

On the 25th Anniversary of the Kansas City Psychoanalytic Institute

Walter F. Ricci, M.D.

Mission, KS

My own history and the history of the Greater Kansas City Psychoanalytic Institute (GKCPI) are inextricably tied, in a history of some fifty years.

“Ex nihilo nihil”. Nothing comes from nothing. Following Parmenides’ wisdom, I searched within myself the origin of my desires to be a psychoanalyst.

My first contact with the name ‘Freud’ occurred in my father’s medical office. I should admit that my curiosity was awakened not only by the name, but by the content, as it was ‘Freud on Sexuality’. Following that, I was rewarded by a lecture by Heinrich Racker.

First GKCPI class back in 1996

Dr. Walter Ricci, Dr. Pam Seator, Dr. Carol Smith, Dr. Mary Lorton, Mr. John Parker, and Dr. Salomon Alfie.

This caused immediate enlightenment of my mind and heart. Studying A. Garma and E. Pichon Riviere, I became fascinated by the subject matter, and in spite of my naïve ignorance, realized that there was something missing in my curriculum at my medical school, something that I had never experienced, something I can only say opened my eyes to the fact that the mystery of the mind and emotions was a subject to be endlessly explored.

I began my personal journey in Buenos Aires, Argentina. I graduated as a psychiatrist in 1962. My goal to relocate to the United States was accomplished in 1965. I applied to the Topeka Institute for Psychoanalysis (TIP), but first, due to my training in another country, had to repeat my psychiatry residency. While so doing, I became acquainted with a psychoanalytic study group comprised of five psychoanalysts working in Kansas City. These five distinguished psychoanalysts included Dr. Harold Meyers, Dr. Gerald Ehrenreich, Dr. Sigmund Gundle, Dr. Ivy Bennett, and Dr. Irv Kartus. All of them were faculty educators at Western Missouri Mental Health Center (WMMHC).

I went on to train at TIP. Dr. Harold Meyers was my training psychoanalyst. It was my good fortune to have trained with this wonderful man. Harold, (as he wished to be called) was very humanistic, open, flexible, and capable of engaging during our sessions. He had a respectful warm disposition while he led us in our exploratory search and analysis. During one of my sessions, I had just been called by Jefferson City and offered the position of superintendent of WMMHC. This was a full training facility with over

1500 employees and 8000 to 10000 admissions per year. I conveyed my terror to Harold. He listened and then simply said, “You can do this. This could be a major step toward having our own psychoanalytic institute in Kansas City.” Though scared, I felt supported, and with the sense of a mission in mind, I accepted this position and stayed on as superintendent for eight years.

The task of creating a group at our institute, with diversity and an open orientation, was not easy. Using all that TIP had given me, and the desire to have an institute dedicated to the teachings of Freud, combined with the passion of pioneers such as Dr. Frank Broucek (and his understanding of shame), along with Dr. Hans Uffemann (a renowned philosopher with disciplined reasoning), and Dr. Salomon Alfie (who I had hired to be the director of the department of child psychiatry, and of the child psychiatric residency), I brought together these exceptional individuals with my own contributions from Dr. Heinz Kohut and Dr. Joe Lichtenberg -- and our GKCPI was born.

Our mission of forming this institute with a mission of teaching and learning in an atmosphere of respect, curiosity, compassion, and acceptance of diversity was no longer just a dream, but a reality.

The first class in 1996 including Dr. Mary Lorton, Dr. Pam Seator, Dr. Carol Smith, Dr. Badresh Parikh, and Mr. John Parker was launched, but it was a precarious time. We convened in a conference room in my former office on Shawnee Mission Parkway. We had no administrative staff, no funding, and no assets, just our intense commitment and desire to succeed. Many times, we were doubtful of our ability to bring this to fruition, but we prevailed. The Menninger Clinic had moved out of Kansas, and those professionals remaining in Topeka came to join with us, and they contributed to our development. Thus, over time, the trip from Kansas City to Topeka became reversed.



Figure 1. The first GKCPI class in 1996. Dr. Walter Ricci, Dr. Pam Seator, Dr. Carol Smith, Dr. Mary Lorton, Mr. John Parker, and Dr. Salomon Alfie.

Many professionals from Topeka came to us, and we always received them with welcoming arms.

I was the first director of the institute for two years, but because of some differences in philosophical orientation (with the committee for new institutes of the APsaA), I resigned as director and Dr. Michael Harty, an excellent contributor, assumed this position.

It is with such pride, that I look back on this seed of desire that has become a fully accredited institute. I want to thank all of you who are here, and all who came before and are no longer with us for this tremendous accomplishment.