

In Memorial

Dr. George William Fairweather - 2/1/1921 to 1/24/2015

Dr. George W. (Bill) Fairweather's 1963 book, *Community Life for the Mentally Ill*, based on Fairweather's research at the Veteran's Hospital in Palo Alto, was a milestone in the treatment of mental illness in this country. And the "Fairweather Lodge," an innovative social experiment which fostered more participatory roles in society for ex-psychiatric patients than had previously been thought possible, remains, more than fifty years later, one of the few modalities of community mental health treatment based on rigorous, scientific research.

In addition to the experiment's direct success in providing value to its subjects, Fairweather's research and *Community Life for the Mentally Ill*, gave birth to the "patients rights," movement in psychiatry, and the idea of persons with mental illness participating in major decisions related to their treatment. Fairweather was decades ahead of his time in insisting that ex-psychiatric patients be allowed to direct their own treatment in settings created to maximize their success. Fairweather was also one of the fathers of the "strength-based" approach to mental illness – a belief that a patient's strengths were at least as important as the patient's illness. One example was Fairweather's insistence that ex-patients hold paid jobs in the community.

Under a grant from the National Institute of mental Health (NIMH), Fairweather set out to promote the Lodge Model nationally, in what became known as "The Dissemination Project." In this pre-internet era, Fairweather and his project team toured the country sharing data showing the power of participant groups to govern themselves. Eventually, at least 17 states attempted to replicate the Fairweather Lodge. Today, over one hundred such lodges are represented by The Coalition for Community Living, a non-profit association of Lodges.

Fairweather began his research at the Veteran's Hospital in Palo Alto in 1960, amongst great skepticism that a "society" of ex-psychiatric patients, for ex-psychiatric patients, and governed by ex-psychiatric patients, with mental health professionals serving merely as "advisors," was remotely possible. Fairweather stunned the mental health profession by using terms like, "full citizenship," "meaningful roles in society," and "equal social status" to describe the desired outcomes of his experiment. And despite the Lodge's obvious successes across the country, Fairweather's dedication to such concepts would keep him on the fringe of the professional community for the remainder of his career.

Fairweather went on to create the Ecological-Community Psychology Program at Michigan State University, the first of its kind nationally. After retiring in the mid 1990s, Fairweather served as an advisor to lodges around the country. But "Bill" Fairweather will long be remembered for his unquestioning faith that a person with mental illness was, underneath the distraction of mental illness, still a person, with rights, and dignity, and the ability to heal themselves. His rigor as a

scientist, his strong humanitarianism, and his extraordinary gift for innovation, made Fairweather a giant in his field.