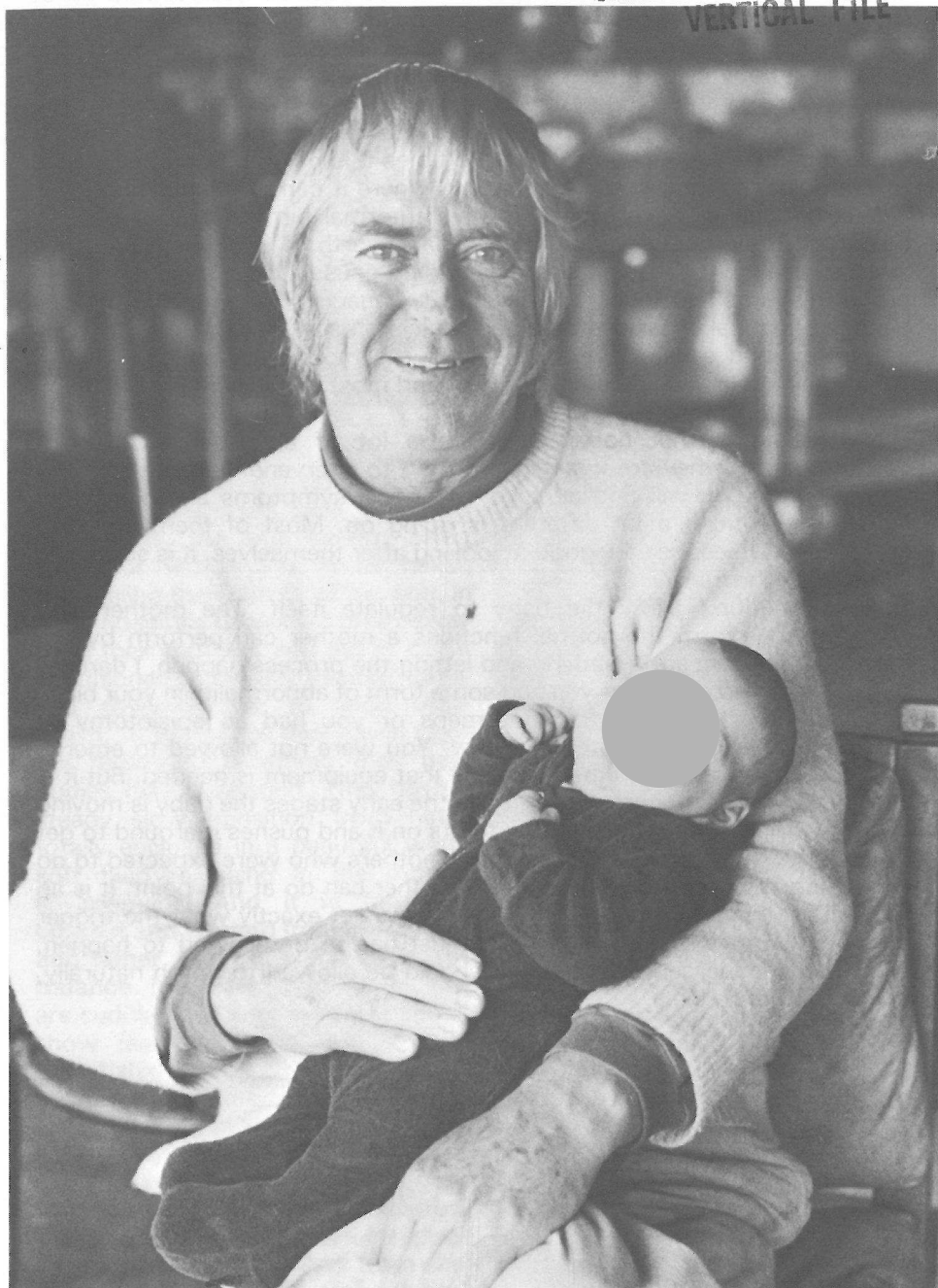


Centrepont News

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July 1980

Issue No. 2

BERT'S TALK

We have now had eight births since we've been at Centrepont. All of them have been straightforward and the babies and mothers have thrived.

Birth is a process most of you have not really experienced for yourselves; either as a baby or as a parent. In nearly every case there has been some intervention. In Centrepont births there is very little intervention. The women are allowed to have their babies in a very normal, natural way. At times it can be very uncomfortable, at times it is painful. But it never gets to the point of being absolutely panicky, where it can't be handled.

It is difficult to have even a relatively normal birth in any of our big hospitals. They have several million dollars worth of equipment and they want to use it. At the least sign of anything unusual, they whip it out and put in the plugs and tubes, and take over managing the whole birth. They have the hospital organised on a very efficient basis, but I doubt if anyone ever stops and says, "What is best for the mother, father and baby?" What they are looking at is what is best and most convenient for the team, and for the hospital.

My feeling is that hospitals create a lot of abnormal births. Not deliberately, but they are watching, looking to intervene. If you watch any normal birth, you will find all sorts of clinical symptoms and signs that indicate something a bit different is going on. Most of them are self-correcting. Babies are very good at looking after themselves. It is surprising how tough they are.

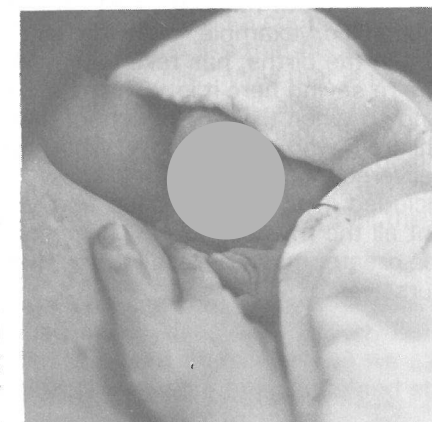
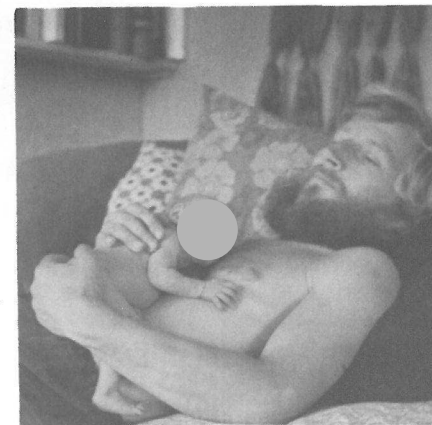
Hospitals don't allow the baby to regulate itself. The mother isn't allowed to perform the normal functions a mother can perform by not doing anything except breathing and letting the process happen. I daresay quite a large percentage of you had some form of abnormality in your birth. You were either delivered with forceps or you had an episiotomy or something that wasn't quite necessary. You were not allowed to emerge normally. Sure there are times when all that equipment is needed. But it is not needed for every normal mother. In the early stages the baby is moving inside the mother as the uterus contracts on it and pushes it around to get into position for birth. Most of you had mothers who were expected to do something, and yet there is nothing a mother can do at this point. It is an involuntary thing. I don't think we even know yet exactly what the trigger point is. The process starts and then just has to be allowed to happen. Unless something serious occurs, it should be allowed to go on naturally, without interference.

In the past it has been assumed that babies didn't really know what was going on, that they were quite blank. Yet a few years ago, when people started going into very deep workouts in groups, I started seeing this birth process happening on the floor in front of me. **And somehow the first experience of actually living on your own has been impressed on every one of your minds.** And it is surprising how clear a picture some people get when they go through their rebirth process. They go through all the feelings which were there at the time.

Now no matter how careful we are, and how loving we are, the baby is being subjected to quite a bit of stress and strain. There is quite a hefty pressure on it and there is nothing it can do about it. It has to go along with it and so it is born. And as it goes through life from then on, and as each one of you have gone through life, you don't go through an all loving, all beautiful experience. **One thing we learn is that life isn't all sweet and kind and loving. It is a series of good times and bad times, of pain and pleasure and we have to accept the whole lot.** It is all part of being human, and all part of living.

One thing most of you missed out on when you were born was care afterwards, the real caring, being with your mother, lying on her naked and feeling the warmth of her skin. In most hospitals babies are taken away from their mothers and put in an air conditioned, centrally heated area, and covered over to keep them warm. At that stage they haven't got the facility for warming their own bodies fully developed. They need a steady slow transition from being totally enclosed in a beautiful warm soft fluid to being in the outside environment. **And it is the skin contact and warmth from the mother and father, that gives the baby this balance.** It is a fact that babies that are cuddled and kept in body contact show less post-natal weight loss than babies cared for under normal hospital conditions.

This is something that most of you haven't experienced. You were taken away from your mothers very early in the piece. You were cleaned, weighed and brought back wrapped up and insulated off. And from that moment on, some of you have very little skin contact with your parents.



Very few of you were even allowed to bath in the same bath as your mother and father when you were very young. You might have been allowed to later on, when you got to two or three. But as a baby, no. You had your own little bath on the table.

This transitional period immediately after birth is most important. It is not something only needed by the baby. It is something we need every day of our life. We need contact. We need to be able to reach out and touch somebody; to feel the warmth and intimacy of the contact. And again I know most of you missed out on that. Not because your parents were cruel or nasty, but simply because it wasn't done. The children born here have got some chance of having close skin contact, because the parents are a little more aware than most of the need to be held, the need to be kept warm, the need to be looked after on a skin to skin basis. They've experienced it themselves. They know how good it makes them feel.



PARENTS AND CHILDREN

We need the stimulation of people and we don't get it in most of society because everybody is doing the same thing, closing down. Here we allow the children to have this sort of stimulation. We allow them to experience things. For example, allowing all the children, even the young ones, to watch the births, has taken away all the stupid romantic mystery of birth. We're saying here it is. This is a natural process. Watch and be part of it. And so when they go to school they're going to one of the small group of children who really know what happens. They know the baby wasn't delivered by a stork. They know how babies are conceived too. They're included in these very deep and very intimate experiences. They haven't got all the mystery to get through. They're having it all cleared away. But the greater mystery is still there, that of experiencing all these things within ourselves.



People often say: "If you're brought up in a secluded atmosphere like Centrepoint, how are you going to cope in society?" The answer is that you cope more easily, because you see the games people are playing. Most people are hooked into the manipulative society of today and there's no way they are ever going to get out of it, because they don't know it's a game. Our children are not going to be like that. They will see these manipulative games being played and exposed right in front of them. They're going to see that these games don't work. They're going to listen to all the emotions that are aroused and see the way people work their way through them.

A guy on a group recently got a shock when he heard a couple having a real knock down fight. He said, "I didn't think things like that happened at Centrepoint. I thought you were all very loving people." Well that is part of loving. Being able to use the emotions that are there, being able to expose them and say let's look at them in the raw. Let's work through them and see what it's all about. Let's see if we can get a better relationship going. Let's not just pretend that it's all sweet and nice because that is not the way normal people are. And because we're normal we have to accept all these normal feelings amongst us.

We can't go out and change society. We can't make everybody else different so that we can feel good. The only person I can really do anything with is me. And the only person you can do anything with is you. But I believe we can show some alternatives to living out there. I believe we can show that it is possible to live fairly amicably in quite a big group, and still have the loving feelings happening.

Our children have a choice. Most of them will probably leave here for a time, but they'll always have Centrepoint to come back to. They have a right to a place here and they have a right to move away.

Again I come back to the babies born here. They are being born into an atmosphere of freedom: the freedom to love, the freedom to be with people. They're not going to just have to rely on mother and father. They've got other people they can go to. It's quite remarkable with the little ones, how well behaved they are in our sense of the word, when Mum and Dad aren't around. They're very little bother, almost anyone can look after them. But as soon as Mum and Dad appear on the scene, of course, they start performing. And that's when they start getting into their manipulations and hooks.

I think it's much easier to bring children up when it's not just the parent's concern. I've noticed that children take far more notice of other people than they do of their parents. They haven't got the same games going. Other adults don't get as frustrated. They bounce the children back more quickly. They don't lay the big trip on themselves and they've got to bring the children up the right way.

Learning to let go of all these manipulations is a long process. It is not something that happens easily, and it's not something that happens without some hurt inside. We also have to learn to step out into risk areas. You never grow by staying in a nice safe place all the time. Your physical, emotional and mental growth comes from experiencing something a little differently; from extending yourself a little bit.

LET YOUR PARENTS GO

I still see adults hanging on to mother and father, still wondering and worrying about mother's attitude to them living here. So we need to let our children go; our children need to let us go and you need to let your parents go.

A lot of people, when I start talking about this, feel they literally have to cut their parents right off and never see them again. That's not what I mean. It might happen for a time until you see them, not as mother and father figures but as human beings with exactly the same sort of problems and feelings that you have. Then you begin to see their needs and you get to the point where you can start to fill them in some little way. It would probably embarrass a lot of fathers if you rushed up and threw your arms around them and became all effusive about them. You don't have to be as blatant as that. You can do it in smaller ways; by the feeling you engender within yourself; by just being there and not having to carry on some bright social conversation. Perhaps by just reaching out and putting your hand on a leg or hand. And you learn to let go of all the frustrations and the resentments you've been carrying around for so long. Then even when

they're in their seventies and eighties, you can begin to form some sort of relationship which has a reality for them and which offers them something they've never really experienced, which they cut off from with you, when you were very, very young. And so it's not a matter of wiping them out altogether. **When I say that no child can be free until he kills his parents, I mean the parent you carry in your head: the parental image.**

When you kill that off, they you see very unique human beings. You see the people who probably really did love you, even though they never showed it; really wanted to, but didn't know how and probably never will know how. You have to take the responsibility for starting to bridge that gap a little. Then they can start to see something of you. It might only be a little bit but even that little bit is important. To be able to see you as an individual, not as that snotty nosed little brat they had to bring up, who never did anything right and never fulfilled their expectations. None of you have every really done what your parents wanted you to do. You were never good enough, never important enough. In other words, you didn't live their lives for them. You didn't provide them with all the things they felt they lacked. You have to let all that go. If you can become a real person, then you can start to see them as real people, and you can start to bridge that gap.

Everybody has an enormous investment in pride. If you can accept the responsibility for letting go of your pride then you are in some way able to reach out and see the other people. And if your pride is something you are loading off on to your children, then you're not going to see them as people. You will see them as objects of your pride to be moulded by you. And so we have to learn to let go of that type of pride and say, "O.K. I will accept my child whatever he grows up to be. No just by being "nice" about it, but by really accepting everything that happens.

ACCEPTANCE

I've often said that I wonder what my place is here sometimes. People see me in all sorts of roles, all sorts of guises. **But one of my main contributions is the total acceptance I have of each one of you, no matter what you do. I might not like it but I will accept it, and you as a person.** And so you can get yourself as deep in the shit as you like and you can always come back and I'll accept what happens. I don't judge it. I might highlight it for you, by saying: "Does it work for you?" "What's the pay off for you in it?" "I don't see you getting very much out of it." But I won't judge you as a person because of it. And if you can get to the same position with your children and with your parents, then you're in a position where you can start communicating.

As long as the judgements are in the road there's no way you can communicate, because the judgement says, I judge you and you're going to have to change before I'm going to see anything of you. Now this might be a statement of fact. It might be that somebody is so closed off that no way are you going to see them until they change. But you're not judging that, you're just saying that's where it is. This is one of the things we have to accept, that some of the people we meet are so closed off and so hostile, and that takes an enormous effort to get through to them. And if you're going to surround yourself with a lot of people who take a lot of effort to reach, you're not going to get anything for yourself. If you can have at least some people around you who are relatively easy to get through to then you're on the right track.

I've been able to create a situation where I have a lot of loving people around me; a lot of people who are fairly available. They're not available all the time, but fairly available most of the time, not just to me but to everybody else as well. And we can build on this. It's a growing, developing process, and we are starting with our children from their earliest days.

(From Bert's Talk on Sept 15, 1979, the day after Bonnie's birth.)

MAUREEN

It is one year since I took what felt like a plunge into Domicilliary Midwifery. I knew there must be a better way than hospital birthing, but I wasn't sure how. Women I had nursed in hospital often looked as though they had been run over by a bus following what is after all a normal, physiological process.

The year has been one of putting the pieces together in my puzzle; de-hospitalising both myself and my training and enjoying the task of being a caretaker of the simple, beautiful process of birth — different every time, for each woman and her attendants.

I allow each woman to have her baby at her own pace, in the position she chooses. She will instinctively choose the best position for her labour — usually fairly upright or on all fours. Gravity is on her side.



Studies done in hospital show that women have more effective, less painful contractions in a more vertical, mobile position. Conversely, less effective and more painful contractions are experienced lying down. Hence pain relief is required more often in hospital and rarely, if ever, at home.

While I honour and admire medical technology in its place, I think we are fools to imagine we can improve on nature. Any interference in the birth process must detract from its optimum efficiency.



I believe the majority of women could deliver safely at home if they wanted to, simply because the woman is "at home".

Stress and fear influence all the physical processes in our bodies. The stress or 'fight and flight', system takes precedence over the production of hormones released during sex, birth and breastfeeding. If you are stressed these processes will be affected. So where you feel at home is where you will have a good labour. (How many women's contractions go away when they reach hospital?)

I think the Centrepont women enter labour with less fear and anxiety. They have witnessed other births so that labour is less of an unknown and less frightening experience. I hope this will be so for our children also.

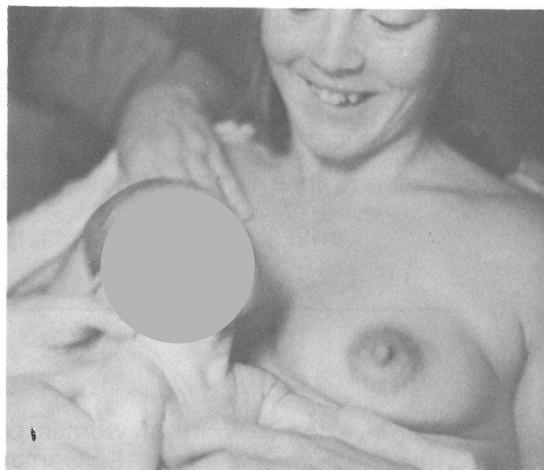
During pregnancy they meet regularly with Annie to share and clear their fears and anxieties. They have Bert's availability and their trust in him. They have a wide support group — if their partner is a bit overcome by it all, there is support for him too (and even for the midwife!)

One thing that stands out here is the ease with which home birth mothers and babies get along in the post-natal period. The baby is bonded into its total family and mothers will often state on day three or four that they feel as though he has been part of the family for ages. Other children are very protective towards their new sibling — there are fewer rivalry problems when the child has shared the birth.

The sharing of the birthing and post-natal period enriches the parent's relationship. Couples can be themselves in their own environment and together watch their babies grow.

Babies born without drugs have a quiet, alert period straight after birth—nature's provision for bonding. As a midwife, I try to interrupt this as little as possible, and merely attend to the cord and weighing of the baby.

Homebirth babies are relaxed, alert, and open, even in the rowdiest of homes. They have lived with those noises for nine months and they are "at home" too. They rarely cry for long periods and have more skin contact and cuddling in the first few days of life.



Parents take responsibility for all decisions regarding their baby's care. They very quickly learn to understand and respond to their baby's needs. There is no routine, no conflicting advice, they are free to follow their own instincts which are never wrong.

Follow-up by the midwife is for 14 days, but problems are rarely encountered. I feel more like a friend than a nurse. The beautiful thing is that I learn and grow with each home-birth.

Having a baby and caring for it is a very simple business. After all, their needs are basic — love, food, warmth, comfort.

Although I understand the necessity for standards and some routines in hospital, I can't help thinking they have made birth and childcare into some kind of complicated procedure.

The answer lies in keeping it simple.

Maureen

DON'S EXPERIENCE:

I felt reasonably under control during the first stage of Sue's labour, timing contractions and helping to support Sue through the rushes of energy she was experiencing. Then as we moved from our bedroom, to the dining room, Sue vomited and her waters broke. By the time we arrived at the dining room, I had a very tight, hollow, uncomfortable feeling just below my diaphragm.



Bert and Annie supported Sue through the contractions while I sat thinking that I wasn't being particularly helpful. My energy seemed to be tied up in my stomach. Then as Sue started to go into another contraction, Bert drew me in so that I was face to face with Sue. The moment I started to have eye contact with her, the uncomfortable feeling in my stomach changed to a really warm glow which moved up into my chest. At that moment Bert reached out and put his hand on my shoulder. I have never before experienced such a marked feeling change. From then on I felt involved, comfortable and joyful at what was happening.

The next day was a long warm exciting, cuddly time. Three of us in the water bed, all really "blown out" by the experience. I was amazed by my "turn on" for Rachael. She is an unbelievably sexy, wriggler.

For me the sharing of Rachael's birthing with the Community has been an incredibly rewarding experience.

ANNIE-NATAL CLASSES:

In January, Annie began taking regular ante-natal classes with our five pregnant women. It has been a time of exploring and discovering together since the moment Annie looked up from a book of formal pregnancy exercises with its photos of serenely posed pregnant women, to the cuddling, laughing heap of curvaceous bodies in front of her, threw the book in a corner and joined in. Since then it has been clear that we would have to find our own way and write our own book.

One aspect of the classes has been clearing the "old tapes". These are the niggling, programmed thoughts and fears which run round and round in our heads. Each woman thinks she's the only one having them and she pushes them down and keeps them secret. The resulting tension is stored in her body.

The women found in the sharing sessions that these tapes are remarkably similar and that they lose their power when shared with honesty and energy. The body tension is then released and the breathing freed again. There are the fears of deformity: I'm too old to be having another baby; I was using sprays during the early weeks of pregnancy; my past abortion may have affected me. Then there are the fears of the labour: the recurring memory of a previous lonely and unsatisfactory labour in hospital, mine will be the longest hardest labour of all; or I'll do it all wrong.

There is the image of the perfect pregnant mother to live up to. All the ladies had one in their heads: serene, Mother Earth, always loving to her man, beautifully groomed, married. Accepting the changing body is another tension area: I'm getting fat and heavy; my man won't turn on to me; The women took their clothes off for most of the classes. Sharing the "yucks" about body changes in the early months was important. It became clear that society's conditioning is that the Miss Beauty Queen body is beautiful, but the pregnant body is ugly and should be hidden away under cunningly disguising clothes. By crying and laughing their way through each little "yuck" and sharing it with each other, they found the conditioning dropped away, until the full curves of each other's bodies looked voluptuous and beautiful.

Accepting the restlessness of pregnancy is another area. At times Annie exaggerated this for them, by giving the ladies exercises to move around the room as their bodies wanted to: to sit, lie, crouch, flop, stand, walk. To be totally aware of their bodies. We found that pregnancy is a highly energised time. Sitting or standing for long periods of time in the same position is wearying and uncomfortable. There is a lot of energy released by following the demands of your body. For a few months here at Centrepont, one could get up at any hour of the night and find at least one pregalump on the prowl: having a bath, making cheese toasties or filling hotties. The legs are especially restless. It seems that a lot of the energy for labour is stored in the legs. So many ladies have trouble with their legs during pregnancy because the energy is blocked and results in tension.

This body awareness has flowed over into birthing. The five women have been able to be very clear about where they wanted to be: on or off the bed, standing, crouching, leaning on someone, kneeling on all fours. They gave themselves permission to move a lot and were thus able to relieve the back-ache and body tension associated with giving birth.



1. Back to back. Experience your fears.



2. Share your fear with someone.

Breathing is very important. Annie approaches breathing from two places. Clear the blocks. Roar, cry, laugh, kick you way through them with full energy, and the breathing is released, the chest expands and the muscles relax. The second way is with conscious exercises.

Getting stuck in roles in the partnership leads to trouble e.g. the dad should care for the mum because she is weak and pregnant and needy. Let the roles change. When you want caring, touching, a back rub, a cup of tea, ask for what you want and be specific. When the women are clear of their fears and tensions, they find they overflow with nurturing energy for their partners and each other. Expectation without voicing the want is poison in the relationship.

Keep the relationship clear. "That loving sexy vibe is what puts the baby there and its what gets it out too." **"Spiritual Midwifery"**, We endorse that and add that the loving sexy vibe grows beautiful babies. Lots of couples run into sexual problems during pregnancy. We are finding that with continual clearing of the resentment and fears which build up in the relationship, the lovely, luscious, turned on energy remains all the way through the pregnancy.

Because of the depth of sharing during the ante-natal classes, mothers, fathers and their babies still feel very closely bonded to each other.

Barrie



3. Through the fear is trust and loving.

THE BIRTH

Waiting

We supported the mother

Together we watched the birth of a child

She lay on the table

Head revealed

Emotions many

The baby only half exposed, extends its arms and smiles

Sarah Smuts-Kennedy (age 13)

Editors: Barrie and Debbie

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I enclose foryears subscription.

The Saturday afternoon meeting with Bert's talk, the contact exercises and meditation, has been available for two years now. It has provided an opportunity for ex-group members to maintain their link with Bert and Centrepoint and for new and interested people to experience us.

Over that period, all Bert's talks have been taped. We see these as Bert's gift to the Community. But it is a gift that has been simmering away in boxes with great potential but being little used. This newspaper is an attempt to share this gift with people who would like to maintain their link with Bert and his Community, in a regular way, but who cannot attend Saturday meetings.

For 1980, we offer 4 quarterly newspapers, on a subscription of \$2.00 a year. We intend that future editions will be much bigger and will include more material from Bert's talks and a section on the Community (in particular, trying to convey to you honestly, the agonies and ecstasies of being a member of this changing and growing Community), and photos of Bert and the Community.