

'The Living Mountain'

A tribute to Martin Jordan - friend & collaborator

I have been invited to speak about Martin and his work. I am Hayley Marshall, a psychotherapist and trainer who has worked closely with Martin in his nature based psychotherapy work over the past 9 years. During this time we have built a significant professional collaboration and friendship through regular peer supervision, our co-writing, and our many and varied co-facilitatory experiences running outdoor groups together. We have roamed rich landscapes, both quite literally on our trips in various parts of the country, and intellectually, in our strivings to understand how nature and psychotherapy could be combined. The title for this tribute to Martin – The Living Mountain – is taken from the book by Nan Shepherd about her relationship with the Cairngorm Mountains in Scotland. The book was a particular favourite of Martin's and was the title of one of our earliest outdoor courses. The book encapsulates the essence of Martin's passion about the human-nature connection – that there is such wisdom to be found through connecting with the natural world. We know more of nature, but also find more of ourselves as human beings. This belief was fundamental to all the work he undertook and that we did together.

Over the past 2 weeks I have been inundated with E-mails about Martin, and I will share some of what has been said in these as I go. What these Emails show without question is that he was so very well respected and loved, both by his colleagues, and the many clients, supervisees and students on various training courses he was involved with. As well as being very moving to read they really remind me of how far his reach is in the broader ecotherapy world. It's clear that his writing alone has touched many people, inspiring them to follow their instincts, think more about the value of the human-nature connection, and then to take that major step to move their therapeutic work out into nature. Through his research, many articles, and books, he has made an important pioneering contribution to the development of ecotherapy and nature based psychotherapy in the UK, and also internationally. He leaves behind a very significant professional legacy.

But, as the E mails also show Martin offered people much more beyond his writing; so in my few words today I want to focus on Martin in action, the man I knew from our work together. As a framework for my thoughts I'm going to use a structure that was very meaningful and important to Martin in his relationship with nature. It was central to the work on our courses too. I learnt this model from him, and it is something I will always associate with him. The Four Directions, developed by Steven Foster and Meredith Little, is based on an ancient psychology - the Native American tradition of a medicine wheel. Martin was introduced to this when he went on a Vision Quest in California with Stephen and Meredith some years before I met him. This had proved to be a formative experience for Martin in setting him further along his path of exploring the human- nature relationship. In this model, the Four Directions - corresponding with the four points of the compass and the four seasons - are said to represent our embodied, metaphorical connection with the natural world around us, representing aspects of our psychology. In practice they are outlined with different coloured stones.

To honour Martin and his love of this wheel, I will put out the stones as I go through what I want to say

Knowing Martin through the Four Directions

Beginning in the South (the red stone & the direction relating to summer/body/child/instinct & the earth)

I first met Martin in 2007 in a very unusual quite disparate group of outdoor practitioners. I did feel a bit intimidated, experiencing him as this slightly gruff bear of a man who seemed to already know so much about this (for me at least) new world of working out in nature. However, at what felt like a therapists 'confessional' in the evenings we discovered our shared love of TV psychics, particularly Colin Fry (we thought he really had the gift!). We also found we both loved the same rather violent TV dramas namely the Sopranos and the Wire! Through all of this I discovered he had quite a dark irreverent sense of humour that I really liked and shared. I instantly knew this was someone I could work with - it was always big part of our connection.

In fact, Martin's humour generally was very engaging and many people loved this about him. In the E mails this was mentioned a lot. He especially enjoyed

the social time we had with groups around the fire in the evenings. He was a natural clown at these times, and knew how to play with others without shaming them. Because he cared about his impact on others, he gave a good deal of thought to the management of this social time on our residential weekends. He wanted to be himself but not lose his role as facilitator, and by and large, I think he got this spot on. As a result people saw his warmth, sense of fun and irreverence, and really took permission to follow suit! The outcome of this was that most of our groups had an amazing energy and this helped the learning I think. As a partnership we were often complimented on our double act as we sparked off each other in our banter. I so enjoyed this aspect of Martin. He was a funny man.

Another important association for me with this South direction is that Martin loved the earth. He believed strongly in our innate connection to the earth and was passionate about it in quite a physical way. This was obviously part of his vocational pull to work outside. I have many memories of him sitting and walking out in nature during various courses and other peer group trips out in the woods and in the wilds of various bits of the country. But just how important this was to him fully came home to me on one of our early outdoor courses during a body work exercise. In this work, participants began to connect through their bodies with elements of the natural environment they were moving around in. I was leading, giving directions but the general idea was that Martin would be witnessing people as they moved. About half way through the exercise I became aware that (due to way I was facing) I hadn't caught sight of Martin for a few minutes...when I turned around there he was, lying prostrate on the ground just down from the group, completely communing with the earth in his own world- he was gone! Later (after some complaining from me about him uncharacteristically shirking his duties!), he told me he simply couldn't resist the opportunity to follow what his body most needed at that moment and that meant getting, as he would put it, 'his hairy arse down close to the earth'.

Moving to the West (the black stone, where we find autumn/soul/ adolescence/introspection and the shadow side of us)

My main association with this direction concerns Martin's ability to be in touch with and reflect upon his more troubled and vulnerable aspects. This was such a strong feature of the way he worked, and I'm only sorry that towards the end of his life that this couldn't help him. In our many Skype and campfire conversations he and I would often discuss aspects of our personal difficulties and self-doubt together. With any therapist this self-reflective aspect is an absolutely vital tool in the work, and Martin was totally committed to this process. I felt very secure with him because he would do that, it formed a very solid base for our working relationship.

He was also self-revealing in a way that made him very accessible to the people we worked with. For instance he would often share his personal experience of going on that Vision Quest and his resultant depression. There was a generosity in this sharing but also a willingness to offer a sense of common humanity to others. He was not someone who would hide behind the role of therapist or facilitator. Many of the people we worked with responded to this by opening up and Martin was there to receive what they had to share. He was emotionally present and available, which I think made him an excellent therapist and group worker.

Of course, Martin wasn't a saint. He could be grumpy and got miserable when things were turning inhospitable on the weather front at times! And we did have some struggles in our dealings with each other, sometimes it was about one of us feeling left out if the other was working elsewhere, or the way one of us led a session - I used to get annoyed at him being bossy or interrupting me! And inevitably working outside we also had several tent erecting rows! (Martin always felt he knew best!) He did also occasionally have his struggles with some of the people we worked with. The theme for Martin here tended to be coming up against certain types of - as he would put it - 'tricky women'! What this meant in practice were women who seemed to misunderstand him but then proceed to get the wind in their sails and begin to challenge him in a rather angry manner. And indeed, he did seem to rather cop for that process. But later, in characteristic Martin fashion (after he'd ranted for a bit!), he would always want to reflect, saying to me - 'I don't understand it. What's going on? What am I doing in this?'

In the North (this is the white stone marking Winter/mind/Adult/ thought & responsibility)

Martin was a fine original thinker. I really valued our many conversations about our work as we both tried to fathom out what we were doing in our practice and then link it to theory. We have talked our way across such interesting and stimulating territory. I'm glad to say we didn't always agree but somehow we always seemed to be roughly going along the same track. He was a very smart man, and absolutely tenacious in his desire to understand what was happening in the process of introducing nature to psychotherapy. He often said to me that he felt he really had to try to understand the nature-therapy process first before he felt confident in undertaking more practice. In his tireless quest Martin paved the way for others through researching practice and then linking it to great vistas of psychotherapeutic and philosophical knowledge. I am so grateful to have been involved in at least some of this, as for me and many others he has been an inspiration.

*I'm thankful to have had the conversations with him that I did around the camp fire, and to take the chance to tell him that he was a bit of a hero of mine - his books having become my 'bibles' that got me fired up for this work. **Ruth***

Martin's wonderful book Nature and Therapy is one of the outcomes of his rigorous linking practice to theory process, which is now the book for practitioners intending to take their practice outside. Martin really wanted to get published, but I think it's important to say that in practice he was very generous in his sharing of ideas, always wanting to encourage others to get into this work.

*Martin was an inspirational figure to me and to many of my peers. His book on Nature and Therapy was so accessible and straightforward to read, yet was full of details and ideas freely given with a lot of generosity. **Andy***

Another aspect of Martin connected with the direction of north was his ability to make things happen – in the nicest sense he was a mover and shaker. He was ambitious for himself (and quite rightly too, as he had much to offer and worked so hard), but also for the whole ecotherapy field. As a result he made important events happen....like the setting up of CAPO and the Nature and therapy symposium at Brighton more latterly.

From the E mails Vanessa said

He had huge energy, aspiration and determination. Martin made things happen, he got things done, he breathed life into ideas and intention.

He was passionate about people coming together to dialogue and explore this work and for the ecotherapy field to be developed much further. In connection with this Cara and a few of us have decided to set up a bursary in Martin's name. I think Martin would have been delighted about supporting yet more folk to develop the work he felt so committed to. I certainly valued this aspect of him as he was often pushing for us to present papers and workshops together and to write more. I owe him a great debt as I learnt so much and have definitely progressed in my career as a result.

Also in the North I want to mark Martin's solidity as a co-facilitator. Relating back to his connection with his emotional world, he was present in the process and always willing to look at what was happening with between us or in the group. He was definitely what would be termed a safe pair of hands in group work; reliable as a co-facilitator in a way that I haven't yet found elsewhere. I knew I could rely on him to support me when we worked with groups, and I think he felt the same about me.

I can't leave the North before I share Martin's ongoing engagement with the issue of responsibility. This issue, as with so many others really came alive in working outside. We discovered very early on that working with groups outdoors stretched us both in our skills as psychological and emotional facilitators, but also in how to deal with the practicalities. We would often talk about how much we should and shouldn't be taking on in the process with our participants. Although this was a shared issue, Martin's often conflicted version of it would sometimes extend to comical proportions. On one of our earliest outings Martin went to investigate after a complaint from someone on the course that the camping toilet was 'blocked up'! (I remember thinking that this could mean only one thing and promptly made a sharp exit!) But the next and abiding image I have is of Martin actually carrying a very over-full porta-potti across the farm yard in order to find somewhere to empty it. As he passed by me he muttered 'I've heard of carrying the shit but this is fucking ridiculous!'

The work outside has inherent uncertainties in it and Martin did have a willingness to take risks. This leads me to an example of what I call our 'ecological outtakes'. Our many mistakes as we made our way through this new nature therapy territory; and there were some whoppers! Like the time we allowed someone to bring a dog on a weekend course that within the first 2 hours promptly ran off and ate the farmer's children's pet chickens. This set off a series of quite disturbing events including various heated exchanges ending with the farmer threatening to shoot the dog. You can imagine the effect on the group of that! It was at times like these Martin would turn to me and say pleadingly, 'Why the fuck are we doing this Hayley?!'

This ubiquitous question though was the motivator for him and us to regroup, start thinking, and refine what we were doing. So although at times he got pissed off and fed up, Martin was so sure about the value of working out in nature, he always returned with renewed vigour.

We end the wheel in the East (with the yellow stone representing spring /Elder/spirit/ death & rebirth/ insight & healing)

Martin was quite rightly sought after for his insight and words of wisdom. This was mentioned a lot in the E mails:

Martin was a true visionary and I remember his wild spirit during our training at Powdermill.
Shirley

One of the reasons he loved this medicine wheel exercise I think was that he had a real gift for attending to and understanding people's stories seeing them nested within a bigger story of the earth and the wisdom of our ancestors. He was interested in the mythical and spiritual aspects of our connection with nature and he supported others who thought and worked in these ways. In the E mails people have said:

Martin had a very unique presence and a deep understanding of the work that I find hard to articulate - he embodied something which meant just being around him was a great learning experience. I hope he knew that. Some people pass on a lot in a short time – **Rebecca**

He was a lovely kind man. He had an amazing ability to sit quietly yet give careful attention
- **Charlotte**

His engagement with his own vulnerability and a deep understanding of the process of psychotherapy meant that he was so well placed to work with others in their distress. He combined this with a unique perspective on how this could happen out in the natural world.

Anna said Martin had a sense of peacefulness, wisdom and vulnerability he brought to this relational work, extending into nature with all the aspects of reciprocal loving care.

So with his blend of intellect, soul connection and love of the earth, he was a worthy elder and now ancestor in the ecotherapy world.

My final associations to this spiritual direction are simply powerful memories of being out in nature with someone who I have shared all kinds of wisdom with. So, these include memories of sitting round countless campfires talking, thinking, and feeling; and one final one – returning to the idea of the Living Mountain and all that offers - a very special moment in the Rhinog Mountains in Wales when we'd gone out together to recce a route for a group walk (for the Living Mountain course actually). We ended up at one of the beautiful lakes up there. There was no breeze; the water was like glass; no movement anywhere. We stood and looked out across the lake in total silence, barely breathing. It was the stillest place I have ever been with anyone.

Written with deep sadness, love, and respect.

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