



Margaret Anne Speak, MA, CCC

## NEW BOARD MEMBERS WELCOME

*Are you interested in supporting and promoting the advancement of Bowen theory in the Lower Mainland?*

*We are currently looking for new board members who have experience in marketing, fundraising and strategic planning. We would also welcome those who are familiar with the organization and have an interest in its future. Please contact Mark Smith, MSW, RSW, President of the Board, at mark.smith@livingsystems.ca.*



Training & Research Director  
Randy Frost, M.Div, RCC

Design and layout:  
inEthos Graphic Design  
and Illustration  
[www.ethosgraphicdesign.com](http://www.ethosgraphicdesign.com)

EDITING: TANYA HAWKE,  
[tjwordsmiths@telus.net](mailto:tjwordsmiths@telus.net)

Leila Howard,  
Business Office,  
604 926 5496 ext.300,  
[livingsystems@telus.net](mailto:livingsystems@telus.net)

[www.livingsystems.ca](http://www.livingsystems.ca)

## Welcome to the Premier Edition of our quarterly e-newsletter!

*The mission of Living Systems is to make knowledge of human behavior from a natural systems perspective available to the community by providing counselling, training, education and research.*

## Systems Thinking & Forgiveness

BY MARGARET ANNE SPEAK, MA, CCC

In a recent therapy session my client said, "I just can't forgive my father." She was referring to her belief that his treatment of her contributed to her 10 year addiction to cocaine. Now 'clean' for a few years and a member of N.A., she believed that she had to forgive in order to move forward. "What I really feel like doing" she said, "is cutting off from him." This got me thinking about where forgiveness, blame and guilt fit into systems thinking.

The client's angst was arising from a conception of forgiveness that is individual in nature rather than systemic: a conception that is widely held not only in psychology and N.A., but in religion, politics and rule of law. A systemic conception of forgiveness is different. Here's how I understand it.

Each one of us is born into an emotional environment that we must survive. I think of it as the organism being dropped into an 'emotional soup' made up of the complexities of our parents, grandparents, siblings and ancestors. We are all in the soup together. There are other things in the soup too: money, hierarchy, illness, pain, pleasure etc. all flavouring the soup. Guilt, blame and the idea of forgiving, come out of a feeling process that I see as the skim on the surface of the soup. Unfortunately, the skim often drives our behaviour. If I'm 'thinking systems', I'm searching for something bigger, something below the surface feelings that might help me to be more accurate about where I am in the soup, how I influence it and it me. I'm searching too, for a way to stay cool when the temperature is turned up so that I don't contribute to the pot boiling over.

In systems therapy we search out what Bowen called, 'the functioning facts': the who, what, where, when and how of emotional process between people. The client is encouraged to focus on researching the more objective facts of functioning rather than dwelling on his/her own subjective feeling states. Once the emotional process between people is better understood, the client's perspective widens, and feelings are less rigidly held. My effort with my client was to question her belief that her father functioned in isolation of the influence of others in the family. The session was coming to a close so I shared my memory of something I recalled Dr. Papero saying. He said that "forgiveness is for God," that you don't need to forgive your parents, you don't even need to like them, but it's a good exercise to work on being able to sit in the same room with them without getting anxious. This was useful to the client and she left the session somewhat relieved. We both knew however, that we would be back in the soup next time and that getting clarity and holding onto it is 'slow cooking'.

## 15th Annual Living Systems Conference

### ATTACHMENT THEORY AND BOWEN THEORY:

*What Difference do the Differences Make? How Bowen Theory Guides Therapy*

**Fri/Sat June 8 & 9, 2007**

Dr. Michael Kerr, MD and Kathleen Kerr, MSN, MA.  
Bowen Center for the Study of the Family, Washington, DC  
Douglas College, New Westminster, BC

*This conference was sold out in San Diego and received strong reviews*

Visit [www.livingsystems.ca](http://www.livingsystems.ca) for details.

## Post Graduate Training Program

Living Systems part-time post-graduate program has been offered since 1984. Visit [www.livingsystems.ca](http://www.livingsystems.ca) for details or contact Randy Frost at 604.926.5496 ext. 304.

## Upcoming Course "Extraordinary Relationships"

*A psycho-educational course around the text 'Extraordinary Relationships' by Dr. Roberta Gilbert.*

**March 19th to April 30th – Monday evenings 7-9pm (Except April 9th)**

Cost \$125.00 per person, text included, North Shore Location  
Group Leaders Evan Llewellyn and Margaret Anne Speak

This group will be of interest to all those interested in relationship dynamics and emotional process from a Bowen family systems perspective. Dr. Roberta Gilbert studied under Murray Bowen and her book is well respected and often recommended by therapists working from a family systems perspective.

For more information contact Margaret Anne Speak at [livingsystems@telus.net](mailto:livingsystems@telus.net)

To unsubscribe to this newsletter please reply back with unsubscribe in the subject line.