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Jesus Otero and his wife, Maria, grew up on the same street of a small, rural Puerto Rican village. They saw each other at a distance for many years without speaking much. Jesus spent most of his time with the boys of the village, while Maria was with the girls. They admired each other at a distance.

Like most of the other families of the village, the families of Jesus and Maria were poor. Work in the fields paid poorly, and the families were barely able to scrape out an existence. Most of the villagers, especially the young, dreamed of getting away and finding a way to make money. While they liked the warm sun and the beauty of their land, they were tired of worrying each day about where food for tomorrow would come from or how to buy tarpaper to cover the latest leak in the roof of the ramshackle huts they lived in.

At the age of nineteen, Jesus finally summoned up enough courage to declare his admiration for her to Maria, who, at eighteen, responded with wild delight. Within the year they were married.

Maria took her place with the women of the village. Within six years she bore three children, first a girl, then a boy, then another girl. Maria was happy with her children and her place among the women. She saw her parents every day. She spent her days on the streets of the village with her two sisters and

the other mothers and their children. She knew that her children were safe there, since if she lost track of them, the other women would be watching. There was much gossip to chatter about. True, she sometimes went hungry so her children would have enough to eat, but Jesus would come with food before she got too hungry.

Jesus, however, was not so happy. It was hard to feed five mouths, and he sometimes had to borrow from friends when money ran out. He spent his time, like the other young men of the village, either working or with his friends. He wished he had more money for beer, since he liked drinking with his cronies. Mostly he was unhappy at the thought that his life would always be like this. He could not see any way to change it. And since his children were born, he had little time with Maria. There was no way for them to be alone in the little two-room hut they lived in. Even when they made love late at night, Maria kept silent so as not to wake the children. Jesus's fondest dream was to find a way to get enough money to build a house, but there seemed no way in their village.

Jesus had an older brother, whom as a boy he had both admired and envied. Jesus considered his brother Juan to be smarter than he was, and there was no doubt he was more successful with the girls. Juan had many girls, and he had not married. Shortly before Jesus had married Maria, his brother had left their village and gone to Ponce where he had learned the

trade of a bricklayer. Subsequently, he had gone to New York where, after a period of struggle, he had been able to get into the bricklayer's union. He had begun to make what to him and Jesus was a great deal of money, and, still unmarried, he wrote a couple of times a year to Jesus about the good life he was leading with money and girls in New York. Jesus envied him. He loved Maria and his children, and he did not want to lose them, but he wished he could do as Juan had done and keep his family too.

One day he wrote to his brother, swallowing his pride a bit, and asked Juan if he could lend him enough money to get him to New York and to buy enough food for his family for a month or two until he could find himself a job. His plan was to send money back to his family and at the same time to try to save enough to bring them to New York. Maybe there he could get better jobs if he worked well and hard. It seemed just possible to him that if he was lucky he might be able to then save enough to come back to his village some day and build his house and maybe even to start a small business of his own. Maybe he could build houses for other people for a living.

Juan's answer to his letter was discouraging. Juan said that he was willing to save money for a loan to Jesus, but it would take a few months for him to do so. He wrote, however, that he did not approve of Jesus's plan because New York was a bad place for families. There was not much sun or fresh air for children, the streets were dangerous for them, and it was hard

for the women to take care of them. Good housing, he also wrote, was very expensive, and cheap housing was bad. The apartments smelled, and there were rats in the buildings. He advised Jesus not to come.

Jesus argued with Juan by mail, using as his arguments that there was no way he could better himself in the village, and that in New York his children would be able to go to school all the way through high school, unlike their village where the school had only recently expanded from six grades to eight. After several letters, Juan finally wrote that, although he felt that Jesus would be making a mistake, if he still wanted a loan to come himself to see what it was like, he would save the money for him. Jesus excitedly wrote back that he did indeed still want to come.

When he told Maria that he was going to New York, she was, at first, dismayed. It frightened her to think of leaving the village, and she had heard that life for a woman was very hard in New York. But Jesus was so elated at the plan, and she understood how impatient he felt with the restrictions of their village. She could not find it in herself to destroy his joy. So she hid her dismay and tried to act excited herself. In a few days, she had convinced herself that the plan might be for the best. And it was true that her children could get more schooling. But she would miss her mother and father and her sisters and her friends.

Several months later, a money order arrived from Juan, and three weeks later, carrying his clothes in a paper box bound with string, Jesus set out for San Juan and the plane to New York. His excitement grew with his first experience of flying. The sight of New York City below him as his plane descended was overwhelming. His way of later describing how he felt was that it was like the clouds were his. Juan was waiting to meet him at the airport. Jesus cried as he embraced his brother.

It did not take long for Jesus to find a job despite his very limited English. Juan had tried to get him an apprenticeship as a bricklayer, but had not been able to do so. There were a great many men seeking such apprentice jobs, and Juan knew no one who could give preference to a newly arrived man who spoke virtually no English. But one of his friends who managed a diner had agreed to hire Jesus and train him to be a short-order cook. So within a few days Jesus was at work. He lived with Juan, who asked no rent. By living sparingly, Jesus was able to save money rapidly. He had arrived in New York in late spring, and by the end of the summer he had saved enough to pay for his family's fare to New York. He set out accordingly to find a place for them to live. For the first time, he hit a snag in his plan.

Jesus's take home pay was $89 a week and change. He had been living very meagerly on $20, sending $30 to Maria and saving the rest, which added up to about $160 each month. He wanted to begin paying off his loan from

Juan, and he knew that it would be difficult to maintain his family in New York on the $50 he had been allotting them. He figured that he could spend $100 for rent.

Juan's room, in which he was living, was on the West Side of Manhattan, and Jesus began his search in that neighborhood. He found nothing that he could afford. As he branched out into other areas of the city, he fell more and more into despair. Tenement apartments, which he could afford, were universally filthy and in disrepair. Apartments he liked were all too expensive. It took him five months before he finally rented a place in a tenement building on the Lower East Side. The apartment had four small rooms that were, he felt, livable, and, unlike most of the tenements he saw, there seemed to be enough heat, and the toilet and the appliances worked. Jesus bought mattresses, a table, and chairs and sent off a money order to Maria for fare for her and the children.

A few weeks before Maria made her trip to New York, an incident occurred in her village that was to play a part in her life at a later time. The incident involved an old woman who lived alone on the edge of the village who had been assigned a particular role in the community. Some of the elders of the village, who loved to tell stories of the early days of their lives when belief in witchcraft and the occult was widespread, had teased Maria and her friends when they were children by telling them that the old woman was a

witch. Their teasing was only half in jest, since they half-believed that she might have some kind of dark powers. The old woman was hit on the head one day by a stone thrown by one of a group of boys at play, one of whom was Maria and Jesus's son. The old woman had fallen, stunned, although as it turned out she was not seriously hurt. But when back on her feet, enraged, she had turned on the women who had run to her aid, one of which was Maria, and screamed: "A curse on you! A curse on all of you!" The hate in her eyes momentarily terrified Maria, on whom the old woman's gaze had landed.

Jesus and Juan met Maria and the children when they arrived on their low-fare midnight flight. Unlike Juan, Maria had found the flight frightening, and the children, sensing her fear, had been restless. She was relieved and happy to see Jesus, but she was tired, and the bus ride to Manhattan seemed endless. She could barely get herself to believe that all that time they were in one city. She later said that she felt that she had been swallowed by the city. On the subway ride in Manhattan to the Lower East Side, she clung so tightly to Jesus that he complained that she was hurting him. She was not able to respond to the poorly lit apartment, and, with the children asleep, she fell exhaustedly on to the mattress she shared with Jesus. She was too tired to enjoy his love-making.

In the morning she felt better. The two windows in the apartment faced east, and there was sunlight until midmorning when the sun disappeared

behind a building and was hidden for the rest of the day. She took stock of the apartment, found that there was more space than their hut in the village had provided, but it was filthy and there were many cockroaches. She set about cleaning the apartment after Jesus left for work. She ventured out of the apartment once, clutching the money Jesus had given her, to go the store he had pointed out across the street to buy soap and food, but the store was huge, and she could not see what she wanted. She finally found soap and a can of beans. She tried to pay the man in the white apron, but he had said something in English she could not understand and had pointed down the aisle. She could not tell what he had pointed at, but she walked down the aisle in the direction in which he had pointed and found several lines of people paying for food. She joined one line, wondering if it was the right one, then realized her children had disappeared. She found them in one of the aisles pushing a cart with someone else's food in it. She scolded them, but then she began to feel as if she could not breathe. Gasping, she left the soap and beans on the nearest shelf and fled back across the street to the apartment.

When Jesus arrived home that evening, he found Maria sitting on the mattress on which they slept. It did not appear that she had done anything to the apartment. The children were dirty, and seemed unattended. There was no food. He was at first annoyed, but then realized something was wrong. When he asked Maria what it was, she told him of her experience in the supermarket. She emphasized that she had not been able to breathe. She said

her breathing was all right now, but that she felt very frightened. She missed her sister, and she did not like it here in New York. Jesus said he thought the city was all too new and big for her, but that it would be all right soon. He took her with the children back to the supermarket, and they bought food and cleaning supplies. Later, Juan came to visit and they reminisced about their childhood days in their village. Maria relaxed and laughed at their reminiscences. She seemed better, and the next day she set about cleaning the apartment. She asked Jesus to do the shopping for her until she felt more sure of herself. He agreed.

For the next two weeks, Maria seemed all right. She went with Jesus to the school four blocks away to enter the two oldest children. They were told that, even though this school was closer for them, they lived in the district served by another school, nearly twice the distance. They registered their children at the other school. Maria asked Jesus if he would take the children to school the next morning. They argued a bit when he objected, telling her she would have to start doing more things outside the apartment if she were ever to feel comfortable in the city. But she insisted, and he agreed. Jesus was working when school let out, so Maria went to get the children. When she arrived at the school she could not, at first, find her children, and she again found it hard to breathe. Her children found her gasping for breath seated on the steps of the school. Nevertheless, for the next two weeks she went each day to collect her children. But, with the exception of an occasional trip to the

supermarket, which she had learned to negotiate, she stayed in the apartment.

After two weeks, at Jesus's insistence, she also began to take her children to school in the morning. For one month she kept up this routine. She complained bitterly to Jesus about her loneliness. There were no other Spanish-speaking people in their tenement, only two elderly Jewish women and a number of black families, how many she did not know. None made any effort to be friendly. She had tried a couple of times to make friends with some of the other Spanish-American mothers who came to the school. They had been nice to her, but they seemed busy with their own families, and she had been unable to get any of them to carry on a sustained interchange. Juan brought girls with him twice when he visited, but they were very different from Maria, and she could not talk with them about the things they were interested in. They were not married and were interested in clothes, men, dancing, and having a good time. Both had been in New York for many years. They knew little about rural Puerto Rico. Jesus was not home much either. He had his men friends, and he behaved much as he had back in the village, spending time after work with his friends.

It was not until about four months after the arrival of Maria and the children that Jesus began to worry seriously about her. His concern began in earnest when she confided in him one evening that she was terrified of the

men who stayed in the hallway each afternoon, because she was convinced that were there because they wanted to kill her. She begged him to stay home the next day to send them away. Jesus reassured her, telling her that she was imagining things. After a week of evenings during which she continued to plead with him, he did stay home one day. He discovered that Maria was indeed partially right. There were men in the hall for an hour or so about noontime. They seemed to be waiting for someone to arrive to open the door of an adjoining apartment. They were agitated and noisy for a while, but after getting into the apartment next door, they left by ones and twos within a few minutes. It was not Jesus, but Juan, who later surmised that the men were junkies and that someone was using the apartment next door to deal dope from. Juan cautioned Jesus to leave them alone lest they give him trouble, and suggested that Jesus install a second lock on his door. He also said that perhaps Jesus should look for another apartment.

What Jesus did not know was that, for two weeks before confiding in him, Maria had been so afraid to leave the apartment that she had stopped taking the children to school. He only found out about it two weeks later when the following events took place.

The absences of Maria's children had come to the attention of the school attendance officer, who made a routine visit to the Oteros' apartment to find out why the children had been absent. He found Maria in bed, unkempt,

paying little attention to the children. The oldest child had answered his knock at the door and told him that Maria was not feeling well. He had asked if he could speak to her anyway for a moment.

The child took him to the mother's bed. The attendance officer explained who he was and asked why she was not sending her children to school. Maria, speaking rather vaguely in Spanish, which the attendance officer understood fairly well, although it was not his native language, said something about being afraid to go out when those men were in the hallway and about noises on the street that bothered her. The attendance officer asked her about her husband who she said was at work at the restaurant. She could not tell him the name of the restaurant or where to find it. She did have a telephone number, however. When the attendance officer asked her if she was sick, she answered: "I have asthma." The attendance officer observed that her breathing seemed all right at the moment. She answered: "Yes, but I am afraid."

The attendance officer then explained to her that she was required by law to send her children to school. Maria fell silent. When she did not speak for several minutes the attendance officer said goodbye and left, feeling uneasy.

Back at his office, he described what had happened during his visit to

the Otero home to the supervisor of the district's guidance program, who said she thought that Mrs. Otero must be emotionally disturbed and that someone ought to get her husband to take her to see a doctor. The attendance officer then called the number Maria had given him. He told Jesus on the phone about his visit and that he would have to do something about getting his children to school. He added that he thought Jesus should know that he had found Maria's behavior strange and that he thought she might be sick. He suggested that Jesus should take her to see a doctor.

Accordingly, Jesus took Maria to see a doctor in a local public clinic the following day. A Spanish-speaking aide interviewed her for the purpose of filling out the fact sheet of her record and, at the end, asked her why she wanted to see the doctor. Maria told the aide that she had asthma attacks. Her statement was duly noted in the area of the record sheet marked "chief complaint." After a three-hour wait, Maria saw the doctor who asked her about her asthmatic attacks. Maria could not speak English and the doctor could not speak Spanish, so another Spanish-speaking aide was enlisted to act as interpreter. Maria described her episodes of shortness of breath, and the doctor told her that what she described did not sound like asthma. He listened to her chest with his stethoscope and said he could hear nothing abnormal. He scheduled her to have a chest X-ray and some routine blood and urine tests later in the week and gave her an appointment for two weeks hence to see him again. He told her if she had another attack to come back

directly to his office so he could listen to her chest during the attack.

The very next evening, Maria and Jesus appeared back at the clinic. That morning Jesus had insisted Maria take the children to school. He had returned in the evening to find that she had not done so, and he had become angry. He was fed up with her fears and complaints, especially since the doctor had found nothing wrong with her. He had shouted at her and stomped out of the apartment to find his cronies. He had come home late, slightly drunk, and feeling somewhat remorseful over his outbreak of anger, to find Maria seated in the kitchen gasping for breath and seemingly unable or unwilling to talk to him. He had become alarmed and had awakened his oldest child to tell her that she would have to watch over the others while he took Maria to the emergency room.

The surgical resident in the emergency room, who spoke Spanish, questioned Maria and Jesus and learned why she was there and that she had been there at the clinic the day before. He read the note the previous doctor had written which concluded with: “Diagnosis deferred, possible anxiety reaction with hyperventilation syndrome. Rule out bronchial asthma.” He listened to Maria’s chest and heard no signs of asthma. He then asked her if she was afraid of something. Maria told him she was very much afraid of the men in the hall who wanted to kill her. He asked Jesus about this fear, and Jesus said it was nonsense. He then asked Maria why they would want to kill

her. She answered “Perhaps because of the curse.” The resident doctor asked what she meant, and she told him of the old woman back in the village who had put a curse on her. The doctor then took Jesus aside and said that he thought Maria might be suffering from a mental illness, but that, since he was not a psychiatrist, he could not be sure. He told Jesus that about a mile away at a large medical center there was a twenty-four-hour walk-in psychiatric service. He said he would call there and tell them to expect Jesus and Maria. The clinic ambulance would take them there.

The psychiatrist at the walk-in clinic talked to both Jesus and Maria at some length. He then wrote out a report that listed Maria’s symptoms as follows: frequent panic attacks, breakdown of social function, somatic delusions (asthma) and paranoid delusions, seclusiveness, breakdown of judgment, little or no insight. He described her affect as labile. He ended with a diagnosis of acute schizophrenic reaction, precipitated by stress (culture shock) or moving. He was inclined to give her tranquilizers and send her home with an appointment to come to the psychiatric outpatient clinic. Two things, however, changed his mind. First, he asked Maria if she had ever wanted to kill herself. Maria had answered that she had begun to think of it very recently. Second, when he told Jesus that his wife was mentally ill, Jesus had appeared reluctant to take her home, saying he feared what she might do to the children. Jesus, who was given no further explanation by the doctor, was responding to his concept of mental illness. Crazy people in his mind

were people who got out of control and harmed others. While he could hardly believe that Maria could do such a thing, he had ceased to be certain the moment the doctor told him that Maria was mentally ill. The psychiatrist, in the end, decided that Maria should be hospitalized for a while, not long, he told Jesus. Maria protested at first, but when the doctor emphasized that she would be safer in the hospital, and when Jesus promised he would see her every day and see to it the children were all right, she agreed reluctantly.

Maria stayed in the hospital for four weeks. She was given rather large doses of tranquilizers at first, which made her lethargic, and Jesus found her uncommunicative and strange. The doses were lowered over the last week of her stay, and she seemed to become her old self again. She no longer expressed the idea that the junkies in the hall wanted to kill her or that her trouble was due to the old woman's curse. She accepted the doctor's explanation that she had had a nervous breakdown and was now better. She made friends with some other Spanish-American women on the ward, and when she left she seemed much happier than at any time since her arrival in New York.

Beginning with the night of her hospitalization, however, things had gone from bad to worse for Jesus. Returning to the apartment, devastated by the discovery that his wife was mentally ill, he had tried to take stock. First of all, he was broke. He had not been able to save anything since his family had

arrived. He still owed Juan the money for his original loan, and now he would have doctor and hospital bills. His job provided no insurance. Now he did not see how he could even keep up his job without help from somewhere. Someone had to care for the children. He called Juan to tell him what had happened. Juan suggested he try to get Maria's sister to come to New York to take care of the children. In the meantime, he would try to get one of his girlfriends to watch the children for a few days. Jesus said he had no money to bring Maria's sister to New York. Juan did not offer to lend him more, and Jesus did not want to ask him to do so.

Jesus stayed home from work for two days. The third morning one of Juan's girlfriends appeared, and he was able to go to work. He paid the girl a few dollars that night, and, for the next week, she spent her days at the apartment. Then she announced she was sorry, but she could not help any longer. Juan could find no one else to help, but one of the men Jesus had come to know on his job got his wife to agree to take care of the children at her own home while Jesus was working. She lived a half-hour by subway from the Lower East Side, however, and after a few days, she, too, said she had done all she could do. Jesus missed more work, and his boss called and said he would have to get back to work or be replaced. Jesus spoke to the doctor about having Maria come home, but the doctor said it would be at least another week, since he did not want to send her home until the dosage of the drugs she was being treated with could be brought down to maintenance levels. He

referred Jesus to the social worker on the service where Maria had been hospitalized. The social worker had called around to various homemaker services but unearthed no promise of immediate help. She stayed with the children the next day, getting the two oldest to school and keeping the youngest with her through the day. But she could not continue to help this way, and Jesus missed work the next two days. The result was that his employer called and told him not to bother coming back. He had been replaced on the job.

Two days later Maria came out of the hospital. She was still taking drugs, which sometimes made her sleepy, but to Jesus she seemed better. She was determined, however, to go back to Puerto Rico. Jesus was able to borrow a little money from Juan for food for the next week. He also found a part-time job washing dishes in another diner. But over the next two weeks it became clear that they could not make ends meet. Accordingly, when the social worker from the hospital came to visit, Jesus agreed to let her help them apply for welfare payments. Jesus got some coaching from some of his cronies on how to deal with the welfare department. He was told that any money he earned would be deducted from the check, but that, if the welfare department thought he had abandoned his wife and was not to be found, his wife could get the full check, and if he could then find a job he could save money and get himself out of debt. He was uneasy about this plan, since it was dishonest, but he saw no other way of getting out of the trouble he was in. He was afraid

Maria would get sick again. If she were on welfare, she could also get Medicaid help. He talked with Maria about this plan. She agreed to tell the welfare worker that he had disappeared, as long as Jesus would agree to let her and the children go back to Puerto Rico as soon as they could save the money. Accordingly, Jesus moved back to Juan's apartment and Maria began collecting the welfare check.

Two weeks later Jesus was able to find another job as a short-order cook, and he began paying Juan back and saving money for his family's return to Puerto Rico. He spent weekends and some evenings with his family, but he and Maria lived in constant fear that their collusion would be discovered by the welfare department. They were especially afraid they would be discovered by the social worker from the hospital who would tell the welfare worker. As a result of this fear, Jesus's visits got less and less frequent.

In the meantime, Maria was again finding life very difficult. She was beginning again to have more anxiety attacks, including the sense of being unable to breathe. Some days she was afraid to go out to take her children to school, but she now allowed them to go by themselves. This frightened her more, however, and she lived in constant fear that something would happen to them on the street. She would not let them out to play after school hours. The children, who became bored and restless while cooped up in the apartment, fought frequently with each other, and she felt she could no longer

control them, especially the boy, Julio. The social worker who came to visit, seeing the return of Maria's fears, raised the question of whether she might not benefit from another stay in the hospital. Maria objected. She did not want to go back to the hospital. Her self-esteem was at an all-time low, and she felt she would be all right again if she could just get back to her village. She could not see how the hospital could help her. The next time the social worker came to visit, she kept her children quiet and did not answer the door.

It took Jesus about four months to get out of debt and save enough money for the trip back to Puerto Rico. But, finally, the entire family boarded the plane for the trip back. When they arrived in their village they were greeted warmly, and a friend made room for them until they found a place to live. Maria's family and friends were shocked at her appearance on their arrival. But within a few weeks she seemed her old self. She was back on the streets of her village with her sisters and her friends. She was happy again. Before her supply of tranquilizers ran out, she stopped taking them.

Jesus, however, was far from happy. He was again scrambling to find money. There was no work in the fields for him, though finding such work was only a matter of time. He did odd jobs for the local storekeeper. He did enjoy seeing his friends, but he could not shake the feeling of failure. He had kept aside enough money to return to New York, and within a few weeks he had decided that was what he would do. Maria did not want him to go, but

when he became adamant that he could see nothing for himself in the village but years of sameness ahead, she could not argue. Accordingly, Jesus went back to New York. He lived with Juan again, found a job and began saving money. Before long, lonely for a woman, he began to take out some of the girls he met through Juan. And, before long, Maria realized she was not missing Jesus very much. He was in New York, which was a place she wanted to forget.

Jesus and Maria's son, Julio, was eight years old when Jesus returned to New York. He missed his father desperately when the latter first left. Through habit, he kept looking for him to appear. Then he would suddenly realize Jesus was not going to appear, and it would make him feel very sad. Sometimes when this happened he would go off by himself and cry. Other times, he would feel very angry at his father for having left, and, as time went by, he got more and more angry at his mother, too, because she did not seem to care very much that his father was gone. There were other angry boys in the village like him, some of them angry for the same reasons.

Julio was a lithe and handsome boy who was well coordinated, and he was a good fighter. He fought readily when provoked, and with the pervasive feelings of anger he felt so often, he was easily provoked. He was a bright boy, but he did poorly in school because he could not keep his mind on the work. His teacher tried to help him, but her attention made him feel embarrassed in front of the others in the schoolroom, and then he felt angry again, and he had

trouble paying attention to what she was trying to teach. He fell behind the rest of the class. His fights with other boys became more numerous. When they sometimes called him dumb he would strike back, and his reputation as a troublemaker began to grow. He began to stay away from school more and more often.

Maria despaired at her son's behavior. Julio was sometimes nasty to her, and often she did not know where he was. She tried to talk to him often, but he would listen sullenly and not answer. His behavior did not change. Finally, in desperation, she tried beating him. This only made him more sullen, and, when one day he exploded and fought her back, she stopped.

During the more than two years of Jesus's absence, his letters had become less and less frequent. Although the money he sent arrived like clockwork every month, the money order was often all that was in the envelope. Maria knew that Jesus must have other women or, perhaps, even another woman. She did not really expect a man like him to do without a woman. Sometimes, as she lay alone at night, she herself needed a man to the point of desperation. She sometimes felt she was wasting the best years of her life. She was an attractive woman, and since the men of the village knew she was without her husband, there was no lack of opportunity. But she had been taught very strictly that a good woman must remain faithful to her husband. And the village was small, so that even if she took a man secretly, her actions

would not remain secret very long.

Maria thought about going back to New York with her family to live with Jesus, but she became frightened and her breath became short even thinking about it. So she began to write Jesus more and more often telling him how much she needed him, begging him to come back to the village.

It made her unhappy sometimes when she realized that her letters did not always fit her feelings. She vaguely knew that it was not Jesus especially she wanted. There were times when she had to make a special effort to remember his face. It was somebody she wanted, somebody to be her man and to help her with Julio.

Jesus answered some of her letters. He said he could not come back to live in the village because there was nothing for a man to do there. He was working for a construction company now and was in the union. His bosses liked him, and there was a chance he could become a foreman. He could not leave. He encouraged her to come to New York. But his encouragement was not very forceful, and Maria could tell that his heart was not in it. But she kept on writing. After a few months of these letters, Jesus wrote that he was coming back to the village, not to stay, but to visit. He had two-weeks vacation from his job and had saved enough money for the fare.

Jesus had been away for two and a half years. He seemed much older

and more self-assured to Maria when he arrived. And she thought he looked handsome. He was different in many ways. He talked much more, and sometimes his talk was about things that she could not really get into place in her thoughts. It was not that she could not understand him, she told herself, but he seemed to be talking of things important to another world than her own. He made her feel vaguely stupid. She had been right when she had thought his heart was not in his letters when he asked her to come to New York. Although he was now asking her face to face, it was clear that he was hoping she would refuse. She did, and she sensed the relief he tried to hide. She told him that New York had made her sick and that even the thought of returning made her begin to feel that way again.

It was several days after he arrived before he made love to her. Lying in his arms, she realized that the two of them had, in many ways, become strangers. By the time the first week of Jesus's stay had passed, both he and Maria knew they would never live together as man and wife again. Their realization remained unspoken, but their talk turned to what to do about their children, especially Julio.

During these first days of his visit, knowing of Julio's troubles, Jesus had tried to get close to his son. His efforts had ended in frustration. Although Julio had stayed near Jesus almost everywhere he went, he had become sullen and silent whenever Jesus tried to talk to him. The only time he smiled and

seemed more open was when Jesus would play catch with him in the village street. But when Jesus tried to turn their talk from baseball to school or to Julio himself, Julio's sullenness returned. Early in the second week of his stay Jesus realized that a five-dollar bill was missing from his pocket. When he asked Maria if she had seen it, Maria said she had not. When further search proved fruitless, Maria said she suspected that Julio had taken it. She broke down and cried then and poured out her despair and helplessness about Julio's behavior. She begged Jesus to do something. Jesus could not think of anything to do. He had not been confronted with Julio's behavior this way before. He was not at all certain Julio had taken his money, and he did not want to accuse him of it unless he was sure. He thought that if he did, and he was mistaken, that Julio would be so hurt he would never talk to him again.

Days passed, and Jesus felt more and more unhappy about Julio and himself. Several times he thought Maria was about to ask him to take Julio back to New York with him when he returned. But she never asked him, and he was not sure whether the idea was hers or purely his. He was torn in two directions by the thought. Having Julio in New York, he knew, would drastically change his life there, and he was not at all sure what would happen to Julio. There were so many ways for a boy to get into trouble on the streets there. Although he kept his thoughts about his idea to himself, he began to get an eerie feeling that somehow the decision had been made and that, even though no one had even spoken about this possibility, Julio would be going

back with him. Finally, two days before he was due to leave, he blurted out a question to Julio. He asked his boy if he had ever wanted to come live in New York with his father. For a moment Julio looked like he was about to cry, but he did not. It seemed to Jesus that a long time passed before Julio nodded his head. Two days later, using money Maria had saved from Jesus's checks, Jesus bought a ticket for Julio, and the two of them boarded the plane.

Here I must stop and say a word about my own involvement in the above story. At the time that Maria was hospitalized in New York City, I had recently begun to work in the neighborhood health center to which Jesus had taken her on the night of her "breakdown." I had become interested in the seemingly large number of recently arrived Puerto Rican women who were showing symptoms similar to Maria's. I had alerted the emergency room staff to notify me when such situations appeared there and, accordingly, had been told about Maria on the morning after Maria's hospitalization. Subsequently, while Maria was in the hospital, I visited her. I also paid a visit to Jesus and to the attendance officer. The purpose of my visits was to collect some data I hoped to use as part of my effort to understand why so many such women seemed to be so devastated by the transition from Puerto Rico to New York. I also followed what happened to Jesus, Maria, and their family until their return to Puerto Rico. I had written a rough version of their story, trying as much as I could to do so from their vantage point. I had put it away in a folder in my files where it had stayed for six years until I pulled it out again as a

result of the following events.

Having been asked by Gerald Caplan, the editor of this book, to contribute a chapter having to do with the delivery of services for adolescents, I had written the conceptual presentation that appears later in this chapter and had been casting about in my head for a story about an adolescent which I could use to illustrate the points I had made. I had settled on another story, and, a bit frantically, since I was already late in submitting my chapter, I had begun to write it. Then I ran into Jesus.

I was hurrying through the lobby of a West Side Manhattan hospital heading for a committee meeting when I saw him. I was late for the meeting, and I think I would have blocked out my recognition of him had he not been so obviously in distress. My attention was caught first by the look of pain on his face, and it was a moment before I realized who he was. Even then, my impulse was to hurry on, but his eyes caught mine, and I could not. I went up to him and said hello. He seemed in a daze, and there were tears on his cheeks. I thought he did not remember me, so I told him who I was, and how and where we had touched before. His tears welled up, and he began to cry. Then he told me his son was dead. Julio had died sometime the night before in the hospital emergency room of an overdose of heroin. He had been fourteen years old.

We sat down in the lobby, Jesus and I, and talked. I talked to him twice more after that, and from these talks I was able to reconstruct the rest of the story above, and some of what happened after Jesus brought Julio back to New York. I will shorten this latter part of the story since it is a repetitious saga of hopelessness and despair well known to those who are trying to help people in our big cities.

When Jesus and Julio arrived in New York, Jesus once again enrolled his son in school. Julio was never able to make it there. Within two months he was suspended for fighting. Jesus, like Maria, tried to control him with physical punishment, to no avail. Julio was then brought to court two times in the next six months, the first time for injuring another boy's eye in a street fight, the second time for stealing a bicycle. At the second appearance the judge remanded him to a state training school.

According to Jesus, at the training school two things happened. Julio learned to read, and he began to experiment with drugs. He stayed there for nearly a year before returning home to stay with Jesus. Not long after he had returned, Jesus had come home one night and found him lying on the floor. He was fully conscious but strangely euphoric. When he announced to Jesus he was taking heroin, Jesus had again become angry and yelled at him. Julio had retorted that he did not care what Jesus thought and then had gone to bed. Later Jesus heard him call for his mother in his sleep. The next day Julio did

not come home, and Jesus did not see him alive again.

Throughout this time, Jesus and Julio had been involved with a veritable multitude of people who tried to help. Julio had been "treated" briefly during his disastrous New York stay by two psychiatrists and a school psychologist. Involved at other times had been a school guidance counselor and three social workers, one from the court clinic, one from the training school, and one from the psychiatric service in the hospital where I had met Jesus. The last of the psychiatrists he saw was also working in that hospital. He had seen Julio only once, right after Jesus had discovered his son's heroin addiction. The note of that visit in the boy's hospital chart, which I looked up, was sparse. It said only three things: (1) that the psychiatrist had not been able to get Julio to talk much about himself, (2) that the psychiatrist suspected Julio's behavioral problems were the result of an "underlying schizophrenic process," and (3) that Julio needed a "residential program for adolescent addicts" of which there was none quickly available.

A nagging and useless guilt has accompanied me as I have compiled the last segment of this story. At best, it is a story of massive failure of the helping systems. At worst, it is a story in which the helping systems contributed to the final tragic end. I keep thinking back to the first time Jesus and Maria asked for help, and telling myself that if I had known then what I know now I could have changed the story. I think I could have. To tell you how, I must present

the conceptual issues about which I had written just before my last contacts with Jesus.

One of the difficulties in writing these days is that the nature of life, at least in urban America, is such that it seems increasingly impossible to address human problems within the framework and idiom of any single discipline. I find myself bouncing from one vantage point to another, speaking sometimes as a psychiatrist, sometimes as a public health worker, sometimes as a behavioral scientist, sometimes as an epistemologist, sometimes as an ecologist, sometimes as a father concerned about the future of his children, and sometimes as a man simultaneously concerned about himself and other human beings.

From some of these vantage points I am less than erudite, and often it is difficult to find language, since I cannot stick to the idiom of one discipline. So be it. We live in an era of rapid and accelerating social change which is becoming so rapid that there seems no other way to capture what is happening at a point in time than to pounce on it from many directions and to hope in this fashion to understand a little for a moment of where we are. In the end, of course, what one man captures in this way may have more to do with where he is than with where we are. But, in today's world, that is the best any one man can do, I think. At any rate, much of what follows is not really a psychiatric essay written by a psychiatrist. It is rather one man's

perception while circling around some issues that seem important.

The incredible growth of human technology during the past quarter century is teaching us much. We are, for example, learning more and more about how the human brain processes information. Despite the continued elusiveness of a full understanding of precise mechanisms, we can be reasonably certain now that the biologically mature human brain, like its extension, the computer, requires prior organization, that is to say, programming, if it is to effectively carry out its data-processing function. Some programs are built into the species and are passed on to individuals through the process of genetic transfer. But cybernetic understanding has taught us that, as part of the process of growth and maturation, the brain is fully capable of programming and reprogramming itself in increasingly complex ways. The brain can accomplish this through learning, when and if it receives sufficient information input delivered in such a way as to allow such a process to occur, and providing that prior programming is such that it allows the information in question to enter the space in which the storing and processing take place.

Before continuing, I had better say a word about how I am using the word “program”, lest I sound as if I am robotizing human beings. Nothing could be further from my intention. (1) Obviously, human beings are living systems with all of the unique properties inherent therein. (2) They possess

human capacities shared by no other living organism. (3) Human programs are of a complexity far beyond the capacity of even the most sophisticated of today's computers. (4) Human programs contain affective components that are not fully reproducible with current technology. The use of the word "program" however, becomes justifiable, in my opinion, when we recognize that human beings do, nevertheless, respond individually and collectively in repetitive ways, given fixed conditions and the same input. (We now have a reproducible model of what Freud tagged the "repetition compulsion.") In this sense, the computer analogy holds. Also, I would like to point out that it is the use of symbolism in thought, or, in other words, the way man processes information, that makes him unique, not his capacity to feel, as some contend. There is abundant evidence that all mammals, at least, have feeling responses. Feelings, furthermore, are a form of information in the cybernetic sense.

It is heuristically useful, in my opinion, to think of learned human programs according to the numbers of human beings who share them. Those programs shared by all people, or by very large segments of humanity, that determine the structural links between programs shared by smaller segments are probably what we refer to most often as epistemological. When we talk of "universal man," "Eastern man," or "Western man," we are referring to prototypes directed by this order of programming. Therefore, a rough subdivision of epistemologies would include Western, Eastern, and universal. I shall refer to these programs herein as first-order programs.[1]

We use a variety of adjectives to describe programs shared by large numbers of people, but less in number than those who share epistemological programs. A list of such adjectives might include “cultural,” “political-economic” (ideological), “scientific-disciplinary” (theoretical), and, perhaps, “theological.” These are second-order programs.

Another group of programs, involving still fewer people, would be generally subprograms of the above and might be called “social systems programs” (third-order programs). These would consist of those programs shared by those who populate organized systems of many sizes, such as governmental systems, political parties, social welfare systems, and corporations. The programs shared by health workers in health systems would be included in this group.

Families, both nuclear and extended, and educational systems share additional programs, which should, I believe, be thought of separately from other social systems programs because of their special relevance to the growth, development, and socialization of children.

Finally, some programs occur as idiosyncratic outcomes of an individual’s experience, programs that are unshared and unique to the individual. These fourth-order programs determine much of that which we call individuality and, perhaps, creativity.

I would like to emphasize that I am not attempting here to classify human programs. What I mean to suggest is simply some rough divisions that are heuristically useful. They also allow me to make a point. I believe that mankind is beginning to understand that members of our species must stop bickering and killing one another over cultural, ideological, theoretical, social, familial, and individual differences and turn at least a major portion of our attention to an even more basic issue, namely, those differences that create conflict between large groups, resulting from what I have called epistemological programs. In order to understand differences, of course, we must first understand the nature of these programs.

I submit that three basic epistemological programs are currently discernible on "spaceship earth." That program with which we have been most familiar here in the United States might be called the Western epistemological program. The precise historical origins of this program are, of course, buried in the darkness of unrecorded history, but teleologically, it seems likely that the events that shaped the program as it now exists, were, at least in part, the same events that formed the notion of monotheism. The image of the omniscient, omnipotent individual, coupled with the notion of a single truth, and the dichotomized polarities of good and evil, right and wrong, healthy and sick, and so on seems to have formed the basis of Western thought. To this day, Western man emphasizes the primacy of the individual and organizes his thinking in terms of such polarities. This epistemological

program demands, for example, that the second-order ideological programs of communism and capitalism be considered one good and one evil. When such a program directs the thinking and actions of nations, conflict is inevitable and irreconcilable, since, to maintain its position, one must be read against the other.

Similar conflicts occur in the social organization directed by third- and fourth-order social programs, which, in turn, are directed by either ideology. In our country, organized under the capitalist ideology, people are programmed in competitive techniques. The "good" thing to do is to strive to win in a social environment that values socioeconomic and/or academic success. Thus, the individual within this society has assimilated a program that directs him to climb vertical socioeconomic and academic ladders. The rules and regulations of this social program state that such behavior is good, and lead our citizens to feel good about themselves when they succeed in ladder climbing. Such success is viewed as an individual achievement. The image created is that somewhere in the clouds at the top of the ladder is a position of ultimate wealth and power and omniscience (God in his heaven).

Our behavioral sciences have evolved their body of theory largely as a result of the focus on the primacy of the individual as directed by the Western epistemological program. People either make it or they do not, and if they do not, instead of being considered good and feeling good, they are tagged with a

variety of labels having evil connotations. They are considered sick, criminal, lazy, or stupid. It is again necessary to have both elements of the usual dichotomy present. That is to say, if some people are to be considered as having made it, there must be some who do not make it. Without both there is no yardstick against which to measure what constitutes making it. Therefore, our society needs to perpetuate the presence of a group of people that are sick, criminal, lazy, or stupid. However, since the individual man is prized, it is not possible under this epistemological program for our society to fully ignore those individuals at the bottom of the ladder. Therefore, we have also evolved a number of institutions designed to care for them—social welfare systems, mental health systems, social rehabilitation programs, and the like. The dilemma of which we are becoming increasingly conscious is that these so-called systems must carry out their work in the context of the epistemological dichotomy described above. They must carry on their work in two ways: One way reflects their origins as helping organizations; the other reflects the requirement that they maintain the social structure that created them. Therefore, they cannot go too far in their helping functions lest they bite the hand that feeds them. They cannot hoist too many of those they help too high on the competitive level. They cannot be so successful that the balance between those at the top and those at the bottom of the ladder is seriously upset.

Stability is maintained in this arrangement through the use of blame

systems,[2] which are, it would seem, the inevitable outcome of the good-evil dichotomy. Everyone can feel like a good guy despite the presence of clear injustice if he can identify the bad guys or the intractable set of bad conditions. For example, the tragedy at Kent State as the ultimate prototypical expression of campus violence set off a welter of charges and countercharges as to who or what was to blame—the weak college presidents, communist influence, permissiveness, the fascist national guard, lack of presidential leadership, you name it.

In space-time terms, the Western epistemological program is essentially a linear program. Space is filled with vertical, spiritual, academic, and socioeconomic ladders, and time is thought of as clock time—horizontal, sequential, and ticking off at a steady rate. Progress is defined as that which creates higher rungs on the ladders, and knowledge is accumulated through a set of parallel linear efforts based on inductive or deductive exploration of linear cause and effect relationships. We call this "specialization," and we have evolved a variety of specialized disciplines, each with its own language, to deal with various pieces of the human condition. The specialized operations that knowledge accumulated in this fashion suggests are organized into programs to solve problems. The recognition that such specialization limits the range of variables that can be used to explore cause and effective relationships has led each discipline to join in so-called interdisciplinary efforts. Such efforts, however, are usually so caught in the

vertical hierarchical aspects of our social disorganization and in language difficulties that they are barely able to use limited input from outside the dominant discipline of the organizational system that mounts the program. Thus, we have evolved hospitals whose physicians (those of the dominant discipline) are helped by ancillary staff. We have social welfare agencies and schools who hire psychiatrists as consultants and psychiatric clinics who use social workers to see collateral clients. Psychiatric clinics establish educational therapy programs, housing agencies hire social workers to deal with problem families, and so forth. Also, the notion that to solve a problem with a program staffed by those whose discipline gives them a claim to be experts in that problem leads to a proliferation of programs as problems arise. We require money (our funding organizations routinely fund programs), and each program is concerned with delving deeper into the causes of the problem by narrowing the field in order to gain more detailed expertise. Each discipline gradually assumes a vantage point that diverges from those of other disciplines, and at the interfaces between disciplines there is overt or covert war. Complex problems seldom get solved. Instead, progress is made.

The second discernible epistemological program might be called the Eastern epistemology. I am on thin ice when I lump all Eastern thought into one program. But in the service of brevity in this chapter, I will comment on only one aspect shared by several Eastern programs in terms of some areas of

similarity to and difference from the Western epistemological program.

The Eastern program, too, emphasizes the value of the individual man and the notion of attainment in a concept of space filled with a vertical hierarchy. The Eastern hierarchy, however, has not been classically primarily socioeconomic or formally academic. It has been spiritual. The ultimate attainment has been defined as a state of oneness with the forces of the universe.

The Eastern view of time, like the Western view, is linear, but, paralleling the emphasis on spiritual attainment, the view of life and death differs markedly. While the Western program focuses Western man on a single lifetime, during which he must qualify for a Godlike existence after death, the Eastern program gives each man more time; it is assumed that many lifetimes are needed to attain that final rung at the top of the spiritual ladder, lifetimes that are not even viewed as necessarily human since the hierarchical program includes all living things. Just where a given individual resides on the hierarchy of species, and on such ladders as the socioeconomic, is thought to be preordained by his performance during the last lifetime. Thus, socioeconomic competitiveness has been less, and the value of the preservation of life in a single lifetime has also received less weight. To the Westerner, life in the East has seemed cheap, and fatalism about one's status has seemed to be the rule. As in the Western program, a kind of universal

blame system also maintains the stability of this arrangement. The blame is put on fate.

Currently, as a result of increases in East-West interchange, Western intrusion into the populations sharing the Eastern epistemology is leading gradually to change in the countries involved (that is, socioeconomic hierarchies have become ascendant), while, to a much lesser extent, the Eastern epistemology has influenced some of those programmed the Western way.

What I wish to emphasize here, however, before going on to the third epistemological program, is that, regardless of differences in space-time and life-death concepts, both Eastern and Western epistemological programs emphasize the ultimate attainment of the individual man within vertical hierarchies in linear time. There is little or no concern for the viability of the species in either program except, perhaps, for the implicit notion that the survival of the species will be automatically ensured by the creation and maintenance of conditions that promote the possibilities of individual attainment.

Despite the present state of the societies based on the Western epistemology, which I have depicted with somewhat pejorative language, the Western program, in evolutionary terms, has been extraordinarily

productive. It spawned what we have called science, which in turn provided knowledge that was used for the development of technologies, which in turn produced extraordinary tools to be used for the acquisition and storage of more knowledge, ultimately useful for survival purposes. Whether or not our species would have been better off if this form of civilization had not evolved is a moot question. It is unanswerable, and, even if there were a ready answer, it would, at this time, be useless. The Western program, as a relatively recent part of the evolutionary process, is with us, together with its products which have become necessary for survival. Because there are so many of us, survival would not be possible if we threw out what we have learned. What the Western program has not and cannot produce is a way of thinking that allows us to collectively learn how to use the knowledge and technology we have accumulated during the era of its ascendancy. It is time for epistemological reprogramming, and thanks to what we have learned in the era of Western thought, we now know that this can be done. Reprogramming according to the Eastern epistemology, I believe, will not suffice, since fundamental space-time concepts in Eastern and Western programs are not all that different.

This brings me to the third epistemological program. I began by describing this program as the universal program, a description that fits in one sense, since like the Eastern program this program begins with a view of man in the time and space of his universe. The term “universal,” however, is confusing when it is recognized that the program is not universally shared.

Also, the nature of the program is such that the term "ecological,"[3] as originally defined, seems more appropriate. Therefore, I will henceforth refer to the third program as the ecological epistemological program.

It seems likely that at least the rudiments of the ecological program have been around on our planet for millennia, if one accepts the likelihood that primitive man could not have survived without developing means of acting collectively. Isolated tribes, who lived directly off the natural resources of the territory they occupied, would, one would expect, develop tribal structures that were designed to enhance the survival chances of the whole tribe. The prolongation of individual life was probably seen as dependent on programs designed for group survival by maintaining a balance with nature. This way of thinking is the keynote of the ecological epistemology. What information we have relevant to so-called primitive tribal cultures that exist at present or have existed in the recent past show, rather clearly I believe, this basic tenet of the ecological program. In the absence of the knowledge accumulated by Western science, efforts to explain natural phenomena are, in these cultures, heavily mystical, but the concern for staying collectively in tune with nature for survival purposes is evident.

Most important, however, is the observation that the ecological epistemological program is now shared by a rapidly growing segment of people throughout the world. A large percentage of those who share this

program presently is made up of those who are growing up in the incredible information environment provided by the evolution of a technology that has allowed millions to see and hear man's escape from the confines of his planet during the occurrence of these events, while at the same time observing the social chaos resulting from the inadequacies of the Western program. A large number of young human beings, together with a smaller number of those no longer so young, having been the continuous recipients of information from sources that span the globe, and, having viewed planet earth from the vantage point of its moon, have become clearly aware of the degree to which our species is hell bent on its own destruction. They begin their thinking with concern for the viability of species man as one living species striving with other living organisms to maintain its survival in its physical environment. Inherent in this program is the recognition that the exclusive focus on the attainment of the individual in hierarchically organized space, a view shared by Western and Eastern programs, is antithetical in the end to individual survival since, if the species disappears, so, of course, do the individuals who comprise it.

While the subprograms of the Eastern and Western epistemologies are well developed, widely shared subprograms have yet to form clearly among those who share the ecological epistemology. Only fragments are discernible, but some trends are apparent. For example, it would appear that most second-order programs (ideological, disciplinary, and theological) may not

develop at all, with the exception of a kind of universal cultural program. Such terms as “post-ideological,” “post-disciplinary,” and “post-theological” have been appearing side by side with the phrase “universal culture” in the new civilization literature. Useful information acquired over the years as these second-order programs evolved in Eastern and Western epistemologies will be used, I believe, in the design of a universal cultural program and in third- and fourth-order programs.

Third-order social systems programs, though poorly formed, seem to be evolving in a direction based on the use of new technology to do more with less in the manner propounded by Buckminster Fuller. The thrust of these new programs would be toward the design of human support systems combining new special configurations of group living with media technology used locally and in networks. The aim would be to link people with people and to provide structural rigidity for groups of people and intergroup relations rather than complex value systems and concomitant blame systems.

And, from this trend, there seems to be emerging an emphasis on the idiosyncratic individual program. People are encouraged to experiment with novelty, to do their own thing, as long as they adhere to a single value system. This value system might be stated as follows: While doing your own thing, you cannot behave in ways counter to ecological necessity or to the maintenance of the integrity of other living beings.

Space in the ecological epistemology is conceived as filled with process in which hierarchical organization appears transiently but not permanently. Space is filled with the model of the universe. It is galactic and planetary. “Spaceship earth” is not a euphemism. It is a serious descriptive phrase. Space is filled with moving, changing, interacting systems. Time is seen as multidimensional. Clock time is conceived as linear and limited in concept. Rates of change, including acceleration and deceleration of rates, are assumed.

Those who share this epistemological program currently tend, in moments of anger, to construct blame systems, but they are short-lived and transient. They have no structural function, and the emphasis on continuous process in multidimensional space-time does not call for the fixing of linear cause-effect relationships.

It may perhaps be unfortunate that a good deal of the activity of those who share the ecological program has been directed at assessing what is wrong with second- and third-order programs (cultural, ideological, disciplinary, theoretical, theological, and social systems programs) developed out of the Western program. The criticism leveled at the ecological thinkers that they should stop carping at the old and come up with something new, or shut up, is probably well taken, if a bit unfair in timing. The problem, however, is that whenever one observes the currently programmed state of

Western society through the template of the ecological perspective, one is seduced by despair into describing what one sees in a kind of desperate outcry that says, “My God, look what we’re doing.” Having said this, I must now confess that I cannot fight the impulse. Since this is an essay about health care, especially mental health care, I propose to describe what one sees, on the terrain of New York City at least, when one looks at our current system of providing help for people who need it, through the eyes provided by the ecological program.

If we momentarily screen out of our vision all but the service systems, what do we see? For the most part, we see vertically organized bureaucratic pyramids standing on the city terrain like windowless skyscrapers, with guards at their doors to assure that no one gets in except those who will accept help in a manner defined by the system inside. (In psychiatric clinics and social agencies we call the guards “intake policies.”) Each intake policy, however, operates differently, and each is considered a separate program to deal with a specific piece of human need.

Inside each skyscraper are workers who operate according to a prescribed linear progression. Doctors, for example, follow a standardized linear procedure. Get the presenting symptoms. Take a history of the development of those symptoms. Do a physical exam for signs of illness. Get what laboratory tests are needed. Make a diagnosis. Treat the illness

diagnosed. Follow up the treatment. If the illness is one with a biological etiology, and a way of treating it is known, the person, who in that setting is no longer a person but rather a patient who belongs to a particular doctor, will get help. The person whose symptoms are part of a set of conditions that include elements of complex life situations originating outside the skin, beyond the purview or competence of the specialist he consults, may not only get no help, he may even have to deal with input from the specialist, which complicates his situation adversely.

Individual people who are parts of families, which are parts of larger systems, and so on, move about on the terrain seeking help for complex problems of living. At the door of each skyscraper they either accept the definition as prescribed or they do not. If they do not, they get no help, so that most often they will accept it.

Thus, what we see are helping systems designed to deal with parts of problems being called on for help by people whose program leads them to believe that whole problems originate within themselves, but who are themselves only parts of problems. A kind of collusion between helper and helpee narrows the view of each. Together they attempt to get the lights back on by replacing the fuse. When it is the fuse that is defective, they succeed, but, too often, it is the whole power network that has broken down, and, unhappily, in the system that has evolved from the Western epistemological

program, there is no one assigned to the task of dealing with the whole network.

Those agencies, especially those of government which one would hope could deal with these conditions, are themselves organized in the same piecemeal fashion. They are, furthermore, populated by people who share the Western epistemology, and while proclaiming the need for integration, continue attempts to solve problems defined in piecemeal fashion by more and more piecemeal programs, which progressively narrow their targets. In typical Western fashion, these agencies and their personnel cling to the notion that this is the right course to take.

Until very recently, failures have almost never been explained as the ultimate result of a basic epistemological program. As mentioned above, the usual way to explain failure is to find someone or some system to blame. Those whose thought is determined by the Western program usually blame some human system near the opposite pole of the socio-politico-economic hierarchy from where they perceive themselves or a system whose second-order programs are the dichotomous opposite of their own. Capitalists will blame communists, and vice versa. The poor blame the rich; the rich, the poor; liberals blame conservatives; and so on ad infinitum. Viewed ecologically, it seems inevitable that this progression of events can lead only to further fragmentation, further construction of blame systems, more conflict

at more interfaces, and a continued rise in the outbreaks of violence, which is currently so frighteningly discernible on the terrain of our lives.

Having succumbed to my impulse to view the world governed by the Western epistemological program through ecological lenses, I fervently wish I could indulge another impulse. If it were possible to shout out of the printed page, I would do so, because I believe that MAN IS AN ENDANGERED SPECIES AS LONG AS THE MOST POWERFUL NATIONS ON EARTH CONTINUE TO CHART A COURSE DETERMINED BY THE WESTERN EPISTEMOLOGICAL PROGRAM. But I also believe that IT IS POSSIBLE TO INTERRUPT OUR HEADLONG RUSH TO OBLIVION BY CHANGING THE WAY WE THINK ABOUT OURSELVES IN OUR WORLD IN THE UNIVERSE, THAT IS TO SAY, BY CHANGING THE EPISTEMOLOGICAL PROGRAM THAT GOVERNS OUR THOUGHT.

By this time, some of you are likely to be asking: What has all this to do with health care, and, especially, mental health? Or, why write all this for this book? The answer, I think, is fairly simple: Because we, as health care professionals, have accepted the task of sustaining the lives of people. We have sold ourselves as those most expert at performing this task for the most part. It is we who have been replacing the fuses and wondering why the lights failed to go on. Ecology has been defined as the study of beginnings and endings of human beings in time and space, that is, with life and death. Is it

not, therefore, our task to confront these issues? It is, of course, obvious from what I have said that I believe strongly that it is not only our task, but also that it is imperative that we get on with it without delay.

Now, let us narrow our sights a bit and zoom down on what is happening at this point in time in that arena we have labeled the field of mental health. Among the growing group of those who share the ecological epistemological program are health professionals of various disciplines who work in programs in this arena. As a result, a few organized systems of response to human need have been appearing here and there in communities under the aegis of mental health programs, which in design and operations flow from the ecological perspective. Since there are fundamental conceptual discontinuities between them and traditional mental health programs, the result is that two discontinuous operational styles now can be seen, each of which shows the characteristics of the epistemological program from which it flows. Let us look briefly at how each operates in space-time.

As we would expect, space in the traditional (Western epistemological) mental health program (a third-order social system program) is filled hierarchically. In the typical organization there is a dominant discipline, usually psychiatry, served by ancillary disciplines. The system responds to people in trouble as those at the bottom of the hierarchy by labeling them "sick" and calling them "patients." There are levels of patienthood determined

by the functional capacity of the patient to successfully fit in and succeed in various arenas of social function. The system decides who is succeeding in school or job, in family roles, in other social contexts. Levels of non-sickness, or mental health, are assigned accordingly. Diagnostic labels describing the kind of sickness carry connotations that slot the patient at various levels. Within single diagnostic categories there are levels, for example, the ambulatory schizophrenic, who is president of the bank, versus the back-ward schizophrenic. The choice of treatment modality frequently depends on which rung the patient occupies on the socioeconomic ladder. The ambulatory schizophrenic bank president is more likely to be seeing a psychoanalyst privately three times a week because he can afford to buy the time, while the back-ward schizophrenic gets shock or chemotherapy and, eventually, nothing but custodial care. The banker may move down on this ladder if he loses his job and his money, but it is unlikely that the back-ward patient will move up in any appreciable way.

Available operating space is usually assigned according to organizational hierarchy. That is to say, the director has a large office, although he may seldom work directly with patients, while the social worker who sees families may have to cram them into a cubbyhole, and aides and students share an office. Time in this system is conceived of as linear clock time. Work going on in the fixed space of offices is also fixed in time in appointment schedules. This is considered efficient use of time even though

the rhythm of appointments does not relate to the rhythm of the patient's life. The two rhythms get into synchrony by chance from time to time or in those instances where the adherence to regularly scheduled appointments is circumvented. The hierarchical nature of the program stands out once again when we recognize that patients are expected to wait till the time slot they are assigned to see their therapist (only when the wait is clearly intolerable can the assigned rhythm be broken), while therapists are not expected to wait for their patients.

Within this system, deviation is allowed under the banner of innovation. Some programs, for example, make home visits, others reach out, and still others even go so far as to abandon offices and move into storefronts or trailers. Most such innovative programs never abandon their fundamental epistemological program, but they do abandon some of the rules of their social system program, at the expense of becoming suspect in the eyes of others in their field. Papers are written on the need for innovation; these also contain warnings about the danger that innovation will not be integrated with sound practice; that is, change is fine as long as nothing fundamental changes or, in other words, as long as change can be rationalized within the basic epistemological program.

Blame systems are discernible throughout this system. Mothers, fathers, siblings, and families as units all come in for their share of blame in the

determination of cause-effect factors, which are considered in explaining the distress of those served. Failures in helping efforts are explained through blame systems. Helpers will blame past and present family relationships, fixed pathology in patients, organizational restrictions in which government, politicians, or administrators are at fault, other helping systems or workers, or, occasionally, themselves for poor results. Sometimes, insufficient knowledge is admitted, but, even in these instances, a blame system seems apparent since there is an assumption that if the experts were closer to omniscience, all could be solved. The limiting aspects of the epistemological program are almost never considered.

To date, very few programs have evolved that are populated by those who share the ecological epistemological program. The differences in space-time concepts show up operationally in such programs only briefly, since they usually develop as offshoots of larger more traditional programs. Such efforts are usually treated as foreign bodies by the parent organizations sooner or later, organizations that, in the absence of an understanding of the epistemological issues, tend to assess these efforts in terms of second-order programs. These programs are, as a result, viewed within an ideological or theoretical dichotomy and are considered too radical. After a period of time, depending on how visible their operations become to the policymakers in the parent body, such programs are either phased out or converted to innovative programs again directed by the Western program. Usually, these programs

are accused of having abandoned sound practice. Until this foreign-body reaction takes over, however, the differences can be momentarily observed.

In these programs, too, one sees what one would expect to see according to the basic epistemological program.

Space is viewed as filled with process (change), which provides its structure. In other words, structure and process are not considered separately. Change is assumed to be proceeding in time at a rate that may be constant or accelerating or decelerating. Processes assume shapes with discernible boundaries, which may be fleeting or may exist for long periods of time; that is, they are relatively stable or unstable. These identifiable shapes are thought of as systems. System stability, which is relative, is thought of as a function of the capacity of the system to control internal processes and to respond to external processes within a viable range. A constant exchange of energy and information between systems is assumed. In general, living systems are thought of as less stable than nonliving systems. These living systems, too, require constant energy and information input. The range of environments within which a living system can survive is thought to be determined by the capacity of the system to store energy and information (for example, a camel can survive in the desert because it can store the elements it needs to produce its own energy in an arid environment, while man can survive there if he has stored the information he needs to allow him to plan to

have camels to carry the elements he needs to survive there). No living system can survive, therefore, without environmental supports. Some organisms, in addition to supports from the physical environment, require support from other organisms. Man, especially, requires information from other men. Our young must learn if they are to survive. People must know what is going on if they are to respond with appropriate action (behavior).

Thus, in the provision of help, the emphasis in such programs is on information collection and the sharing of information and also on the mobilization of needed support systems. Calls for help are viewed as ecological phenomena, as part of the never-ending change process, which emanates from a shape of events occurring at someone's expense. It is assumed that the shape of events can be redirected in a manner that will relieve the distress of the person thus affected. An attempt is made to eliminate factors that tend to fix the shape of the situation encountered, including those factors in the helping system that can contribute such fixatives. Thus, maximum mobility in time and space is sought.

Fixed appointment schedules and exclusive office practice are abandoned. Disciplinary boundaries and hierarchies are avoided. Emphasis is placed on the capacity of the helping system to move rapidly into the space-time of the system of shaped events out of which the call for help came and to effect change using whatever skills are needed in a manner designed to

alleviate the distress therein.

For the sake of clarity, it should be emphasized that, at the time they form, such helping systems are not interested primarily in social systems change. The dichotomous separation between events inside a person's skin and those outside is not made in response to a call for help. It is assumed that the process producing the cry occurs in a shape of events that includes elements from inside the skin and outside over a span of time. Each shape is different, and relief of distress can be obtained only when key elements are affected regardless of where they originate. In my opinion, the argument so frequently encountered currently in the community mental health arena, as to whether social-systems change or intrapsychic change is more relevant to the lives of people, can only occur among those who share the Western epistemology. It is a theoretical (second-order program) conflict in which each position needs the other to survive.

One experience of those among us who have attempted to work in helping systems using the ecological way of thinking is that story after story begins to surface in day-to-day work, each illustrating in some manner how the Western program directs its service systems to simultaneously work for and against their goals. In the limited space available for this presentation, I have only been able to tell one, the story of Maria and Jesus and Julio.

Before sailing off into conceptual space, I wrote that I thought I knew how the Oteros' tragedy could have been averted. From what I have written it is clear, I hope, that I believe the key to that statement is that the problems of the Oteros be confronted by a group of people who order their data according to the ecological epistemology. Let me then present my fantasy of what I fervently wish had happened.

If we pick up the story at the point that the attendance officer has convinced Jesus that he and Maria need help, let us imagine that he knew of a mobile team made up of people with a mix of skills in biological, psychological, and social health care who had enlisted him as a listening post for trouble in his community. Having spotted the trouble, the attendance officer spoke to Jesus about this group that might be able to assist him and Maria with their difficulties and asked his permission to call them. Jesus consented. The attendance officer accordingly called the mobile unit and reported his experience with the Otero family.

Upon receipt of the attendance officer's call, a pair of workers from the mobile unit were dispatched to call on Maria. They had been working in their community for some time, and they were aware of a frequent shape of events that evolved when women from rural Puerto Rico arrived in New York. They knew that the size and complexity of city life were often completely beyond the capacity of these women to absorb. These women had lived in

surroundings that had not prepared them for coping with the city in cognitive terms. They were unable to orient themselves to the complexities, and they rapidly became confused and anxious. These workers knew, too, that women such as Maria, in their efforts to cope without adequate cognitive tools, tended to construct explanations for their fears that were based on their past experience, since they could not explain their dilemma in a manner based on an understanding of their present state. Such explanations, of course, because they were not related to present realities, were, by definition, delusional.

In addition, these mobile workers knew that primary sociopsychological supports for women in Puerto Rico in villages such as Maria's came from other women, not from men (including husbands). The intimacy and chatter and mutual child rearing of the women on the streets of the village made up the major portion of their lives. From experience, the mobile workers also knew that women who arrived in New York and settled near relatives or other women they knew seldom had trouble acclimating themselves to their new environment because the women-to-women supports were immediately established and the newcomer was taught by previous arrivals how to negotiate the city.

Knowing all this in advance, the mobile workers knocked on Maria's door prepared to explore the circumstances of Maria's problem within this context. They found, of course, that these conditions were at issue in

explaining Maria's state. Having verified this, the mobile workers knew how to proceed. They first asked Maria if there was any other woman Maria knew and liked in Puerto Rico who had preceded her to New York City. Maria came up with two names. The workers next arranged to have a telephone installed in the Oteros' apartment. They tracked down the two women Maria had mentioned and arranged for a telephone for them. They also arranged for them to visit Maria, using the unit minibus for transportation the first few times. They encouraged Maria to call these friends on the telephone daily for a while. They then assigned a Puerto Rican volunteer from the community, whom they had recruited for precisely this task, to oversee Maria's education in the geography of the city and the ways to negotiate it. The volunteer introduced her to supermarkets with Spanish-speaking employees. She introduced her to an organized group of Spanish-American mothers who did work for the school to which her children went. She visited Maria almost daily for a few months, babysat for her during the day and on the evenings when Maria and Jesus went to the English class the mobile workers had helped them enroll in. They explored job goals with Jesus and helped him construct a plan to get training for more skilled work with more pay. They helped the Oteros enroll in the neighborhood health center of which the mobile unit was a part. Biopsychosocial family health care was provided in this center by family health units, again made up of people with various skills. Having done these things, the mobile unit turned the job of monitoring the Oteros' life state

over to the family health unit in which they had enrolled, but they remained available and encouraged Maria and Jesus to call them again at any hour of the night or day if they felt the need.

With this kind of help Maria's anxiety fell away. Her delusions never formed, or if they had formed before the mobile unit moved in, they melted rapidly into insignificance. Maria maintained her self-esteem. She was not labeled mentally ill. Instead she recognized that her difficulties were the same as those experienced by many women who had come to the city as she had.

What the rest of the Oteros' story to date might have turned out to be if the helping systems had responded this way, who can say? It is unlikely, of course, that they would have lived happily ever after. But I am reasonably certain that the story would not have progressed as it did. Maria's "schizophrenia" would have been prevented, at least. Jesus would have had a better chance to realize his dream. The Otero family would most likely have remained intact. And, I would like to think, Julio might very well be alive today.

I have ranged over a broad terrain in this chapter, from a story about a single family to a statement that man is an endangered species. Some of what I have tried to say is highly fragmentary or, conversely, highly generalized, especially the efforts to delineate the major tenets of the various

epistemological programs. As a result, many questions can and should be raised that are not confronted here. A dialectic over these issues is badly needed. I have attempted, however, to make one major point, which I would like to reiterate in conclusion.

Western thought has been constructed in such a way so as to facilitate the assemblage of scientific data or information. As a result, man has learned an incredible amount about himself and his universe in a very short time. But most of us who have been programmed according to the Western epistemology find ourselves in a difficult dilemma. The Western program is not useful, and in fact is frequently harmful, when our effort to use our accumulated knowledge is directed by it. The Western program, in my opinion, is, in the end, destructive as the basis of a format for helping one another and for survival of our species. Though perhaps we should maintain the Western program for use in further scientific and technological endeavor, we must reprogram the epistemological program that governs our ways of dealing with one another and with the world and universe we inhabit. As an endangered species, human beings can afford to do no less. We can no longer afford to fail with the Marias and Julios of the world because, when we do so, we may very well be thinking and acting in ways destructive to ourselves and our children. The fact that the Oteros are poor and that they are Puerto Rican is nearly irrelevant. We are all sharing the same boat. We are all Maria, or Jesus, or, perhaps, even Julio.

Notes

1 As usual, I find myself in language trouble. “Epistemology” is the best non-neologistic word I can find to describe what I mean, but I am using it narrowly, in a sense, when I use it to describe only first-order programs.

2 Many will disagree with this language since it is usual to consider value systems as the providers of social stability. In my opinion, in the dichotomy of the Western program, blame systems, which are the other side of the value system coin, are much more useful stabilizers than values.

3 Again, the choice of the adjective “ecological” raises a language problem. In this instance I am using the word “ecology” in the sense of its original definition, which is the study of beginnings and endings in universal time and space. In popular usage, the meaning of the word has been constricted to the point that some use it almost euphemistically to denote environmental cleanliness or aesthetic quality or as a synonym for conservation.