

BOOK REVIEW

SHALLOW DIVE – ESSAYS ON THE CRAFT OF MANUAL CARE

Barrett L Dorko. Slack Incorporated, Thorofare, New Jersey 1996.

Many of these essays originally appeared in "From Dorko's Desk", a column run regularly in PT Forum from March 1990 to June 1995. Barrett L Dorko's e-mail address is bldorko@aol.com and his new website on the Internet is <http://lqin.com/dorko>

■ Book Review by Pamela K Hansford

Barrett L Dorko, a physical therapist in practice in Ohio, is a clinician with a passion for sound scientific reasoning, a teacher who focuses on learning and a writer with a poetic and metaphorical bias. This recently published book offers the reader a challenging compilation of his brief, thoughtful and provocative essays, many of which originally appeared in "From Dorko's Desk", a column run regularly in PT Forum from March 1990 to June 1995.

Gregory Bateson in "Mind and Nature: A Necessary Unity" (1979) explores epistemology, discussing how organisms, or aggregates of organisms, know, think and decide. Philosophically he explores the limits and other characteristics of these processes, centring on quality by quoting Jung who said break the pattern which connects the items of learning and you necessarily destroy all quality. Bateson explains that metaphor provides the pattern which connects and this of course is the strength of Barrett's writing. He is an experienced practitioner who was senior clinician at the Atlanta Back Clinic, between graduating in 1973 and establishing a private practice in 1979. By linking literature and poetry with practice of therapy and personal experience, he develops his holistic approach to therapy. He sees the body as metaphor for its own inner process, a means of expression (very often for what it most wants to hide) and the interface or point of connection between patient and therapist. He invites us to explore the patient-therapist relationship for ourselves, particularly with regard to how the therapist too changes in the course of the interaction.

Barrett says of his patients that he would prefer that "they use me as a resource who helps them understand that the solution to their problems lies within themselves". Barrett recognises that people heal from within and that our job as therapists is to reveal and disclose, rather than impose. To do this we need to get people into the position where they feel safe with our touch. Safe enough to allow the pain of their lives to rise to the surface so that by gentling ourselves and following their lead, we can enable them to reveal their pain and their needs, and we in turn can enable them to find and develop their own corrective movement. We need to learn to follow in order to learn how to lead.

The effect overall is a display of intellect and compassion, as Barrett contemplates his practice as clinician and teacher, and reflects on this. He invites us as therapists in turn to reflect on our own practice. I have shown this book to many people since I received it in August. Therapists in Cape Town and Johannesburg, therapists from Africa and from Europe participating in the recent WCPT-Africa Regional Conference in Harare and others who have had dealings with therapists have responded with enthusiasm. One therapist described the way in which these brief essays invite connections with our own daily experience by commenting that when you read an essay,

it stays with you all day

I discovered Barrett's writing by responding to his offer on the physio@mailbase.ac.uk list to send material to anyone interested in using poetics with physiotherapy. When I received this book it opened up at The Vase, in which we are asked to imagine that we are each holding a vase of great value in our hands and being paid for being entirely responsible for caring for it. Barrett feels that although the role of a physical therapist should include an appreciation of the body that is reflected in the way that we hold it, most patients come to us fearful of being poked, prodded and painfully bent because that's what their friends got for similar conditions. He concludes with My hands are not unusually sensitive, nor are my skills especially difficult to acquire. But when I'm with others on the job, I can sense their worth, and I hold them with care.

The Vase, like the others in the book, is a one and a half page essay. The entire essay is visible at a glance – but this is only the apparently simple form as set down on the page. Barrett's style of writing makes his wisdom easily accessible and then allows further layers of meaning to emerge gradually in the process of reading. His wisdom is derived through sensitivity in response to gentle touch with one's whole being, from recognising our own humanity in the others and from challenging conventional thinking with a delightful subtle sense of humour



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