

Letter from the President

As existentially-oriented therapists and human beings we try to remember that our life is finite, that we will die. Recalling our mortality is not meant as a depressant. Rather, this memory serves to remind us of the preciousness of each moment we live. Death, certainly, is on many of our minds these days with the passing of Jim and Elizabeth Bugental, two exceptional and beautiful human beings who have shaped and guided many of us in the last decades. Both Jim and Eliza-

beth will be remembered as human beings who lived from the heart and used their astute minds to further their teaching us the importance of living and experiencing the moment, of being present with what is rather than with what is not. As simple as it sounds, being present to what is, to others as well as ourselves, constitutes perhaps one of the more difficult challenges we human beings encounter while living our lives. Both Jim and Elizabeth taught many of us how to be present to the moment, whether as therapists and/or in our personal lives.

Our Existential-Humanistic community continues the legacy they left us. Our third annual conference this coming November in San Francisco carries the title, *From Crisis to Creativity: Necessary Losses, Unexpected Gains*. This title speaks to our ongoing effort to move beyond an attitude of judgment and valuation, to an attitude of being and working with what presents itself in the moment. In some ways our conference title, in speaking of unexpected gains and necessary losses, implies that losses and gains are not to be valued as one being better than the other. Rather, it wants to emphasize that without loss we cannot have gain. Certainly, as therapists we are often at the center of a client's dance between loss and gain, between the comfort of the old and the anxiety of the new and unfamiliar.

It is with this in mind that we so-called existentialists regard pain and suffering not as conditions to be eradicated and/or medicated but as symptoms to be understood, as guideposts pointing the way to a deeper awareness of life and living. So it is with this current economic crisis. Along with the hardships the crisis causes many of us, it also provides a necessary transition to a perhaps more just and equitable, more generous and caring world community. This is, incidentally, a community which includes all of life; not just us humans, but all that exists on this amazing planet some lovingly call Gaia, our Mother.

The mission of the Existential-Humanistic Institute (EHI) is to be a home for those of us – whether mental health practitioners and/or others interested in the existential issues we face as humans – who would like to learn more deeply about who we are and how to care for ourselves and our planet. As such we are foremost a home for those who believe in the complexity and richness of being human, in what we existentialists also call the mystery of life. This belief fosters an attitude of deep respect, a standing in awe for the unknowable nature of life. Each life brings with it such wonder that the application of techniques, pre-set interventions, theoretical learning must always take a backseat to being in the moment with what is, with working phenomenologically with what presents itself.

In a world that prides itself on knowing, EHI is a home for those who know they don't. In a world dominated by fads and trends, EHI is a home for those who strive to encounter the immutable. In a world that desires facts and data, EHI is a home for understanding and wisdom.

Welcome home.

- Nader Shabahangi

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EHI at the Saybrook Residential Conference January 2009

On Saturday, January 17th through Tuesday, January 20th, the Existential-Humanistic Institute offered their services to Saybrook Graduate School by providing services as teachers and facilitators for the approximately twenty students in the Humanistic/Transpersonal track. The presenters were Orah Krug, Ph.D., Kirk Schneider, Ph.D., Bob Edelstein, LMFT, MFT, and Nader Shabahangi, Ph.D.; along with Tom Greening, Ph.D. and Gayle Brock, Ph.D., from Saybrook Graduate School.

The theme of the intensive was "The Arts of Existential Humanistic Therapy: Skill Building through Film, Poetry and Practice." The film that was explored in depth for its existential material was *Equis* – a study of the psyche of an adolescent boy who blinded six horses in a passionate act of rage, the psyche of the rational psychiatrist who treated him, and the relationship between the two.

The intensive included a section on poetry and existential psychotherapy. There were also a few sections on various ways to deepen one's skills as an existential-humanistic psychotherapist through case studies, videos, demonstrations, and exercises.

The last day of the conference coincided with Barack Obama's Presidential Inauguration, and was watched by the entire Residential Conference. Students in the Humanistic/Transpersonal track participating in an Existential Political Psychology workshop reflected on President Obama's inauguration speech through the lens of the four existential concerns cited by Yalom (life versus death; meaning versus absurdity; freedom versus determinism; community versus isolation).

The four days were stimulating and enriching – intellectually and emotionally – for both the students and the presenters.



Existential-Humanistic Therapy Comes of Age

by Orah Krug & Kirk Schneider



This symposium signals the potential for a renaissance in existential-humanistic (EH) theory and practice. Not only is EH therapy regaining visibility through a new monograph and DVD series — co-authored by Kirk Schneider and Orah Krug, and published by the American Psychological Association — it is also being re-assessed as a leading evidence-based modality. This re-assessment is exemplified by the latest "contextual" or "common factors" research, which include personal/interpersonal factors as key variables for effective therapy.

These findings are among the most revolutionary perspectives in the history of psychology. EH therapy as researched by Rogers, and conceptualized by the likes of May, Bugental and Yalom, saw this years ago, although they did not see all the contextual factors that have come to light.

This panel, comprised of both clinical graduate students and the co-authors of the EH monograph, will explore the nature, implications, and practical applications of the aforementioned findings, and relate them directly to

EH case material. Specifically, student presenters, Bacher, Cooper, and Fischer, will "set the stage" for the symposium with an examination of the leading common factors research relevant to the EH therapy renaissance, while student presenter, Nathan, will focus on one potentially promising outgrowth of that renaissance - Existential-Integrative (EI) Therapy. EI therapy is an approach that understands and coordinates a variety of therapeutic modalities within an overarching existential framework. In the balance of the symposium, presenters Krug and Schneider will relate the findings of the students to two clinical case studies, drawn from their monograph and video series. Following these presentations, time will be allotted for discussion and audience participation.

In addition, "Existential-Humanistic Therapy," is part of the APA monograph series on the major orientations of therapeutic practice. It is also available with a video of Kirk Schneider conducting existential-humanistic therapy for the series "Psychotherapy Over Time." The video will be available mid-March; the book hopefully by August this year.

National and International Resources

For those interested in panding their existential networking options, check out ICECAP -The International Collaborative of Existential Counselors and **Psychotherapists**

ICECAP exists to promote the appreciation, understanding, and growth of existential and phenomenological psychotherapy through publications, events, and colloquia, including internet activities. ICECAP will seek to achieve these aims by creating dialogues among individuals and societies to further the development and dissemination of existential and phenomenological approaches to psychotherapy.

ICECAP will also provide a platform for the international registration of existential practitioners through the European Association for Psychotherapy and the World Council for Psychotherapy.

The founders of ICECAP – New School of London, England – offers membership to psychotherapists, counselors, philosophical consultants, psychologists, psychiatrists, psychoanalysts, as well as students and trainees in these professions. h t t p://icecap.org.uk/

Experiential Democracy Pilot Proposal to State Assemblywoman Fiona Ma

by Kirk Schneider, Ph.D.

Introduction

Our legislative process is disabled. It seems that "voting one's conscience," a core of the democratic spirit of deliberation, has too often given way to voting to stay elected, or to appease vested interests, or to attain the "quick-fix." In this light, and as a psychologist schooled in interpersonal mediation, I propose a new direction in the way we think about governance. This is a direction that recharges our system of checks and balances with a new check – experientially-based deliberation.

Experientially-based deliberation – or "experiential democracy," for short – is a personally-oriented supplement to standardize legislative proceeding. Put in another way, it is an opportunity for deep and substantive reflection about an issue of moral import. This supplement draws from the depth-experiential therapeutic principles outlined in my recent books, *Existential-Integrative Psychotherapy: Guideposts to the Core of Practice* (Routledge, 2008) and *Rediscovery of Awe* (Paragon House, 2004).

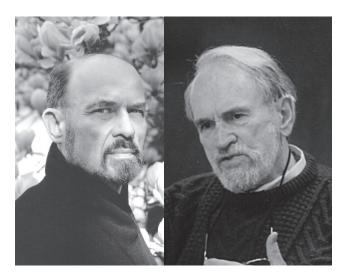
Proposal Structure

- I. Voluntary engagement for all parties (I would be willing to facilitate this proposal one time a week over a four-week period pro bono at a preferably local [i.e., Bay Area] district office, but if need be, I may be willing to travel to Sacramento).
- II. A once weekly (four-week) pilot project entailing the facilitation of a small group meeting (consisting of two diversely-opinionated legislators), accompanied possibly by one or two legislators observers from a given subcommittee during the course of a legislative session. The time period for such a group could range between one and two hours (with a preference for two), once a week for a four-week period.
 - a) The legislators would be presented with 1 or 2(?) morally- significant, genuine (or active) agenda items by the facilitator. These items will have been agreed upon in advance by the legislators assembled. Facilitation of the initial pilot study (i.e., meeting) would be initially coordinated by me although eventually, and if viable, by others.
 - b) Maintenance of strict confidentiality: The confidentiality of the meeting is sacrosanct. No public disclosure of relational processes (short of breaking the law) would be permitted, and there would be strong sanctions for noncompliance. Media could be invited to the post small-group discussion (e.g., with the full committee or legislative body at large), but not to the meeting itself.
- III. The meeting would address the following basic questions/structure:
 - a) What deeply matters about the (given) agenda item for each party and not just intellectually or politically, but also personally, in terms of the particular legislator's heartfelt perspective? (Each party would be afforded five minutes to "tell her/his side of the story" as mindfully as possible to the opposing party. The opposing party would then be asked to reflect back what she/he heard from their counterpart, and the counterpart would have a chance to correct that understanding. The roles would then be re versed.)
 - b) The interaction would then proceed to a deepening of, or elaboration on, the responses (thoughts and feelings) that have emerged from the earlier disclosures.
 - c) Next, each party would be asked to declare the important meanings or understandings that have emerged from the dialogue, and how or whether their opinions of the legislation have changed as a result.
 - d) Finally, each party would consider whether a consensus has been achieved (in which case, it would be specifically identified); or has not been achieved (in which case, the parties would identify the steps necessary to achieve it). A recording secretary (or observer) would then summarize the results, that would be written in a form that strictly prohibits the disclosure of personal details (e.g., emotions, thoughts) of either party, and would focus solely on the conclusions regarding the given agenda item. e) The findings would then be brought back to the entire group of legislators (e.g., subcommittee) for general discussion and integration into deliberative proceedings.

Note: For those wanting or needing follow up counseling on emotional issues arising in the groups, I could be available for referrals and/or advice as warranted.

IV. At the end of the four weekly group meetings, a brief assessment could be administered to each deliberator. This assessment could then be used to help determine the utility/viability of the proposed procedure.





Brief Summary of JHP article comparing James Bugental and Irvin Yalom

by Orah Krug

My article entitled, "James Bugental and Irvin Yalom: Two Masters of Existential Therapy Cultivate Presence," will be included in the JHP tribute issue to James Bugental coming out this Fall. The article compares the cultivation of presence by Bugental and Yalom, specifically Bugental's focus on intrapersonal processes and Yalom's focus on interpersonal processes. The research explores this fundamental methodology in an attempt to articulate the differences and similarities and the value of it in effecting therapeutic change. Recent research on "common factors" in therapy has found that personal and interpersonal factors are key variables responsible for positive therapeutic outcomes as opposed to specific treatment modalities. As a result, it has been suggested by Wampole that all therapists need an understanding of EH therapy because it forms the foundation of all effective approaches.

Learning Communities

EHI invites you to join us at our next San Francisco Bay Area Learning Community Meeting. This is a great opportunity to meet and network with local professionals and students who share an interest in existential and humanistic psychotherapies and ideas. After some time to say hello and share a community meal, we will partake in an informal discussion which addresses the national recession and its impact on the individual, the family, our small communities and the global community. This is a new group, so fresh ideas are encouraged and welcomed.

Host: Candice Miller Hershman

When: Thursday, April 23rd, 2009 @ 6:30 PM Where: 14 Zanco Way, Novato, CA 94947

Please RSVP: 415-328-4575 or cahershman@comcast.net

Bring a dish and your fabulous thoughts . . .

We hope to see you there!

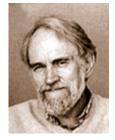
EHI is seeking supporters who are interested in hosting learning community meetings in other regions of the country. A learning community is basically a social forum in which people who share an interest in the Existential-Humanistic tradition can get together and network, share resources and ideas, brainstorm, and build a local support system in the psychological world at large. Learning community meetings can look very different depending on who organizes them, but the common thread which they all share is that they bring people together who have diverging interests. It is also helpful to invite people from other professions (e.g., the artistic community, the teaching community, the medical community) to create an integrative grassroots forum. If you have any questions about how to begin a learning community, or want to advertise with EHI, please contact Candice Miller Hershman, M.A. at cahershman@comcast.net.

SAVE THE DATE

Third Annual Existential-Humanistic Conference November 19-21, 2009 - San Francisco

From Crisis to Creativity: Necessary Losses, Unexpected Gains

October-November 2008 AHP *Perspective* Dedicated to Jim Bugental



The October November 2008 issue of the Association for Humanistic Psychology *Perspective* was primarily dedicated to the life and

works of Jim Bugental. Jim was one of the leading Existential Humanistic psychotherapists of the 20th century. He was also a founder of the Existential Humanistic Institute. He died on September 18, 2008.

A number of EHI board members contributed to the issue. Bob Edelstein served as guest editor of the issue, and also wrote an article on Jim; along with Nader Shabahangi and Kirk Schneider. Tom Greening and Elizabeth Bugental also contributed articles.

You can get a copy of the Oct-Nov 2008 issue of the AHP *Perspective* by going to the AHP website at www. ahpweb.org/index.html, and clicking on the link **AHP Perspective Magazine** and then **Perspective ARCHIVE**.



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Reflections on the "Lived In" Life of Elizabeth Bugental: A Student Perspective by Candice Hershman, MA



In this most recent December, I went to drop off a Camelia tree for Elizabeth Bugental on behalf of EHI, along with some of my homemade chicken barley soup. I was aware that Elizabeth had been ill, and I was unclear about what to expect. However, I walked away from that brief visit with a deeper sense of how Elizabeth Bugental has influenced me on both a professional and personal level. I appreciate the opportunity to share my impressions regarding that visit. However, I would first like to share a bit about how Elizabeth influenced the path I am walking.

In relation to the existential tradition, there are two interests that have occupied the figure in my ground of thinking. I have always wondered about how the feminine manifests itself in existential concepts. How does a woman experience existential aloneness and connectedness? How does responsibility play out in the lives of women? These are questions that have come to mind over the years. I had asked Elizabeth these questions on a few occasions and felt validated by her responses.

The other interest I have had is in poetry as it relates to experiencing life in a deep and connected way. Elizabeth published several books of poetry. Her example has encouraged me to continue my exploration into this form of human expression.



Elizabeth Bugental's contribution to the gerontology community has been paramount. Elizabeth's book of poems and prose, *Agesong: Meditations for Our Later Years*, has offered a fresh perspective on the meaning of aging. In fact, I first had the opportunity to meet Elizabeth at

a book signing for *AgeSong*, when I was still exploring internships. I remember sitting and listening to Elizabeth reading her poems with gentility and poise. Her delivery was moving. She was clearly a woman who felt her life on a deep level and was able to draw people into that depth of experience. All I had to do was be able to watch and listen.

In my internship specializing in elder care with Pacific Institute at the AgeSong Senior Communities, that the book was named after, I had other opportunities to meet Elizabeth. There I trained with her on group process with elders. Elizabeth had a background in theatre and had utilized those skills to once again draw the interns into a real "experiencing" of our inner elders. I was surprised at

the thoughts and feelings I had about growing older. Most importantly, I was impressed with Elizabeth's ability to draw her audience into the felt experience. Not only did I walk away from her training a little closer to my concept of what it means to age, but it was also with a more clear concept of who I am. Her facilitation helped me own that experience. What a gift I felt I had received just to be able to participateinsuchamovingexperience.



Elizabeth's second book of poetry and prose, *Love Fills In the Blanks: Paradoxes of Our Final Years*, has also influenced my love of poetry and its significance to the existential community. Elizabeth once again explored the process of aging, although this time, she honed in on the classic existential theme of paradox and how it manifests in the later years of life. Many of the themes are universal, and during my brief visit with Elizabeth and her daughter, Karen, in December, I was able to see Elizabeth's lived experience of paradox. The primary paradox seemed to be the desire to let go of life and hold on to life.

The morning I drove up to drop off the tree and soup, Elizabeth's daughter greeted me at the door. I could see Elizabeth waving to me from her bedroom. She was on a respirator and had a surgical mask over her face. She sat up a bit, and Karen gently reminded Liz to sit down and not try to speak. I went to the door of her bedroom and echoed her daughter's concerns. I assured her that thank you was enough. I then went into the kitchen with Karen, and sat down for a chat.

I looked around Elizabeth's home. There was framed poetry on the walls, and even a lovely poem called "Ode to Bowls" taped to her kitchen cabinet. That poem made a deep impression on me, reminiscent of Heidegger's homage to "thingliness" and Fellini's reference to the significance of a pebble in "La Strada." In that moment, I was caught up in appreciating an item I use everyday and otherwise take for granted. *This*, I thought, *is what poetry does for us*. Once again, Elizabeth had drawn me in to a deeper understanding of life.

There was beautiful art, and wonderful books on her shelves. I would have expected to see this, and yet there was something I didn't expect. Elizabeth's home was "lived in." There were signs of life everywhere. For some reason I had thought, due to Elizabeth's notoriety, that her home would be impeccable and grand. I expected everything to match perfectly, for everything to be brandnew, for framed diplomas and awards to be showcased like Oscars. And yet, this was not the case. This was a home of eclecticism. There was an old rocking chair with

what seemed like hand-sewn cushions in the corner. There was also a recliner with a TV tray next to it with books. It was a warm chair, a favorite chair it seems. Sitting in the kitchen, Liz's cat climbed into my lap as if she were my own. She settled her chin onto my fingers as I stroked her, and I chatted with her very kind and friendly daughter about the similar life path we were on and how hard it is to pursue your dreams and make a change in the world, especially when you are raising children.

I looked at the refrigerator and there were pictures of family and Liz's husband, Jim. There were fridge magnet toys, most likely for the grandchildren. There were plants and wind-chimes hanging from the ceiling. Packets of vitamins and so many medications were nestled in a corner on the counter. There were browning bananas in a fruit bowl on the window sill.

Next to me on the small dining room table was a lazy Susan with an antique teapot, one cup and saucer, accompanied by a canister of sugar and some creamers. I rested my free hand on the vinyl tablecloth while this very devoted daughter answered the phone that still had a cord. It struck me as simple. It seemed that everything in this house was not extravagant at all, and yet eeked out family and devotion and history. What was even more wonderful is that it was a home, not very different than my own.

I was struck by the warmth that Elizabeth's daughter, Karen, showed. The hospitality was exceptional, and I couldn't help but think that Elizabeth was a woman



who valued people. It was obvious that she had passed this value on to her daughter. There was a sense that "time" was available to sit and talk and appreciate others. In these busy times, I have found this to be a rare experience.

I stood up to leave and give Karen a hug. She went to get her mother's last book of poetry and as I went to say goodbye, Elizabeth signed it for me. I could see Elizabeth's frustration at not being able to write well. She said that she couldn't even recognize her own writing. I sensed that she wanted to be able to commune more, not because I am necessarily a person who had a history with her, but because all people are special. It was her very nature to "be with" and now, in her illness, she could not. My impression is that this was unnatural to her. This was the other paradox that I witnessed: that of needing to be alone and yet needing to be with people. My impression of Elizabeth is that it was very strange for her to not get up and spend time with someone in her home. Even in her state of physical weakness,

Elizabeth radiated graciousness and regard for people.

Seeing Elizabeth's home helped me appreciate my own home. Seeing Elizabeth's family reinforced the love I have for my own family and the belief that people can love each other well. Seeing Elizabeth's poetry helped me appreciate my desire and conviction to keep writing, no matter how imperfect I feel in my efforts. But most importantly, briefly seeing Elizabeth in her last days of life helped me appreciate my own life. I can be ambitious, but everything I need, I already have.

It is true that there is more that I want, but it will come to me when it is meant to. For now, I can do nothing but want to have a life that is "lived in." What a gift.

I would like to close by sharing a poem Elizabeth wrote in *Love Fills in the Blanks*. This poem is a favorite of mine. It sums up what it means to be in the world in a way that enhances appreciation for everything.

One quick commentary about this poem: Elizabeth capitalizes "Mystery" and "Unknowable" just as one would capitalize "God." I appreciate this subtlety so much, because to me, mystery and the unknown are God. Yahweh means "that which cannot be named." This poem is one which sums up so beautifully an experience I struggle with describing in my own words. This feeling is as close to God as I will ever get:

Immense power lies in our ability to notice the possible in impossibility. We're wise enough to grab what's available to boost us up without looking first to see if it's perfect:

the sun going down,
the bird in the morning,
the hand of a stranger at our elbow,
the pillow under our head,
the bread in our hand,
the voice on the phone,
a poem, the stars,
a baby's delight,
the crisp pages of a new book,
quiet, peaceful moments
allowing the entrance of faith,
hope, the friendly Mystery
of the Unknowable
cushioning our aloneness,
transforming it into solitude.

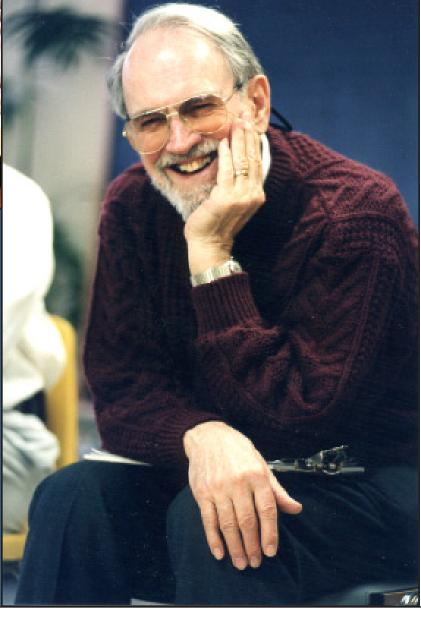
All this and more, simply because we have awakened, as so many sleepers do, when we have almost, but not quite, finished.





Elizabeth Bugental November 2, 1926 - February 23, 2009

James Bugental September 25, 1915 - September 17, 2008



Upcoming Conference Announcements

Existential Psychology East-West Conference for 2010

The first Existential Psychology East-West Conference is being planned for March 31 through April 4, 2010, in Nanjing, China. The conference planning committee is beginning to search for individuals interested in participating in this conference including people wanting to attend, present, and/or engage in panel discussions on critical issues. The focus of the conference is on creating a dialogue, with mutual learning. More information on the conference will be available at www.depth-psychotherapy institute.com/Existential_EW_Conference/Index.html. Additionally, interested individuals are encouraged to contact Dr. Louis Hoffman (louis.hoffman@rockies.edu) to be added to an email list which will provide regular updates on the conference.

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#### 3rd Annual Conference of the Society for Humanistic Psychology

Humanistic Psychology, Psychotherapy and Action: Transformation in a Time of Change University of the Rockies, Colorado Springs, CO October 8-11, 2009

The Third Annual Humanistic Psychotherapies Conference will be held on the campus of The University of the Rockies in Colorado Springs, CO , October 8-11, 2009. We are now seeking proposals for presentations, symposiums, papers, and posters. This years conference will include an experiential track, a research/theory track, and two open tracks. Additionally, this year we will be including an additional track during 1 or 2 days of the conference that will feature presentations on leadership, organizational leadership, and consulting. We hope to have a strong student representation at the conference and students are particularly encouraged to submit poster presentations.

Keynote Speakers:

Leslie Greenberg, Pratyusha Tummala-Narra, Tom Pyszczynski

Please direct any inquiries about the conference to:

Louis Hoffman (louis.hoffman@rockies.edu; subject line Humanistic Conference)

Brent Dean Robbins (brobbins@pointpark.edu)

Conference Web Site: http://www.d32conference.com University of the Rockies : http://www.rockies.edu

Special Student Information:

In order to make the conference more affordable for students, we are working to set up free student lodging through staying with University of the Rockies students. If you are interested in this, please contact: Matt Thelen (mlthelen@yahoo.com)

# PLEASE JOIN US - BECOME A MEMBER OF EHI!

Your support helps us in furthering our programs to promote existential-humanist psychology, practice, and inquiry; and helps us to continue our work, such as the Annual EHI Conference, learning communities, and newsletter publications.

Become a member for \$40 a year, and receive a 10% discount to all EHI events. You will be added to our mailing list to receive all the latest announcements about our work.

All donations are tax-deductible. Please visit www.ehinstitute.org for more information.



# About the Existential-Humanistic Institute

EHI provides a forum, a "home," for those mental health professionals, scholars, and students who seek indepth training in existential-humanistic philosophy, practice, and inquiry. EHI is for trainees who believe that in optimal psychotherapy, as Rollo May said, it is not this or that symptom, but "the life of the client" that is "at stake" – and that it is precisely this life that must be supported, accompanied, and encountered.

The goal of the institute – via both its curriculum and newsletters – is to support existentially and humanistically-informed psychologies and psychotherapies throughout the world. By "existentially informed," we mean perspectives that stress freedom, experiential reflection, and responsibility. By "humanistically informed," we mean purviews that address two over-arching questions – What does it mean to be fully, experientially human, and how does that understanding illuminate the vital or fulfilled life?

#### **Board Members**

Nader Shabahangi Kirk Schneider Orah Krug Sonja Saltman Bob Edelstein Candice Miller Hershman Mary Madrigal Daniel Pitchford Sibel Golden

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