



# The Iowa Marital & Family Therapist

A Bulletin of the Iowa Association for Marriage and Family Therapy

## Passing the Baton and Continuing the Race

by Matthew Burch, M.A., L.M.F.T.

After serving four years as a board member, 1½ year as secretary, ½ year as president-elect and 2 years as president, I find myself somewhat ready and ambivalent about writing my last newsletter article. I am ready because I think that there are members within our organization with leadership capabilities that can take our organization and membership onto the next level of growth and professional excellence. I am somewhat ambivalent because I am saying goodbye to what has been a challenging yet rewarding time in my life.

I reflect back four years and can remember various board members who devoted their time, effort, and competency to gain ground in Marriage and Family Therapy in the state of Iowa. Learning from all of them, I find myself now personally feeling included in a progression and legacy of professional development of the profession. Board meetings, decisions, conferences, legislation, lobbying, relationships, etc. all have been inclusive of teaching me and enriching my life with new understanding. With certainty, I feel that each board member's contribution has added another step to the many steps of those who have preceded him or her. I cannot help but feel gratitude and respect for all who have labored and were diligent for others sake. I have learned and grown as a person as a result of my experience as a board member. While my experience has been meaningful, I

am aware that there still remains much to accomplish if our profession of MFT is to be further recognized and acknowledged. Last newsletter article, "Growing the Organization One Member at a Time," recommendations were given as to how you as a member could support the organization as it grows and increases in membership and visibility. I hope that you take those recommendations to heart. We, as an organization, are at a very crucial point of time where we need to increase the momentum and be very deliberate with our objectives. Our focus on third party reimbursement, lobbying in Washington D.C., thinking outside the box and creating other growth engines, better conferences, creating a website, stewarding our resources with utmost responsibility, and rewriting the board members job descriptions, are objectives that have been a necessary focus and have also brought some degree of success to the direction of MFT at this point in time. Let's not stop here! Let us all continue to carry the mantle of responsibility to contribute our personal part. I think this is a part of what it means to be an MFT.

With pleasure and honor I welcome the new board members and delight in the genius and creativity that they will contribute. Their part will provide all of our "next steps" in the profession. To the board members who still remain on the board, I wish to say thank you. We

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## The Iowa Marital & Family Therapist

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Display advertising must be submitted camera-ready (unless exclusively text, then it must be typed and

Price	Type	Size
\$25 (\$20 members)	Classified listing	5 lines
\$50 (\$40 members)	Business card size	2x31/2
\$90 (\$72 members)	Quarter page	3 9/16 x 4 3/4
\$150 (\$125 members)	Half page	7 1/2 x 4 3/4
\$300 (\$200 members)	Full page	7 1/2 x 9 1/2
FREE for IAMFT	Job Postings	—

double spaced) and pre-paid at the following rates:

Submissions are to be sent directly to the Editor. Please make checks for advertising payable to IAMFT and send to Neal Sheeley, IAMFT Treasurer, P.O. Box 283, Postville, IA 52162

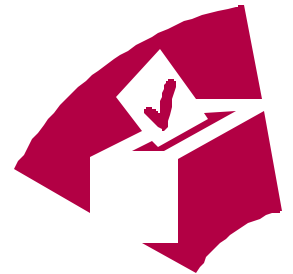
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all pulled the organization forward when it simply wanted to just lie down. We held together and stayed focused in order to uphold the commitment that we all shared. Thank you for all of your hard work as well as your personal support during these times. To all of our membership I say, "You are the message." Continue to advocate, assert, and celebrate the message that lives deep within you. I have found that Marriage and Family Therapists all carry a flame that burns hot and bright. We care about marriage, we care about family, and we care about relationships. Blessings to you as you carry on. I pray for fruitfulness and abundance as we all continue to practice what we believe is so worthy of our time.



## IAMFT Election Results

Members-at-Large:

Newsletter/Communications Committee

..... Steve Kopp

Conference Committee

..... Peg O'Rourke

Membership/Recruitment Committee

..... Kathy Anastasi

Student Representative

..... Kathy Morrissey

41% of the voting members returned ballots.

## Student Spotlight - Kathy Morrissey



I am currently enrolled as a Ph.D. candidate at Iowa State University and have just completed my first year of work toward that degree. I completed my Master's in Human Development and Family Studies (emphasis in MFT and Family Studies) in fall of 2002, and received a BSW from Iowa State University in 1991. While I had a hard time adjusting to being a student again after being out for so long, I soon remembered that I love to learn. I really enjoy being a student and am looking forward to a position in an academic setting once I earn my doctorate.

Prior to coming back to school, I worked for 8 years at Mainstream Living, Inc. in positions such as direct service worker, program coordinator, and group home manager. I then worked for 8 years for the Department of Corrections in a variety of positions from Pre-Trial Interviewer to counselor to supervisor. I also facilitated the Batterer's Education Program for 6 years while with DOC. Each of these positions gave me some experience in counseling, but usually just with individuals. While I enjoyed each of these jobs, I became frustrated with the process of working only with the mandated client when I could see that working with their entire family would be so much more beneficial. That led me to ISU and a new outlook on therapy.

Since being at ISU, I have continued to hold a job in the community as well as work as a graduate assistant in the HDFS program. I enjoy both the teaching and research aspects of being a graduate assistant, and have been exposed to a variety of new experiences. My research interests include positive youth development, designing a group

curriculum for at-risk adolescent males, and family violence. I also enjoy working with families and couples in the ISU MFT clinic and believe that being a therapist will be a part of whatever future career opportunities come my way. In addition to ISU, I currently work for Boone County Prevention as a smoking cessation counselor and prevention specialist.

My personal life includes activities with my husband, Mark, and four children (Shane, 12; Austin, 10; Sally, 8; and Rowan, 5 months). The older children are active in a variety of activities and I stay involved by volunteering at their schools, by being a team mom, driving to field trips, and being a group leader. Rowan is always with me and is already being prepped to be a scholar, athlete, dancer, and activist!

I am also involved in the Boone County Teaming Together for Children coalition and the Boone County Action Team, and I am on the Program Committee for the Story County Boys and Girls Club.

### 2004 IAMFT Conference Information

The 2004 conference of the Iowa Association for Marriage and Family Therapists will be held in Pella on April 2 and 3. Our featured speaker will be Patrick O'Malley, a member of the AAMFT Ethics Committee and a member of the team that wrote the latest revised version of the AAMFT Code of Ethics. Watch for more on this exciting conference!

## Student Spotlight - Devon Palmanteer



I am currently in the second year of my master's program at Iowa State University in Human Development and Family Studies with a specialization in Marriage and Family Therapy. I received my undergraduate degree in 1998 from the University of Rhode Island in communication studies. I also completed all of the necessary coursework for a degree in Elementary Education but decided not to pursue student teaching.

After graduation I worked for a year for the Town of South Kingstown senior services department as a community elder information specialist. This was a new program in the state funded by grants from the Rhode Island Department of Elderly Affairs. The purpose of my position was to improve the community's knowledge of services that were available to seniors and to help seniors and their families access these services. In 1999 I moved to Milwaukee, Wisconsin where I worked as a marketing coordinator for an accounting firm. While in Milwaukee I was also a Big Sister with the Big Brothers/Big Sisters program and a facilitator of a parenting group for parents of children with ADHD with The Parenting Network. In May 2002 I relocated to Ames to attend ISU.

It had been my intention since graduating from the University of Rhode Island to pursue a master's degree and I was looking at programs in mediation and dispute resolution when I learned about marriage and family therapy. MFT seemed like the perfect fit for me since it allowed me to combine all of my interests in a meaningful way. I

have really been enjoying my work in the ISU MFT clinic and have been able to gain great experience with a variety of clients. In addition to my clinical work and other courses I am working on my thesis—exploring whether MFT master's students feel prepared to work with clients from other ethnic groups. I am looking forward to gathering data in this exciting area. My other areas of interest include parenting and family issues that arise in the caregiving of elders.

Much of my free time since coming to ISU has involved trips back and forth to Milwaukee where my boyfriend still lives, as well as travel to the east and west coasts to visit my family. Recently I had the opportunity to travel to Long Beach, California for the National AAMFT conference. It was a great time to learn new things and meet others in the field. I will be looking forward to attending the IAMFT conference in April.

### Upcoming Meetings



#### IAMFT Board Meeting

Date: Saturday, December 6, 2003

Time: 9:00am

Place: Matthew Burch's office,  
315 Main St., Pella

For more info or directions, contact:  
Matthew Burch at 641-628-1723

#### Ethics Meeting

Date: Friday, January 23, 2004

Time: 10am - 3pm

Place: Keith Schrag's office  
233 S. Walnut Ave., Suite B, Ames

For more info or directions, contact:  
Keith Schrag at 515-232-3482

# Ethical Dilemmas for Marriage & Family Therapists--Self-Disclosure

Keith Schrag, M.Div/LMFT, Ames, IA

Recently I received a letter that sent chills through me. This letter was from a local attorney, on behalf of a (former) client. In the letter I was accused, in typical lawyer fashion, of being unethical, immoral, and self-seeking. I was requested immediately to refund the money my client had paid for my services. I was extremely uncomfortable, feeling very vulnerable, and wanting to avoid any further negative consequences...which might include litigation, having an ethics complaint filed against me, etc. I immediately put a check in an envelope addressed to my (former) client, and placed the envelope in the mailbox, away from my office.

What followed was significant to me. I have been encouraged to share it with you. I received numerous one-on-one support sessions from personal friends. I also contacted professional peers locally, talking by phone and/or meeting in person with them, including the monthly therapist consultation group I am part of. I also contacted George Applebee, our IAMFT lobbyist and consultant in Des Moines, and AAMFT office staff. In each situation I received valuable feedback, both of a personal and professional nature.

I had disclosed my sexual-orientation to a young man who had come for help with a strong reaction to a relationship termination. His mother had arranged the contact with me and had contacted the attorney who sent me the startling letter. He had been with me for two sessions, during which his initial issues were addressed. In the third visit it became clear that he was stabilized and could profit from addressing some systemic relationship issues. At that time I decided to let him know that I am gay. I am very out and locally known as a consultant and ally around issues of sexual orientation. Many clients already know that. I want to establish a deep basis for trust with clients who work with me, especially on systemic relationship issues. I want them to learn about my orientation from me directly, rather than to hear it later, which often could interfere with ongoing trust issues.

When I disclosed to this young man, his body response cued me to the sense that he was uncomfortable with that knowledge. When I asked if that were the case, he concurred. I gave him several options, including referral to another therapist. He indicated he did not want to discuss his discomfort any further and wanted a referral. That accomplished, he paid for his session (since we were at the end of the hour) and left. Two weeks later, upon returning to my office from a trip, I found the attorney's letter.

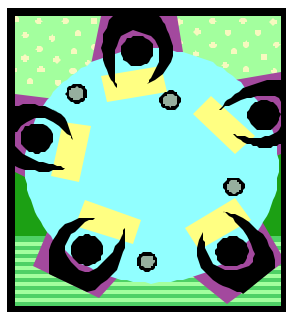
My consultations, including with our Ethics Committee this past Friday, and my own further thinking have been most helpful to me. I share the following reflections as some of my learnings and suggestions around the issue of therapist self-disclosure.

Therapists differ on the issue of whether to self-disclose, how much, etc. It is important that each of us is clear about the basic issues around self-disclosure and have a policy. Self-disclosure is often an important aspect of bonding, building trust, and normalizing between therapist and client(s). For others, self-disclosure is seen as not having therapeutic relevance. Each therapist must decide what s/he is personally more comfortable with.

It is crucial that we be in conversation/consultation with other therapists around issues of self-disclosure. To operate in isolation is not being professional or wise. Litigation and ethics complaints are way too costly a risk! There is no "right answer" about self-disclosing. But it is important to have a clearly-defined process for dealing with either withholding or sharing personal material in the therapeutic context.

In spite of our best thinking and practice, we cannot guarantee that we will be understood accurately. Having appropriate session notes documents our thinking and responses to these times. Often our own intuition is the best indicator that we need to pay careful attention.

Our IAMFT Ethics Committee is interested in feedback from any of our membership on this issue...your ideas and experiences. We are also interested in addressing ethical issues that you present.



*IAMFT Board of Directors for 2003*

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