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### *On Reaching 85*

By the time this is in print, I will have passed my eighty-fifth birthday. Though I care very little for the external celebration of this occasion, I do have some personal thoughts about what it means to me to be eighty-five. For the most part I feel incredibly fortunate, so these notes will be in the nature of a private thanksgiving.

I am in good health and have plenty of energy. I feel truly blessed in this respect. My poor vision is my only major physical flaw. Reading, always a central part of my life, is now difficult and laborious. But to have only one serious deficiency, at this age, is something for which I am grateful.

I have a circle of close and supportive friends, and I am glad that included in that circle are my son and daughter. This psychological "home base" is very important to me.

I feel deeply privileged to have lived long enough to see the international influence of my work. Two documents arriving yesterday constitute a small sample. One mentions finding 165 published papers on the person-centered group approach between 1970 and 1986. The shocker is that these 165 articles are those written and published in Japan! The other letter tells of a large conference in Brazil devoted to the client-centered/person-centered approach. And I could mention Italy and West Germany and Great Britain and Australia and Mexico and Switzerland and Austria and Hungary and Greece - and the list goes on and on, of countries where there is significant and ongoing work in the person-centered approach.

The most recent and perhaps the most exciting addition to that list is Russia. I have recently returned from two intensive workshops and a number of large public meetings in the Soviet Union. I could scarcely believe the extensive knowledge of my work that I found there. The impact we had on Soviet psychologists was profound. I say that with some assurance, because many members of the Moscow workshop spoke publicly of their experience, two days after the workshop, to a most prestigious Scientific Council. To hear them tell others of the personal and professional changes resulting from the workshop was for me a magnificent reward.

I have been fortunate beyond words to have been deeply and personally involved in three of the world's "hottest" areas of tension - Northern Ireland, Central America, and South Africa. It was years ago that I helped to facilitate a group from Belfast containing militant Protestants, militant Catholics, and English. We learned that even these ancient feuds could be greatly softened in a brief intensive group.

In 1985 I was the leading facilitator of a group of policymakers and shapers of public opinion from Central America. Participants came from Costa Rica, Honduras, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Colombia, Venezuela, Mexico, the United States, and nine other interested countries. It was a new, challenging, and difficult experience, dealing with government leaders, ambassadors, legislators, authors - many of whom came with little knowledge of or interest in the psychological aspects of tension reduction or mutual dialogue. We learned enormously.

In 1986 a colleague and I facilitated intensive groups - equal numbers of black and white participants - in South Africa. Never have I experienced such depths of rage, bitterness, and pain (on the part of the

blacks), or such fear and guilt and prejudice (on the part of the whites). The best evidence of the outcome is the urgent invitation to return again in 1987.

I do not believe I deceive myself as to the significance of these efforts. Certainly we had no obvious influence on the total situation in any of these countries. But I derive much satisfaction from knowing that, on a small scale, we were able to demonstrate, in each of these tension-filled groups, that meaningful dialogue could be established, that conflicts could be reduced, that a more realistic mutual understanding could emerge. We worked only on a test-tube scale, but we showed what was possible. Now the question is whether there is the social will to multiply these efforts.

From a personal point of view, I look with surprised satisfaction on the fact that I have been able to participate in dealing with such crucial conflicts. I could never have dreamed of such events at age sixty-five! I also feel grateful to the multitude of persons who made these ventures possible. In each case I have been on the visible tip of the iceberg, while the unsung efforts of countless individuals have made the events possible.

I view another portion of my life with astonishment and a sense of awe. I am forced to realize that, through my writings, I am in personal touch with many hundreds of thousands of people! Translated into more than a dozen languages, my written words have touched the hearts and minds and lives of more persons than I can imagine. My surprise is deepened by the knowledge that almost all of my books and articles were written because there was something I wanted to say. The current method of writing "for the market" is foreign to me. So it is doubly surprising that my work has spread so far. To know that I have touched the life of a man in Egypt, a woman in the Australian outback, a student in the Soviet Republic of Georgia, is most rewarding.

I hope it is clear that my life at eighty-five is better than anything I could have planned, dreamed of, or expected. And I cannot close without at least mentioning the love relationships that nurture me, enrich my being, and invigorate my life. I do not know when I will die, but I do know that I will have lived a full and exciting eighty-five years!