

Six short “personal” stories⁶

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Counting 27 consecutive years in the Family Therapy Unit of the Attica Psychiatric Hospital at Pagrati, there are many things I would like to say about my collaborations, my colleagues and my work, and many more about what I have learned and embraced over the years.

Today, as we honour the Founders of the Family Therapy Unit and celebrate its 30 years of operation, I decided to share with you six short “personal” stories regarding each of the six persons I met and worked with that are no longer members of its staff, as a way to thank them for the years we worked together.

- My first short story is about **Athena, Athena Goka**, who was the head nurse of the Family Therapy Unit from its establishment in 1994 up until her retirement in 2008. Athena is the person who recommended me and the reason I ended up there, back in 1997. I listened and watched her carefully, to learn and understand until I felt prepared, but mainly to validate her choice. Athena knew everything, took care of everything, had all the solutions, and seemed like some kind of “guru” to me. For a long time, I was afraid to pick up the phone if she was not there, in case it was an intake and I could not do it alone. When she was talking on the phone and the second line rang, I made two wishes: that she would answer it simultaneously, – like the “guru” that she was – and that I could make the phone stop ringing by staring at it intently and praying. None of these worked. It took me a while to answer a phone call on my own. Until one day ... she picked up the phone and said: “*Ioanna it is for you...*”. Just like that, I took my first intake. It was February of 1998. I owe her a lot...
- My second short story is about **Katia, Katia Charalabaki**. In 1999 after my genogram presentation in the 3rd year of my training in the “Systemic Approach of Family Therapy”, Katia made a comment that troubled me greatly. It wasn’t so much what she said, but more importantly how right she was. How could she have known? We had only known each other for 2 years and were not yet on first name terms, yet she understood something very personal about me. How was that possible? What she said that day affected me so much that I walked the entire long road home from work, thinking about it all along. The next day I asked her

⁶ This paper is based on a lecture given at a conference held in October 2024 to celebrate the 30 years of operation of the Family Therapy Unit of the Attica Psychiatric Hospital, and a farewell to the founders of the Unit.

how she had known. When she finally explained to me how she came to this comment, her answer touched me deeply and made me realize that Katia has the ability, or intuition, or gift (call it what you will) to “read” behind the words, to “hear” the unspoken, to feel and read your thoughts. What Katia told me that day, was a truth about myself that I had not yet realized. A great skill; a great human being...

- My third short story is about **Eleni, Eleni Motaki**. Eleni was the first to leave the Unit for personal reasons and not retirement, and that made it even harder for me. I wasn’t ready to say goodbye so soon, and I don’t think any of us were. She was my companion every morning the person with whom I shared my first coffee for the start of each day. Eleni is a generous, honest person, with a great sense of humor and a genuine concern for others. When she finally left and handed me her keys it was very hard for me. I could not even let go of her keys. If someone else used them because they had forgotten their own, I would ask for them back on my desk the very next day, where they belonged. It took me a while to “let go” of them, but I can’t say I have done the same with her. She is still a part of me and my life.
- My fourth short story is about **Bianca, Bianca Levi**. Unlike Eleni, when Bianca left, it was as it should be. It was as if we were more ready for it, but she had prepared us too. This farewell had it all: care, gifts, laughter, joy, emotions exactly like her personality. She cared about you, listened to you, didn’t mince her words when she disagreed with you, and would let you know when she was “down”. Our collaboration was perfect and I always remember her with love.
- My fifth short story is about **Fotis, Fotis Kotsidas**. I chose to tell you a more recent story that happened in 2018. Fotis used to start every sentence he uttered, with my name: *“Ioanna, how many appointments do I have today?”*, *“Ioanna, do we have pending issues?”*, *“Ioanna, do you remember this family?”*. In 2018 my father died and I was going through a difficult time. During that period Fotis didn’t ask me for anything, didn’t request anything; it was as if I were invisible. He gave me all the space and time I needed to recover, not because I asked him for it, but because he had the ability to understand what I needed. Our working relationship was more than that, and for that I deeply appreciate him.
- Finally, my sixth short story is about **Athanasia, Athanasia Kati**. Fair, honest, generous, ethical, caring, and always available to me. A precious

relationship. In 2014 she suggested that I participate in two experiential courses of our three-year training program: “the name story” and “the birth order”, and since then we’ve been doing them together.

This brought us even closer. The day we gathered to say goodbye to her, I was the only one who couldn’t utter a single word about her. I had spent endless hours at home rehearsing, thinking of what I would say about our relationship, our work together and our closeness, and now I was so emotional that I could not say a word. Now I know why, and I will admit it to you, to her and to myself. I will never say goodbye to her!!! She was and remains a very important person for me and the Family Therapy Unit. This is a lifelong relationship.

However, beyond these six individuals with whom we have served together since 1997, I work with seven more people who represent the present and the future of the Family Therapy Unit and I would like to thank them as well. These people are: **Kia Thanopoulou, Katerina Kostakopoulou, Georgia Moschakou, Ioanna Papaioannou, Nikos Marketos, Maria Stathaki and Ersi Tsopanaki.** I could also tell a story about each of them but that can wait for another time.

In closing, I would like to refer to the Psychiatric reform that will take place. I won’t hide that I worry for the future of Mental Health. I don’t know what changes will occur...

I only know that half of our name: Attica Psychiatric Hospital, will not be the same, but I hope that the other half - **Family Therapy Unit** - will remain.

What I wish... and hope... the most is that the quality and way of working in the Family Therapy Unit will remain the same, as will its staff.

Because... the story behind the name... is more important... than the name itself.

“It is a story of 30 whole years!!!”

Ioanna Anagnostopoulou