

## The Constructions We Carry



By Ken and Mary Gergen

So often we use constructionist ideas to treat matters at immediate hand. What is the best way to look at things in this moment, we ask. Can we bring what is positive? At these moments, the past becomes something we wish to change, a sort of baggage to be re-constructed. However, this summer we have also been struck by the significance of this “baggage” in giving life and joy to the given moment. Let us share two moments of insight:

Our August was headlined by participating in the American Psychological Association meetings in Hawaii. Our days were filled with the usual activities - giving presentations, meeting up with colleagues and old friends, and attending meetings. Yet, because our convention hotel was on Waikiki beach we also took spare hours to swim in the Pacific. Initially this was not too inviting. The beaches were packed with tourists, scarcely a place to sit. Equally crowded were the waters, which also included plastic flotation devices, surfboards, and small craft. What a distressing comparison with a previous visit there some thirty years ago. And yet, as we dove into the waters, looking up at mountains, we began to chortle along as if we were in a paradise. Why? As we began to realize, we weren't swimming in the present. Wrapped around our present experience were these very special times of the past, when our relationship was new, Waikiki was a first, and the sounds of local music and the fragrance of flowers pervaded the beach area. We were swimming happily in memory!

We had a similar experience later in the summer, visiting Cape Cod. One day we boated out to a remote cove where successful Bostonians live for weeks at a time in ramshackle cabins without electricity. Their water is pumped from temperamental wells, and the tides are ever higher, with flooding a resulting danger. The community is isolated, with boats their only major access; the seawater is cold and the beach is rocky. Yet, generation after generation they return. Like so many families, they return in their summer vacations to the same places they have been many times before. They may go, generation after generation, to the same island, or cabin, or isolated retreat, with multiple inconveniences and privations. As we see it, the source of joy on these occasions comes primarily from the laminated constructions from the past – layers of history now forming a way of appreciating the present, lending to it an aura from which we are nurtured.

We see, we feel, we understand through lenses offered by history. So, while we may often seek reconstructions, we should also be grateful for the pleasures of the beautiful baggage.