

## College of Nursing and Health Professions



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**IVAN BOSZORMENYI-NAGY, MD: A TESTIMONY TO LIFE**

Watson, Marlene F

Beloved husband, father, pioneer, and colleague, Dr. Ivan Boszormenyi-Nagy passed away peacefully at his home in Glenside, PA, with his devoted wife, Dr. Catherine Ducommun-Nagy, by his side, on January 28, 2007. Dr. Nagy, renowned psychiatrist and family therapist, was born in Hungary, which also became his final resting place.

Dr. Nagy was a member of the staff at the famed Eastern Pennsylvania Psychiatric Institute in Philadelphia for 20 years. From 1976 to 1994, he served as Chief of the Family Therapy Section in the Department of Psychiatry at Hahnemann University, now Drexel University. He was a Professor Emeritus in the Programs in Couple and Family Therapy at Drexel University. He was a founding member of the Family Institute of Philadelphia and the American Family Therapy Academy. He also founded the Institute for Contextual Growth, where he and his wife, also a psychiatrist and family therapist, offered training in the Contextual Therapy approach. Dr. Nagy was coauthor of the groundbreaking book *Invisible Loyalties*, which across the world influenced family therapists.

For those who knew the gentle spoken, yet powerful, man well the death of one of family therapy's most influential leaders is secondary to the loss of a kind, caring human being, particularly so in our current culture of disconnection, marginalization, and abuse of relationship. Ivan Boszormenyi-Nagy was a man of integrity. He, as they say in my community, did not just talk the talk; he walked the talk. As the originator of the Contextual Therapy Approach, Dr. Nagy, long before the notion of social justice was popularized in the family therapy world, emphasized the "rightness" of ethical relating.

When I joined Drexel University I knew little about Contextual Therapy. Contextual Therapy was not prominent in the couple and family therapy doctoral curriculum at Virginia Tech, where I received my doctorate. But I soon understood my good fortune in being able to learn from the innovator himself through observation and everyday conversation. Dr. Nagy was the consummate teacher whether in the classroom or in the hallway. Affectionately referred to as "Professor" by his European followers, the ideas espoused by Dr. Nagy were evident in all of his interactions with people, irrespective of their station in life. He not only understood the meaning of the human family, but he also accepted his responsibility and accountability as a member of the human family.

Standing transfixed behind the one-way mirror as Dr. Nagy worked with a low-income African American family in front of a class of students - radiating principles of fairness, trust, partiality, mutuality, between give and take, balanced ledger, and forgiveness - I was deeply moved as he, in his unassuming way, acknowledged and gave the utmost respect to the youngest member of the family, a little boy around 5. My telepathic wish to that little boy on that day was for him to always remember the acknowledgement and validation he received because I knew it would probably be rare in his life. As I watched in awe, Dr. Nagy's life and work became one before my eyes.

Dr. Nagy strongly believed in relational ethics and followed the Golden Rule, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." That is the human way, and it was his way. Dr. Nagy was held in the highest esteem by his colleagues at Drexel University. His contributions as a faculty member were many, and generations of family therapists yet to come will be affected by his teachings. Dr. Nagy was an icon who chose to lead with humility instead of power and privilege. Without a doubt, he will be remembered for his greatness in the field of family therapy. But I will remember the man who embodied the spirit of humanity and called me "The African Goddess."

Memorial contributions can be made to the Ivan Boszormenyi-Nagy Scholarship Fund, Attention: Kathleen Gallagher, Director of Development, Drexel University, MS 501, Philadelphia, PA 19102-1192; telephone: 215-762-6484; email: keg37@drexel.edu.

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