

Dr Trudy Spencer- 40 years as a psychiatrist: the story of an early member of the C G Jung Society of Melbourne

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The late Dr Trudy Spencer was born in Vienna, a city famed as the place where Sigmund Freud lived and worked in the late 1800s and the early twentieth century. Whilst Trudy's parents were hatters and milliners, there is evidence from family postcards that her uncle Leon studied medicine at the University of Vienna. Trudy studied bacteriology after she finished school in Palestine. When she and her first husband migrated to Australia, Trudy, who studied medicine at the University of Sydney, subsequently qualified as a psychiatrist, which profession she practised for the next 40+ years.

Her psychiatry studies were undertaken through several residencies in Washington DC in the United States in the Psychiatry Department of the District of Columbia General Hospital, Washington General Hospital, Georgetown University Hospital, and Georgetown University Medical Centre, from July 1956 until December 1960. In 1961 she returned to Australia, and took up a position in February as Medical Officer Grade I, in the Mental Hygiene Branch, of the Department of Health, in Melbourne. It seems this move back to Australia was very much in her mind as she had registered with the Medical Board of Victoria in February of the previous year.

In 1962 Trudy took up a position as a consultant psychiatrist at the Children's Court Clinic, in Batman Ave, Melbourne. Her particular interest and expertise was in the assessment of young children who were wards of state at Allambie and Baltara, and with young women at Winlaton.

In the meantime, Trudy had become a member of the Jung Society which was founded in early 1962. Early meetings of the C G Jung Society of Melbourne included lectures and workshops. The archival lists of lectures and workshops which date from 1962, show that Dr Gertrude Spencer gave a lecture on Eastern thought in Japanese Psychiatry (Morita Therapy) on 26 November 1963. She subsequently had an article on Morita therapy published in the Medical Journal of Australia in November 1964 which attracted much interest from her colleagues around Australia. She had attended in May of that year a meeting of the Japanese and American Associations of Psychiatry. Her annotated program from the conference shows the sessions and lectures she attended including Psychotherapy in the East- Morita therapy given by Akichika Nomura MD, a panel session on Anti-Social Behaviour and Delinquency, a session entitled: Present Concepts on Schizophrenia, and a symposium on Psychiatry in Asian and Oceanian Countries. This comprehensive conference program also included visits to institutions of psychiatric interest and Trudy visited Musashino Gakuin, an institute for juvenile delinquents.

Her professional interest in, and work with, troubled adolescents is underlined by the newspaper cuttings in her scrapbook of May 1962 when 8 Winlaton girls kidnapped the matron and rioted through the Training Centre- a riot which was broken up by warders and police wielding high pressure hoses. Newspaper articles of August 1963 detailed the work of the Mental Hygiene Authority and the Children's Clinic who were dealing with the issues of runaway teenage girls. The November 1963 cuttings which Trudy had kept detailed conditions for girls in Goonyah, the security section of Winlaton girls' home in Nunawading.

Her professional life was punctuated by her work with troubled adolescents, the professional development she undertook in attending conferences, and visiting other psychiatrists overseas and then on return giving papers, and writing articles on her particular interests in psychiatry, all of which culminated in further professional certification and recognition. In July 1964 Trudy was involved in the Department of Mental Health, Departmental Psychotherapy Training Group for supervision as acting leader of supervision along with Doctors Goding and Christie.

Her interest in cross-cultural issues in Psychiatry continued and she arranged for leave in March/April/May 1965 to travel to the University of Mexico and Lima in Peru to visit other psychiatrists working in this field and attend a conference in the United States.

As part of the documentation Trudy carried on this trip to visit countries in South America, she had a letter of commendation on Commonwealth of Australia letterhead signed by Robert Menzies, Prime Minister. She was also to be the accredited representation of the Victorian Department of Mental Health at the American Psychoanalytical Association's Conference in New York in May 1965. Her experiences were detailed in an article in the Herald, of May 1965. A highlights for her was attending a session with professional musicians to study the effect of music on the emotions. She also visited villages in the Amazon region learning of the work of Indian healers whose methods were arousing great interest amongst psychiatrists in Peru. She also noted that in unspoiled communities in Guatemala where tight communities speak no Spanish there is no juvenile delinquency. However, she noted that, when these people start to learn Spanish and move to the cities, 'their problems are just as great as those of people elsewhere.'

Inevitably after her trip to South America, Trudy gave several lectures and talks to various organisations. The first was at the Mental Health Research Institute in July 1965 entitled 'Psychiatry in Latin America'. As the advertising brochure indicated Trudy had recently returned from a tour of Mexico, Guatemala, Bolivia and Peru where she investigated modern psychiatric practice as well as some aspects of native medicine. She also spoke to the Melbourne Travel Club in August, la Sociedad Hispanica in September and then to the Jung Society on 30 November 1965.

Later in 1965, Trudy spoke on Susto: Its significance in Indigenous American Thought. Susto, according to the Anthropology department of the University of Michigan, is a psychosomatic culture-bound syndrome found in Hispanic populations. The symptoms include apathy and depression and it is attributed (by the culture) to the soul (or a spirit) leaving the body. Her paper on Susto was well received by Trudy's colleagues and she was advised by Dr Alan Stoller, the Chief Clinical Officer of the Mental Health Authority, to write to his good friend, Dr Margaret Mead of the American Museum of Natural History in New York for advice as to a suitable American or international vehicle for the publication of the Susto paper. Trudy did indeed write to Margaret Mead - she kept a copy of that letter in her scrapbook. There is tantalizingly, no reference in Trudy's personal papers to a reply from Margaret Mead. In the meantime, Trudy presented a paper to the 2nd annual Congress of the Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists in Hobart in November 1965. Subsequently, in March 1966, a paper by Trudy was published in the Australian Psychiatric Bulletin entitled, 'Some Old and New Psychiatric aspects of Peru' and in May 1966, the Medical Journal of Australia published Trudy's article Peru- Cultural Peculiarities and Psychiatric Phenomena.

Then in April 1966, at the Larundel Clinical meetings of postgraduate psychiatry education of the Department of Mental Health, Trudy gave a talk on Susto. Later that year in August Trudy addressed

the Business and Professional Women's Club of Melbourne, an organisation committed to the recognition of the value to the community of women's work and service. Her visit to South and Central America had certainly engendered many professional opportunities and opportunities to speak in the wider community.

Clearly however, apart from her overseas trips, her commitment was to the youth of Victoria in her professional capacity as a psychiatrist. Newspaper cuttings in her scrapbook document articles written about the work of the Children's Clinic.

In October 1966 Trudy was again off overseas furthering her professional interest in trans-cultural and ethno-psychiatric aspects of native peoples. She had made medical contacts in Papua New Guinea in hospitals and with the Division of Mental Health in Port Moresby. Her particular aim was to travel in more remote parts of New Guinea to gather information about indigenous healing procedures and all matters concerned with native healers. Her itinerary from her scrapbook shows her destinations as Port Moresby, and the New Guinea Highlands: Lae, Rafael, Wewak, Angorum, Madang, and Mt Hagen. Having studied the life of indigenous people living along the Amazon River in South America she was keen to take a trip up the Sepik River to 'see primitive Melanesians in their native state'. She also visited the Cheshire Home for physically and mentally handicapped children in Hohola, a suburb of Port Moresby. At Mount Hagen, she met with Dr Rodrigue of the Regional Leprosy Control Unit. Later that month, whilst still in New Guinea, Trudy was delighted to learn of her promotion and appointment as a Consultant Psychiatrist.

In December 1966, Trudy attended a Conference of Consultant Psychiatrists which included colleagues from a range of Victorian facilities: Mont Park, Kew Cottages, Larundel, the Children's Clinic, Malvern Clinic, Ballarat, Plenty and Glenhuntly.

Her New Guinea trip afforded more opportunities for talks and lectures. She gave a lecture on the 'Many Faces of New Guinea' to the Mental Health Authority in April 1967. She clearly kept up her interest in New Guinea putting in her scrapbook an article written early in 1967 in the Herald about how unsafe the streets of Port Moresby were after dark, for women, black or white.

For all her own professional achievements, she kept up with news of at least one of her 1954 medical graduate colleagues from the University of Sydney- Dr Gustav Nossal. A newspaper article from early 1961 which she had kept indicated the research grant he had received to continue his work on immunology. Professor (and later Sir) Gustav Nossal was also featured in an article in the Australian of 1 April, 1967 on the major achievements of Australian medical research.

In October 1967, Trudy wished to attend the Western divisional meeting of the American Psychiatric Association in Los Angeles, and then in November to attend the 20th annual meeting of the World Federation for Mental Health in Lima, Peru. Such events were important to her to 'renew certain professional contacts which are of great value in my work and interest in cross-cultural psychiatry.' Having gained special leave, she attended these events as a representative of the Mental Health Authority of Victoria. It was fortuitous that when she was in San Francisco for a few days after the meeting in Los Angeles that she was able to attend a lecture sponsored by the C.G. Jung Institute of San Francisco when Dr H. K. Fierz of Zurich, Switzerland, spoke on 'The Archetypal Image as a Healing Factor'.

On 20 October 1968, Trudy was admitted as a member of the Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists. Trudy spoke again in the Jung Society series of talks in 1968. This time her topic was: The Initiatory Drama- Its Symbolism and Significance. In 1972, according to the recollections of a fellow Jungian therapist, Rev Dr Joan Snedden, Trudy was Vice-President of the Jung Society of Melbourne. Trudy spoke again in the Jung Society series of talks and lectures in 1973 on the topic of Jung and Beyond. 1973 and 1974 were in fact the years when Trudy was President of the Jung Society.

It was around 1973 that Trudy met her future husband to be, George Pappas at the Harmony Lodge of the Rosicrucian Order in Ormond whom she subsequently married in 1977. Her scrapbooks show that she did not travel as much in the 1970s to conferences as she had done in the 1960s. She did however undertake a combined business and pleasure trip to China from late September 1978 with a group of medical colleagues. Apart from the usual tourist sites such as the Great Wall, The Forbidden City and Chairman Mao's Mausoleum, she made a number of professional visits to hospitals, a street clinic, the Shanghai Psychiatric Institute, a commune in Chengchow, and a middle school in Sian. She and her colleagues also met with the staff of the Department of Psychology at Peking University. Trudy returned home via Indonesia, visiting Jakarta and Jogjakarta on the way.

Significantly in July 1978 she was granted a Certificate of Registration as a Specialist Practitioner in Psychiatry through the Medical Board of Victoria. This had implications for her private practice as a consultant physician in Psychiatry under the Health Insurance Act. It perhaps indicates that Trudy had already begun her private practice from home before she actually retired four years later.

In October 1980, two years before she retired, Trudy was admitted as a Fellow of the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists. When she turned 60, Trudy retired from the Mental Health Authority and from then on continued in her private practice as a psychiatrist and Jungian therapist from her home in Aird St, Camberwell. According to friends, her practice continued up until she was 82 in 2004, the year before she died.

The Jungian Society of Melbourne remembered Trudy at a memorial gathering of the Society on 22 May 2005. The talk given by Beth Brough, Trudy's friend and colleague, on that occasion was reproduced in the Jung Society newsletter of July 2005. Beth paid tribute to the gifts Trudy had brought to the Society: her leadership, her generosity, her compassion and wisdom, her intellect which spanned so many different areas of interest. Her devotion to the Society, said Beth, was recognised by life membership.