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Thomas Grisso was awarded the 2012 American Psychology-Law Society Award for Distinguished Contribution to Psychology and Law. This Award is not presented on a regular basis. Rather, it is reserved for those individuals whose contributions are so unusual as to merit special commendation. Dr. Grisso is Professor of Psychiatry, Director of Psychology, and Director of the Law-Psychiatry Program at the University of Massachusetts Medical School. His research and teaching have focused on improving forensic evaluations for the courts and informing policy and law for youths in the juvenile justice system and for persons with mental disorders.

Dr. Grisso's contributions have helped shape the field of forensic psychology, beginning with his studies of juvenile Miranda competency in the late 1970s and his seminal work, *Evaluating Competencies*. His work has shaped the way that forensic psychologists conceptualize professional issues today. He has been generous with his time, serving uncompensated on any number of professional boards and advisory committees. He has been involved with the American Board of Forensic Psychology for over a decade, currently serving as its executive director. The following is Dr. Grisso's acceptance speech, a personal statement regarding the importance of timely mentorship.

“Right-Time” Mentors

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Thank you for this award. When I was informed of this a few weeks ago, I began deciding how to entertain you. I considered a research talk. I have growing interests in cross-cultural mental-health assessment in juvenile justice settings. But I think Ron Roesch got it right two years ago in Vancouver. There are lots of occasions to talk about research. We get far fewer public opportunities to relate what is in our hearts.

So I want to tell you a series of little stories that will serve two purposes.

The main purpose is to describe a type of mentoring, and to encourage you to engage in it whenever you have an opportunity. Many of us have that very special mentor who guides, nurtures and cares for us across a significant part of our careers. In contrast, we sometimes have what the mentoring gurus call “situational mentors”—that is, a mentor for a particular task. The mentors in my life seem to have been mostly situational mentors, but not for tasks.

I want to call them “right-time mentors.” We crossed paths at the right time. They tended to show up when I was going through some critical stage of growth. Times when I was moving through dark valleys or tricky mountain passes in my career. Sometimes I saw them first, off in the distance, and called to them. Sometimes they noticed me before I saw them, and they just came over and made themselves available.

In most cases, once our paths had converged, we traveled it together for a while. Then, as the critical stage receded, often as not we traveled somewhat different directions but usually within sight of each other. A “right-time mentor“ is the right person for *that* time, but not necessarily for all of your times.

My purpose in telling you about some of them is not so much to thank them—I’ve already done that. I want to sensitize you to look for opportunities to do for someone else what these people did for me. So today, my voice represents someone for whom you are someday going to be a “right-time mentor.” My stories are like those that someone else will tell in the future, but about you.

I didn’t realize the second purpose of this talk until I’d drafted about half of it. While describing my right-time mentors, I had to set the stage for their arrival, and I discovered that I was revealing some moments that do not flatter me. Times of self-doubt, fear, naiveté, indecision—moments that we don’t usually talk about, especially in a public forum. I hesitated. Then it occurred to me that many of my younger colleagues encounter these same doubts and fears. I’ve had my share of good fortune, and that is about all many of you know about me. Perhaps it would be helpful, I thought, for younger, struggling colleagues to realize that we seniors weren’t always as confident as we appear. So I just kept writing, and I ended up with four episodes in which right-time mentors walked with me for a while, seeing me through some ugly times in my life.

I've had a lot of right-time mentors. I chose the ones I'm describing here not because they are different from the rest of my right-time mentors, but because the stories connected with them were especially good for getting my points across.

First Job: Stan Brodsky

It was 1974, and I'd spent my first four postdoctoral years as an Assistant Professor at a small liberal arts college in rural Ohio. I was doing psychotherapy with college students 16 hours a week and teaching four undergraduate courses a semester the rest of the time—clinical psychology, applied psychology, developmental psychology, and social psychology. I was at this little college because, at the end of my graduate years, I had no notion what I wanted to do as a psychologist. Not the faintest idea.

I'd found a four-hour-a-week consulting job doing assessments of delinquent kids as they arrived at a nearby Ohio Youth Commission forestry camp, they called it. The task was very clinical—not forensic—identifying which programs in the place might fit best with each kid's needs. But it required that I read their legal case files, and I got interested in where they'd come from. How did these kids get here? And I began forming ideas about the legal and social processes involved, and began to get the notion that psychology might have something to offer in *that* process—*while* kids were being adjudicated, not only *after*. It's hard to imagine, I suppose, but I thought this was an *original* idea. In the early 1970s, there were no books on forensic psychology, and I didn't know—and had never heard of—any psychologist who worked in criminal or juvenile justice.

Then two things happened at once. I discovered a new book called "Psychologists in the Criminal Justice System," 1973, by Stanley Brodsky, a faculty member at University of Alabama in a program called the Center for Correctional Psychology. And someone named Silber published an article that year in the *American Psychologist* on the potential role of psychologists in criminal justice. Brodsky's book became my introduction to possibilities I'd begun to imagine. I began identifying with this person I'd never met. The idea that there was someone out there being what I was beginning to think I wanted to be was very important to me.

Meantime, Silber's article—full of inconsistencies when I compared it to Brodsky's review—stimulated me to think *as though* I were a correctional psychologist and to write a commentary for publication in the *American Psychologist*. My little manuscript sliced and diced Silber's article. But I couldn't mail it. I just couldn't do it. I'm sitting in this little office in this little college in this little Ohio town surrounded by cornfields, going nowhere. The manuscript sits there on my desk for several days, mocking me. "*You're* no correctional psychologist," the manuscript is saying. "You have no authority to be writing me. Who do you think you are . . . Stan Brodsky?" And that's when I decided I could address an envelope to Stan Brodsky at the place that I thought he worked—

remember, faxes and emails didn’t exist yet—send him the manuscript, and see what he thought.

I remember not expecting to get a reply. But a little more than a week later, there it was—a letter from University of Alabama in my office mail slot. He said it made sense! He said it was well argued! He made a few suggestions. He encouraged me to submit it!

I did. It was published. A few months later I got a job teaching graduate students at St. Louis University and was introducing myself to the St. Louis County Juvenile Court where, two years later, I’d be starting my first NIMH-funded grant to study kids’ capacities to understand *Miranda* warnings.

What if Stan hadn’t bothered to reply? He had barely started his own career. And he was certainly busy. This act of right-time mentoring, simple as it was, crystallized my vague, growing notion that there was something for me to do as a psychologist in the legal system. But Stan certainly didn’t know any of this and had no real reason to reply. What if there had been no letter in that mail slot?

First Book: Saleem Shah

Forward, now, to 1985. By now I’d hit three NIMH grants in a row—it was easier in those days, believe me—and all from NIMH’s Center for Studies of Crime and Delinquency where Saleem Shah was the Director. Saleem had become a long-distance mentor, because that’s what he did with Principal Investigators on most of the grants his Center funded. It was a good thing, because my mentors at St. Louis University did not have much experience with research grants.

One of those NIMH grants, amazingly, was to write a book. I had the notion that all criminal, civil, and juvenile legal competencies had certain things in common. If you could find those things, you’d have one conceptual model to guide evaluations for any legal competency. Saleem’s Center bought the idea and supported the literature search, the think-time, construction of the model , and writing, and it became the first edition of *Evaluating Competencies*.

A few days after I sent the book off to the publisher, I got a call from Saleem. I prepared myself for congratulations, enjoying the moment as one would anticipate a father’s acknowledgement of pride in a son. He said he’d read the manuscript again and was eager to tell me that it was, as he put it, “*very, very* important, Tom—a really fine contribution. This is the guide that we have *badly* needed to make competency evaluations what they ought to be.” I felt a rush of affection and made my humble thanks. Then with only the briefest pause: “But Tom, it isn’t going to make any *difference*, because no one’s going to read it.” I could barely conceal my disappointment. “Well . . . what makes you think that, Saleem?” “Tom, the people who *do* these evaluations won’t read a book about a model for evaluations and a lot of psychometric tools for accomplishing them.” “Really,” I said. “Why wouldn’t they want to do things better?" "Why would they do that, Tom?" "Just because it's *better*! Why *wouldn't* they want to do things better?"

I think I might have heard a faint sigh. "Tom, they aren't *paid* to, they don't *have* to, and they don't *want* to because it means doing something different. Besides, your book tells them what evaluations ought to aim for, but it certainly doesn't tell them how they are going to do it when they can't get the records and files, when they have only an hour from start to finish, and when the lawyers and judges complain because they bring a lot of test data into the proceedings. Tom, you've got to do more than publish this book if you want it to make any difference in the places where forensic work is done." "Ok, Saleem. What should I do?"

And that was the point of this whole "right-time" event. "First," he said "you need to see forensic mental-health practitioners where they work. Tom, you really have *no idea* what it's like to work in a forensic hospital unit. You haven't been there. Your ideas will go nowhere if you can't translate them into their language and the demands of their workplace."

"So, Tom, here's what I can do." It was a service contract to do workshops in the state forensic hospitals of 8 states—and they had to be what Saleem called "have-not states"—that couldn't otherwise afford to have visiting lecturers and consultants. And off I went to a number of state hospitals in western and rural eastern states. Places I'd never been before, like Wyoming State Hospital in Evanston, and Warm Springs State Hospital in the Montana woods, where my lodging was an abandoned nurses' quarters with a cot, one bare bulb, no heat, and screams in the night coming from the nearby women's forensic unit.

Saleem knew that I was on a mission. He knew that I was intellectually capable of it, but that reaching the goal was doomed to failure, because I was very naïve about real forensic practice in the real world of state public sector forensic systems. He knew that I was at that critical moment between completion of something and looking for the next steps. And he cared enough to challenge me to make a choice. Take this on as something you have to do to meet your objective—or pass on it and give up the notion that you are going to change what happens in the real world of forensic practice.

Those lessons by Saleem have never left me. Every time I start a research project, I have two things in mind. One is the theory and empirical methods that will drive the study. The other is how to do it in a way that will be of use to the person sitting in the swivel chair behind the booking desk of a juvenile detention center, or the psychologist in the state hospital beginning a competence evaluation by interviewing a patient who is shackled to a table leg.

First Career Move: Joel Dvoskin

While sitting in my office at St. Louis University one day in 1986, I got a phone call from Paul Appelbaum, whom I'd met only once, asking whether I would be interested in considering a position at University of Massachusetts Medical School. Thus began several months of that agonizing indecision most of you are familiar with. I was tenured and had a stable job. To give it up, I was being offered a chance to nearly double my salary and—because of arrangements between Massachusetts' forensic system and UMass—I had the chance to participate in redeveloping the whole state's way of doing forensic evaluations. But unlike my situation in St. Louis, I'd be expected to bring in my weight in research grant funding within a couple of years, at a time when grants were getting harder to obtain. It was high-risk/high-gain versus low-risk/comfortable. And my daughter would hate me if I pulled her out of St. Louis the summer before her senior year in high school.

I visited UMass. I agonized. I doubted my ability to make a living off of research grants. I'd done well, but a good-sized fish in a Missouri pond could easily disappear when dropped into Boston Harbor.

I'd recently gotten to know Joel Dvoskin, and a person in Boston who was helping Paul recruit me—I'll describe him in my next vignette—suggested I call Joel for advice. After some phone calls we eventually met up at the APA convention in 1986 at Washington DC, where we talked several times more. He patiently listened to me weighing the odds—watching me do a mental version of listing the pros and cons for staying, listing the pros and cons for going, prioritizing them, ranking them, eliminating some, adding others . . . it went on and on. He questioned, commented, and walked with me through all of my obsessive strategies for trying to find the answer. He must have thought I was a poster-child for OC.

On the last day of the convention, I told him I'd had no closure. He paused a moment, then looked at me and said, "Tom, do you have a place back in St. Louis where you go to just be alone? Someplace where you just feel *at peace* whenever you're there?" I said yes—I was thinking of a hillside near the Missouri River, far beyond the suburbs, where I sometimes went to do photography. "You've done all the thinking you need to do. When you get back home, just go there. When you get there, don't think about all the why's and if's. Just wait and you'll get your answer." I did. And then I accepted the position. And my daughter *has* forgiven me. It must have been truly boring for Joel to listen to all that stuff I laid on him. Yet he stuck with it until his wisdom showed him what I needed—that is, to be rescued from the tyranny of my rationalizations that wouldn't let me listen to my heart.

First Risk for a Cause: Robert Fein

My final right-time mentor is Robert Fein, and this story is a good example of mid-career, right-time, peer mentoring. You don't lose the need for mentors in mid-career, and they don't have to be older than you.

It was January, 1990. In my mail slot was a letter postmarked from South Africa. I knew no one in South Africa. The writer introduced himself as Dap Louw, the chair of the Forensic Division of the Psychological Association of South Africa. PASA's annual convention in the fall was featuring forensic issues. Would I consider an invitation to visit for about three weeks, offering a keynote speech, then visiting up to six universities to give talks to graduate students in psychology?

Today, this would be the equivalent of opening a letter and being invited to address the Psychological Association of Egypt right before the recent "Arab Spring." Every day we were reading news accounts of South Africa in political and social chaos. In the black townships, people were being murdered nightly by a hideous method called "necklacing"—placing a person inside several automobile tires, doused with gasoline, and set afire. In the cities, the military was gunning down men, women, and children engaged in mass protests. White professionals were beginning to leave for whatever jobs they could find in Australia, the U.K., or the U.S. The month that I received the letter, the South African government had freed Nelson Mandela after 27 years in prison. Mandela's return was seen as the beginning of the end to almost 50 years of government-sanctioned racial discrimination called "apartheid." South Africa seemed ready to explode.

More specific to the profession, the Afrikaner-dominated Psychological Association of South Africa had supported apartheid earlier in its history. In fact, psychological research on race differences had provided the scientific logic on which South Africa had established the policy of apartheid. In the late 1980s, the American Psychological Association had passed a resolution condemning South Africa and severing all ties with PASA. It was officially engaged in an academic boycott of PASA. APA refused to sell its books and journals there and censored any exchange of academic information.

Given all of this, the answer to this letter seemed to be an easy "No, I cannot consider your invitation." What, then, possessed me to reply to Professor Louw that I would be willing to learn more about his proposal? Have you ever felt that something very strange and difficult was put in your way—just came straight at you out of nowhere—and then stood there in front of you, looked straight into your eyes, and said "Here I am"—for reasons that you were unable to understand? The whole thing was so improbable that it didn't feel like chance. I guess that's why I had to know more.

Dap Louw turned out to be a wonderful guy, full of energy and hope. He was an anti-apartheid forensic psychologist who was regarded in his organization as an important leader. Depending on to whom you talked in South Africa, he was either too progressive or not progressive enough. He was trying to take a balanced position in order to influence the organization from within to embrace the new South Africa that would soon emerge. He had been to the United States, and he knew a lot about Law and Psychology here. Did not U.S. Law and Psychology have something to teach them, he asked me, about the *wrongness* of a psychology that coexists with apartheid?

After a few phone calls, the possible message began to emerge. Almost everything in law and psychology in the U.S. was related in one way or another to human rights. Brown v. Board of Education, research to decrease inaccurate eyewitness identifications (typically of black males), research that challenged the stigma of the mentally ill as a major source of violence, the concepts of therapeutic jurisprudence and procedural justice, work on informed consent, and research to advance the fair application of *Miranda* waiver criteria. So much of law and psychology here was aimed at policies and practices that would reduce discrimination that results from unguided or biased discretion. We agreed that it could be valuable for PASA members and students to hear this message. The message was this: In the U.S.—a place that most of them saw as the model for psychology—you simply couldn't *be* a person who applied psychology to law without respecting and promoting human rights without discrimination for race, religion, or gender.

It took me a while to understand that this would be a *new* idea for many South African students. They had been raised in homes with government-censored television, and in classrooms with lessons that taught a psychology that studied principles of human behavior without a societal context. And they would be the profession's leaders in the new South Africa that everyone knew was on its way.

I began to talk to my colleagues in Massachusetts about the value of accepting the invitation. They were skeptical and often demurred from telling me what they really thought. I contacted the APA's International Affairs office and was informed that any collaboration with South Africa was in violation of APA's position on South Africa and, therefore, was contrary to its view of proper conduct by its members. The more I thought about the idea, the more my enthusiasm waned. The easier choice was to drop it. I questioned whether my motives were sincere, or whether I was just being drawn along by some type of narcissistic, messianic fantasy.

Then I brought it up to Robert Fein. He was a friend, a clinical psychologist, and the Director of the Forensic Division of Massachusetts' Department of Mental Health. He had recently reformed the forensic mental-health system in our state, and was one of the most empirically minded public-sector administrators I've ever worked with. Later he would become a senior psychologist with the Secret Service, and he received an APLS/ABFP award a few years ago. He became my right-time mentor.

Robert seemed to think there was potential value in the proposed trip. If this was something that I thought I ought to do, then he would try to help. He offered to bring together a group of black psychologists in Boston to consult with us, and he arranged the meeting. They listened to my explanation, then very politely told me that if I did this thing, they could never speak to me again. I would be aiding the enemy of their brothers and sisters in South Africa. PASA would use a visit by a significant American academic to their advantage, as a demonstration that the U.S. was really on their side. There were new black psychological associations in South Africa, they said, striving to prepare for the new South Africa, and my visit would give PASA more power in the struggle between them. Moreover, by going as a guest of PASA, I would learn nothing about the real South Africa, only what they wished me to see and know. After the meeting, I drove back to Worcester with the intention of putting it all behind me.

But Robert had not given up. He called a few days later. What he had not been at liberty to tell me was that the black psychologists themselves were the U.S. connection for one of the black psychological associations in South Africa. Robert had proposed to them that they contact their associates there to determine whether they, too, might wish to invite me to South Africa in order to meet with their organization. After another meeting and some complex negotiations, I was informed that I was invited as a guest of a black psychological association called the Psychology and Apartheid Committee, or PAC.

This was an interesting group. Their acronym, PAC, was perhaps not coincidentally the acronym also for the Pan African Congress, one of the more aggressive anti-apartheid political groups in South Africa. The PAC that was my host rejected involvement of white psychologists in the future South Africa unless they were working for black African psychologists.

In the plan that evolved, whatever lectures I was offering to the universities on PASA's list, I would offer the same at the University of the Western Cape and University of the North, two universities established early in the days of apartheid as "colored-only" institutions. The conditions were clear: although PASA would finance the trip, the two hosts were to be treated equally. A schedule would be developed whereby I would be "transferred" between the two groups. Dap Louw not only agreed for PASA, but was excited. He explained that the PAC had refused to talk to him in the past, and directly negotiating my "handling" while I was there would be one of the few times that PASA and the PAC had communicated with each other.

I went to visit my contact in the International Affairs office at APA and explained the new arrangement. In a few more weeks, she called with an answer: "We will not object if you decide to go," she said, "but if you do, we would appreciate finding out what you learn there." They'd had had little communication with South Africa for several years.

My role was getting complex. I was going to be an observer for APA, while infiltrating the South African education system to preach an anti-apartheid model of psychology and law. And thanks to Robert, I was to be a guest of two parties—PASA and the PAC—thus creating a face-saving reason for them to cooperate with each other. While I was there, I was going to transfer information between PASA and the PAC about what I was learning about both of them, therefore telling them things they might want to know about each other—information that they might use either to move toward collaboration or to exploit each other's weaknesses in a power struggle.

I will not describe the events of the trip—that is another story for another time—except to say that I did everything that was planned. At times it was scary and disorienting, but I don't think I've ever felt more alive than for those three weeks. None of it would have happened but for the efforts of Robert Fein, who either shared my convictions or simply saw an opportunity to help a colleague who was struggling with his conscience. I thought of him often when I was in South Africa--

- When I saw the puzzled looks on faces in both PASA and the PAC, after telling them something I'd learned from the other side that contradicted their stereotypes of each other.
- I thought of him the time that Dap Louw and the representative of the PAC, when meeting in a parking lot to exchange me, shook hands for the first time.
- And when I was lecturing—looking out at young, mostly white faces straining to understand this law and psychology that was devoted to human rights. And students who sometimes found me after a lecture, asking me questions to timidly explore this vision of a different way to use psychology for social good.

About a year after I returned home, two young South African forensic professionals did a sabbatical together at our UMass Law and Psychiatry Program. One was a white male psychologist from PASA, the other a black female psychiatrist from the PAC.

A few years later, when Mandela came to power, PASA voluntarily disbanded its organization. In 1994, the former leaders of PASA and the PAC worked together to create the Psychological Society of South Africa. Today the organization's website affirms that it "has dedicated its work to the reconstruction and development of post-apartheid South African society."

Robert and I were only a tiny, probably insignificant part of this. Sort of like the guy who happens to mend Paul Revere's saddle the week before he takes his famous midnight ride. But without Robert's right-time mentoring, neither of us would have played any part at all.

As I look back on the right-time mentors I've described, and as we try to understand their motivations, we are likely to be deceived by our knowledge of the outcomes. At the time, none of them offered their mentorship with any notion of its eventual consequences. They simply did it because life threw me in their way. And something in their notion of what matters in life caused them to not merely acknowledge my need, but to offer to complicate their own lives by doing something more. I do thank them, and the dozen or so more whom I could have described today.

I wish that you may have an opportunity to be a right-time mentor. I hope that you will see that opportunity when it comes and act on it. If you do, you will be part of an interconnected chain of right-time mentors that binds us together. It is likely to account for more than you can know at the time.