. You’ve done it all, you’ve seen it all. What advice would you give a developing Solution-Focused therapist?

- N: I would say get a supervisor, somebody who will either be able to observe you or that you can send audio or video or transcripts to in an ethical way, and get feedback. Practice, practice, practice, and get feedback. And reading. The more I read, the more I see little things. I'm teaching the Beyond Basics for the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee - the follow up to the course that Insoo and Harry developed.
- D: Wow.
- N: So, there are things, like, little nuanced things that I think people could...Pre-suppositional. To practice, practice, practice pre-suppositional questions until it becomes a part of your thinking.
- D: Until you become completely fluent.
- N: Practice and feedback.
- D: Practice and feedback. And just one last question: What are you doing now? I'm hearing you moved to Santa Fe recently.
- N: I have, yes. About a year ago.
- D: How do you like it?
- N: We love it. It's just a wonderful place to live. It's a very exciting place to live.
- D: Wow. And you're teaching. I know you do the supervision course for AAMFT, you're teaching at a university, could you fill us in?
- N: The only university I'm teaching is for the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee online. It's not a regular graduate course. It's part of their continuing education department. So that's what I'm doing. I'm teaching workshops, particularly in supervision and in solution-focused work. I go to agencies that invite me that want to know how to use brief therapy principles in the therapists' own way. Integrating, marrying - I don't know quite what the right word is - but using brief principles in your own approach.
- D: Beautiful. Right.
- N: So, for example, how do you use Brief Therapy, meaning Solution-Focused, with Emotionally-Focused Therapy? I think the two things that I'm most interested in right now are Solution-Focused Brief Therapy and relational supervision.
- D: Lovely. And when we saw you in Charlotte two years ago, you had just announced to us that you had just retired.
- N: I retired from university. I did not retire from professional life. I continued to do practice, to see clients until we left [Utah] a year ago. I'm not seeing clients now, and I don't know that I will, because every time I think that I'm going to, then I go lie down for a while and it goes away.
- D: This is an exciting new chapter, right?
- N: It is. It's a very exciting new chapter. And so I'm really reducing and focusing more on the things that I'm most interested in.
- D: I think that's beautiful. And it's inspirational. And it reminds us...I think when we do Solution-Focused, it is a stance of the therapist as well, it's our world view.
- N: Exactly.
- D: It does come into our lives quite a bit.
- N: Quite a bit.
- D: So, it's nice to hear that you've organized your life in such a way that it's rewarding. Too bad you're not doing any counselling, because I think it's always inspirational when we meet with people and they get to see their therapist living their life the way they want to.
- N: And I am. I'm living my life the way I want to.
- D: Thorana, thank you very, very much.
- N: Oh you're welcome, Dina. Sorry that Geri couldn't join us, so say hello for me.
- D: Me too. I will. Was there anything you were hoping I was going to ask that I didn't, or I should have and I haven't?
- N: No. I don't think so. I think you covered the things I'm interested in.
- D: Excellent. Thank you, Thorana. And I hope to see you soon. I'm going to carry this interview with me for a little while, and I'm

going to go through it and send it to you as soon as I can. All the best.

N: Okay. I'll try to look at it very quickly.

D: No worries. Thank you.

N: Bye-bye.

D: Bye-bye.

Calendar:

Upcoming Events not to be missed:

Please send us your SFBT events so we may announce them to:

Canadiansfbtnews@outlook.com

The University of Toronto, School of Social Work provides Solution-Focused Counselling and Coaching training. The Counselling options for Fall 2014 are: **Promoting Post-Traumatic Growth**; February 7th & 8th, **Very Brief Helping Interviews**; April 11th & 12th, **Child and Adolescent**; May 2nd & 3rd, **SF Supervision** May 23rd & 24th. For more information please go to:

www.socialwork.utoronto.ca/conted/certificate/SFC.html

Solution-Focused Brief Coaching: Mindful Presence of a Coach; February 28th & March 1st, **Solution-Focused Perspectives on LEAN Management**; March 28th & 29th, **Solution-Focused Supervision and Mentorship**; April 25th & 26th.

Book Review:

Solution-Focused Interviewing: Applying Positive Psychology (A Manual for Practitioners) by Ronald E. Warner

What an absolute delight to read and review Ron Warner's book "**Solution-Focused Interviewing**". Warner's book reads like a warm and wise consultation you would have with someone who is open to ideas and keeps hope alive by believing in people. He says it so well, "when we help them to see that they have what they need to live their lives with a renewed sense of hope, we are in some way fulfilling our own ultimate purpose".

His thirty plus years of psychology practice, research, writing, and teaching provides him with so much wisdom and we as a Canadian community can be very proud to claim such a scholar and mentor as one of us. Warner's book is a must read for anyone using SFBT ideas in their work. And, in particular, I highly recommend this to students and Solution-Focused practicum/placement supervisors.

I really appreciate how Warner locates SFBT work within the history of therapy and positive psychology. I remember, not too many years ago how a student once commented that she was skeptical of SFT ideas because it had no anchor in any other model. O, would I love to have had Warner's book then. He clearly gives a mini history lesson on the models of psychology to positive psychology to micro-analysis all the while explaining how SFT fits.

The second part of this book is a wonderful map/manual of how to use all the SFT "tools" in your session/s by using his tri-phase model. Warner is a gifted teacher and wonderfully integrates other theories and research with SFT. The case examples of both Martha and Steve gives the reader many aha moments as to how SFT ideas are weaved throughout the tri phases of his model. In particular, I appreciated the idea of micro questions and his many examples. This certainly helped me understand the idea of "going slow the SFT way".

Warner asks "How will you know, when you have finished reading this manual, whether your time has been well spent?" I can say that this

small book will be read over and over again and will encourage all my SFT colleagues and students to do the same. And, I strongly believe this is an important manual for anyone involved in Walk-in clinics. It was worth every minute spent because I am prouder than ever to know that we as Canadians have a wonderful SFT mentor in our midst. And, even though my primary lens for therapy is SFT, I walked away from this book with many wonderful gems. Thank you, Dr. Warner.

Clinical Pearls:

My new 7-year-old client (Mozart) stood between his mother and father looking like he might make a run for it at any second – he was not happy to be in my office. The presenting issue was encopresis that had started a year ago after his parents had separated. I admired his spunk right away as he told me that he didn't want to be here and he wasn't going to speak to me. I thanked him for telling me 'straight up' what he was thinking and feeling, and validated that I probably wouldn't want to talk to a stranger about personal matters either. I asked if it would be okay to talk a little to his parents to find out what he liked to do and what he was good at. He shrugged his shoulders.

I found out that he was a very helpful boy, that he liked to tinker with mechanical devices, and that he loved the military channel. In fact, his parents told me that he was obsessed with the military channel and historical battles. I asked if it would be okay to play a game all together and we proceeded to play 'Jenga'. At the end of the session, I asked him if he might come again and teach me a little about battles and showed him our play room with toy soldiers, tanks, and airplanes. He agreed!

For the next two sessions, we played with the toy soldiers and planned military campaigns – we had a lot of fun and Mozart taught me a great

deal. I was so impressed with his knowledge base. He could identify weapons, different types of planes and talk about world wars – and he was just seven!!

In our fourth session, we returned to the playroom and started to set up. As we played, I asked Mozart what did soldiers on the battlefield do when they needed to go to the bathroom? He patiently explained to me that they dug a little hole and then covered it with leaves. I asked him, what did fighter pilots do? He answered that they went to the bathroom before they got into their planes. "But what if they have to go when they are on the plane?" I asked. "They hold it!!" he quickly and with some indignation responded. We had a delightful conversation about toilet paper replacements on the battlefield, finding a safe place, and the courage and 'control' it took to be a soldier.

In the next session two weeks later, his parents informed me that there had been no 'accidents'. We had one more session after that, again in the play room, where Mozart continued to use his expertise and knowledge to teach and amaze me.

By Dina Bednar

WATCH FOR OUR NEXT ISSUE

We look forward to your feedback, questions, ideas, and subscription requests. Please contact us at Canadiansfbtnews@outlook.com.