

Looking Back: Personal Reflections on the History of Our Association¹ Part I: Conception to Birth

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Abstract: None available.

Full Text: INTRODUCTION The imminent arrival of the 21st century provides an irresistible opportunity to reflect on what we have been doing together from the birth of APPPAH in 1983 to the end of 1999. At our present age we are "sweet sixteen" and "sixteen has been a very good year" with new highs in membership, extraordinary publishing accomplishments, and the climactic experience of our 9th International Congress on the edge of the third millennium. As I began to outline and fill in the details of our history, I could see dividing the entire history into Gestation, Birth, Growth, and Future Promise. However, I quickly lost hope of telling the whole story within the time and space available to me so I chose to comment only on our gestation and birth. This period extends from our conception in 1975 to an auspicious birth at the First International Congress of Pre- and Perinatal Psychology held in Toronto in 1983, a gestation period of eight years. Our Roots Our Association was born in the mind of Thomas R. Verny. Before this, Thomas had won doctorates in medicine and psychology and had distinguished himself as a teacher and author. He later explains what we might call our conception, in the Foreword to *The secret Life of the Unborn Child* (1981, p. 11). This book really began in the winter of 1975 during a weekend I spent with some friends at their cottage in the country. Helen, my hostess, was seven months pregnant and radiant. Often in the evenings I would find her sitting alone in front of the fireplace, softly singing a beautiful lullaby to her unborn child. This touching scene left a deep impression on me, so when Helen told me later, after the birth of her son, that a lullaby had a magical effect on him, I was intrigued. It seemed that no matter how hard the baby was crying, when Helen began singing that song he quieted down. Was her experience unique, I wondered, or did a woman's actions, perhaps even her thoughts and feelings, influence her unborn child? Also in the Foreword, Thomas describes six years of intensive study, thought, research, and travel to learn more about the mind of the unborn and newborn child. This odyssey led him to share ideas with psychologists, psychiatrists, fetologists, obstetricians and pediatricians in London, Paris, Berlin, Nice, Rome, Salzburg, Vienna, New York, Boston, San Francisco, New Orleans, and Honolulu. All this found expression in the 140 citations that were the scientific backbone of *The secret Life*. His references were a judicious mix of anecdotal evidence, clinical evidence, and experimental evidence that set a standard for our work in the future. Meanwhile, at his office in Toronto, he was busy "treating hundreds of patients affected by traumatic pregnancies or deliveries." *The secret Life of the Unborn Child* (1981) opened doors and proved to be the forerunner of the activities to follow. The book became an extraordinary instrument educating the world about prenatal and perinatal psychology, an emerging field that was neglected in academic psychology. Although the going was hard at the beginning and Thomas was often criticized for his revolutionary ideas, the book became an international best seller ultimately translated into 25 languages. He once told me that a quarter million books had been sold in Japanese alone. This book became our primer. The book is 19 years old today. Thomas was the visionary who could see the emergence of an important new discipline that would require the attention of professionals from many different branches of study. He was the weaver who recognized the value of the separate strands of many contributors and was the first to weave them into one fabric. Communicator that he was, Thomas reached out to everyone he could find who had similar interests and brought us together one by one. How Thomas and I met is just one example. Late in 1980, after his book had been sent to the printer, he read a story in his newspaper about my research with ten mother and child pairs in hypnosis, a study that documented the reliability of birth memory. I had been very involved with birth memory since the summer of 1974 when I sought training in clinical hypnosis. From that time on, I had clients who remembered birth (or

before birth) and spontaneously described their thoughts, feelings, and actions in detail-without any suggestion from me. I found this kind of memory both fascinating and surprising. Nothing in my training as a psychologist had predicted this possibility. When I began sharing these clinical findings with colleagues in San Diego, they reminded me that such memories were impossible (lack of myelin sheathing of nerves, they said) and could only be fantasies. A local journalist who often wrote for McCall's magazine came to interview me about the twenty-five cases I had accumulated at that time. She too had no trouble remembering her own birth in hypnosis. Nevertheless, when the article was submitted, it was rejected. The editor said that no one would believe such a story and, in fact, might think I paid her to fabricate this work! The difficulty I had explaining birth memory led me to conduct original research with mother and child pairs in hypnosis. The goal was to obtain independent reports of the same birth (the child's) and find out if they were reliable or a fantasy. It took a couple years to find and complete work with ten pairs but I was able to present the study at the annual scientific meeting of the American Society of Clinical Hypnosis in Minneapolis in November 1980. (David Cheek, whom many of you knew, was in the audience cheering me on!) This paper was rejected for publication by the Society and went unpublished for six years until it was an "invited paper" in the Journal of the American Academy of Medical Hypnoanalysis in 1986.² The reason Thomas was able to read about this study in his newspaper, I can now confess. Anticipating that my "earth-shaking report" to an august body in Minneapolis might fall into oblivion, and considering the advice of friends who were savvy about circulating news, I composed a press release about the importance of the work reported at the Minneapolis convention and sent it to news organizations. I was immediately rewarded for my effort. Some news gathering bodies sent it to all their affiliates. This is how the story found its way into the Toronto newspaper and into the hands of Thomas Verny. After contacting me about the news article, our correspondence flourished during 1981. He wanted to know about my research and publications. He noticed I had spoken on "Birth Recall in Hypnosis" at a conference of the Birth Psychology Association in New York City, and asked for a copy. Later, after he had lost the paper during a move, he said he had been quoting from it a lot and needed another copy. In December, he suggested we meet in Los Angeles after his appearance on the Merv Griffin Show, part of the promotion for *The Secret Life ...* We had our very stimulating meeting January 9, 1982. One of the decisions which came from that meeting was to propose a symposium "Prenatal Psychology Comes of Age" for the annual meeting of the American Psychological Association to be held in Washington, D.C. in 1982. I was given this assignment and put together a symposium with five speakers, including W. Ernest Freud of Germany, great grandson of the originator of psychoanalysis. No matter, the proposal did not find favor with any of the committees with program time. Neither Developmental Psychology nor Psychoanalysis had any place for prenatal development. Learning that our proposal was rejected, we agreed it would be good to plan a conference of our own. I am sure Thomas had discussed this possibility with other colleagues but I had the feeling we were making the decision together right on the spot-an example of his diplomacy and skill as a communicator. The First Congress The first congress was scheduled for July 1983 in Toronto with Thomas as the Chair. But before this (April 1, 1983) an application as a Registered Charity (Canada) had to be approved and the goals and purposes of the Association specified. Our name at that time was the Pre- and Perinatal Psychology Association of North America (PPPANA). The name was changed in 1993 to Association for Pre- and Perinatal Psychology and Health (APPPAH). Founding board members were Dr. Verny, Sandra Collier, Marcia Penner, and attorney Paul Dineen. The objectives of the Association were to further understand the psychology of pregnancy and birth and the ways in which pregnant mothers influence the unborn; to study the effects of medical intervention on mothers and babies; to explore remedial techniques to counteract pre- and perinatal traumas; to enhance the mental and physical health of mothers and fathers and their babies; to publish and distribute information; and to organize educational meetings for the purpose of exploring the above issues. Professionals and non-professionals were invited to meet in an atmosphere of openness free of dogma. The 1st International Congress on Pre- and Perinatal Psychology was a venture of faith which ran on personal capital and hope for

reimbursement. A list of possible speakers was assembled, invitations were sent out and the resulting faculty had a distinctly international flavor with Alfred Tomatis, Michel Odent and Anne-Marie Saurel from France, Sheila Kitzinger and W. Ernest Freud from London, Arnoldo Rascovsky from Argentina, Peter Fedor-Freyberg from Sweden, Hans Rausch and Ivan Milakovic from West Germany, and Averil Earnshaw from Australia. Sir William Liley, pioneering fetologist from New Zealand was on the program but died shortly before the Congress. The meeting was inspirational, egalitarian, interdisciplinary and lifechanging—a character which would be preserved in all succeeding congresses. Interestingly, seven speakers at the first congress were also on the program for the 9th biennial congress in 1999: Barbara Findeisen, Lewis Mehl, Stanislav Grof, Bob Mandel, Carista Luminare-Rosen, Thomas Verny and myself. They illustrate for the speaker's group as a whole how well prepared they were to contribute to this first conference. Barbara Findeisen had been busy developing a therapeutic process and making video documentaries of her clients regressing to birth and womb events; she brought examples to Toronto. After publishing his path-breaking book, *Realms of the Human Unconscious* in 1976, Stan Grof had accumulated a library of artwork illustrating the feelings expressed by persons regressing to pre- and perinatal stages with the use of L.S.D. Lewis Mehl had begun his research on how to improve birth outcomes by using a mind-body approach. Bob Mandel discussed some of the basic conclusions infants come to about relationships at birth and how these conclusions affect their adult relationships. Carista Luminare-Rosen revealed the processes she had developed to encourage conscious parenting in the prenatal period. I spoke on the range of evidence for consciousness and memory at birth and brought with me a 59-page monograph published for the congress, "Consciousness at Birth: A Review of the Empirical Evidence." That all the speakers were well prepared for the opportunity to speak on prenatal and perinatal psychology in 1983 confirmed the accuracy of Dr. Verny's vision and the reality of a new discipline whose time had come. In closing, let me call attention to the relationship I believe we all have to the Association that was founded 16 years ago. I marvel at how the Association has influenced my life and work. What I realize now is that while I was busy investing my time and talent in the activities of the Association, the Association was building its investment in me. How else could I have published over forty works and made scores of presentations in Canada and the United States, Germany, Poland and France, Spain, Italy, Norway and Denmark, or in Switzerland, Hawaii and Brazil? Had there been no Association, I cannot conceive how I could have done all this work. The truth is, the Association is the mother that nourishes us all. She generates energy and momentum, provides the structures for professional stimulation, enlightenment and support for pioneers and enthusiasts like you. Members of this audience know better than most that mothers themselves need nourishment if they are going to nourish their children. Your dues, financial gifts and volunteer services are the life blood that keeps the Association in vigorous health and assures that it can serve both you and the world. I appeal for your steady support and diligent work on behalf of the Association as it reaches out to professionals, parents and babies everywhere. Footnote 1 This address was delivered in response to receiving the Thomas R. Verny Award for Outstanding Contributions to Prenatal and Perinatal Psychology and Health at the 1999 Congress in San Francisco. This presentation, including final comments by Dr. Verny, is available on audio tape (order from Sounds True; 1-800-333-9185; tape # PPR 3). Dr. Chamberlain served as President of APPPAH from 1991 to 1999. Correspondence to: wombpsi@msn.com 2 Reprinted in Special Millennium Issue: Selected works by David B. Chamberlain, Ph.D., Vol. 14, Nos. 1 & 2, Fall/Winter 1999, JOPPPAH AuthorAffiliation David B. Chamberlain, Ph.D.

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