

Research Article

An Interview with Dr. John Banmen on the Satir Model

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Abstract

Dr. Jesse Carlock interviews Dr. John Banmen, a leading proponent of the Satir Model about the early beginnings of his relationship with Virginia Satir, his on-going intrigue with her approach, and his desire to fully understand what others coined, “her magic” in healing emotional wounds and helping people to thrive. The interview explores the origination of the book, *The Satir Model* and also clarifies the origin of the central concept used to explain the approach, the “Iceberg.”

Banmen and Carlock go on to examine the growing visibility of the spiritual, energy elements of the Satir Model, which Satir had once obscured as a result of their controversial nature, and the early adverse reactions from some influential professionals. Dr. Banmen takes this central energy element “out of the closet” and proudly speaks about the transformative dimension of the Satir Model that he views as fundamentally spiritual in nature. Finally, Dr. Carlock moves the interview towards a look at what Dr. Banmen might include in a new tome on the model.

Keywords

Satir Model, energy, transformational, Esalen, healing, spiritual

Introduction

In 2005, I was invited to take on a project of conducting video-taped interviews with elders in the Satir Global Network. At that time, many of the first generation Satir followers were beginning to age and Dr. John Banmen, who served on the Avanta (now Satir Global Network) board, did not want their voices lost, or any of the history each had to tell. He was instrumental in convincing the board of Avanta at the time, to fund this video project which culminated in *The Oral History of Virginia Satir*.

Following the Satir International Conference: *Becoming More Fully Human: The Evolution*, June 23-26, 2016, in Vancouver, I arranged to interview Dr. John Banmen, as a continuation of recordings of the *Oral History of Virginia Satir*. At the time the first interviews were conducted, interviewees were the elders of the Satir community and were limited to those aged 72 or older, or those with significant health issues. Because of his age and good health at the time, that first group of interviewees did not include Dr. John Banmen.

Since those original interviews, from time to time at Satir meetings and gatherings, I have continued to conduct informal interviews with other elders in the Satir Global Network, though not always adhering to the original questions used in 2005-2006. Finally, Dr. John Banmen would now have his turn. Dr.

Kathleen D. Glaus, the Associate Editor of *Satir International Journal*, also attended the interview and made a few comments as well during our time together.

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John: So, you are continuing the oral history. Neither Jean (McLendon) nor I were 72 yet when you started those interviews. We didn't qualify. I was pushing this project for funding from Avanta, and I didn't want my involvement to skew the response. If I don't include myself, I surmised, maybe they will be more likely to fund the project. But that was a long time ago, and I've been 72 for a long time.

Jesse: I met you first in 1981 in Utah. We were in Satir's process community in Park City, but I am confident that you knew Virginia (Satir) previously.

John: Oh, yes, I knew her already. I was telling Mary Jo Bulbrook (who had attended the Satir conference that just ended June 26, 2016) how I got to Utah (for that process community). I called Mary Jo and told her that I was at the University of British Columbia and that I now had time and I wanted to come to the process community. She said, "No way, it's full, and it's been full for a long time, and you can't come." She (Mary Jo) was adamant about it. So, I called Virginia and told her, "Virginia, she said I couldn't come," and Virginia replied, "Come anyway." Why not? If she told me to come anyway, why wouldn't I come? Mary Jo had not remembered that conversation. I'm so glad I made that second phone call (to Virginia Satir).

I met Virginia Satir for the first time in January 1970 through a friend.

Jesse: Had you studied her at all?

John: No. We had a professor of Social Work, whose name I can't remember right now, who told us about her. In Winnipeg, we were on a committee to select workshop leaders to train professionals, and he suggested that we should choose Virginia Satir. So, we invited her for a five-day residential workshop in January 1970, and she came.

I met her luggage first and then Satir. At that time, she carried a **lot** of luggage because she would go from one city to the other. I had just finished my doctorate the month before in a very strong Rogerian program. Now, when I look at it, the program was a very structured Rogerian approach. "You can't do this; you must do that." But at this workshop, I see and hear this woman (Satir) asking questions, and professors had specifically instructed us that we couldn't ask questions in our role as therapists. So, I was entirely taken up with her.

The next time I met Virginia Satir was in 1972 when Maria Gamori convinced the government to hire Virginia to come to Manitoba for three months to work with all the levels of government and institutions (the premier, the cabinet, and hospital administrators). I spent three months with Satir off and on and attended a two-week residential program as part of this. We'd invited 48 professionals to be there. Of course, when you work with someone for three months, you can develop a good relationship.

My wife and I came to visit our family in Vancouver, B.C. in February 1979. We had both lived here in B.C., so we both said, "What are we doing in Winnipeg? It's so cold until May here in Winnipeg compared with B.C." My wife said, "Let's go back to B.C. It's beautiful there as early as February." I said, "OK." My wife was a nurse, and she got a job, and after about a month she asked, "John, what are you going to do?" I kept my promise and said, "OK." The University of British Columbia had always wanted me, and I phoned them and said "You want me? I'm available." And (that's how) I came back. I called Virginia (Satir) and told her, "I'm free now, and I want to be connected." So that's how I ended up in Utah.

Jesse: What else struck you about her (Virginia Satir) that made you pursue her?

John: The intimacy that she created between people, like in the role plays, where men would hug each other, go inward, and hug each other, and cry together. That probably moved me a lot. But the other was, I couldn't quite figure out what happened in one hour, or half an hour, or one day. But I knew that it was something I needed to learn. I committed to learning what she was doing; I remember making it. "I have to learn this," I said to myself.

You know, people called what Virginia Satir did magic. But I wanted to understand it.

Jesse: You wanted to decipher what was happening?

John: My goodness, I said, "I have to know about this."

Jesse: And Virginia (Satir) wasn't the best at articulating.

John: No. Well, that's it too. Oh, yeah. And she said that later in King's (1989) book. But I knew the spiritual part was there when we spoke about that later on. In retrospect, I believe that I had connected with the "Life Force" part. That's my guess now. That's what I saw. But I think that was the impact, the effect that she had.

Jesse: But you couldn't label it (at the time)?

John: But when I look at it now, reflect now, I'd spent ten months in the mountains meditating before this, so I knew *that* spiritual part. However, I had that separated from my academic part. But I saw a connection at that time that allowed me to bring the two together. That would be my guess. Before that, I understood what she was doing only with my head.

Jesse: You were more integrated now than before?

John: Yes. It allowed me to be more integrated because before that it looked like I had two worlds. I'd lived in two different worlds, and publicly, they didn't fit together.

Jesse: Had you observed quite a few different therapists before this?

John: Well, not really. It wasn't until I went to UBC (University of British Columbia) and I was asked to teach theories that I tried to make contact with Harris (Dr. Thomas A. Harris of Transactional Analysis) and attempted to contact Perls (Frederick Perls, founder of Gestalt Therapy). My goal was to make the theories more practical to teach them. But before that, no. I had read their work before, but I did not connect with them (at a deeper level).

And before that, I didn't have the money to experience other leaders in the field. However, at the first Evolution of Psychotherapy, all of them were there, but this was 1985. I tried to connect with some of the leaders there. I had a chance to say, "I think this, to say how about this, and this and this," but I stayed pretty loyal to the Satir Model (while learning about other models).

Jesse: You could see, maybe, that she was doing something more, something very different.

John: Satir was doing more than the other leading practitioners. I don't know why we didn't label it (the unique part) better. Now I can say it was spiritual energy. Spirit in human form. And I have no shame or embarrassment or fear of saying it in public.

Jesse: But back then it was a big "No, no."

John: And it could have been a big "No, no" at my end too.

Jesse: In the professional world.

John: In the professional world. Then we went back to Utah for three weeks, and the next year we went came to Colorado, and she asked me to be part of the faculty, I guess you'd call it.

Jesse: How did she impact you personally?

John: I don't know. Validation. Acceptance. I broke away from my culture, religion.

Jesse: From Rogerian?

John: No. No. From the church. I grew up in a fundamentalist Mennonite church. They were extremists. The Bible was literal. When I started reading Freud in high school, I decided that this religion doesn't fit me. Since then, I have found that the religion and philosophy in China and India are integrated, and I was just so excited. I decided to stop (my work) at the university and go to India for ten months. I took ten months to live in a monastery/ashram and bring these two together.

When I returned, I went back into teaching because at that time you didn't need a degree to be a teacher. And I had these two worlds. And so, I think she allowed me to bring these two together.

Jesse: You knew Virginia (Satir) quite well?

John: I'm not sure if I knew her quite well. She said we knew each other in a previous life. That kind of connection is how she felt about me. I don't have any sense of us being together in a former life. I don't have any recollection or intuitive feeling of it, but I felt very connected to her.

Jesse: A very immediate connection.

John: Immediate. That first five days were the glue of my experience with her, and I don't think that I ever strayed.

Jesse: Did you see her (Virginia Satir) change over the years?

John: Well, the thing I liked about what happened over the years, was that she was curious and she would always seek out something new. Sometimes she would tell me, John I've discovered something new. I remember the summer Virginia (Satir) was so obsessed with triads. She would have us do 96 sets of triads. Another time it was Universals, and Virginia (Satir) would be developing this Universal kind of thing. There were many occasions when I found that she was a little more focused on this or a bit more on that.

I don't think I looked at her model as developing as much as I saw that she would add things to her model.

Jesse: She was always integrating other approaches that she would incorporate into her training, whether it was from Assagioli ((1965), founder of Psychosynthesis), who she said influenced her, as well as others such as Ashley Montague (1971) and his book on touch.

John: Oh, yeah, Perls would be a significant influence there; even Erickson. When Johnny Faulkner (current Satir archivist) read the long list of people who were at Esalen at the same time she was, I was fascinated. And there were records of discussions and debates that would last until midnight. There was a lot of interactive stuff that was going on at Esalen that I don't think she ever discussed with us. Well, I knew some of it.

Jesse: I knew she was at Esalen and the Director of Training for a period, but I was not aware of all the different people who were there at the time.

John: Well, Hayakawa (Samuel Ichiye), he was there, and she liked him.

Jesse: I'm not familiar with that name.

John: He was the linguist expert whom she liked. Allen Watts was there.

Jesse: Were any therapists there who were doing body work?

John: Ida Rolf was there at one time. And I don't know if Lowen (Alexander Lowen) was there, but faculty mentioned him. These are two people who were doing body work with whom she had contact.

Jesse: The Satir Model Book that you, Virginia, Jane Gerber and Maria Gamori wrote, was it through that collaboration that you came up with the *Iceberg* as the central metaphor?

John: No. Let's focus on the Satir Model book. I had wanted to write a book with Virginia (Satir). We had already made a plan a long time ago. In fact, that was one of the reasons that I phoned her, what was it in 1980? I was at the university, and it was an excellent idea to write a book. That was one of our plans, and, well that never happened. You just couldn't get her to sit down and get her to write, and I probably didn't feel secure enough to write the book myself.

At that time, Maria Gomori and Jane Gerber and I, who were a training triad, would go down the hill (this would be at Crested Butte during the summer month-long process communities) and have a formal Sunday morning brunch. At one of those brunches, I proposed to them that we should write this book together. Both Jane Gerber and Maria Gomori agreed to write it with me. So, we all participated contributing our different strengths.

Jesse: And Virginia (Satir) was at these meetings?

John: No. Virginia (Satir) was not at the meetings. She was never at the meetings. We wrote this book. For historical purposes, I am keeping the manuscript in a box.

Jesse: The original?

John: Yes, because they are all handwritten. We can someday see who wrote what in the book. That's a start, right?

When we began working on the book. Bob (Robert Spitzer of Science and Behavior Books, Inc.) was interested enough to give us a grant. We would meet over the weekend in different places and try to do some work together. I would write some drafts, we would get together and brainstorm, and then we would put it back together. We finally finished.

Jesse: Back up a step. Were you the one who would integrate what everyone was talking about into an initial draft?

John: No. We would choose chapters. We set up a book of chapters. Then I would work on a part.

Jesse: And others would work on their chapters?

John: Yes, we worked collaboratively on the book.

Jesse: Fleshed it out (together)?

John: Yes.

The first six chapters I discussed with Virginia (Satir).

Jesse: She read it?

John: I read it to her. I would read it to her, and she'd say, "Oh, you say it so well, you say it so well." She was taken with it. However, we didn't publish the book for another three years. I think there were 12 chapters. The last six she never saw. She was only involved in the first six.

Jesse: Who developed the *Iceberg*?

John: Well, Satir introduced the *Iceberg* at the first Level 2 at Crested Butte. She was talking about it at that time.

Jesse: But she wasn't calling it the *Iceberg*, was she?

John: Yes, yes. Virginia (Satir) was calling it the *Iceberg*. And then I took that Iceberg, remember, she was there training for the week, the first week of four weeks. She had this Iceberg aspect, and it caught my fancy. I worked on the concept, and I made a video, and I went to her home. We were both lounging on the floor, and I was showing it to her on the video. And I said, "this is what you were telling us," and she thought that this was fantastic. She endorsed it. She liked it. And of course, it was hers. It wasn't mine. I just drew it up a little further. No, it happened. That's the time that it happened.

Jesse: And what year was that?

John: 1985 or 86. All I remember is us lying on the floor, and her equipment was somewhat outdated. I may still have that video.

Jesse: That original film?

John: It would be fascinating if I could find it and I could say, this is the video that I showed her.

Some people think I invented the Iceberg. I didn't make it up. This metaphor, this was her idea. But I did work on it. I put it in linear form, and I don't know how far she had gone to put it all into a complete figure.

Jesse: You mean the various levels?

John: Yes, the different levels. I don't know if she would have... I think she might have put behavior at the top and "I Am," the *Life Force*, at the bottom, but I don't know that.

Jesse: She knew all of the elements but, perhaps, she hadn't fully conceptualized it in detail.

John: She knew all that, but she probably hadn't put it together. I feel no ownership of that idea, no. She talked about it so much. It was nothing new for her to think in metaphors.

Jesse: And her model, she was always collaborative, and this is how the concept emerged, in a collaborative way. I think she looked for people like you who could help (elucidate her ideas, and probably, help begin to identify her structure and process).

John: How it started was I would explain what Virginia (Satir) was doing and later on Maria invited me to teach her students cognitively what she knew so well intuitively. That's how I ended up in Taiwan. They were asking Maria (when she was conducting training in Taiwan) all these questions. And she said, "I don't know, you'll have to ask John." And that's how it ended up that I came to be in Taiwan. The Taiwanese trainees said, "You're supposed to explain the Satir Model to us." And I said, "Oh, how come?" "Maria told us." We had to be able to explain what we were doing; it had to make sense.

Jesse: You have to be able to explain it to teach it well. I remember as a beginning student in the late 70s, watching her. I was extremely impressed with what she was doing, but when I would ask her a question about how she had come up with this (intervention), she'd say, "I don't know, it just comes through me."

John: Yes. One of the things I want you and others to know is that when we were doing this second meditation book that Satir Global published and printed, I had wanted to have a preface, but Satir never wrote it. I said, OK, I'll write it. I'll attribute it to you. I'll interview you. She was in our home. We discussed what we were going to write as a preface. And you know, she ordered me, "Don't put that in there." "I channel it, but I don't want anyone to know it," I channel this. Much of this is channeling. Don't put that in there. Don't write that down.

So, when you asked her to explain it, she couldn't. Oh, now I want to find that tape. Virginia (Satir) didn't want me to write that down. And she made a specific order, "Don't write that; don't put that in." So, when you ask her to explain how she came up with a direction, sometimes she was just channeling it. It comes forth. You can call it intuition, you can call it whatever. My other model of that, of course, is Mozart; Mozart had the same experience. He just wrote down what was coming.

There is a connection with (a universal life force). Now we're able to say that we are tapping into it. Deepak Chopra talks about that. We're just channeling the Universe; the universe has it there, and if I can connect with it, it comes through, and I can be the agent or the funnel, and it comes through to (others, the Universe). I want to say this now because now I don't think others will ridicule her. People will say, "Hey, look, she knew that this was channeling."

Jesse: The conversation that you have on tape, would that have preceded the family therapy group (AAMFT, as I recall) where she received so much criticism?

John: I don't know that part. Our discussion would have been 1986. She would give me two days a year, and I would have her come to Vancouver. She would come here, and she would live at our place, and we would go over to Vancouver, and she would do a two-day public workshop. That's the definite time she would be with us because the book didn't come out until after.

I'm curious to see if I can find that tape. (John has a space in his home that holds a considerable amount of archival material that Virginia Satir left for his safekeeping). It was Johnny's (Faulkner's—Johnny Faulkner, along with others in the network, has created a Satir archive with private funds) inspiration yesterday, "I want you to find what's there."

Jesse: Yes, that's part of the history. If you were to rewrite or write a second edition of the Satir Model, it probably would be renamed, wouldn't it?

John: Well, Yes.

Jesse: And how would it be different?

John: I wanted a second edition, but Maria and Jane were dead against it. And I obeyed.

I shouldn't have. I should have redone it myself and said okay, we're going to keep your names on it, and we're going to publish it, but I didn't. I was a little resentful that I didn't. So, I wasn't going to do it a second time. They were very much against it. One of the first things I think that we would have done is to re-write the family rules part. The family rules part of this book is so simplistic, "All we have to do is change the rule from never to sometimes, always to sometimes, that kind of intervention."

Jesse: What might you have done differently with the rules section? How might you do that now? Can you talk about changing rules or beliefs?

John: There are beliefs under the rules. What we want to learn how to do is how to change these views. We discovered that beliefs and the person get so enmeshed that people can't see the difference between their beliefs and themselves. So, I would want to find a way of de-enmeshing beliefs from the self. By viewing the Self as the spiritual part, congruent part, you can, therefore, radiate and manifest this piece, and, therefore you could more effectively de-enmesh and change your belief. That's the direction that I would have taken the book had I been ready at that time, but if I did it now, I would be very much looking at what is the belief and then tie it in with cultural parts. Then you would have cultural aspects and family of origin kind of thing. It would be a beautiful, I think, way of looking at that. Then you can see how the rules are just the manifestation of the belief system, instead of trying to change rules merely by just renaming them. To me, that would have been a much more profound way of bringing about separating beliefs from the Self. I can radiate and manifest this (spiritual) part.

Another way we can change beliefs is through what we call the critical incident change event. At first, it looked like this critical event needed to be a traumatic kind of experience. Instead of going for this two-day or three-day intervention that some people were doing, we would go in the direction of what (would have the greatest) impact. We would unearth the effects of different experiences in one's family of origin and see how you could transform the energy of the impact. Now that is possible. We're doing it. Kathlyne (Kathlyne Maki-Banmen, a leading teacher/trainer of the Satir Transformational Systemic Therapy) is doing it right now. That to me would have been much more effective. Instead of going through a process of becoming aware, accepting, and so forth, instead, actually changing the energy.

Jesse: How do you conceptualize doing that?

John: Well. If I were to do it today, I'd explain that you have a story. Here is the Iceberg. The Iceberg is you, your structure. This story has impacted you at several different levels. It affects your feelings, it changes your perceptions, it impacts your expectations, and it does impact, in a sense, who you become.

Now I'm going to take this story, and I'm going to view it through the iceberg, and I'm going to see where it is stuck and what has to be released. The blockage may occur in all these places (levels of Iceberg). I'd figure out where the story is stuck, and how I can, then, undo it. And when I release it, then I bring in the life force and make it congruent. Now I could maybe use the word, healing. I will bring this healing energy to the point of the most profound impact, the pain, the suffering. I can tap the healing part inside of the person's life energy. That's what I'd like to write about, and I'm probably going to do it, but I'm not going to do that in the second version of the Satir Model; I'll, perhaps, write my own.

Jesse: Write your book, your current understanding of the model?

John: Right. This book would represent how I see the Satir Model in 2017, 2018, now. Instead of being controlled by the chapters of the original text, The Satir Model. I can always reference and acknowledge it...

Jesse: Oh, sure.

John: I think, from what I've learned, I could write a lot more (about) the context in which Satir developed her model. That to me would be more exciting, looking at the influences of these people who influenced her. You know the book that she liked so much, I don't know if you've ever read it, is *Science and Sanity*?

Jesse: No, I've never read that.

John: Korzybski first published *Science and Sanity* in 1933, and it is systemic; it's a systems book. She gave me that book to encourage me to read about that. And I still have it; I'll never let go of the book because it represents such a fond memory. But this *Science and Sanity* is a working systems book. Satir had that book, that background in the earlier days because Korzybski published it in 1933. When did she read it?

Virginia (Satir) wanted me to read it, but, it was a very dry book. It was the foundation for systemic thinking at the time. I would probably incorporate some of the background from that text into the new book, as well as material from a fascinating meeting Virginia Satir had with Carl Rogers that I found. She gave me a two-day workshop that she and Carl Rogers conducted in 1979. It is fantastic.

Jesse: Tapes of them?

John: Yes. I have tapes of it.

Jesse: That's fantastic.

John: The tapes are so beautiful! Can I tell you? I want to tell you one story...

Jesse: Sure.

John: Satir gets up, and she talks to the crowd and gets them all going and interacting as she always does, and then Carl Rogers takes the stage, and he reads from his notes.

The variation in Carl Roger's style is so different from Virginia's (Satir) style. But then Carl Rogers starts to disclose, "My wife has been very sick, and I have been very sad," and he became personal right away. There are five CDs of this workshop.

Jesse: I'd love to hear those.

John: She gave them to me. She gave them to me many years ago, but I just couldn't find them. Then I finally remembered where they were and I located the recordings. Jason (John Banmen's son), had put them on CDs. The originals were on these little cassettes, four or five of them. Jason now has transferred them to five CDs. I've been listening to them and they are so beautiful, because Satir and Rogers come into a dialogue after a very, very short time. They could trigger each other, inspire each other, build on each other, and it's just beautiful. Some of that material would be great to include to show how they were supporting each other. They would merge and dialogue with each other.

Jesse: And the fourth birth too? Would you include that?

John: The Fourth Birth is what I have to work on now. We might even want to call it Fourth Birth. Well, we still haven't done an adequate job with the Third Birth. For example, we need to explain choices at a different level. It's not a choice between an apple and a banana and a pear, with three options. I don't want them to be equal; I want them to be choices representing different levels.

Jesse: Say more about that.

John: Well, I can be kind to you. I can be compassionate to you. There are choices at different levels of energy. I want to show how we can make decisions at various, deeper levels. Alright, you're walking the street, I can help you walk the road. That's one level. I have that choice. I also have the option to help you go wherever, or I can help take care of you and help you to get food, or a meal. There are different levels of choices.

Jesse: And different levels of commitment.

John: Well, yes, choices have a more significant impact the deeper the level you choose. Remember the Einstein quote I mentioned a few years ago? He said, "The problem can't be solved at the level of the problem; it has to be solved at a deeper level." So, I want choices to be understood not as an alternative, 1, 2, 3, but as...

Jesse: Qualitatively different?

John: Yes, that would be an appropriate word or an energy level difference.

Jesse: A qualitative, energy level difference....

John: That would make the choices of meta-goals much more powerful. We'd see that it is not just choosing one or the other, or the other, or the other. The choices are at different levels. There are lots of good ideas that I can integrate into this new book.

Jesse: One of Virginia's (Satir) allies in the family therapy movement was Bowen (Murray Bowen). Is this accurate?

John: Yes, that's accurate. There was communication between them. There was a significant direct connection there, much more than a letter. A long time ago, Jean McLendon, or someone from her group, reported, "Oh, there's a letter between the two that they did know each other," but there was much more there. We have proof. Johnny (Faulkner) has it. Their communication was far more extensive than even I had ever known before. I can say confidently now, coming from Johnny Falkner (Satir archivist), that they (Bowen and Satir) had a powerful connection.

Jesse: They (Satir and Bowen) were so different regarding their style. I've seen films of him talking about differentiation, triangulation, and so forth, and he is so dry and stiff, but what I understand is that he was quite supportive of Satir at the time when she was receiving so much criticism from people for her ideas. I think this criticism made her reticent to talk about the spiritual part or channeling as you say, part of her work.

John: Records indicate that Virginia (Satir) told Bowen that she was a little emotionally distressed during one period and that she had looked at suicide as an alternative. She shared that with him, and he had shared his internal process with her. That's what the records seem to show.

Jesse: Interesting. And Whitaker, Carl Whitaker was another supporter of her.

John: Whitaker, I don't know about their relationship until much, much later when he was dying. We (Satir and Banmen) were probably in Crested Butte when Whitaker was dying, and Virginia (Satir) was very moved and very concerned. She tried to get communication to him. She did get communication to him. We found someone who knew both of them who facilitated their communication. She was very supportive, very moved. It was like a brother dying. And it was very tender, very tender. In my sense, he was on his deathbed.

That relationship part doesn't come through very often in her everyday kind of work.

But it seemed like in the background there was a lot. But most of it was when she was at Esalen. I have some Esalen tapes that I have never heard. I would love to listen to them and get a little inspiration. I'd like to see what she had to say back then.

Jesse: These are records of workshops she conducted there?

John: Yes.

Jesse.: And they're tapes? Great.

John: I'll see what they have to say... But they (the faculty at Esalen) wouldn't record their long evening talks, but the tapes would give me a flavor of what was going on at that time. There's still so much to do, so much to do, to develop, and grow, and blossom. It's going to take more than my lifetime to get everything out of this material. If I could just stop this running around the world doing workshops, then I would have enough time to write. I don't even have to create it; I would have enough material if I were just to produce some of the hours and hours of tape that we already have. For example, I would like a transcript made of the Verbatim book. Do you know the book *Frogs and Princes*?

Jesse: Yes, I vaguely remember that from a long time ago.

John: *Frogs into Princes* is a book of just transcripts from workshops and workshop notes that Bandler and Grinder (1979) put together that were published by NLP. They did very well. I've even given someone the *Frogs and Princes* books and said, "This is what I want." No one has been able to do it. But how do you write a book that is based on demonstrations? See that's the problem because she would always show and tell. How do you work this out when you, as the reader, cannot see and experience it? Consequently, we don't have any books. I don't know how many pages I have, maybe 3,000 typed pages of transcripts. Nothing is being done with these because that's not one of my skills. I need someone else to do it. I can oversee the ideas part, but I don't have the writing part. But I want to have a look at these transcripts again. They are in the back of my drawer somewhere.

Years ago (when I was teaching), I had one of the psychology students transcribe one of Satir's workshops. She transcribed the whole thing. She was one of these people, her mother said, who was a total recluse. She would go to class; then she would go back into her bedroom and start transcribing the workshop. Afterwards, she finished her degree, and someone hired her as a therapist for their agency. Her mother said just listening to Virginia (Satir), transcribing her workshops, healed her.

Jesse: That's amazing.

John: I have all of that exciting material that I am not doing anything with much of it.

Jesse: Some transcripts have already been completed.

John: Yes, all of that verbatim stuff even though it's informal, geared for the public. It's not academically written but easy to read.

Jesse: Research continues coming out, though not conducted by people in the Satir network that supports the Satir Model.

John: That's right. Let's talk about that.

Jesse: The research I'm referring to is regarding neuroplasticity, mindfulness, positive psychology, the earlier common factors research; all of that research substantiates Satir's model.

John: I've been delving into another field. I'm dabbling into the Great Courses. Do you know the Great Courses? I've been buying a lot of these courses over the years until our dollar went down and now they are too expensive. I have dozens of them. And I'm looking at physics, modern physics. The physics part is something that people are exploring. Astrophysics has a tremendous amount that fits with the Satir Model. I would like to look at that part, plus the so-called neuroscience part, and show how Satir intuitively had a lot of this stuff in her model a long time ago. I'd like to use this material to show support for the Satir Model and bring all of these ideas somehow together. That's very doable. It would be good if we had a specialist in neuroscience do that part. I have the same sense that that's what you are saying. That the modern sciences, and spirituality, if you take both of them together, that researchers are coming up with the connection; that we are all connected at the life energy level. It's amazing. It would undoubtedly support Satir's system, but this book would bring it to a depth that Virginia Satir, at the time, may not have had the ability to conceptually articulate. She had the wisdom of it, but not always the words to adequately describe the experience.

Jesse: Yes, she did.

John: Putting the knowledge and the wisdom together would show what she had developed.

Jesse: What do you think is attracting so many people to her model now?

John: I don't know... I'll tell you about the Chinese. I don't know about the other people, but I can tell you about the Chinese.

Jesse: But you've worked in many countries.

John: I know, but I can tell you better about China. China is a collectivist culture. On their name tags, they have a number. If you see a waitress, they don't have a name on their badge; they have a number. They have very little individuality about who they are. Then, I come along and say, "Who are you?" And really, I start there. And I allow them to differentiate, but not like Bowen. I show them that in America, this is how they differentiate. In China, it's this kind of differentiation, and in the Satir Model, it's this. We're going to learn about the Satir way. You can still have your family and your relationships, but you can be your own person. So that's appealing, very appealing, profoundly appealing.

The second thing is the family. They have a tremendous sense of family. In fact, the family will come before they do as individuals. Therefore, to use the Satir Model at the family level is exceptionally appealing to them.

The third reason is that in the last ten years or so, the Chinese people have been encouraged, not just allowed, to look back into their philosophical background. The energy, or life energy, as I look at it, and their I-Ching or Chi, their energy is very compatible; they see it as one. We are tying the Satir Model values to their historical roots. In China, the belief systems of Taoism and Confucianism and other philosophical systems are one with the spiritual dimension. They are now allowed to go back there and draw from those systems; they are encouraged. They don't understand their philosophical roots. I have heard people publicly say, "I've never grasped my philosophical background until I learned the Satir Model. I have heard that many times, many, many times. The president of China now is encouraging the people to go back to their roots. Before this, they could be murdered. They had to live through the Cultural Revolution. These are three crucial reasons why Chinese people like the Satir Model.

Family, culture and the Self. When I talk about the *Self*, they glow. Their eyes sparkle. What's in the way of the *Self* shining? Manifesting? You are the manifestation of the universal energy. That they know, everybody (every Chinese citizen) knows that. I know that fits them and they hear that. When I say, there's a paradox here, we're unique, and we're the same. They can understand paradox better than we.

I can teach the Chinese the paradox of you are unique, but we're the same. The Chinese have a sense of that, an intuitive feeling about them. They have an easier time than others have regarding experiencing the polarities, and so they can go with both at the same time.

Kathleen: The model is consistent with their experience, their cultural background.

John: We talk superficially of yin and yang, it's all superficial for them, but it is a context in which they can be both. They can sometimes be this. Are you this? Are you that? Are you male? Are you female? They don't see it as two separate things. They see it as two different things that are together. Integration is a systemic kind of experience.

I hold my tension in my feet. I don't know if you know this? I like foot massage and reflexology. And when the guy works on my feet, works on my soles, he says, "Kidney. Kidney." And I say, "No, kidneys are here, not there." So, we put on this big show when I take my shoe off, and I say, "No kidney here (pointing to the sole of my foot)." "Oh, yes, it is, he'd say." I'd say, "You know systems better than I because I say, I have no kidney here, but you know it's there." Systems thinking in therapy is simple to teach the Chinese people.

You know medicine, right? Chinese medicine is so systemic compared with other medical approaches. They like that.

Jesse: They resonate with it.

John: They resonate with The Satir Model, and they feel good because they have an understanding already. They don't have to let go of anything. I teach the Satir Model, not as an external energy. I use it to understand who they are and their culture. They like the approach. They eat it up with enormous appetites.

Jesse: How has your work changed? Let's say in the last ten years, how has the way you work changed?

John: I think I'm more open to the deeper forces of life. I'm more receptive to the spiritual part. People say, how can you talk about spirituality in a Communist country? Well, I do it all the time. Because I make sure that I use the words, "We're not talking about religion. We are not talking about religion. We're going to leave religion out of this. Religion may have a spiritual part, but we are not talking about religion." We're going to talk about *Life Force*; we're going to talk about *Chi*; we're going to talk about *Prana* from the Hindu tradition, which is how I learned about energy. I learned it from the Hindus, Pranayama. So, I can use that to help them understand. I'm more open to that. I'm more open to my spiritual energy, and I think I'm also more direct. I say to my Chinese students, "Ok, now, let's face your Self." I look at it more as living the model instead of teaching it.

Kathleen: You've integrated it to that point.

John: I don't need any practice. I'm living it. You've picked up so nicely on it, Kathleen. I've integrated the spiritual part and the psychological part. When I went to India the second time, which was maybe ten years ago, I went back, and I had this tremendous conflict inside. The battle was whether I would give up Satir and go down a spiritual path, or would I go towards Satir. I had this very, very strong battle going on inside. I was viewing the issue dualistically, believing that I had to make a choice and then somehow...

Jesse: Something clicked.

John: But somehow something happened, and it got integrated, and I realized you don't have to make a choice; they both fit. If I have to select a time when I significantly shifted my work, it would be that. I came home and realized that I don't have to choose. But now I have to find time to nurture that part (spiritual). I

have to find time for meditation. I've been back and forth to India three or four times. I don't know if you remember, but I returned to India for three months.

Jesse: Yes. I do remember that.

John: I think there's been a greater integration of that energy.

Jesse: Do you meditate on a daily basis?

John: Well, I try, but not the way I would like. However, I will be in a meditative state every day. When I heard that Ken Wilbur meditates three hours every day, I said, "Oh my God, that would be part of my life ideal, if I could meditate three hours every day." No, I've never achieved that. Well, maybe, when I was away for three months (at the ashram), I had all of this time, but in my daily life, I've never come close to it. It's a very neglected area for me, having time alone. That's what I would do at lunchtime; I would just go to my room, to be alone there. I find if I can be silly, I can be excellent company to myself. I need to develop my meditation time. I have all of July; I have no workshops. I have two weeks for my grandchildren and two weeks to myself. I have time to do very little.

Well, have I told you what I want to do? I want to flesh out some of the past influences on Satir, so there can be some building on it, sorting it out, and applying it.

Jesse: How can the Satir Model be further developed?

John: I think there is tremendous potential in the Satir Model. It's not just a therapeutic model; we know that. It's a growth model, a self-actualization model. It incorporates Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Bruce Lipton (2005) in the *Biology of Belief* says that therapy must be experiential to bring about deeper levels of change, and the Satir Model has all that. And we have the spiritual part. If we put this ability to change at the DNA level, and then we have the spiritual dimension, and we put this together, we could evolve the model even further and make it more universal. I have very high hopes for that.

I don't see many people wanting to do work at this level. My Chinese friends told me yesterday (at the conference) that they had said to their cohort, "I'm not listening to you guys, I'm going to attend the sessions offered by non-Chinese presenters. They knew enough English, so they were choosing these workshops. One of their complaints (about these presentations) was that they were too shallow. That was their most significant complaint. But the Satir Model isn't superficial to me; it is right at the core. My hope is we'll get the two parts together.

I have some ideas maybe I'll share with you sometime as I develop them, about how to build a team, a different kind of group of thinkers and developers and curious people. I want to create a think-tank kind of approach, and then take that think-tank idea into a practical application. Most of the think-tank people are also sensible people. The Satir Model has a more substantial core (than we realize). We don't have to change models. It's all there; it's already there. One idea I have is that we need to bring even more body (the physical, sensory, muscular, movement aspects of experience) into the work. There's a physical dimension of the human system, and we need to incorporate it more. Virginia (Satir) acknowledged it so well with the touch part, the sculpting part.

Jesse: Yes, it was always there. I remember how Satir would ask us to meet our triad through dance. Movement, sensation, was reliably a part of all of the work she did.

John: There's a tremendous amount of work to be done.

Jesse: Are there limitations in the organizational world to going down to the third or fourth level?

John: I don't know. I haven't heard any yet. We're also going to get critics. You probably know about the publication, *The Psychotherapy Networker*. The last edition showed that the CBT (cognitive-behavioral therapy) bubble has burst....

Kathleen: I haven't read it, but I've heard about it.

John: If that bursts, if that's the reality, then that may change where the money goes from the government.

Jesse: Well, that's what the research is showing too. With what we have come to know, you can't go deep enough using only the cognitive and behavioral dimensions of experience.

John: We haven't formulated the Satir Model well enough so that outsiders can look at the Satir Model. Some people feel that we haven't put it into any systematic, credible kind of theory. Critics challenge that the Satir Model is not an entirely developed model. Someone put it in these types of philosophical terms, "The epistemology isn't explicit," those kinds of words. We don't have an epistemology or ontology. Well, all it would need is a little philosophical attention to bring that into the model. I'm very hopeful. I don't think it will come from here. I think it will come from Asia. Korea is working hard on it, and China is never going to stop, and other countries. I don't see the enthusiasm here or the money.

Jesse: By here, do you mean Canada?

John: Canada, or the US. And as you said the other day, a lot of the elements of the Satir Model have been integrated into the general form.

I have tapes of a two-day workshop that Virginia did. Two days focused on making contact. Well, everybody is now talking about contact. Her spending two days on the topic helps you realize how crucial making contact is. Making contact with self, making contact the other, making contact with the other's life energy. It's so beautiful. Somebody needs to write it up. Even take those two days of tapes and write it up.

Jesse: Are they videotapes?

John: No, they are audio.

Jesse: They can be transcribed and edited.

Kathleen: You can transcribe and elaborate, extend, or would you just keep it on what Virginia (Satir) said?

John: You could do both, or the editor could make comments without evolving it further.

Conclusion

We covered such a wide range of material in this interview. Had it not been for our fatigue, the discussion could easily have continued for hours. The short history of the highlights of Dr. Banmen's work with Virginia Satir and the process of writing the seminal work, *The Satir Model* (Satir, Banmen, Gerber, & Gomori, 1991) provided some historical context to Dr. Banmen's relationship with Satir. Discussing Dr. Banmen's description of his gradual integration of the model, particularly the spiritual core of Virginia Satir's work, contributed to the liveliness of the interview.

Our discussion of Dr. Banmen's ideas about what he might include in a second book on the model was exceptionally stimulating. In reflecting on the many ideas we discussed, it seems that he has several books rolling around in his mind. As a follow-up note, Dr. Banmen has begun the process of writing the second book. Perhaps some of the highlights introduced in this interview will entice readers and support them to write as well. Also, there is a wealth of materials available in the Satir Community Resource Center

archives (johnnyfaulkner.com) to stimulate writers and researchers. The Satir Model could use more meaty and contemporary updates to what is one of the most potent healing approaches in the world.

Dr. John Banmen is a Satir Transformational Systemic Therapy trainer and therapist. He has been training counselors and therapists in eleven countries. At present his main training work is in China. He is the co-author of *The Satir Model: Family Therapy and Beyond*, the editor of *Applications of the Satir Growth Model*, *Satir Transformational Systemic Therapy*, *Satir In Her Own Words* and *Satir Meditations*. He is a registered psychologist and an approved marriage and family therapy supervisor. He was recently appointed Visiting Professor at the Beijing Normal University for a five-year period (2014-2019) He lives in Delta, BC Canada.

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