


## Chapter 9



# THE SEAMLESS CULTURAL CONNECTIONS IN MY LIFE

*No Beginning . . . No Ending*

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IN RETROSPECT, the cultural connections in my life always appear seamless, as they unfold from one salience to the next. I spoke Danish before speaking English, so when I flunked out of kindergarten all I remember are two days of loud noise and everyone being angry at me, making me think I had done something terribly wrong! My parents had never been to Denmark but, in our small farm in Iowa, preferred the Danish language of my grandparents to English. I remember being about 5 years old sitting in the ditch beside the road in front of our "Lilac Hill Farm" thinking that our road was connected to every other road in the world, and then I reached up to touch the road in amazement. I remember our family reading out loud about two or three books a week during cold winter nights, and the whole living room was lined with books, including the "Harvard Classics." I remember people in trouble frequently driving 30 to 40 miles to come and talk about their trouble with my father, who was an unintentional counselor with considerable skill. I remember once-a-month gatherings inside in the winter and outside around a huge bonfire in the summer, eating, talking, and singing both hymns and rowdy drinking songs with much laughing.

Our family was among the "Happy Danes" led by the Danish Bishop N. F. S. Grundtvig who began the Folk School movement in Denmark and believed in bringing cultural enlightenment to all people through the "Living Word." This all happened during the Great Depression when my parents barely paid the mortgage for the farm each month and there was absolutely no extra money, although I never felt "poor." Even when

tornado destroyed all the farm buildings except the house when I was about 8, I viewed our possible relocation to the Emmet County Poor Farm as an exciting new adventure. I learned early the importance of optimism. As my 98-year-old Aunt Agneta put it, "If you are grateful, people will love you, and if you are thankful, God will love you."

As a sophomore at Grand View Junior College in Des Moines, Iowa, my roommate and I found the European History course so exciting that we decided to spend the next summer hitchhiking through Europe. We budgeted the trip at \$5 a day each, including the ship passage over and back. We never knew where we would spend the next night, and every day was full of exciting new uncertainties, adventures, and opportunities to learn. My journal from that summer typed out to 120 pages single spaced. We slept in German haystacks, Venetian gondolas, and Swiss police stations and on Italian beaches, but usually we slept in youth hostels with other "sophomores" hitching around on the cheap. That summer was the least expensive tuition and most powerful multicultural education I ever experienced.

When I next moved to the University of Minnesota, I paid for my education by washing dishes at a food co-op and working as a hospital orderly in the psychiatric wards of U of M Hospital. We orderlies were often consulted by the psychiatrists to learn more about what patients were doing in their daily lives, and that is probably where my interest in psychological issues began. I was able to see, through the eyes of the patients and doctors, the mysteries of how we think and glimpse the inner world. I remember being shocked by how "normal" the patients were in the locked wards. I also remember assisting in electric current therapy (ECT) and helping patients "find their way back to reality" afterward. Every day was filled with learning opportunities.

After receiving my B.A. from the U of M in history and philosophy, I decided I needed to stay on for an M.A. in American Studies to better learn my own roots. I focused on American jazz music, the "Akron Plan" of church architecture, and Henry David Thoreau, all of which harmonized wonderfully. Then I went to the Lutheran School of Theology, now located on the University of Chicago campus, for a master's degree in theology. I wanted to find out the answers to "ultimate" questions about who we are and why people do what they do. I was ordained a minister in the Lutheran Church in America, although I never had a congregation.

The Lutheran World Federation in 1962 offered me a chance to teach philosophy and ethics and be Chaplain at Nommensen University in North Sumatra to about 2,500 students for 3 years. There were many anti-American demonstrations during this time. I remember bicycling to teach my ethics class one day and seeing thousands of students in a mob coming toward me. I recognized some of my students from the ethics class who greeted me and said they would try to make it back to class as soon as possible after sacking the British Consulate. On another occasion, a student burst into the ethics class to say they had wrongly arrested the Vice Rector

and what were we going to do about it? I led the march on the police station with my students and was later scolded by the Consulate. The head of the Youth Communist Party and the head of the Anti-Communist Secret Youth Underground were both seeing me for counseling on their personal problems. During that time, I translated into the Indonesian language the 400-item, multiscaled Lutheran Youth Research Inventory developed by Merton Strommen in Minneapolis and modeled on the MMPI. I gathered data from hundreds of students in North Sumatra and in Central Java to look at "the role of religion in social change." I learned how psychological processes are alive and healthy in Asia but are usually expressed through philosophy, history, politics, religion, or other fields of study. It was at this point that I became vividly aware of how culturally encapsulated the field of psychological counseling was at that time.

I determined to go back to the University of Minnesota for a Ph.D. in counseling. Clyde Parker was my adviser there. He met with all his advisees in a T-group once a week and his definition of education was "something that happens by accident when you are trying to do something else." One particularly important graduate seminar at the U of M involved no tests or papers but only one original idea written on one side of a single blank page. I wrote about the "problem" as a third member of the counseling dyad and came up with the Triad Training Model from that seminar.

After receiving the M.A. in counseling from the University of Minnesota I decided to transfer to Claremont Graduate School in California to attempt a multidisciplinary Ph.D. in Asian psychological counseling, studying in the fields of religion, cultural history, counseling, and political theory. I expected to spend the rest of my life working in Asia as a counselor. In my dissertation titled "The Role of Religion in Social Change Among the Bataks of North Sumatra," I defined religion as "those principles or ideas which do not change when everything around them changes," like "hinges" making it possible for the door of change to swing open. I have never enjoyed writing anything as much as I enjoyed writing my dissertation. I finished the first draft in a week and could hardly take time to eat or sleep from the excitement. The first chapter alone was nearly 100 pages long and was later expanded to become my first book, *Batak Blood and Protestant Soul*.

I do not regret getting a multidisciplinary Ph.D., but neither do I recommend it to others. You can imagine my trying to explain my doctorate in Asian studies so as to gain membership and later Fellow status in the American Psychological Association. While I consider myself professionally most comfortable with the fields of psychology and counseling, I do not provide a typical background profile. I have become accustomed to looking at the professional field of counseling psychology from the "outside" as an uninvited guest, even though many of my students have become leading insiders.

In 1968, I went back to Taiwan for a year of full-time Mandarin language study and to translate the LYR inventory into Chinese for use in Malaysia, where I spent the next two years with my wife and three children. During the race riots in 1969, the only persons not under attack were foreigners, so I drove ambulances around the otherwise deserted Kuala Lumpur and organized discussion groups to keep students off the streets. My task in Malaysia was to gather data from youths and students throughout Malaysia and Singapore and to teach classes at the University of Malaya in education and society. I learned a lot from my students there and was particularly disturbed by the "acculturation" of those students who went to the United States to study and now found it impossible to fit in back home. I decided then to focus on working with international students in the United States. The U of Minnesota offered me a faculty appointment in Psychoeducational Studies and the International Student Advisors Office. From 1971 to 1978 I worked with international students and taught the cross-cultural counseling course in Psychoeducational Studies. I was also actively involved in teach-ins about why the Vietnam War was misguided and likely to do much more harm than good for both the United States and Southeast Asia.

The book *Counseling Across Cultures*, which is soon coming out in its fifth edition through Sage, was put together at that time for my course. Walt Lonner, Juris Draguns, Joe Trimble, and myself organized a symposium on "Counseling Across Cultures" at the Montreal APA meeting that was so successful we decided to edit a book on the topic. All the publishers I approached turned the proposal down. Finally, the East-West Center in Hawaii agreed to publish the book, since I was a Senior Fellow there in 1975–1976, provided we waive all royalties. The first edition of *Counseling Across Cultures* went through several printings in the first year alone and has done extremely well in the subsequent four editions. Many colleagues in the age 30 to 35 range tell me that *CAC* was the first book they read on multicultural counseling and led to their continuing interest in the topic.

Friends at NIMH encouraged me to write a proposal on cross-cultural training of counselors, which I did in 1978, to be housed at the University of Hawaii and the East-West Center in Honolulu. Derald Sue agreed to be External Evaluator for the Developing Interculturally Skilled Counselors (DISC) project in Hawaii, and Tony Marsella at the U of H agreed to be Director of Training. Our "annual conference" resulted in one book a year plus many other publications and consultations. We offered five or six predoctoral trainee positions a year, which included tuition expenses plus a living stipend. We taught two courses a term in cross-cultural counseling through the Psychology Department and the School of Social Work. We also took teams of trainees to do training at Clark Air Force Base in the Philippines, Yong Son in Korea, the U.S. Army base in Okinawa, Saipan in Micronesia to train local mental health workers, Vancouver (Canada), and

elsewhere around the United States and Hawaii. Each team would collectively do a needs assessment, write a training plan, design educational activities, deliver the training and evaluate the training experience. Derald, Tony, and I came up with the competencies in cultural awareness, knowledge, and skill as the criteria for evaluating each class session and training activity in the four-year DISC project. Most if not all the writing I have done since that time originated in what I learned from the students, trainees, faculty, and participants in the DISC project activities.

When the NIMH grant was completed, I moved to Syracuse University to teach in the Counseling and Human Services Department in the School of Education. I worked with my wife, Anne, who was a New Zealand trained organizational psychologist, in the Pacific Science Association, where she was Chair of the Science Communication and Education Committee. The National Science Foundation along with the National Science Council in Taiwan provided eight years of funding to study the reentry of scientists and engineers from Taiwan after completion of their study abroad. Our research indicated that the reentry decision was more profoundly influenced by family and national loyalties than by financial incentives. We both taught at Harvard Summer School every year from 1985 to 1989 and had a chance to spend time with leaders like B. F. Skinner in his home and in ours. It seems ironic to me that Skinner was even more empathic, warm, and genuine than Carl Rogers in spite of their APA debates against one another. In 1987, Anne's brain tumor was diagnosed but, despite all predictions, she continued being productive in her research, writings, and leadership of the PSA until 1996 when she died.

Anne and I both taught in the University of Pittsburgh "Semester at Sea" program, sailing around the world in 1992 teaching courses and working with the 400 mostly undergraduate students aboard ship. I asked my students to write on eight critical incidents they experienced, witnessed, or heard about from their time in each port to illustrate psychological constructs in the "Small Groups," "Cross-Cultural," and "Personality" classes I was teaching. I gathered 300 of the best stories the students submitted in a book I titled *The Five Stages of Culture Shock*. The Greenwood Press copy editor told me this was the only book in her whole career where she would break out laughing while she was copyediting. The opportunities for learning from these experiences were almost unlimited.

In 1995, I moved from Syracuse University to the University of Alabama at Birmingham. I had never expected to live in the South and, if so, certainly not in Birmingham! Much to my surprise, I found the faculty and community at UAB to be perhaps the friendliest and most collegial of any in my professional career. I actually looked forward to faculty meetings! The UAB School of Education has a counseling program in Orot, Israel, and I taught there for a term, learning about the Middle East crisis from the wrong side of the "Green Line." Fred Jandt and I had just organized a conference on "Constructive Conflict Management in a Cultural Context"

through The Asia Foundation in Penang, Malaysia, resulting in a book we coedited titled *Constructive Conflict Management: Asia-Pacific Cases*. The experience at Orot further underlined how culturally encapsulated our perspective of conflict and conflict management is by our narrowly defined Euro-American assumptions.

These international experiences also led to another symposium at the International Congress of Psychology in Montreal, which resulted in the book *Multiculturalism as a Fourth Force*. It is increasingly clear that psychology in general, and counseling in particular, is rapidly changing in response to pressure by broadly defined cultural groups for recognition. Culture provides a "best fit" metaphor for understanding these dynamic and complex changes in psychology and counseling. Multiculturalism is not competing with a behavioral, psychodynamic, or humanistic perspective but complements these theories much as the fourth dimension of time complements three-dimensional space. By making culture central rather than marginal to counseling theory, the potency of that theory is increased, not decreased.

When my colleagues ask me why I am wasting my time on cultural things, I respond by asking them if they value accuracy. They almost always say "yes." Then I smile and tell them that we are on the same side. If every behavior is learned and displayed in a separate cultural context, then accurate assessment, meaningful understanding, and appropriate intervention require attention to that cultural context. The cultural perspective is uniquely useful. By reframing all our relationships (parent/child, husband/wife, sister/brother) into a cultural perspective, it becomes possible for two persons or groups to disagree in their behaviors even while sharing the same "common ground" expectations and core values. Not everyone who smiles is your friend, nor is everyone who shouts at you your enemy. I am less interested in training "multicultural" counselors and more interested in training "competent" counselors.

These insights led to my finally publishing *Hidden Messages in Culture-Centered Counseling*, a book I began in 1968, on the Triad Training Model. The more cultural differences in counseling, the more messages will be "hidden." In TTM training, each client is matched with a pro-counselor and an anti-counselor to articulate the positive and negative "hidden" messages to the culturally different counselor or client. I have become convinced that all communication is fundamentally intrapersonal and multicultural as we encode and decode messages, each according to our own culturally learned rules. Each of us has more than 1,000 "culture teachers" sitting in our chair with us whom we have accumulated over a lifetime from friends, enemies, family, fantasies, and elsewhere. Competence begins with the ability to hear those internalized voices in ourselves and in our clients.

All of my professional life I have focused on Asia. Many of the changes occurring in psychology and in counseling are moving in the direction of

non-Western and particularly Asian cultures where the "self" is a relational entity, where subjective as well as objective data are respected, and where health is best defined as a "balance" of positive and negative forces in our life. In this "two-directional" perspective, pain is as important as pleasure to finding meaning in life. I accepted a Senior Fulbright Grant to teach at National Taiwan University for the 1999–2000 academic year to learn more about these Asian perspectives and the "Easternization" of psychology. The indigenization of psychology is a popular theme among Asian counselors and psychologists, where talk therapy is less popular among the people than going to a local priest to have your "soul called back" after a traumatic experience.

What have I learned from all these seamlessly connected experiences? First, I have learned about myself and increased my own multicultural awareness. Second, I have learned that behavior is meaningless until and unless that behavior is interpreted in the cultural context where it was learned and is displayed. Third, I have learned that a multicultural perspective complicates one's life but that complexity is my friend, not my enemy. Fourth, I have learned to watch for the "surprises" that indicate learning has just occurred and to articulate that learning quickly before it fades away. Fifth, I have learned the importance of working with a mentor. When students ask where to go for graduate study, I suggest they budget 2 hours a day for one week going through periodicals in the library, searching for a mentor who is doing what they would like to do. Then read everything that mentor wrote and finally write the mentor indicating an interest in working with him or her. Sixth, I have learned the importance of working on multiple related topics at the same time so that working on one project contributes to work on all the other ongoing projects. Finally, I have learned to appreciate the wonderful privilege of meaningful work that gives life its greatest pleasure.

### RELEVANT PUBLICATIONS

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- Pedersen, P. (1999). *Multiculturalism as a fourth force*. Philadelphia: Brunner/Mazel-Taylor & Francis.
- Pedersen, P. (2000). *A handbook for developing multicultural awareness* (3rd ed.). Alexandria, VA: American Counseling Association.
- Pedersen, P. (2000). *Hidden messages in culture-centered counseling: A triad training model*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Pedersen, P., Draguns, J., Lonner, W., & Trimble, J. (in press). *Counseling across cultures* (5th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage

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