

**MEMORIAL**

# Martin Jordan Remembered

Hayley Marshall<sup>1</sup> and Joe Hinds<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Unaffiliated, Buxton, UK.

<sup>2</sup>School of Psychology, Politics and Sociology, Canterbury Christ Church University, Canterbury, UK.

In January this year, a leading internationally recognised advocate of ecotherapy, Martin Jordan, after a struggle with depression, took his own life. Known to many through his workshops, teachings and publications, we wish to celebrate and remember Martin here as a multifaceted contemporary in the field of ecotherapy, encompassing his human and personal side as well as his academic and professional persona.

Martin was rooted in the ecopsychological world and was on a quest of discovery from the start, both on a deeply personal level and in terms of a more spiritual connection to the earth. Both aspects of this process were fuelled by his early experimentation with a vision quest with Meredith Little and Stephen Foster at the School of Lost Borders in the United States. He remained connected to the practices he learnt there, using them personally and also with finesse in his group trainings, particularly in his nature-based practices with groups in privately owned woodland at Battle, East Sussex. It was clear that he loved the natural world, but he was also passionate about the psychotherapeutic process; he was in fact very proud of being a psychotherapist.

Although the idea of therapy outdoors has been around in many forms throughout history and across cultures and recently in Western psychotherapy in the works of Jung (Sabini, 2008) and Searles (1960), Martin Jordan's unique contribution was largely informed by his interpretation of psychodynamic psychotherapeutic ideas and concepts.

From his early beginnings in the ecotherapy field back in 2007, Martin was firmly focussed on bringing theoretical clarity and rigour to the aspect of ecotherapy that involved taking psychotherapy outside. Certainly he required personal structure and validation of his approach, which led ultimately to the pursuit and completion of his

PhD in the subject. As with any committed practitioner, much of Martin's work was a personal project in terms of understanding his own relationship with nature and wanting to develop his own outdoor practice. He often said that he needed to understand the process first before he could feel truly confident about offering outdoor therapy to others. This was a key motivation for him in undertaking extensive research into why practitioners were interested in moving their practices outside.

Bringing nature and psychotherapy together was the encompassing focus of Martin's professional life, and he was tenacious in his desire to comprehend what was going on in a nature-based therapy and in the dissemination and communication of this understanding to a wider therapeutic audience. He worked hard to present nature-based therapy as an important and valid form of psychotherapy in its many applications through his workshops, mostly with Hayley Marshall as co-facilitator, and via dissemination through several co-authored (e.g., Jordan & Marshall 2010) and individual journal papers and two key book publications (Jordan, 2015; Jordan & Hinds, 2016).

Martin was also an advocate of others' learning and had established himself as a lecturer in psychotherapy and ecopsychology at Brighton University. He was an engaging tutor and was keen to develop a network of like-minded people to contribute to the ecopsychology module that he ran alongside Matt Adams and, on occasion, Joe Hinds. Latterly, for a number of personal and professional reasons, he had become jaded by more formal teaching and had removed himself from Brighton University to concentrate on specialist psychotherapy with adopted and fostered children—a subject very close to his heart.

Another important strand for Martin in the ecotherapy field concerned his vision to develop and support a UK-based network of practitioners. He was a founding member of CAPO (along with Hayley Marshall, Paul Morris and Selena Chandler) in 2008 and from the start was the main instigator of the many meetings of this practitioner group. His inclusivity was an important aspect, too; so although Martin was an achiever, his motivational gifts were infectious and responsible for many other people's personal

## MARSHALL AND HINDS

and professional outdoor direction and productivity, ourselves included.

Martin was always a presence: Physically he was big man, and as a character he would always endeavour to be in the thick of the conversations, relishing and leading a good debate. In this and several other areas, he was forthright in what he thought, speaking his mind and being direct, not always to everyone's liking. However, he had a sharp wit and did bring a dark sense of humour to challenging situations. This, coupled with his intuitive understanding of the struggles of the people he worked with, meant that he was well liked and respected. Participants on his courses warmed to his 'no frills' natural style, enjoying his ability to muck in with the group whilst still holding his authority as an expert in the field.

Martin was very focussed on the psychological and practical significance of containing and holding in nature-based therapy, and he was especially curious about how much of this was located in the walls of the traditional consulting room. He combined all of this with a further curiosity about the motivations of outdoor practitioners wanting to move outside with clients; that is, what goes on inside us as we take people out? And how robust do we have to be to manage ours and the client's anxieties, which are often heightened outdoors? Given that the natural environment may be a place that many of us turned to during our own difficult times, particularly as children, Martin understood that there may be an important link to medicating and resolving our own trauma away from the human-to-human.

Certainly he was aware that therapy outside can be particularly grounding; viewing it as 'earthing', gained through a sense of connection physically, emotionally and spiritually. Martin was excited by the fact that even the simplest and briefest workshops had profound and lasting effects. The sense of discovery through an embodied, experiential encounter with nature provided a fuller sense of what it means to be human.

At the beginning of his outdoor work Martin worked extensively within a willow dome situated in a larger outdoor therapeutic setting. He knew this satisfied his own deeply held need for some degree of containment—a safer place to confront and to alleviate some sense of anxiety he felt working outside with larger groups in 'wilder' settings. However, through emphasising the need to provide an emotional holding and containing space for him and his clients, he realised that he had effectively created a 'room' outside! Later on he viewed this more as a transitional or threshold space, which enabled the best of both worlds.

His interest in the revealing of vulnerability in the world and how (in him and others) this can unravel if left unsupported also developed from his formative experiences. Martin recognised full well that sometimes nature alone can't provide the containment needed when past trauma re-emerges and that a human therapist becomes essential. This thinking underpinned much of his later work concerning the outdoor therapeutic relationship and led to his more specific recent interest in trauma.

For Martin, while there was an appreciation of the more soothing and regulating therapeutic qualities of the natural world, he also recognised the importance of darkness and our fear of nature (mirroring what we might find out about our own nature). He was known for his reflection that, although nature can be perceived as a containing space, it can also be experienced as a place of foreboding; so for him this work was also about facing trauma. He became increasingly interested in the shadow side of working outside and curious about how to manage what was to be discovered there. In more recent times, there had been a change in Martin that had been noted by many people he was close to as he revealed his more depressive, introverted self, one that had a distinct reserve and withdrawn quality to it. Therefore, his own personal search for resolution and containment of his own trauma was realised in the outdoor space as his struggle with his own shadow side emerged in fuller terms. It is both saddening and sobering to reflect that even with Martin's belief in a sustaining and supportive connection to nature, this couldn't help him manage what was happening for him in his final months.

While many of Martin's professional visions and goals were fulfilled, both in ecotherapy and in other related projects, many remain as ideas that colleagues and collaborators are left holding. At the time of his death Martin was following his current interest in writing another co-authored article (with Hayley Marshall) on working with trauma in nature-based therapy. Referring to a nature metaphor, there were of course, many and varied seeds that were scattered, and these will undoubtedly germinate in the coming years under direct and indirect influence of Martin's legacy. With his inimitable style, Martin Jordan was a true pioneer in the ecotherapy world. He led the way with generosity, soul, and a heartfelt passion for the people he worked with and for the natural world he loved so very deeply.

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## MARTIN JORDAN REMEMBERED

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Address correspondence to:

*Dr. Joe Hinds*  
*School of Psychology, Politics and Sociology*  
*Canterbury Christ Church University*  
*North Holmes Road*  
*Canterbury*  
*Kent CT1 1QU*  
*UK*

*E-mail: Joe.Hinds@canterbury.ac.uk*

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AU1: Please confirm the affiliations.