

Some memories about the history of EATA

Written by Jan Hennig

These notes— in addition to the cited facts – expresses my personal view of EATA, personal impressions, memories and opinions. I am writing this to facilitate an understanding of EATA – what it is and what it is not – for those who have questions or are interested in the history of EATA.

My knowledge is from experience (I am a member of EATA since 1978 and have served in many roles over the years on EATA boards and committees) and from re-reading all EATA newsletters and many of the ITAA Scripts from the last 30 years.

In July 1975, the first international TA conference in Europe took place in Villars in Switzerland and was a great success. The enthusiasm was immense and all over Europe, were people training in TA and beginning to form TA associations in their countries and with their languages. Most of these founding people were members of ITAA (with the headquarters still in San Francisco) and were training with trainers from ITAA, mostly Americans. At this legendary conference, they met for the first time and realized that they were already many in Europe.

Out of this enthusiasm, with the strong support of Bob and Mary Goulding (who were, together with others, the initiators of this conference) a group of European Transactional Analysts started as a “steering committee” with the clear goal to form and install a European Association for Transactional Analysis – EATA. After at least 3 meetings from autumn 1975 until July 1976 EATA was founded and domiciliated in Geneva in Switzerland. At meetings at the second TA conference in Europe, in Enschede in the Netherlands in July 1976, the first EATA council was formed and it elected at the first EATA council meeting in October 1976 its first officers: President: Michael Reddy (Great Britain), first Vice President: Carlo Moiso (Italy), second Vice President: Konstanz Robertson-Rose (Switzerland) and Treasurer: Raimond Hostie (Belgium).

8 years later, in the EATA newsletter from June 1984, Michael Reddy, the first EATA president, wrote about the origins of EATA:

“EATA began in a bar. At any rate, I like to think it did. To be precise, it was the bar of the Club Méditerranée in Villars in the summer of 1975. At least I think it was. There were three of us drinking in there – Arnold van Westering, Konstanz Robertson-Rose and myself. I think it was me anyway.

This is simply to say that what follows is a purely personal account of the origins of EATA. Experience has taught me that I don't always remember history the same way as those I shared it with. I have always had a certain sympathy for those who write history: I now have a fresher understanding of those who are under the impression they have also been making it.

Anyway, while we three were mulling over the chances of a European TA association, doubtless there were other small groups muttering darkly about the same thing in other corners of other bars.

Because the next vivid recollection is of a much larger group of all the Europeans at the same conference who had had the same surprise to discover there were so many across Europe already well into TA. Then, all of a sudden, we discovered: there are probably a couple of hundred of us: and seventy or so are already gathered in the Yoga Room of the Club Méditerranée to seriously discuss the founding of EATA. Despite the Yoga Room this was not a meditative assembly – more like the Tower of Babel – and if we had needed any further excitement (which we did not), it was provided by the irruption of a South American gentleman who was passionately determined to address the meeting on his own behalf.

We concluded in any case with the resolution to form a Steering Committee which in turn evolved into the first Council of EATA, and I had the great pleasure of serving on it for four years.

The last series of vivid mental images are of the various Council meetings during that time: in Brussels, in Paris, in London, in Yvoire, fogbound in Munich. In Elsinor, in Enschede, in Seefeld and in Rome.

There are two things about those meetings: subjective impressions again, but perhaps important and perhaps shared by others.

The first is that the members of those first Councils, as of subsequent ones too I have no doubt, were all very much individualists. It was alleged from time to time that there was a fair component of Rebellious Child. And why not? Both theoretically and personally it has sometimes amazed me and sometimes hurt that this could be said as a matter of accusation. But Viva the Rebellious Child, say I. And Viva likewise the positive aspects of Adapted Child and Critical Parent which are neglected in some of our theory and practice.

The second important aspect of those first meetings was the surprise that we actually achieved something. As individualists we were not naturally the best committee members, yet just as we reached a conclusion at the end of that first meeting in the Yoga Room and put it into practice, so we brought into being a viable organization which is now in its tenth year.

The clue lies in two things: First, the great pleasure and enjoyment we had in each others company. Nothing else would have taken me, and it was true of others too, away from home so frequently for four years at some considerable personal cost in time and expense.

The second element was the extraordinary composition of those early Councils.

There was one period when no single member was married to someone of his or her own culture. The Dutchman had an American partner, the English a Spanish one.

The Spanish representative was married to a Hungarian, the Swedish to an Englishman, the Swiss to a Norwegian, and so on. It was a genuinely cosmopolitan group, without being pretentious about it. It was just naturally so.

The weakness of such a group was that it disguised the fact that the national groups we represented were not in such close harmony themselves. For me, the strength of EATA lies primarily in the regional and national groupings. In my view, EATA was

always destined to be more of a federal organization. But because the early Council members had crossed national boundaries themselves we perhaps did not see that was not equally true for the different people we represented. Perhaps we wasted energy at the beginning in attempting to create centralised organs.

This is wisdom by hindsight. Perhaps it had to be so. What I carry with me and will treasure to the end of my days is the closeness I had with those people, the experiences we shared together, and the recollection of such intense moments.

Which all started in the bar at Villars.

Or was it the bar? I'm sure it was. Wasn't it?"

As the leading principles of EATA I only cite the current preamble of our statutes, which gives the spirit and goals of EATA:

"EATA's guiding principle is to develop, sustain and protect Transactional Analysis philosophy, theory and practice. Fundamental to this is respect for autonomy and the dignity of all humanity. EATA will, therefore, actively promote individuality, diversity and community at affiliate association and individual membership levels.

The association is underpinned by a commitment to TA principles, especially those of confidence and trust in self and others, a contractual method and the human capacity to solve problems and grow.

The association is governed by democratic principles and accountability as defined by contracts between the affiliated associations and EATA."

Two other leading principles, which are not less important, are and always were:

- The quality of TA shall be protected through clear and strong qualification processes and these shall be controlled internationally. Out of this principle, training and examination was always one core activity within EATA.
- All TA qualifications shall be mutually recognised worldwide.
- The international cooperation, respect and recognition shall not end at the borders of Europe, but shall be realised worldwide. This included the commitment to co-create, together with ITAA (the International Transactional Analysis Association), the standards for training and examinations worldwide.

EATA developed as an organisation of (national) organisations with only a handful individual members and this was always important: EATA acts in the interest of its member organisations and this is secured through democratic structures and procedures. Of course this was not always easy and the history of EATA shows a lot of conflicts of all kinds, but in the end EATA seems to be still a story of success.

PS:all further details of the history of EATA can be looked up in the EATA newsletter – all issues since No. 1 in October 1977 until No. 110 in June 2014 and also the minutes of meetings and discussions are stored in the EATA archives at the EATA office in Konstanz in Germany.

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