

Classic Paper

Introduction to *Gale Miller: The man behind the mirror behind the mirror* at BFTC

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This interview with Professor Gale Miller appeared in the very first edition of *InterAction*, back in May 2009. As the journal was a new feature of the solution-focused (SF) landscape at the time, not so many people read it. However, in the meantime this interview has been cited several times by authors wishing to convey a sense of how the original Brief Family Therapy Center (BFTC) in Milwaukee operated.

BFTC was, of course, the location where Steve de Shazer and Insoo Kim Berg brought together practitioners to build their investigations of how to make therapy as brief as possible, building on the work of John Weakland, Paul Watzlawick and others at the Mental Research Institute (MRI) in Palo Alto from the late 1950s onwards. It is something of an irony that while MRI continues to function under a new generation of leaders, BFTC (which has arguably had more impact on worldwide practice) was wound up by Steve and Insoo as they built their careers as international teachers and authors.

This means that while it's still possible to go and sit in the MRI's building on Middlefield Road, Palo Alto CA, watch tapes, see work in action and so on, BFTC has passed into folklore as a somewhat mystical place for those many of us who have been inspired by Steve and Insoo but weren't able to participate in work at BFTC. One option is to glance through the recent book *Encounters With Steve de Shazer and Insoo Kim Berg* (Vogt, Wolf, Sundman, & Dreesen, 2015), which offers an excellent variety of reminiscences, and which is well worth exploring.

Now that Steve and Insoo are no longer with us, there is one

person who was not only a regular visitor, but was actually tasked with the job of being a professional observer of both the practice and the practitioners. Gale Miller spent two periods as in-house sociologist at BFTC, and became a long-term collaborator with Steve de Shazer in thinking and writing about SF practice. He also published a book of (disguised) observations from BFTC, *Becoming Miracle Workers* (Miller, 1997), which has since been republished.

In this interview, Gale Miller gives a vivid first-hand account of BFTC both before and after the practice we now know as SF Brief Therapy came into being. It is personal, well-observed, and (like our work itself) brief. Please enjoy this glimpse into the mid 1980s in downtown Milwaukee.

References

- Miller, G. (1997). *Becoming Miracle Workers: Language and Meaning in Brief Therapy: Language and Learning in Brief Therapy*. Piscataway NJ: Aldine Transaction.
- Vogt, M., Wolf, F., Sundman, P., & Dreesen, H. (Eds.). (2015). *Encounters with Steve de Shazer and Insoo Kim Berg*. London: Solutions Books.