



PERSPECTIVE

“Professional Changes and Transitions”- Dr. Ann Barnard 4/9/12

Dear AVIP colleagues,

When our Chairperson Dr. Braithwaite-Hall suggested that we might take turns blogging about being psychologists in the Virgin Islands, I thought it was a great idea. I would love to hear exactly what everyone is doing in our varied settings in St Croix and St. Thomas/ St John. To me, we never have enough time to talk and share during our tightly-packed annual and biannual meetings.

So I volunteered to begin. I ask for your forbearance as I jump into this process:

For those who don't know me, I am Ann Barnard, a psychologist in private practice in St Thomas. Recently, I have experienced some major changes in my professional life.

First, in November, 2011, my beloved partner Ilene Rothgeb and I closed our offices at 10 Norre Gade in downtown St. Thomas. I had been there since 1986, and Ilene joined me there full time in 1995. But now Ilene was contemplating retirement and a possible move to the States, and the office was too big for just me.

Well! I ask you to imagine the sheer volume of files we had to go through and shred.

At least 15 full sized filing cabinets throughout the offices, and boxes of files stacked in all the closets. Everywhere we looked, More Files! At one point around 1997, Ilene had the brilliant idea to remove some acoustic tiles from the ceiling and store some files up there! (As I recall, we took them down when we heard ominous creaking sounds coming from up there and we imagined the boxes crashing down on the patients' heads).

There were many files of documents related to writing our law to license psychologists in the Territory! (Rita! Pat! Remember those days?) We had solicited laws from every State (there they were!); there was voluminous correspondence between ourselves and APA, ASPPB, members of the VI Legislature. There was also urgent AVIP communiques as we struggled to reconcile everyone's concerns and fears about this new groundbreaking law.



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Another major category of files was hurricane related: research about treating this trauma, our own speeches, newspaper and journal articles written for the public, and prototypes of our Hurricane Handbook written by Gloria Mendez, Rita Dudley, Juliana Zinn, Maria Garrido, Ilene and myself.

Psychology Board documents also filed many files and boxes! When the law finally passed the legislature and was signed into law by Governor Farrelly, the new Governor Schneider appointed the original Board members, including myself. Our mandate was to protect the people of the Virgin Islands from being preyed upon by untrained, unqualified "psychologists." We had to figure out how to organize ourselves to function as an arm of the VI Government to duly license qualified psychologists in the Territory. And apparently it took a lot of paper to figure this out!

Most poignant were the patient files—every one of which touched my heart as I looked back through my hen-scratched notes. Twenty-five years of patient notes!!! APA guidelines say to keep intact files going back 7 years, which we did, but that still left 18 years of touching human stories headed for the shredder. Hopefully, the majority of people themselves have rallied from whatever crises brought them into therapy. Of course, this being the Virgin Islands, I routinely see many on the streets, and the knowledge that only the two of us have of our special relationship is often a quiet, very warm bond.

Well! I see I could go on all day! But since you all are busy and have limited time to read my blogosphere musings, I will stop for today. Thanks for reading this, and more soon. Marilyn says I have a month at the helm!

Your colleague, Ann B.