



The Chronicle

The Newsletter of the Canadian Group Psychotherapy Association

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CGPA's New Website @ www.cgpa.ca

"Generally, I see the website (www.cgpa.ca) as a 'go to' point for information and resources regarding group therapy, particularly group therapy in Canada," reports Colleen Wilkie, PhD, the Chairperson of the Website and Public Relations Committee (p. 2).

"Over the next year I hope that the website can be one of several projects that will contribute to the 'privileges of membership' for all the group therapists in Canada who continue to support CGPA through their membership," states Jim Merchant, BA, MBA, RSW, FCGPA, President-Elect (p. 3).

27th Annual Conference in Winnipeg, Manitoba October 11 - 14, 2006

To Group or Not to Group . . . That is the Question

"The program looks fantastic and we are looking forward to seeing you there", says Linda Croll, MSW, RSW, Manitoba Section President, and Local Arrangements Committee Co-Chairperson for this year's annual conference (p. 10).

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Letter from the Editor

I am pleased to present the first issue of the Chronicle under my editorship. Beginnings are always exciting with the dreams of all things possible.

I am also the Web editor, which gives me a good vantage point to try to articulate the differences between the website and the newsletter. Generally, I see the website (www.cgpa.ca) as a "go to" point for information and resources regarding group therapy, particularly group therapy in Canada. Given the immediacy of the internet, the website is ideal for us to communicate to each other regarding upcoming events, and to chat via the forums. I see the newsletter as more intimate, somehow, in giving us an opportunity to share our work, our reflections, and our opinions on group therapy. In short, I see the Chronicle as a way of getting to know each other better. To facilitate our ability to network I have included a work phone and email address for each author.

Over the upcoming issues, I plan to incorporate new ideas regarding content as well as design. Please let me know what you think. I'm also currently a one-woman show, so if you'd like to join me (in any capacity), don't be shy!

I want to thank the contributors of the items you find in this issue. It was validating to receive responses to my request for submissions, and reminded me that the work of putting together an issue of the Chronicle also occurs in a group of individuals with a common goal.

Enjoy!

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Getting to Know the Executive

Editor's Note: This is the first of a regular column in which members of the executive can introduce themselves and share their plans with us. My hope is that over time members will become familiar with the various executive positions and interested in participating at different levels of CGPA.

In this issue, we are introduced to Jim Merchant, BA, MBA, RSW, FCGPA, our President-Elect. He can be reached at (403) 297-4986 or jim.merchant@calgaryhealthregion.ca.

Wilkie: Can you tell us a little about yourself? What is your training and your current work?

Merchant: I was originally introduced to group therapy at the Foothills Hospital in Calgary. Dr. Roy MacKenzie facilitated the training of a number of group therapists there and I was fortunate to have a number of excellent group supervisors during these formative years, including Roy, Dr. Kathy Cairns, Maureen Coleman and Dennis Dickason.

Wilkie: How did you first become interested in group therapy? What keeps you interested in the field of group therapy?

Merchant: When I first started to lead groups, it was, not surprisingly, a rather anxiety-provoking experience. It did take a number of years to be practiced enough to be "in and out of the group" at the same time. Many have said this before, but it is true that patients teach us many things about ourselves, especially in the context of group. This is what keeps me interested in group therapy. There is so much that group process can contribute, whether in therapy or in organizational groups. I am a better group leader and a better leader of work groups when I remember and put into practice the precepts and concepts of group.

Wilkie: What is your executive position on council? What are your hopes for your term on council - goals, projects, etc.?

Merchant: I am President-Elect. Currently I am involved in helping to develop the website and I am fortunate to be able to work with two very dedicated people - Gordon Regar, the web service provider, and Colleen Wilkie, the web editor, who have spent considerable time towards making the website informative and user-friendly. Over the next year I hope that the website can be one of several projects that will contribute to the "privileges of membership" for all the group therapists in Canada who continue to support CGPA through their membership. I do believe that CGPA can be a leader in the development and application of group therapy principles.

Wilkie: Anything else you'd like to share with members?

Merchant: There are some very talented and experienced people in CGPA and I hope that the organization can share its expertise with those entering the field of group therapy, or those developing their group therapy or group leadership abilities. I believe that we can generate even more enthusiasm for and interest in group process.

Wilkie: I've appreciated your support in the process of making the new website a reality. It's an exciting time for CGPA.

Let Me Tell you about Myself

Editor's Note: This is the first of a regular column in which members of CGPA can introduce themselves and let us know about their practice. Dr. Hammond-Meiers is also presenting at this year's annual Conference in Winnipeg.

Group Therapy and Sensory Modalities

Group therapy has been an important area in my life as a therapist for many reasons. I started doing group work when I worked at the Day Hospital at the University of Alberta Hospital from 1976 to 1979. Dr. M. Blackman encouraged me to attend an American Group Psychotherapy Association Conference and the Intensive Experiential in New Orleans about 30 years ago. The University of Alberta Day Hospital team was a group in itself. I learned a lot from interactional relationships, continuous process discussions, as well as the boundary negotiations and bonding experiences within the team. I learned a lot about large groups as well as various kinds of psychotherapeutic small groups such as art therapy groups (that was then called "Projectives Group"), psychodrama groups, multiple family therapy (a special kind of group therapy with many families).

Years ago, I presented with Dr. Jim Eliuk on the stages of adolescent group therapy in a Day Program which had a therapeutic milieu. In retrospect, although I and others found this work very valuable and important to patients, I thought that there must be a way to grow more as a leader and to offer more to patients. I think that I needed to find ways of processing more effectively, of seeing more, of sensing more, and of being more present as a therapist, without burning out or being stuck myself.

I discovered Dance/Movement Therapy in 1980 when I took a workshop in Edmonton that sparked my new direction. I was able to take the leap to New York University to study Dance/Movement Therapy at this point in my life partially because of a transition that I was going through and partially because of the influence that doing groups also had on me as a therapist. Some colleagues had difficulty not seeing this move as a step backward, questioning what this would do for my career because I was already a skilled group psychotherapist. However, I knew that the "dancer" part of me was seeking something – what I later realized was "to be more embodied" and to understand the role that "bodies" play in the health and wellness for clients through group or individual work.

As an individual and as a group psychotherapist, I had to look at myself and to deeply trust myself. How was I to move forward in my own process as a group therapist if I did not find more integration and depth in my own self and in my relationships in the world?

My studies and experiences in New York were very enlightening, and changed my life. I learned that verbal group therapy differs from expressive arts or mixed modality group therapy, which can include one or a combination of the therapeutic use of psychodrama, drama, art, music, dance, expressive writing, journaling, or poetry. Both verbal and mixed modality groups have a lot to offer as is indicated in the research available. I was also able to see many settings where dance/movement and "bodies" were being considered within therapy. Although I believe that my initial work as a verbal group psychotherapist and my exposure to group

psychodrama influenced my initial stages of development as a group psychotherapist, I question whether I could have influenced or “taken my clients” as far in the last 24 years if I had not done my own artistic journey in dance/movement and art. Both verbal and nonverbal modalities helped embody my presence as an individual and shaped and informed my understanding of others.

I returned to Edmonton having learned how to value sensory integration and body integration. I also learned how to draw and paint spontaneously and kinesthetically. I was enriched by movement skills, and having a new paradigm about experiencing self in group and in the world. From this beginning, I made new choices – who to study with, how groups and group members could benefit from these experiences, and how I would be so challenged to write about these things.

That move to study in New York was 24 years ago, and I am still continuing on this journey – it is amazing. In 2003 I decided to get my Canadian Art Therapy Registration, and I have just received that after much study and work. I did a program through the Vancouver Art Therapy Institute, which I found very profound.

At the CGPA conference in Winnipeg, I will be presenting some of my final project, with a women’s art and movement therapy group. The power point presentation at the beginning of the day is a way of showing part of my life’s work in group therapy. The experientials that follow will hopefully help others to experience important aspects of this work for themselves.

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Reports from the Sections

Vancouver Section News

At our Annual General Meeting in May, a new slate of CGPA group therapists take on the following positions, Rosemary Van Stavel, secretary, Carol Parr treasurer, and Joan Wilson Jones, president, with responsibility for the section newsletter 'Here and Now'.

We often talk about our small membership yet recognize that we are a core group of 'worker bees'. Like a group, we get to belong. Our satisfaction is about inclusion, cohesion, altruism and mutual respect. We are groupies who want to work on a team with others similar to ourselves. In the spirit of mutual learning and collegiality our section of group therapists is working together to provide education and training for mental health professionals.

Due to group therapists retiring over the next few years the training of Mental Health Professionals in Group Therapy is necessary. A Group Training Pilot Program at Peace Arch Hospital initiated by Colleen Wilkie, PhD, on faculty with the Group Therapy Training Program (GTTP) Calgary, Alta., promoted an increased interest in getting Group Therapist Certification. Colleen and I co-led a 20 week interpersonal group which was observed by five clinicians in the Fraser Health Region. The clinicians met with us before and after the group to ask questions, offer their feedback and suggestions, and generally contribute to the understanding of the individual clients and the group process. Readings were assigned for every week and the learning was assessed via take-home exams. The seven of us thoroughly enjoyed working together and this pilot program has sparked interest in group therapy training.

As a result of this Pilot Training Program the Vancouver Section plans to work in conjunction with the GTTP to offer accredited training in group psychotherapy. This fall and during the spring of 2007 group therapy lectures will be offered by GTTP with Vancouver Section CGPA as sponsors. We are excited by the prospect of offering continuing accredited group therapy training for mental health professionals in our community and to the learning this brings.

CGPA Conference fever is in the air and Winnipeg hospitality draws us together. I look forward to seeing you there.

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Calgary Section News

Editor's Note: These items were previously published in the Calgary Section Newsletter August 2006 and are published here with permission from the Calgary Section Executive.

Editor's Note: Isn't this a great idea?

The Group Therapy Interest Group is an informal journal club that focuses on various aspects of group therapy or topics of interest to group therapists. It is supported and organized by Calgary section, CGPA four times a year. The meetings are held at Health on 12th in the Reading Room on Level G. Anyone with an interest in group therapy is welcome to attend. It operates on a drop-in basis, there is no fee and CGPA membership is not required. Please contact any member of the executive for more information or to be placed on an email notification list for the upcoming sessions.

President's Report, August 2006

On September 21st 2006 the Calgary Section's Annual General Meeting will be held at the Rajdoot Restaurant. Chris Marcil will be handed the reigns of Presidency and the group community will elect a new President Elect. I will move into being the Past President giving Mike Brager many thanks for his ongoing consultative support over this past year in that position. We are fortunate to have Debbie Kunkel who will continue to serve as Secretary – Treasurer and Trevor Warwick will stay on for a second year as Member-at Large. Pat Kelcher, our Calgary Section Newsletter Editor, has also agreed to hold a Member-at-Large position. The executive is looking to appoint additional Member-at-Large positions this coming year in order to expand and broaden member input and to take into account the reality of our busy lives, knowing that intermittent, short-term commitments are more possible for us than long term ones.

The executive has an exciting proposal to put forward to the members at this year's AGM, in the way of a tribute to Dr. Kent Mahoney. Please attend to give your input. An announcement will be placed in the next newsletter.

Our Spring Conference was a great success with Dr. John Toews and Ms. Ginger Cunes presenting. See the heartfelt synopses provided by attendees Karen Daniels and Sylvia Gorman in the Summer Newsletter for more details on these presentations.

Congratulations to those who received Group Therapist Appreciation Awards – Marcia Nerbas, Theresa Makowsky, Alecia McFeetors and Kathy Gates. Many thanks to the organizing committee members; Pat Kelcher, Chris Marcil and Debbie Kunkel. A warm and sincere thank you as well to the volunteers who helped out spontaneously on the day of the conference; Kathy Gates and Therese Makowsky.

This year the AGM will be held in conjunction with the Dr. Aldous Memorial Lecture on September 21st. We are most fortunate to have Dr. John Elliot deliver this year's lecture. We are sure his lecture "...WONDER...INGS..." will be of great interest to members of the group community, and a fitting way to resurrect this lecture series.

I want to remind everyone of the 27th Annual Canadian Group Psychotherapy Association National Conference "To Group or Not To Group – That is the Question" is being hosted by the Winnipeg section in October. Several Calgary group therapists are presenting this year and I encourage the Calgary group community to attend this wonderful opportunity for learning and fellowship. For information or program details please visit the website at <http://www.cgpa.ca> or contact either Co-chair: Linda Croll, MSW, RSW (204) 958-9644 or Lois Edmund, Ph.D., C.Psych. (204) 953-3863.

Over the past two years as I have served, first as President – Elect and then President, I have worked towards increasing the compliment of the section executive and increasing the visibility of CGPA. In doing so I have become increasingly aware of the larger group community in Calgary. Interests, issues and concerns of the group community have been raised with the executive where they were deconstructed, examined and discussed through the lens of group theory and process. Actions were decided upon through consensual decision making. What a privilege it has been to have been apart of this team! It has been a satisfying worthwhile experience full of warmth, support and intelligence. My personal resilience has expanded and my faith in the power of group has grown. I look forward, already with some sweet sadness, to my final year on the executive. My aim in my final year will be to fully support Chris Marcil as President and she leads the executive into her term.

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Manitoba Section News

The Manitoba section has been in full swing with preparations for our 2006 National Conference in October. Co-Chairs Dr. Lois Edmund and Linda Croll have been working closely with the Local Arrangements Committee (LAC) consisting of Dorothy Strang, Ruth Zetner, Fern Currie, Pauline Steinberg, Joan-Diane Smith and Pam Wener. The program looks fantastic and we are looking forward to seeing you there. The Fort Garry Hotel will host us once again. Please visit the hotel website to update on their facility, (ftgarry@fortgarryhotel.com), especially the world class spa "TEN", located on the previous casino floor. It's an amazing spa, and we hope you take advantage of it while you are there. Remember to book the hotel rooms by September 6 for the conference rate!

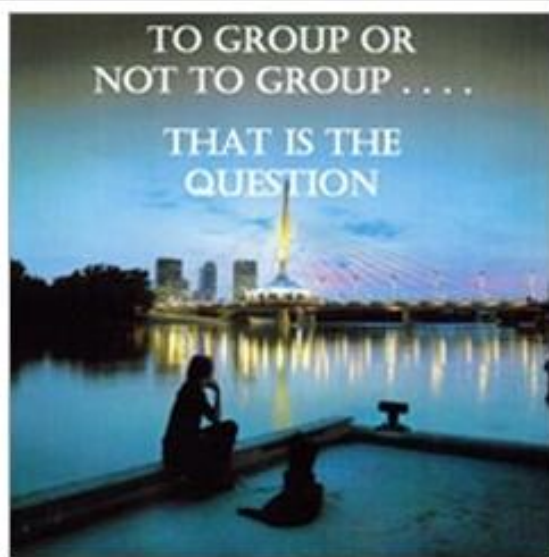
Our Manitoba Section celebrates our 10th anniversary in CGPA this year and it's been a wonderful ten years for us. We are in the midst of hosting our third conference for the association and really appreciate the opportunities that our conferences provide for that professional and personal mingling with group colleagues, nationally and internationally.

We are extremely proud of our Manitoba Section Training Program and the caliber of education and leadership that the Training Program Committee has established in a short period of time.

We have developed a strong and committed section over the years and often reference our section as 'small but mighty'!

See you in October.

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Updates from the Training Programs

Manitoba Section Training Program

Since beginning in 2001, we have had 21 trainees complete Module I. The trainees have come from the following disciplines: Social work: 5, Nursing : 6, Occupational Therapy: 3, Psychology: 2, Mental Health Clinician: 1, Youth Care: 1, Chaplaincy: 1, Art Therapy: 1, and Marriage & Family Therapy: 1. We have had one applicant from psychiatry, but this was not followed through.

We currently have a few trainees who have completed Module II (observation), and are involved in Module III A (Group supervision through the pre-group phase to launching), and one trainee is part way through Module IV (individual supervision).

Current Challenges: Culture Building

In our own committee meetings, we have identified the problem of a lack of receptive 'culture' for group therapy in our mental health community. We see this as a systemic issue, requiring strategic attention. To this end we continue to identify key individuals with whom we occasionally meet to encourage the development and profile of group therapy.

In addition, this past year we have held two successful one-day workshops aimed at attracting new people to the area of group therapy. These were both well attended, and we hope to use such events to attract trainees to our next round of Module I.

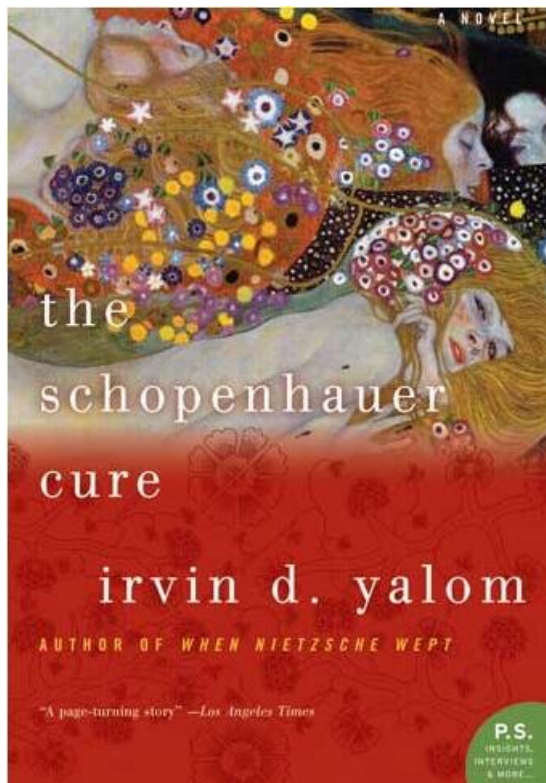
Finally, we are working closely with the Section and the Local Arrangements Committee for the upcoming national conference in October, to gather momentum and pursue the 'culture building agenda'.

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Book Review

The Schopenhauer Cure, A Novel, by Irvin D. Yalom
New York: 2005, HarperCollins Publishers, 345 pages, \$24.95 US.

Reviewed by: Joan-Dianne Smith, MSW, RSW, FCGPA



Editor's Note: Joan-Dianne Smith graciously suggested including this article that was published in the *International Journal of Group Psychotherapy*, 2006, 56, 379-381. It is reprinted with permission from the American Group Psychotherapy Association. *The Schopenhauer Cure* is also available through chapters.indigo.ca (hardcover \$23.06, paperback \$13.26) and amazon.ca (hardcover \$23.07, paperback \$14.40). Joan-Dianne commented that *The Schopenhauer Cure* is a great training complement to Yalom & Leszcz's textbook, *The Theory and Practice of Group Psychotherapy*, 5th edition, published 2005. I agree. The novel brings to life what we as group therapists experience in our clinical work; the textbook provides the underpinnings of the work we do. Both are highly recommended.

Arguably the most realistic, honest, and poignant portrayal of the experience of group therapy in fiction, this intriguing page-turner will appeal to anyone interested in philosophy, psychotherapy, and the human struggle for meaning. Psychiatrist/author Irvin Yalom, well known for his seminal texts in psychotherapy; *The Theory and Practice of Group Psychotherapy*, *Existential Psychotherapy*, and *Inpatient Group Psychotherapy*, and increasingly recognized as a writer of fiction (*When Nietzsche Wept*, *Love's Executioner*, *Lying on the Couch*), now introduces the compelling story of Julius Hertzfeld, eminent group psychotherapist. And so we are ushered into the intimacy of the therapeutic group.

As the story unfolds, Hertzfeld discovers at a regular physical check up that an advanced melanoma has infiltrated his body, and that he has at best, "one good year" left. Yalom graphically captures Julius' barefaced confrontation with the inevitable: He is now "a host; -- food for an organism whose gobbling cells divide at

a dizzying pace, -- outfitting clusters of cells for cruises into the bloodstream and colonization in distant organs" (p.8). And "in another year Julius Hertzfeld would be leeched into the soil, his molecules scattered, awaiting their next assignment" (p. 19).

After struggling with the initial shock and angst, Julius begins to consider how to spend this last year. He considers his successes and failures throughout his career, and on an impulse, decides to make contact with a former patient, Phillip Slate, with whom he had utterly failed after three years of individual psychotherapy some twenty-three years ago. "You want failure? --*There was failure!* Old-time major-league failure," he reminds himself (p.13).

Through a series of complex interactions, Phillip finally agrees to accept Julius' invitation to join his longstanding and favorite therapy group, although Phillip is not interested in personal growth or change; in fact he believes that he has cured himself, through his rigorous studies of Arthur Schopenhauer, the nineteenth century German philosopher. In return for this agreement, Phillip gets Julius to agree to be his supervisor in his new career as 'philosophical counselor.'

The challenge begins in the therapy group, with Julius and Phillip holding opposing existential views of the road to life's meaning. Julius, favoring the philosophies of Camus, Sartre, and Nietzsche, advocates that it is only through the honest examination of one's relationships that one finds self-understanding, intimacy, and ultimately, peaceful acceptance of the human condition; including "the pain of transient existence." (p. 9). The cynical and pessimistic Phillip, ("twin-brained" with Schopenhauer) is firmly convinced that tolerable existence can only be achieved by complete detachment from human connection. "Blessed isolation is what I seek." (p. 167). What better place to stage this battle than the arena of the therapy group! Yalom structures his novel around these two parallel stories: the life and development of Arthur Schopenhauer, and the story unfolding among the members of the therapy group. In alternating chapters, we see the progression of each, while Phillip bridges the two sagas with his enactment of Schopenhauer in the group.

In his weaving of these two tales, Yalom also attempts to demonstrate how group therapy works: we get rich and vivid glimpses into the subtleties of an interpersonal group therapy, as when Julius presses for the identifying and expressing of feelings. At one point a member says "I felt *that it was odd*—that's not quite a feeling, is it?" And Julius gently coaches, "Closer. -- First cousin to a feeling. Keep going." And the member does. (p. 161).

There are many instances of Julius' harnessing the power of the therapeutic group by moving the group to explore its 'here and now' dynamics. In typical fashion he says, "Let's take a look at what's happened in the past several minutes. Who's got some feelings or observations?" (p.159). He also encourages the group to explore its automatic and collusive reenactments of members' dynamic patterns. He speaks toward the end of a difficult session, "The very issue she wanted to talk about may have been played out here in living color with all of us playing a part in the pageant." (p.140). The book illustrates many other techniques routinely employed by Yalom, er...Hertzfeld. Without a doubt, Julius loves his work, and finds it to be a life-giving experience, even as he approaches his death.

Unlike the Bob Newhart caricature of group therapy, Julius himself and the group members unfold as believable, multilayered characters, each with compelling life

stories, strengths, and "blind spots." And, as in a true-to-life group, there are some jolting surprises when the unexpected emerges in the group. Yalom delights the reader with every therapist's nightmares and "bombshells." There is the explosive coincidence of a group member from Phillip's past, and disclosures of secrets long withheld from the group. There is the development of an intimate subgroup, the ongoing, conflictual impact members have on each other, and of course the impending losses due to Julius' fatal illness, and the resulting termination of the group. Julius rises to the occasion with each of these challenges and demonstrates grace, humor, and steel-edged honesty. At one point, Julius pushes the edges of Yalom's own advice on the judicious use of therapist self-disclosure as one member pointedly asks him, "What's not clear is *why* you're telling us. *Why now?*" (p.239). Julius becomes increasingly transparent under the pressure of his short time left. And all of these issues are on the table for exploration, "grist for the mill."

There are challenging bridges to be woven into this ambitious novel. First there is the movement back and forth between the alternating tales. The Schopenhauer historical detail becomes a bit sluggish at times, and the reader becomes anxious to get back to what's happening in the "here and now" of the therapy group. Yalom also wants to use his story to inform the general public about group therapy. For the most part this is successful, as we have access to Julius' own thought-dialogue. But there are some occasions when the "instructional" elements seem a bit deliberate, not so smoothly incorporated. Nevertheless, the book is well researched, beautifully written, and thoroughly absorbing. Yalom's command of language and his portrayal of the existential issues, touch the soul in technicolor.

Facing Julius' inevitable death is difficult, but it becomes compelling as the plot simmers to a surprising ending. *The Schopenhauer Cure* will captivate the audience of group therapists, most of whom will have studied *The Theory and Practice of Group Psychotherapy*, written by Yalom, and first published in 1970. (The fifth edition, published in 2005 with Melyn Leszcz.) For a generation of group therapists, Yalom has been a mentor, who has challenged us to become more humble, self-aware, and human while applying theoretical knowledge and skill to helping others. For the general public, *The Schopenhauer Cure* is a compelling story. It gives credence to the idea of embracing life and facing its inevitable questions and ambiguities. Human relationships are at the intimate heart of the search for meaning, and the struggle is worth it. As Zarathustra says, "Was that life? Well. Then, once again!" (p.332).

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In the Next Issue

In addition to the regular columns introduced in this issue (**Getting to Know the Executive, Let Me Tell you about Myself**), you can look forward to the launching of another regular column, **Consultation Corner** where a group therapy dilemma will be addressed by two members.

Editorial policies are currently being developed and are anticipated to be ready for publication in the next issue.

And of course, there is always room for **your submission!**

Some ideas . . .

- Reports or summaries from committee chairs
- Reflections from first-time attendees at the conference (what did you attend, what was the feel of the conference as a whole?)
- If you are bringing a digital camera, feel free to email me some pictures of the conference
- Any anniversaries of membership? What is it like to be a member of CGPA for 5, 10, 15 years? What is the same and what has changed since you joined?

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