

Praise for

**VIRGINIA SATIR'S EVOLVING LEGACY:  
TRANSFORMATIVE THERAPY  
WITH A BODYMIND CONNECTION**

*A truly amazing read. What distinguishes this book is its emphasis on the holistic nature of Satir's approach, which recognizes the interconnectedness of body, mind and spirit in the therapeutic process. It was a joy to delve into Virginia Satir's Evolving Legacy: Transformative Therapy with a Bodymind Connection and rediscover the essence of Satir's teachings within its pages.*

*Crafted by esteemed authors deeply immersed in Satir's work and closely connected to her model, clinicians are provided valuable insights and practical techniques. The authors' deep understanding of Satir's teachings, combined with their personal approach to integrating the bodymind connection into therapy is compelling. Through interviews, personal reflections, compelling case studies and experiential exercises, the authors demonstrate how attention to the bodymind connection can lead to profound healing and growth.*

*This book is a must-read for therapists seeking to deepen their understanding of Satir's model and harness the power of the bodymind connection in their practice."*

– Michael Argumaniz-Hardin, PhD  
Director of Training for the Virginia Satir Global Network  
Professor of Marriage & Family Therapy, Fuller Theological  
Seminary (Houston, Texas)

*Virginia Satir's Evolving Legacy is a fascinating exploration of many ways that the original teachings of Virginia Satir have been adapted, combined and expanded in multiple areas of modern practice. The authors have included case studies and detailed, practical explanations of how they*

*incorporate processes such as the Personal Iceberg Metaphor, sculpting, body work and meditation as well as the philosophical underpinnings of the Satir Model in their work with clients. A most welcome addition to the Satir classics and a must read for all students of the Satir Model of Family Therapy!*

- Patricia Bragg, BA, BEd  
Counsellor, mediator, trainer, Satir coach  
President and Director of Training of the Satir Institute Society of the Yukon, Canada  
Former longtime Board Member of the Virginia Satir Global Network

*The authors brilliantly portray Virginia Satir's understanding of the use of body as an integral part of personal healing. I believe that healing can take place when we connect with our mind, body and spirit. Every word has a spirit, connection is the key.*

- Grace Elliott Neilson. My native names are: *Tiyuqtunaat Wulwisulwut*  
Director and co-founder Tillicum Lelum Friendship Centre  
(Nanaimo, BC Canada)

*Virginia Satir's Evolving Legacy is an amazing achievement and will be a great addition to the literature related to the work of Virginia Satir. For those of you who are trained in the Satir Model, it will add to your understanding of how to help your clients use their body wisdom. For those of you who are new to the Satir Model, it will add to your understanding of the key elements of the Satir Model.*

- Sharon Loeschen, LCSW  
Author of four books on the work of Satir and the Satir Coaching and Mentoring Program

*Bravo to the team of writers! This book provides cutting edge updates on the contributions of Virginia Satir's approach to health and healing in this transformative model of care and healing.*

*The opening poem of conversation with your body blew me away! How insightful it is to remind us about the power of the body on the soul and the*

*journey called life. This poem sets the energy of what is to come, highlighting that we must look inside to feel, know, and experience the impact of life's transactions on our present and future, as these are forever entwined with the past. The personal sharings of the authors touched me deeply.*

*The blending of Virginia's teachings, woven like a tapestry, will provide the support needed to shine your light within and without, to achieve peace within, peace between and peace among! Blessings to all readers and those whose lives they touch.*

– Dr. Mary Jo Bulbrook, RN, EdD  
President of Akamai University, Dean, Integrative Health College  
President Energy Medicine Partnerships, Inc.  
CEO, Global Healing Alliance

*If you assumed family therapy is exploring the family constellations and patterns, you are missing the most important aspects of Virginia Satir's family therapy approach. The essays in this book vividly explore how Virginia Satir, the mother of family therapy, integrated the mind-body-spirit-energy interconnection. Every thought and emotion has a corresponding body response and, in turn, changes and impacts our thoughts, emotions and spirit. It is a must read for any therapist, as it provides a perspective for widening the lens to incorporate soma, spirit and family and thereby provide an holistic healing therapy.*

– Erik Peper, PhD  
Professor, Institute for Holistic Health Studies, San Francisco State University  
Co-author of *TechStress – How Technology is Hijacking our Lives*,  
*Strategies for Coping and Pragmatic Ergonomics* by Erik Peper, Richard Harvey and Nancy Faass



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**DEDICATED  
TO VIRGINIA SATIR**

*Whose teachings have inspired and enriched each of our lives.  
And to each of those who have shared and continue to share  
her wisdom throughout the world. We honour the legacy of  
Virginia Satir that continues to evolve, with love and gratitude.*



## *FOREWORD*



### **JOHN BANMEN**

Virginia Satir (1916–1988), the world-renowned family therapist and world peace advocate, actively included the human body in her therapeutic approach. From conscious breathing to physical touch, to tracking body sensations, to encouraging body movement and body sculpting, Satir did all this in her training sessions and in her work with clients. And she accomplished this in the days when involving the body in any type of therapy was very limited, maybe even discouraged. Fortunately, time has proven her intuitive certainty right. Now the body is often central to the practice of therapeutic change.

The authors of *Virginia Satir's Evolving Legacy: Transformative Therapy with a Bodymind Connection* show us clearly and convincingly how to bring together body and mind within the framework of

Satir's Model. One might say, from practice to theory, each chapter is an outstanding presentation of how a therapist or practitioner can achieve an integrative approach applying bodymind interventions when working with individuals, couples and families.

As you will read in the introduction, the group has worked together for several years broadening their own already-significant understanding of Satir's bodymind approaches. Their discussions and sharing of private practice work and teaching experience has resulted in this timely practical book.

Fortunately, you will not need to be a Satir-trained therapist to apply the valuable teachings in each chapter. As Satir often said, *use what fits*. I encourage you, if you are a therapist, to add to your practice what fits, taking some risks with new ideas, approaches and suggested skills. And I encourage you, reader, to *fully* experience these moments of revelation and discovery. The world will be a better place for it.

Dr. John Banmen, R.Psych.

Co-author, *The Satir Model: Family Therapy and Beyond*

Former Associate Professor, University of British Columbia

Chairman/President, Banmen Satir China Management Centre

## I AM YOUR BODY

Together we have seen and done so much. Inseparable throughout life. Everything you have felt, I have felt, we have felt.

I have experienced all the emotions, the painful ones, the beautiful ones and those you were not aware of.

I have absorbed the repercussions of your thoughts, assumptions and beliefs. You can hear this in my tone, see it in the way I move,

in my shape and how my parts work together – or don't. I have suffered and thrived as a result of your choices.

So many times you have been unaware of me, punished me for my limitations or rewarded yourself at my expense.

Many times I have been in the way of what you wanted to do. I have screamed loudly or held my part in silence, but

that does not mean I didn't feel anything. I hold the memory of every fall, accident, near-miss, disappointment, fear, worry, hope and longing.

I have been the witness and companion to everything that ever happened to you.

My tissues are the crystallized matrix record of everything you think

about yourself, about life, relationships, and about the world.  
I would like to tell you how this has been for me. I understand you.

I know you so intimately. You have no secrets from me.  
Through me you experience yourself and your life.

I hold all the secrets, the things you don't dare tell yourself.  
Sometimes I feel you don't understand me.

I would like to serve you in the way you wish,  
but without a few changes this will be impossible.

I am afraid we will be doomed forever to work against each other,  
even though I am doing my best to serve you. This causes me great pain.

I would like to tell you about life from my perspective  
so we might know each other better. Through knowing me,

and my experience, you will better know yourself.  
That will be good for both of us. For both of us.

When you feel down, sad or lonely, it is because we crave  
to be connected and loved. I know how to pull those strings

so hard it hurts. Because you need love. I always want to motivate you  
to do anything it takes to remember you need love and connection,

but sometimes you go the other way, into isolation and self-pity.  
It is not my intention that you go there, but it seems to happen a lot.

I wish so much good for you. It is my duty to keep you safe,  
warn you of danger and help you cope with life. It is my job

to make sure you survive. Most of all I crave that you feel you are worthy,  
that we are worthy, that you feel loved and accept yourself, accept us.

I admit, sometimes my ways of communicating are complicated,  
and it seems I am saying the opposite. Making you feel bad is not my  
goal.

I am trying to help you remember. That's my job.  
I only want the best for you, for us.

I am you and you are me. We continue to be inseparable.  
How do we heal together? How *will* we heal together?

**Anastacia Lundholm**





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*Virginia Satir (1916–1988)*

# INTRODUCTION TO OUR COLLABORATIVE PROCESS AND PURPOSE

WRITTEN BY MARY LESLIE

Several Satir therapists and practitioners met in 2017 to explore ways to bring into our training programs a greater emphasis on the *centrality of the body* in Virginia Satir's work. We began by reflecting on Satir's use of the body in her writings, sharing personal observations of her work, and watching videos of her training sessions with clients. While sharing how we each integrated the body in our respective therapeutic practices using the Satir teachings – the way such use had transformed our practices and informed our personal growth – it became clear that our original vision in designing training programs was shifting. Collectively, we were tapping into a deeper level of the Satir process as we revisited the gems of Satir's energetic and spiritual way of attending to the body. In February 2020 we decided to write together.

Our goals evolved to highlight:

- Satir's considerable influence on therapeutic practice during the last twenty-five years of her life, particularly through her *prioritizing the body and integrating spirituality into her teaching and therapy practice*. She brought her unique portrayal of the energetic systems within and beyond the physical body into practice before these ideas were mainstream in the West. She anticipated many of the theorists and therapeutic practitioners who focus on the body and energetic systems today.
- Our passion for Satir's ideas and her whole-person approach. Her teaching is still relevant and continues to evolve. Satir's model is taught around the world, including in China, South-east Asia and Europe. Our respective approaches have evolved in alignment with the values, beliefs and ideas of Satir's teachings.

- Our aim is to demonstrate how each approach might be woven creatively into individual personal growth and into any therapeutic practice.

Satir viewed the body, mind and spirit, not as separate parts, but as one integrated, energetic and indivisible whole. In therapy and in her training programs, her focus was experiential and encompassed a view of human life that incorporated a systemic and deeply optimistic view of humans and their potential for change.

The hallmark of Satir's work was her extraordinary sensitivity to the nonverbal aspects of communication – height differentials, distance, voice, tone, eye contact, posture, touch and movement. Much of the magic of her therapeutic style was the ease with which she used these nonverbal dimensions. She believed that if she could help her clients see, hear and feel more, their personal and interpersonal resources would lead them to their own solutions.<sup>1</sup>

Virginia Satir (1916–1988) is often referred to as the mother of family therapy. She was the first family therapist to begin seeing whole families together, and published her seminal and ground-breaking book, *Conjoint Family Therapy*, in 1964 [3<sup>rd</sup> edition in 1983], highlighting the importance of working with whole families with the same therapist. This marked a significant shift from the prevailing theories of psychoanalysis of the time. She placed greater emphasis on the therapist-client relationship than on techniques. Her influence was very broad during her lifetime through her many collaborations with other therapists and theorists, including as the first program director in 1963 at Esalen, in California. In many of her collaborations she was the only woman in a field dominated by men.

She had a strong foundation in human sciences and brought creative attention to all aspects of being human. Her colleague, John Banmen, observed that, “She saw herself as more of an innovator and independent thinker instead of a follower of the predominant therapeutic approach

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1 Simon, “Ten Most Influential Therapists.”

of the day.”<sup>2</sup> Her overarching mission was to create a more fully human world through working with individuals, with families, and by teaching her approach extensively throughout North America and globally.

The *Psychotherapy Networker* magazine in 2012 quoted Frederick Duhl, a psychiatrist, family therapist, teacher, founder and co-director (1969–2003) of the Boston Family Institute: “Satir was the most gifted therapist in the field. She knew human systems with her fingertips. Virginia probably trained more people than any other family therapist alive.”<sup>3</sup>

*The Satir Model*, a book outlining Satir’s approach as it had evolved through her teaching and writing, was begun in 1985 and published in 1991 following her death in 1988. The writing process involved Satir, as well as John Banmen, Jane Gerber and Maria Gomori, senior faculty members of her international process community. Their aim was to formulate the model to that point in time and to highlight core concepts.

Throughout our chapters, we – the contributors to this book – will use the term *Satir’s model* (to distinguish it from the book, *The Satir Model*) to encompass all her writing, presentations, video and audio tapes, and articles that evolved over time in harmony with her teaching.

Despite the centrality of the body in Satir’s training workshops and practice, we feel that the body aspect was not articulated clearly in her early writing, nor in *The Satir Model* and *SATIR Transformational Systemic Therapy* (2009).<sup>4</sup> As Satir therapists, practitioners and trainers, we focus on the body; we use it, we talk about it, but we haven’t written about the body as clearly as writers from other modalities. This book, therefore, was created to address that need and opportunity. In agreement with Satir’s deeply energetic and integrated view of the whole person, we see the body as a way to tap into a person’s dynamic energy

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2 Banmen, *Satir Model in Action*, 14.

3 Wylie, “Changing of the Guard.”

4 Banmen, *SATIR Transformational Systemic Therapy*.

system. The body is in constant flow with mind and spirit, always in alignment with the deep energetic “being” of a person.

## OUR PERSONAL HISTORIES WITH SATIR'S IDEAS AND TEACHING

In the opening chapter, I will briefly outline aspects of Satir's model that are especially germane to our body/mind/spirit focus to provide a context for the chapters that follow. Rather than being didactic, the contributors chose to lean more towards inspiring readers with Satir's living legacy. We will elaborate on the deep and long-lasting impacts, not only for clients, but also for ourselves, as we seek to bring our whole selves, including a body focus, into our therapy. It is our hope that through the case studies in subsequent chapters, we will be able to convey the energetic and experiential aspects of Satir's ideas and capture the depth and breadth of her way of attending to bodies.

Together we have over 250 years of experience, which includes significant study of Satir's ideas and concepts within both clinical and teaching contexts. We will share our own stories of how we were drawn to the life and wisdom of Satir and Satir's model and how we are carrying her legacy forward. We are therapists, practitioners, coaches, teachers, personal growth facilitators. Each writer's experience of Satir is different. Three of our core group knew her well over many years: John Banmen since 1970 and Nitza Broide-Miller since 1976. Leona Flamand Gallant, an aboriginal elder, met Satir and trained with her starting in the early '80s when Satir held her process groups at The Haven on Gabriola Island on the west coast of Canada. These three, with their rich personal experiences, have greatly enhanced our writing process. I watched Satir working with families on two occasions, several years apart, and the others (Jennifer Nagel, Julie Gerhardt, Anastacia Lundholm and Carolyn Nesbitt) connected with her wisdom through taped sessions, books, and training sessions of Satir's model. Gallant was not part of our initial group process but has long been an enthusiastic supporter of Satir's vision and

continues to promote Satir's wisdom, healing and teaching actively in her community in British Columbia.

Gallant and Banmen each had the experience of having Satir lead a family reconstruction around their own families of origin. Gallant has had the opportunity through her training with Satir and Gomori to facilitate family reconstructions on her own, in training programs, and presently for those who seek her out. She is passionate about the relevance and timeliness of this aspect of Satir's legacy, given aboriginal people's need for healing from years of trauma and hardship.

## OUR COLLECTIVE OVERALL VIEW AND FOCUS

In the spring of 2020, we began to meet by zoom on a regular basis to attempt to put the non-linear ideas and spirit of Satir into words. This has been a process of feedback and mutual support as we have faced the challenges that Satir named herself when addressing the importance of metaphor. As she said, "There are so many things that have to do with meanings in terms of human beings, and often language is a limiting factor," and as her friend Barbara Jo Brothers stated: "No one has found a way to write a holographic book."<sup>5</sup>

In the spirit of Satir, we have been exploring the body, not just as a key part of therapy, but as a primary focus of therapy; we place it increasingly in the foreground of our work with clients. At the core of Satir's conceptual framework is the unity of the body, mind and spirit. We have chosen to refer to this unitive aspect as body/mind/spirit or bodymind. The two phrases are not far apart in the meaning we give to each of them as authors, but each author's preference is being honoured. The body is not just the "container," but is a clear manifestation of life itself. The body, along with the energy within and beyond the physical bounds of the body, contributes to the vitality of the whole person. Satir

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5 Brothers, *Well-Being*, 11.

stated, “For every feeling we have, we have a body response.”<sup>6</sup> The mind is regarded more as an observer rather than as the leader of change, as we encourage clients to extend their awareness through integration of the messages from their senses, including behaviour, cognition/thoughts and feelings, into all aspects of the therapeutic process. This theme will be expanded upon considerably in subsequent chapters as it is so central to Satir’s approach and to each of us in our work with clients.

We will each elaborate on how congruence is expressed in our own particular body/mind/spirit approach; however, as I reflect on the interactions of those of us involved in this writing endeavour, I am aware of the deep level of congruence that has marked our group’s interactions and explorations together. Trust and safety permeated our deliberations. This enabled us to be vulnerable together and to enter the sacred space that Satir alludes to so eloquently, resulting in a highly intuitive process, where each offering deepened our collective understanding and the process of exploration. By each sharing what a congruent state feels like and how we experience it in therapy – as a sense of flow between ourselves and our clients, as deep knowing or resonance that invariably is evident and affirmed by and through the responses of our clients – we have achieved, as clients often achieve, a sense of profound connection, and a sense of embodied inner peace and compassion, within ourselves and with one another.

Our discussions and explorations led us to look deeper into what we mean when we speak of the self, both the small “s” self and the large “S” Self. In trying to write from a consistent understanding of what we are each referring to, we agreed that the self (without the capital) refers to that experience of being and relating from an awareness of who we feel we are, the thinking and everyday part of us. When in a congruent state, fully centered and embodied and connected to a sense of universal energy, we experience a state of greater unity with one another; here there is information that we intuit comes from “beyond” our day to day

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6 Banmen and Loeschen, *Simple but Profound*, 202.



thinking; in this state we may be experiencing the large S Self, even if only briefly, a state that resembles the essence or divine aspect of ourselves. It may also be referred to through out our chapters as life energy, soul, or spirit.

We agreed to primarily address Virginia Satir as Satir throughout our chapters; however, this has its challenges. Some of us, especially those who knew her in person, refer to her as Virginia, a name she preferred. It was commonly known that she was spoken of in many therapeutic venues and circles by her first name only. Our use of her last name, as Satir, does not in any way diminish the deeply personal way in which we and many others hold her and her contributions.

In the ordering of the chapters, we chose to place the contributions of our elders first, as they bring a very personal and deep knowledge and appreciation of her through their many years of training with her. There are a number of ways we could have ordered the remaining chapters. We trust each reader will choose the order in which to read the chapters according to their own interests and curiosities.

## SUMMARY

Our group of writers brings an array of unique voices and varied experiences to this book celebrating Virginia Satir. While we each worked on our own chapters, the degree of sharing, support and feedback from the others was deeply enriching and expanding. At times we have each seen our ideas more clearly in the reflections of others. Managing the challenges of living in the real world of work, family and health challenges, while balancing a commitment to write creatively on the side, has been the context of our work together. Our deep passion for Satir's ideas and values, the sustaining support of each other and the many moments of wonderful laughter, have been rich and have enlivened what we have been able to do together.

In the introduction to *Satir Transformational Systemic Therapy* in 2009, William C. Nichols noted that Satir's strong emphasis on growth

was one reason she founded the Avanta Network [now called The Virginia Satir Global Network] in 1977, “as a forum for the continued evolution of Satir’s theory and practice.”<sup>7</sup> He continues: “Whether in the mainstream or not, whether driven by the personal charisma of Virginia or not, the Satir legacy is a different and growing phenomenon throughout much of the world.”<sup>8</sup>

Banmen spoke during the 100<sup>th</sup> birthday celebrations of Satir and her legacy about the inheritance we have been given through her life and contributions. He encouraged us to take that inheritance and share it forward.

It is in this spirit that our group of writers has come together to share creative ways we have used and experienced her teaching; we have seen that growth and transformation can be realized by staying true to Satir’s ideas and principles. It is our hope that this writing will reach others, both within the Satir family and beyond – including those less familiar with her work and writing. It is our intent that readers will gain from the depth and expansiveness of her legacy and be inspired to take forward her ideas and passion for this work in creative ways.

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7 Nichols, “forward”, ii.

8 Ibid., vii.

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# I

## SATIR'S ENDURING AND EVOLVING LEGACY



### MARY LESLIE

Mary Leslie retired in 2022 following thirty-five years of experience as a registered clinical social worker in healthcare settings and private practice. She taught as a sessional faculty member at the University of British Columbia School of Social Work, presented at conferences, webinars and workshops and has published chapters in journals. Her life and work have been deeply inspired and influenced by Satir's holistic, energetic and spiritual focus.



## SATIR'S ENDURING AND EVOLVING LEGACY

### PERSONAL STATEMENT

I first saw Virginia Satir work with a family at a gathering at Burnaby Mental Health in 1969 when I was a social work student at the University of British Columbia. I was in awe as I watched her interact with the family members chosen to work with her that day, moving them physically around on stage, and connecting very respectfully with each. Following that first experience, I read and reread Satir's *Conjoint Family Therapy* (1963).<sup>1</sup> In 1988, a few months before Satir died, I had a second opportunity to watch her work with a family in Vancouver and was drawn once again to her attention to the body and to the profound respect she offered each member. She moved with ease in front of several hundred people in the audience. Three years later I began my studies with the Satir Institute of the Pacific and knew I had found my "tribe" as well as support for integrating a spiritual focus into my professional practice.

As a social worker at St. Paul's Hospital, Vancouver, I was introduced to Healing Touch in 2003 and two years later to Therapeutic Touch at the B.C. Cancer Agency where I set up and supervised a Therapeutic Touch Clinic for patients and families. Learning these body-centred energetic approaches significantly amplified my appreciation of Satir and opened up a new depth of understanding of her way of working. Through that energetic body lens, I saw beyond Satir's words into the significance of her use of touch and recognized the value of her spiritual connection with each family member.

Case studies of my practice of Satir's model can be found in the *Satir International Journal* article, "Widening Our Lens, Deepening Our

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1 Satir, *Conjoint Family Therapy*.

Practice: An Exploration of Energy within the Teachings of Virginia Satir.”<sup>2</sup> and in *The Satir in Action*,<sup>3</sup> edited by John Banmen.

Virginia Satir (1916–1988) taught in many countries in her quest to promote peace within, peace between, and peace among. Many of her books have been translated into other languages and her ideas continue to be widely taught. To celebrate Satir’s 100<sup>th</sup> birthday in 2016, 252 people from seventeen different countries came to Surrey, Canada, to share how her work is being used and taught today. There are thirty Satir Affiliates and/or Institutes around the world. Satir’s model has been widely taught in China and throughout Asia, Europe and in Africa.

Satir started an organization called Avanta in 1977, a forum for the continued evolution of her work. This organization continues, with a name change to The Virginia Satir Global Network (VSGN) in 2007, to promote and support the teaching of her model and to advance her ideas globally. At the onset of COVID restrictions, VSGN began offering weekly zoom meetings to support therapists and adherents during those challenging times, with participants from Israel, China, Taiwan, Korea, Thailand, Turkey, Serbia, Romania, Bulgaria, Kenya and other countries. These virtual gatherings included a presenter and break-out groups for discussion and sharing of ideas and concerns. Since the fall of 2022, this pattern has shifted to once a month, with weekly hour-long Satir coffee groups providing a less structured sharing opportunity for those interested.

## THE EVOLUTION OF SATIR’S MODEL

Satir’s model can be placed among the humanistic/transpersonal psychological schools. John Banmen writes: “With the parallel thinking of Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers, Satir developed a belief system...

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2 Leslie, “Widening the Lens.”

3 Leslie, “An Exploration of Energy.”



that advocated a faith in human beings and their ability to manage their lives from a sense of strength, inner motivation, and responsibility.”<sup>4</sup>

Banmen outlines four iterations of Satir’s model which evolved over time:

1. The Communication Model (1960s) with the advent of her book, *Conjoint Family Therapy*
2. The Human Validation Model of the ’70s and early ’80s
3. The Growth Model in the mid-’80s (still going strong)
4. The Satir Transformational Systemic Therapy Model (STST) – where spiritual, energetic and transformational aspects, as demonstrated by her in video tapes, evolved with a greater emphasis in the early 2000s.

Banmen writes: “The Satir Model in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is best described as positively directional goal focused and transformational change based.”<sup>5</sup> Our group of contributors to this book has been studying, working with, and teaching versions of the STST model as we and the model have evolved over time. William C. Nichols, a marriage and family therapist, educator and active contributor to the International Family Therapy Association writes:

It appears that Satir’s work embodies an invitation to her disciples to “go forth and grow” rather than doing things exactly as she did them. In other words, a broad framework of ideas and values, rather than a narrow and explicit list of prescriptions to be followed without deviation, seems to be the path and pattern expected of Satir-model practitioners.<sup>6</sup>

Banmen refers to Satir’s teachings as deceptively simple at first glance, but also states that in many ways we have only scratched the surface of the deeper levels of her wisdom and approach. According to Broide-Miller: “Satir’s model really is a journey into a way of living that takes time to grow into and internalize. It does not consist of didactic

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4 Banmen, *Satir Model in Action*, 15.

5 Banmen, *Satir Transformational Systemic Therapy*, 5.

6 Nichols, “Forward,” ii.

information you can learn and copy. It needs to involve internal experiencing as part of the learning.” (Chapter 3, Broide-Miller).

## SATIR'S TRAINING PROGRAMS

Satir encouraged participants in her training programs, which included family therapists and lay persons, to dig deeper into their own family dynamics and patterns of reactivity to recognize their many resources. Broide-Miller describes meeting and working with Satir in 1976:

What seemed somewhat different and very welcome to me was Satir's attention to our inner selves and our deepest yearnings, and the importance of doing our own work on ourselves as part of our preparations for working with others. Other therapists also valued this, but it was more consistently and effectively woven into Satir's training and allowed much deeper work with people. (Chapter 3, Broide-Miller).

Satir training sessions included the use of triads where participants in groups of three would rotate through the roles of Star (the client), therapist and observer in an interactive, hands-on process. These roles would rotate, with each person experientially grounding Satir's teaching. Participants explored the influence of their families of origin and early life experiences and supported one another to transform their own patterns in the quest to become more congruent and more “fully human.” Satir stated:

It is urgent that we nourish and develop the buds of sanity and humanness that are emerging. We have going for us a fantastic know-how of technical development and proven intellectual ability. We know how to probe and investigate practically everything. Our challenge now is to develop human beings with values – moral, ethical and humanistic—that can effectively utilize this development. When we achieve that, we will be able to

enjoy this most wonderful planet and the life that inhabits it.  
WE ARE ON THE WAY.<sup>7</sup>

## SATIR, AHEAD OF HER TIME

Satir, best known for her pioneering work in family therapy, was very much ahead of her time. More than sixty years ago she was incorporating the body in therapy with individuals and families.

Barbara Jo Brothers, a friend and colleague of Satir's and a family systems therapist, has stated:

Virginia was aware, long before body therapies were fashionable, that the human being is a multi-flowing, biocomputing, spiritual, sensate entity. In the late sixties and early seventies when I first made her acquaintance and entered training with her, it was that lack of recognition of the whole, breathing bodied person that was one of the major errors in the world of psychotherapy. The world has caught up with her to some extent in that there is now an intellectual consensus that bodies are more than just structures to carry patients into the consulting room and that they cannot be separated from feelings. *All aspects of this chemistry-and-electricity-of-the-moving-parts-of-a-person is part of [the] flow of communication.*<sup>8</sup>

*The Psychotherapy Networker* acknowledged Satir's contribution in this way:

As the *Networker* paid its respects to the trailblazers who'd ignited the clinical imagination of a generation of therapists—people like R.D. Laing, Murray Bowen and Carl Whitaker—there was a palpable sense of the changing of the guard. But it was perhaps the passing of Virginia Satir that stirred the deepest resonance among clinicians who'd been viscerally influenced

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7 Satir, *New Peoplemaking*, xi.

8 Brothers, *Writ Large*, 55.

by her work, which anticipated so much of the mind body orientation of many approaches today.<sup>9</sup>

In their article, *Ten Most Influential Therapists*, editors of *Psychotherapy Networker* noted her attentiveness to neurological aspects:

It was always difficult for Satir to describe a family in abstract terms. Only when she was engaged with them fully with all her senses would she allow herself to think conclusively about the family system. And she always included herself in the description. So she might say, "I felt a warmth that told me the son was open for some contact." She trusted that her neurology registered the necessary information about the therapeutic system.<sup>10</sup>

Evidence of her ideas and thinking can be found in many writers whose bodymind theories are in use today: for example, Peter Levine, Pat Ogden, Janina Fisher, Stephen Porges, Bessel Van der Kolk, Bruce Lipton, Dan Siegel and Norman Doidge. Of these, only Peter Levine may have collaborated with Satir during her time at Esalen.

## SATIR'S ENERGETIC, SPIRITUAL AND BODY ASPECTS

If Satir's earlier writing did not give full expression to the spiritual, energetic and body-based aspects to her approach, that was no doubt influenced by the culture of psychology and family therapy in which she began her work with clients. Her natural and unusual abilities to see energy as it expressed itself in people's lives, bodies and actions (likely deepened by her family's Christian Science background and strengthened by her need to survive in an emotionally challenging early childhood environment) were not widely appreciated by the scientific communities in which she lived and moved. She commented to a few trusted students and friends that she was seeing more deeply into the lives of her clients and students than she was free to share publicly. She expressed an interest

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9 "A Brief History of Psychotherapy".

10 Simon, "Ten Most Influential Therapists."

in *Therapeutic Touch and Touch for Health* with Mary Jo Bulbrook.<sup>11</sup> Those with whom she collaborated at Esalen (1962–'69) were also considered on the “fringe” in their appreciation of the body’s centrality in healing and therapy. Satir’s articulation of energy and spirituality in her teaching evolved at Esalen and continued until her death.

According to Maria Gomori (1920–2021), a co-author, close friend and colleague of Satir:

Satir’s embodied presence and belief in the other person’s life force evoked something powerful in those she was with, and her intention was to help people to re-connect with their own life energy, and their own resources and strength to make new choices towards their dreams and growth. The metaphor she often used is that all people have their own lights; she offers a match to light their own lights.<sup>12</sup>

The spiritual nature of Satir’s approach is evident in her language and choice of words as she speaks about the high-risk clients she had in the early days of her private practice:

Many of these people began to blossom as the treatment proceeded. I think now that this happened because I was working to contact their spirits, loving them as I went along. The question for me was never whether they had spirits, but how I could contact them... I consider the first step in any change is to contact the spirit. Then together we can clear the way to release the energy for going toward health. This too is spirituality in action.<sup>13</sup>

Satir’s attentiveness to energetic aspects of individuals, families and groups with whom she worked is most evident in the videotapes of her working with clients, and in her month-long training programs beginning in 1969. In an article, “When I Meet a Person,” Satir discusses an

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11 Bulbrook, Mary Jo, personal communication with Satir 1972, shared with author in personal communication, June 2016.

12 Gomori, Maria, personal communication, June 19, 2016.

13 Satir, *New Peoplemaking*, 340-341.

“important element” she refers to as the energy field. She speaks about this in relation to touching:

Around any well-integrated person there is a circular field that is about three feet in diameter. At the edge of this field, you can feel vibrations – at least I can! These vibrations are like unacknowledged territorial lines around the person... you can physically feel them... I respect these lines. That is why I stay at arm’s length. If I go closer to a person, I have already experimented as to whether or not his or her boundary will let me in... There seems to be a relationship between the development of trust and the elasticity of this boundary.<sup>14</sup>

Although few of us would describe the boundaries between ourselves and others in this way, we do experience something. Consider how close to another person you stand in a line-up; sense your discomfort when someone gets too close to you. In an elevator, when a new person enters, others will often shift to maintain equidistance. This happens in response to our intuitive sense of the energy field around ourselves and others, although it remains largely an unconscious process for many people.

Satir knew that the internal state from which the therapist engages in therapy must be fully grounded and centered, with an awareness of self and the field, and focused mentally, physically, emotionally and spiritually on the client. The fullness of this approach can be supported through meditation or other mindfulness processes. This internal state of being is the state of congruence; it applies to the therapist and is also a state a client can access. When connecting with clients from a congruent state, “a therapist’s creative life energy shows up in metaphors, humor, self-disclosure, sculpting and many other creative interventions.”<sup>15</sup>

Congruence is core to Satir’s energetic and deeply spiritual approach, and was a vitally important condition for herself, and foremost in her goals for clients and other therapists.

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14 Satir, “When I Meet a Person,” 193.

15 Banmen, *Satir Transformational Systemic Therapy*, 246.

## CORE AND UNIQUE CONCEPTS OF SATIR'S MODEL

### MAKING CONTACT AND CREATING SAFETY

For Satir, creating a connection with each individual and member of a family and group she encountered was vitally important for bringing the best out in them, for forming a bond of trust. Safety was essential to this goal: clients needed to feel safe to risk and co-create lasting change. She used a metaphor to describe her relationship to clients:

When I am completely harmonious with myself, it is like one light reaching out to another. At the outset, it is not a question of “I will help you.” It is simply a question of life reaching out to life. All life talks to life when it is in a harmonious state. If my ego is involved or if I need them to get well, then it is a different story. This is one of the secrets of what I do, if there is a secret.<sup>16</sup>

Satir's valuing of the safety and trust in connecting with clients is beautifully stated:

When people come to see me, I don't ask them if they want to change. I just assume they do. I don't tell them what's wrong with them or what they ought to do. I just offer them my hand, literally and metaphorically. If I can convey to the person that I am trustworthy, then we can move and go to the scary places.<sup>17</sup>

One way she connected with clients was through close attention to the specific words and language they used; she integrated these into ongoing therapy by using a metaphor to shift a client's perspective and meaning making in subtle but powerful ways. She used shared language to establish and maintain a safe and deep connection with each person she encountered, often using metaphors to engage visual and kinesthetic senses energetically, to support shifts in a person's feelings, beliefs, perceptions and assumptions.

Her belief that everyone has resources within, that if made evident

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16 Satir, “Reaching out to Life,” 39.

17 Satir, “Reaching out to Life,” 39.

and encouraged, would support healing, along with her deliberate intention to honour strengths and enable clients to actively co-create the change they desire, set her apart from many therapists. In session, she always set the stage by forming a strong connection with clients before engaging them in any change-focused process. She used touch throughout, but always asked permission and carefully monitored the safety and comfort of others. She would shake hands with clients or initiate hand holding if she felt they were comfortable with that:

One can touch in all kinds of ways. In training therapists, I have told them that to develop “eyes and ears” in their fingers is important. People in families are touching all the time – slapping, pushing, shoving, holding... touch can have different meanings. So it isn't a matter of giving a touch; it is a matter of the message in the touch.<sup>18</sup>

She spoke of assessing a family non-verbally by closely watching their bodies, movement, position, tone of voice and facial expressions before beginning to explore other avenues of assessment:

We think the most important area of observation for the therapist has to do with body and behavioural clues. There are numerous simultaneous levels of observations around this data... the most important are: the congruency of the body messages of each member of the family with his words, tone, and quality of expression.<sup>19</sup>

She stressed how important it is for the therapist to be fully aware of his/her own body posture and alert to the messages she/he might be conveying.

## FIVE ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS

There are five elements considered essential for change in the *Satir*

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18 Satir, “When I Meet a Person,” 184.

19 Satir, “Therapist’s Use of Self,” 205.



*Transformational Systemic Therapy (STST)* model. Each of these elements is observable in the taped demonstrations of Satir working with families and participants in her training programs; however, they have been articulated to a greater degree in the *STST* model. The unique components of her approach have been highlighted as: *systemic, experiential, positively directional, change and transformational focused, and the intentional use of self*. These are deeply interwoven with the energetic field of the body. They interact with one another and are not in reality separate or distinct in themselves.

### *Systemic*

Any change in one area can result in or bring about a change in another area. By using the word “systemic,” we are referring to Satir’s ability to address multiple areas of focus, such as beliefs, fears, yearnings and body sensations simultaneously. Systemic also refers to systems, such as: closed vs open, hierarchical vs egalitarian and differences in power between therapist and client.

Satir focused primarily on two levels of systems: *internal*, the relationships among the constituent parts of a person: emotions, beliefs, perceptions, expectations and yearnings, addressing the different roles or internal (intrapsychic) parts of a person as a system and *interactional*, the relationships among the constituent parts of a family, community or country.<sup>20</sup> Transformational change involves an energetic shift in the intrapsychic system, which then changes the interactive system. Whether Satir was working with an individual, a family or in training groups, she always addressed the vital role that the lived experience of family of origin had in shaping worldview and self-image. The relationship between the client and therapist is also a system that Satir believed requires keen attention.

Satir believed that each human being has what they need in terms of resources, and the goal of therapy therefore is to assist the client to access

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20 Smith, “Transformations in Therapeutic Practice,” 126.

what is already there. From this perspective, she envisioned her clients as co-creators of the outcome of their work together; we each have the capacity to connect with and draw from the universal energy field; it is accessible to each of us, either consciously or unconsciously.

### *Experiential*

Satir consistently articulated the experiential in the energetic focus of her work. For her, experience is located in body sensations, feelings and their interrelatedness, all occurring in the present moment. She demonstrated that emotions, beliefs, expectations and yearnings rooted in our somatic experience must be experienced deeply and processed at a body level before any behavioural changes can be integrated and sustained. She stressed the importance of therapist/practitioner and client moving slowly and incrementally in present time to anchor, reinforce and strengthen the client's resolve and integrate change. This may begin at any level, but eventually will involve the deepest level of the body/self.

Satir held that goals set between client and therapist, including movement towards transformational change, can be supported in many ways, including by an experiential focus on the body as guide, truth teller and monitor, through asking open-ended process questions intended to give the client an opportunity to explore their intrapsychic parts. Process can be entirely experiential or guided with questions oriented toward bringing the client into a deeper inquiry into his or her own being and experience.

### *Positively directional*

The therapist actively engages with the client to help reframe perceptions, generate possibilities, hear the positive message of universal yearnings, and connect the client to his/her positive Life Energy (soul or spirit). By exploring the positive or survival role that our coping patterns provide at times of stress and threat, the therapist shifts clients from self-judgement to more compassionate acceptance of their past responses.

The therapist can link the body sensations of clients to affirmations

of their deepest yearnings. This paves the way for the important work of transforming old patterns into new choices and fresh patterns. “The focus is on health and possibilities, appreciating inner resources, and anticipating growth, rather than on pathologizing or problem solving.”<sup>21</sup>

This growth-oriented, positively directional component distinguishes Satir's model from others. Satir was committed to supporting clients to move from a negative view of the body associated with trauma to a positive, resourced view of the body. She strived to empower them as participants in the vital change process.

### *Change and transformation-focused*

“The goal of therapy... is transformation in the way the system relates to itself, in essence a change in its way of being.”<sup>22</sup>

The focus on intrapsychic change begins with a focus on the body to reveal emotions, beliefs, expectations and yearnings that are stored in the cells and are biologically based in body memory and experience. The body is the storage unit and carries an imprint of one's past, thus attending to the body is a necessary first step for resolving trauma and internalized memory of the past, which the body is still holding. Satir believed that movement towards transformation must first be recognized at this deeply internal body level, and experientially felt and honoured there, before the impacts of past events can be transformed and behaviour can change. When a therapist works interactively with couples or family members, the change will involve connecting people at the level of their emotions, beliefs, expectations and yearnings to help externalize relationship issues or patterns. “Transformational change happens as people embrace the pain of the past in the present and feel the difference in the core of their being.”<sup>23</sup> From this place, different choices can be made moving forward.

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21 Banmen, *Satir Transformational Systemic Therapy*, 246.

22 Smith, “Transformations in Therapeutic Practice,” 126.

23 Sayles, “Transformational Change,” 114.

Integration of this transformational change by each person is enhanced by “anchoring a change internally,” a process that takes place at the level of one’s beliefs, assumptions, yearnings and sense of self. This can be supported by the therapist exploring through the body the ways that the client will be, or feel, different given the change that has just been experienced. The importance of the anchoring process will be expanded further, especially in Nagel’s and in Broide-Miller’s chapters. Timing, in Satir’s approach to therapy, is critical to the establishment and sustaining of change. The principles of moving slowly, and integrating change at each level, have been demonstrated with every age group from newborn babies to adults at any stage of their life. This will be expanded further in all chapters that follow, but especially in Gerhardt’s Chapter 4, on sessions with infants and mothers who have experienced birth trauma, and Broide-Miller’s Chapter 3, on work with movement and dance therapy.

### *Intentional use of self*

The therapist’s conscious awareness of herself, of her body, mind and spirit, is a central tenet of Satir’s teaching and writings. The actions that follow from the congruent state of the therapist are what we refer to as the intentional use of self. On a surface level this awareness of self helps the therapist to avoid or minimize burn-out and overload; awareness of self can alert us to the need for greater self-care at times of stress. At a deeper level it accomplishes so much more. When therapists are connected, through meditation, grounding and centering, to the deepest core of themselves, they can be fully present to support others’ connection to their own lifeforce. In this way clients are supported to embody their own state of congruence and be in touch with their core selves and their inner resources of creativity, imagination and yearning for wholeness, encompassing body/mind/spirit.

## CONGRUENCE

Congruence was fundamental to Satir’s work and teaching. She saw

congruence as a process of aligning one's deep and sustained attention mentally, emotionally and spiritually with and in the service of her clients and students. Satir considered congruence – a state of deep centeredness, at one with self and the other, a deep sense of presence – as the most important aspect of therapeutic interactions. The importance of congruence to client outcome is beautifully expressed in “The Therapist’s Story,” written by Satir in 1987, a year before her death, and included in the book, *In Her Own Words*:

I have learned that, when I am fully present with the patient or family, I can move therapeutically with much greater ease. I can simultaneously reach the depths to which I need to go and at the same time honor the fragility, the power, and the sacredness of life in the other. When I am in touch with myself, my feelings, my thoughts, and with what I see and hear, I am growing toward becoming a more integrated self. I am more congruent, I am more whole, and I am able to make greater contact with the other person... The whole therapeutic process must be aimed at opening up the healing potential within the patient or client. Nothing really changes until the healing potential is opened. The way is through the meeting of the deepest self of the therapist with the deepest self of the person, patient, or client. When this occurs, it creates a context of vulnerability, of openness to change. This clearly brings in the spiritual dimension. People already have what they need to grow; and the therapists’ task is to enable patients to utilize their own resources.<sup>24</sup>

Congruence will be discussed in each of the following chapters as it is closely linked to a full embodied relationship between therapist and client. When the therapist models this internal state, the client often reaches a deeper level of congruence; the client reflects the patterning of the therapist’s state. Broide-Miller and Nagel each explore this in their chapters. Nagel speaks of the flow between Knowing and Unknowing (or

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24 Satir, “Therapist’s Story,” 220-221.

not knowing) when she and a client are engaged in a sculpt and in congruent states. For Broide-Miller, congruence is “the metaphorical dance that emerges between the client and myself, when we are each embodying a congruent state.”<sup>25</sup>

## SATIR IN PRACTICE

### PREFERENCE FOR DEMONSTRATION OVER WRITING

Barbara Jo Brothers commented:

Satir’s work was explicitly multidimensional... The awareness of this multidimensional nature, the “roundness” of people, is a major reason Virginia put much more energy into live demonstrations – videotaped and audiotaped – than into writing books. The venue of the book was far too limiting. No one has found a way to write a holographic book. We are limited by the single-file march of the word across the page. Virginia sought to engage the whole person in training and learning events.<sup>26</sup>

### MEDITATION

Satir made extensive use of guided meditation, at times with clients, but very frequently in her training sessions. In her words: “I see meditations as a path to the intuitive part of ourselves, which I feel is where everything emanates from.”<sup>27</sup> She spoke in her meditations of the importance of centering (in one’s heart) and grounding (in one’s body) as key ingredients in making contact with and attending to the whole person. “Through meditations, it is as though I’m doing an internal job of bringing together everything that people have, through their senses, through

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25 Broide-Miller, Personal communication, September 20, 2023.

26 Brothers, *Well-Being*, 11.

27 Banmen, *Meditations of Virginia Satir*, 3.

their feelings about themselves, and through their breathing and relaxation, to enable them to approach tasks.”<sup>28</sup>

She also believed that meditations need to come from a state of love. “They have to come from caring and they have to come from a total belief in growth... Before I lead a meditation, I need to prepare myself to be in that state of love and caring... it is not only what you say but what state you are in.”<sup>29</sup>

Satir often began training sessions with a meditation. In chapter 6, Nesbitt will elaborate extensively on the multiple ways Satir’s meditations supported a state of congruence and set the tone and receptiveness for her therapy and teaching. Nesbitt will also highlight her own use of meditations in therapy with her clients.

## CENTERING

For Satir, body awareness and centering, intuition, spirituality and congruence are streams that flow together seamlessly. She was able to work from each level of the stream simultaneously and systemically.

Dora Kunz, in her book *Spiritual Healing*, speaks to the centering process from a Therapeutic Touch perspective, which can add further clarity to our understanding of Satir’s process of centering:

Centering involved, first of all, the intent to be quiet within. It is the focusing of one’s energies and attention to a place of stillness within one. One is not reacting to outward circumstances, but one turns to one’s own sense of wholeness and oneness for a moment. This leads to a sense of being integrated... Slowly a sense of peace and integration is experienced. Often an intuitional insight can occur... One’s intent is enhanced and clarified and so one is more likely to be effective in one’s therapeutic encounter.<sup>30</sup>

While Satir did not define specifically what she meant by centering,

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28 Banmen, *Meditations of Virginia Satir*, 1.

29 Ibid., 3.

30 Kunz, *Spiritual Healing*, 253.

she frequently shared the following centering exercise with participants “to deepen your experience of spirituality”:

Sit comfortably on a chair with your feet on the floor. Gently close your eyes and simply notice your breathing. Now silently go inside and give yourself a message of appreciation that might sound something like this, “I appreciate me.” This is to give your spirit strength from your actions. Next visualize yourself affirming your connection with your creator.

Brothers comments:

While it might contain some of the elements of self-hypnosis, this centering process was not simply a trick to bypass the conscious into the unconscious. It was a method for affirming the sacredness of the human spirit in each specific person and of bringing that human being into interior and exterior balance and harmony. In Virginia’s experience, this movement toward balance and harmony was all part of the congruence process necessary for effective therapy and life.<sup>31</sup>

## SPIRITUALITY

Satir’s spiritual essence and intuitive gifts were fully present in her interactions with clients and students. Her concept of spirituality is interwoven throughout all areas of her approach and methodology. This is another area of focus that sets her apart from many other therapists:

I believe (spirituality) is our connection to the universe and is basic to our existence, and therefore is essential to our therapeutic context... We are all unique manifestations of life. We are divine in our origins. We are also the recipients of what has gone before us, which gives us vast resources from which to draw. I believe that we also have a pipeline to universal intelligence and wisdom through our intuition, which can be tapped

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31 Brothers, *Well-Being*, 49.



through meditation, prayer, relaxation awareness, the development of high self-esteem and a reverence for life. This is how I reach my spirituality.<sup>32</sup>

## METAPHOR

Satir often used metaphors in meditations, in training and therapy, to connect people to their own bodies, to help them access their own inner wisdom and to shift beliefs. Satir talks extensively about her use of metaphor and calls metaphors her adjunct (additional) therapist, as they help shape her work with clients in such a profound way:

There are so many things that have to do with meanings in terms of human beings, and often language is a limiting factor. So when I want to get some special meaning across, I will bring in a metaphor. By using a metaphor, I can make space between whatever is and what I am trying to get across... What I am most interested in is beyond the logical, to engage the intuitive to bring out the pictures, to bring out the sensing which gives juice to the form and possibly allows for deeper change... I believe in and practice the use of sculpting, metaphors, and pictures to activate the whole brain and engage the whole person.<sup>33</sup>

With metaphor, as with sculpting and pictures/visualizations, Satir draws from multiple layers and aspects to engage the client's imagination and help shift their perceptions, and ultimately their beliefs. Physicality is central to so many of her metaphors. She commented that she did not plan ahead what she would use in a session but would allow the images or metaphors to arise organically from her own centered state and life energy. She did not focus on problems needing to be solved but from the outset of a session would address the widest possible context of situations. Metaphor, visualization and pictures were frequently used

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32 Satir, *New Peoplemaking*, 334.

33 Satir, *Satir Model*, 259-261.

to engage the client so that they would begin to see change possibilities, even in the absence of personal stories.

## THE ICEBERG METAPHOR

The Personal Iceberg Metaphor was named by Banmen, but it emerged from Satir's later teaching as a metaphorical structure of how folks experience themselves, "their unexpressed inner life." Wendy Lum addresses how the iceberg can be useful to therapists:

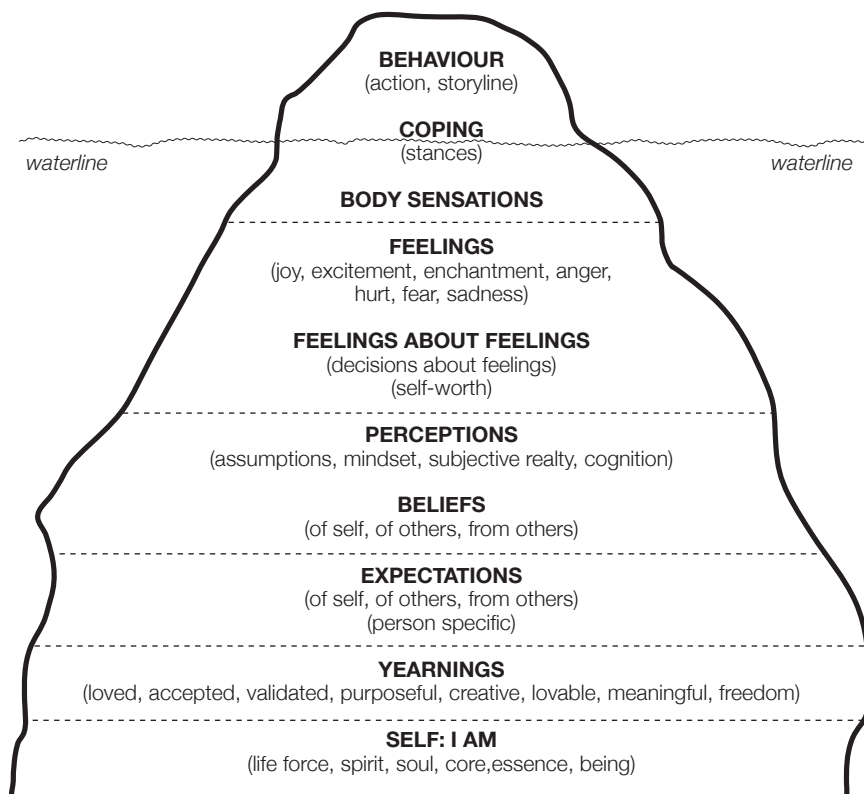
The personal iceberg metaphor represents the lived experience of a person's intrapsychic world. This metaphor is a specific tool that gives a framework for therapists to reflect, gain awareness, and effectively intervene therapeutically with their clients. Therapist trainees are also encouraged to reflect upon their own internal processes and to gain awareness of their own inner world.<sup>34</sup>

## THE PERSONAL ICEBERG METAPHOR

The conceptual components of the iceberg may seem linear in this diagram but, in reality, they are highly interactive. Above the waterline lies visible behaviour. The "waterline" is where one's patterns of coping lie, which are reflected in one's actions (placating, blaming, super reasonable, irrelevant). Below the waterline lie body sensations, the internal aspects of a person, including feelings, feelings about feelings, perceptions (meanings, beliefs, assumptions, understandings and expectations). Still deeper in the layers of the iceberg lie yearnings (yearning to be loved, affirmed, accepted and/or valued). At the deepest level lies the innermost self, what Satir termed "I am," the component which represents the life

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34 Lum, "Use of Self of the Therapist," 202.



### THE PERSONAL ICEBERG METAPHOR

© 2022 Revised, John Banmen  
 Satir, V., et. al. 1991, *The Satir Model Family Therapy and Beyond*

force, essence, and soul.<sup>35</sup> All parts of the iceberg are continuously experienced by a person, through and with their body.

Lum continues:

Each layer needs checking out, although Satir's process of transformational therapy can start with an intervention at any level, it invariably involves all levels in the change process towards transformation. This metaphor provides a tool for

35 Satir, *Satir Model*, 67.

systematically exploring issues from all angles and a window into how an individual represents and holds their internal world.<sup>36</sup>

This iceberg metaphor portrays the deeply systemic nature of Satir's therapeutic approach, where any change at one level results in change at another level or at multiple levels.

This powerful metaphor, when applied to our day-to-day work with clients and in our personal lives, can highlight areas that need more attention and focus. Combined with a body-centred approach, the iceberg brings awareness to sensations and intuitions deeply embodied in our intrapsychic processing.

## SCULPTING AND STANCES

Sculpting is another process Satir used to involve the body, to bring a client to greater awareness of internal states. "Satir developed physical sculpting poses, stances, in order to externalize the internal experience in a non-verbal manner to allow the body memory and wisdom to express itself."<sup>37</sup> Satir saw these physical positions or stances as a shorthand that would allow insight, by therapist and client, into the ways in which people communicate with one another: "I have translated the various kinds of responses into body positions. Within a few moments, I am making mental pictures of the people in front of me and translating them into physical postures that represent their ways of communicating."<sup>38</sup>

Sculpting involves having clients form a physical pose or sculpt (body stance) to externalize the relationship between themselves and another. This intervention is particularly valuable when used in family therapy to support individual shifts in perspective around power sharing and resources within the family. Sculpting can be very helpful in change

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36 Lum, "Therapists' Experience," 48.

37 Banmen and Maki-Banmen, "What has happened," 119.

38 Satir, "When I Meet a Person," 183.

and transformation processes. To quote Nagel in chapter 5 on sculpting: “Sculpting is one way of ‘waking up’ cellular memory or familiar energetic patterns of experience...” and “sculpting will shift [clients’] perceptions of themselves more quickly than will verbal therapy.” Sculpting can tap into the client’s body to bring greater awareness and a wider view to the process and can support their decision to change behaviour.

As with any intervention, timing is a critical factor when using sculpting to tap into the well of body wisdom, especially when the aim is to shift perceptions and beliefs. Satir commented: “I never ask anyone to do anything until they are ready. Timing is very important in how you make trust.”<sup>39</sup> Sculpting and stances (placating, blaming, super reasonable, and irrelevant coping patterns) will be addressed in detail in Nagel’s chapter 5.

## FAMILY RECONSTRUCTION

Banmen refers to family reconstruction as:

[Satir’s] major vehicle for change. This is a three generational, experiential change technique that basically works on various levels of change at the same time. This technique is classically achieved through a dramatic play of re-enacting parts of the three generational family experience with the client (the Star) having the opportunity to see the various connections of experiences from a new perspective and deeper level and make peace with the past in such a way as to be free in the present. It is a major transformational experience.<sup>40</sup>

Sculpting and stances are central to Satir’s Family Reconstruction Process where an individual, in the presence of others who offer to “stand in” as members of the Star’s family, is supported by a guide to revisit a traumatic situation and gain a fresh perspective of their own

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39 Satir, “1979 DVD 29.”

40 Banmen, *Satir Model in Action*, 17.

actions, those of family members, and of the impactful event they have chosen to explore. The guide supports the Star to see new possibilities, to gain a wider perspective from the feedback of others and by tapping into the body and internal sensing, and to make new choices for moving forward. The ultimate goal is a revision of the meaning-making from that incident and a healthier relationship with family and self. Maria Gomori, a close colleague of Satir's, describes the process this way:

Family Reconstruction, like all Satir's creative approaches, works experientially with both cognitive and non-cognitive processes. The therapy must be experiential for the Star to experience the impact of a past event in the present with positive life energy. Often body memory is accessed as a way to help experience the impacts of the past. When the Star experiences both the negative energy and the positive energy of their life force, an energetic shift can take place. Satir encouraged this through externalizing the internal processes and coping patterns, making the covert overt, and the abstract concrete, through role-playing, sculpting, metaphor and drama... this context is often seen through the lens of childhood experience and conclusions made at that time. Satir wanted to include an adult perspective and find ways to help a person access new perceptions and choices.<sup>41</sup>

Satir regarded families as our learning laboratories and affirmed the importance of one's family context in the evolution of one's perspective and decisions, relating both to one's past, and one's self-definition. Through the involvement of those playing roles as chosen by the Star, who became contributors in the Star's process of exploration, Satir tried to help the Star gain distance, to see their family and experiences through "fresh eyes"; thus, the Star could gain new awareness experientially for new conclusions and choices. Those playing roles for the Star also expressed how transformational it could be for them as participants.

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41 Gomori, *Personal Alchemy*, 74-76.

## CONCLUSION

This is by no means an exhaustive overview of all Satir's work or teaching. There has been an effort to incorporate and highlight those aspects that most clearly relate to the experiential and body centered aspects on which we are focusing here, and to form a context for those reading, especially those less aware of her work. We were clear that we could not provide a manual, and more information about her model can be found at <https://satirglobal.org> and <https://satirpacific.org>. Information for other websites of Satir Institutes and Affiliates can be accessed on the Virginia Satir Global Network site and there you will find information in other languages as well as resources and courses available.

Although the values and ideals modelled by Virginia Satir are held in common across the various Institutes and Affiliates, her model is evolving in unique ways as she intended, and in line with her teachings. The Virginia Satir Global Network continues to provide a venue for sharing between global members and provides resources and education offerings. There is also extensive sharing of teaching staff, and resources among the various Satir Institutes and Affiliates.

We trust our book can be an addition to what is already happening and that others less familiar with Satir's approach will find a path from here to explore and follow their curiosity. Together we will continue to honour Virginia Satir's yearning for "peace within, peace between and peace among, and her passion for healing the world, one family at a time.

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## II

### HEALING AT ALL LEVELS



#### LEONA FLAMAND GALLANT

Leona Flamand Gallant is Métis and lives in Nanaimo, on Vancouver Island, B.C., Canada. Flamand Gallant's first experience of Satir followed years of involvement in self-directed and experiential learning. She heard about the presentation of a video of Satir working with a family and had a strong sense this was "meant for me." In 1982, soon after seeing the video, she attended her first month-long training with Satir at The Haven on Gabriola Island. She followed up with two additional month-long training sessions, and other presentations and workshops that Satir presented in Nanaimo through the Northwest

Satir Group out of Seattle. She studied Satir's book, watched and discussed videos with a study group in Nanaimo, and she included Satir's model in her work at Tillicum Lelum Aboriginal Friendship Centre in Nanaimo. She had the privilege of having Satir facilitate her own family reconstruction process, and a parts party. She continued to train with Maria Gomori, including a three-month training group for her workplace, and was certified to train others in Satir's model, which included the facilitation of family reconstructions. She continues to train with science and spirit-based writers and therapists of various disciplines. She is an active member of the Vancouver Island Satir Network Group and continues to have an active role with Tillicum Lelum as a board member. She currently consults and facilitates family reconstructions as requested by those in her community.

## HEALING AT ALL LEVELS

*Mary Leslie: What memories do you have of first seeing Satir in a taped interview?*

Leona Flamand Gallant: As soon as I was offered the chance to see her on the tape, I felt quite drawn to attend. Having seen Satir at work, I knew I wanted to learn as much about her and from her as I could. As she worked with a young man, I witnessed him come alive with a hope that there was a way out of his despair. She provided a light into the darkness of his own despair. He saw that the light was within himself. She created the mirror for him to see his way through despair. I knew without a shadow of a doubt I was going to base my future learning on this woman, Virginia Satir. She spoke the truth clearly, in her choice of language, use of metaphors and humour; it was a universal language.

*ML: Can you recall your first encounter in person at the month-long workshop at The Haven on Gabriola?*

LFG: That was 1982. I recall that Satir invited each of us to come up to the front at the opening of her workshop, to where she stood, and introduce ourselves. I remember getting halfway up to her and breaking into tears. It was as if her heart had reached out and connected with and opened mine. It was so powerful. I think I had entered her field of love (heart energy) and it was so welcome and needed in that moment.

I appreciated how Satir spoke in pictures and had a deep love of nature. I felt very connected through her appreciation for the natural world. I valued the collaborative way she worked and her collective lens through which she viewed life and the world. She saw that we are all connected to generations before, to nature, to each other and to everything that lives. That spoke to my aboriginal heritage and world view. Satir's appreciation of "context" was important to me. In addressing the Self/Other/Context

she used everything to create a wider picture and view of a client's awareness to support change. I recall watching Satir observe bodies closely and make decisions from those observations about how to work further with participants. All parts of us, as well as the world into which we are born, and all the lives from which we came, were considered in her healing and approach. Nothing was left out. I appreciated her emphasis on the reality that we have each come from an egg and sperm because that is inclusive not only of our immediate family, and what they have given or not given us, but of all the generations before our parents as well. It puts our healing and growth into a much wider lens and reality.

In her work that I witnessed, or was a part of, the transformation proceeded like putting a puzzle together. As the pieces were put in place a full picture emerged. All of a sudden, the participant could see an answer that had never been seen before. This raised hope for everyone witnessing this moment.

*ML: You have been a strong supporter of our writing efforts since our first conversation about our group's intent. Can you say more about the importance of this information being shared at this time in our history?*

LFG: I believe there is a hunger to recognize our own essence, as humans, which includes searching for and valuing meaning in our lives now. That essence was what Satir spoke to, but it is taking us time to move as a culture from seeing ourselves as the centre of the world around us, to seeing ourselves as part of something much greater and more inclusive.

I believe many are living at a higher vibrational level culturally at our time than in Satir's time. She understood everything then that we are learning about now: understanding ourselves and our world energetically, seeing the world from a "we are all One" perspective, and how connected everything is, not only among humans, but with nature and all sentient beings.

Her life messages are like a living cell in each of us who connected with her. Her message keeps expanding and renewing itself. It doesn't

stand still. As a culture and collective, we are more able to see her depth, creativity and relevance now. Contemporary writers and scientists have made important connections biologically, spiritually, ancestrally, in line with their regard for all aspects to be included in our understanding of ourselves, and in our view of healing and growth.

As I watched her facilitating family reconstructions in the 1980s, I believed she was doing ancestral healing, going way beyond the family triad of mother/father/child in her work with people. This is more commonly understood in an aboriginal world view, but it is also more present in the scientific world as well, today. That ancestral healing includes the bidimensional aspect of healing generations before and to come.

*ML: Can you say more about the family reconstructions you are facilitating, and how you are using stories as part of those sessions?*

LFG: I believe Satir's healing and transformative work with people was founded on her belief in the importance of contacting and connecting to people at all levels of her and their being, supported through her open heart and compassion. A sense of belonging is supported through the telling and reframing of stories. The sense of belonging, of being seen and heard, flows from that deep sense of connection.

There are times when a larger group comes together to support the family reconstruction process; however, we often do not have the luxury of involving many people to play the roles of family members. In those situations, I draw on objects of nature, for example, rocks, to "stand in" for their family members. Nature-based objects have an energy of their own and can become a powerful energetic force in the healing process.

I begin my process of family reconstruction with individuals on family healing by meeting over several sessions, a few hours at a time. We do family maps together first, looking at how relationships were formed and developed over time. Over the next week or so, participants write and reflect on the stories of their mother, and their father, one at a time. This involves doing research with other family members or friends as

needed. Then they write their own stories. Through this process of telling their story and listening deeply, there is a heart opening that happens. As we share their story, they begin to see their family members and themselves in a wider context. In Satir's view, we don't need to change the child; we need to recognize the holiness of the child and the coping decisions made at that time that carried on into adulthood. Through this process the participant can see more clearly the survival purpose of earlier coping patterns and can make changes now as they choose.

I find the metaphor of the battery helpful, where connecting the negative and positive terminals results in a positive charge. Transformation in our family work is similar. The real and deeper change happens when positive as well as negative aspects are connected, and a wider and more compassionate view is possible.

We heal by integrating each part of the story. Once those parts come together, after several sessions, and shift has begun, we plan a ceremony to celebrate the transformation in how they see their family that has taken place during our time together. The ceremony or ritual as we conclude is a very important part of the healing process and is largely a creation led by the participant.

Satir's experiential way of working, drawing on meditations, visualizing, metaphors, sculpting and parts-party processes can bring a wider view and move participants into a deeper internal place at any time during this family healing process. The sculpt, especially, is what keeps the energy of the process alive, accessible and moving.

*ML: Can you comment on how Satir's ideas and overall work relates to reconciliation, as we hear this is needed for our aboriginal communities and for non-aboriginal communities as well.*

LFG: Satir's whole approach with people was to work towards healing at all levels, within a person, between people and among communities. This work has been ongoing for many years but is sorely needed currently for healing between aboriginal and non-aboriginal populations, as well as



immigrant and non-immigrant peoples. In our country, it is especially needed around residential school impacts and the hardships that evolved from this historical trauma. Satir's model connects individuals, families and ancestors through connecting people and families to their stories. The healing that can come from this connection is vitally needed in our communities at this time.

In my opinion, not only is the content of Satir's teaching important, but her method of integrating all the learning through the body, mind, spirit and emotions needs be an integral part of all learning in our education system.



### III

## MY BODY, MY SELF: THE USE OF DANCE/MOVEMENT THERAPY AND ITS MANIFESTATIONS IN SATIR'S MODEL



#### DR. NITZA BROIDE-MILLER

Dr. Nitza Broide-Miller has over fifty-five years of experience as a dance therapist, forty-five of which she has taught Satir's model. She met Virginia Satir in 1976 and worked and studied closely with Satir until Virginia's death in 1988. Her life work has taken her to Israel, USA, Hong Kong, Thailand, China and Taiwan. Broide-Miller's unrelenting curiosity to know more, coupled with keen observation skills, are hallmarks of her work and training style.

She continues to study with body-oriented therapists and scholars, and lives and works in Palo Alto, California. Her exemplary gifts of scholarship and her passion for working with the body have generously enriched our group's exploration of the role of the body in therapy. The following interview took place over several weeks and months beginning in December 2021.

## MY BODY, MY SELF: THE USE OF DANCE/ MOVEMENT THERAPY AND ITS MANIFESTATIONS IN SATIR'S MODEL

*People need to see themselves as basic miracles and worthy of love.*

Virginia Satir

The chapter you are about to read was born out of a work of love... love and acceptance of ourself; love of our body and the spirit that inhabits it. It was also born out of the many conversations between Mary Leslie and myself, allowing curiosity to lead our way; we explored and attentively listened, which clarified our feelings, thoughts, beliefs and yearnings. These talks helped me bring to the foreground the journey of my life in relation to the body. They also highlighted the turning points in my life which re-emphasized what was important for me and what drove me, through opportunities offered and risks taken, to create who I have been and who I have become, and the gifts I discovered in the process.

Recently, my extended family in my native country of Israel helped me celebrate a big birthday. My son, now a mature adult man who was born and raised in the USA, flew there for the occasion. Each person shared their experience of their life with me over the years. When my son's turn came, he said: "I knew Nitza before she knew me." I have dwelt on that statement, and I realize now how relevant his comment is to the chapter you are about to read. My son, while in utero for nine months, learned about his mother and the context of our lives even before I saw him, held him in my arms, before I knew him; he was a viable part of my body, connected to my inner self; he received inner subtle messages through sensations, through the intricate parts of my nervous system in the most congruent way. According to Satir, this receiving was his first birth. By the time he was physically born, he was into the second birth, as Satir called it. He had already internalized subtle nuances that

he'd received from my body. Our bodies were the connection transmitter between us; the transmission was nonverbal but steady, congruent and accurate. This transmission is evidence of the power and the gift that our body can share with us as we connect with our true self through our sensations – the primary way we connect with self. The messages we get through our sensations (visual, auditory, taste, smell, and touch) inform us about the inner as well as the outer world and help shape our social and physical connections and relationships.

As I share with you my development as a dancer, choreographer, teacher, psychologist, Satir trainer, and most importantly as a human being, I hope my passion and my learning over the years will inspire you and pave the way to realization of your own discoveries and growth.

*Mary Leslie: Dance and movement have been a big part of your life. Can you share more about being drawn to dance in your earlier years?*

Nitza Broide-Miller: I started at age eight with ballet, and later that year I choreographed and performed my first solo piece to Tchaikovsky's Flower Waltz, for my grade three class. I was haunted by a desire to dance, but my mother's dream was that I would become a concert pianist. I continued with ballet and modern dance, partly with and partly without my mother's permission. The passion I felt in connecting to my body in that way is difficult to explain. Looking back, I believe the artist in me was born very early and found expression in dance and movement at about two or three years of age. Even at a very young age I was kind of hypnotized by watching people dance.

I performed in theatre from age thirteen until I went to college. I chose teachers' college, as supporting myself as an actor was not an option. I did military service, which was compulsory in Israel, all the while practising modern dance and Israeli folk dancing. I was part of a professional Israeli dance troupe from age nineteen. While performing abroad in 1961, I had an injury which interrupted my professional performing. The doctor told me, "You will never dance again."