

San Antonio Rose: ATTACH 2009—A Clinician’s Perspective

Some things never change. Once again this year, flight delays and broken airplanes made for travel trials. And this year, no different than every other, I swear I’ll never get on another airplane. Paying American money to be routinely inconvenienced by the airline industry makes no rational sense.

But, every year I end up concluding that the ATTACH conference is worth the hassle.

This year was no exception.

As a clinician who has not missed an ATTACH conference since 1999, I cannot ever recall two better keynotes than those provided by Drs. Bruce Perry and Ira Chasnoff. The ATTACH staff and board really outdid themselves this year. Both presentations were highly relevant and practical, to say nothing of the imbedded humor provided by these dedicated practitioner/researchers.

“We have in general been biologically disrespectful to our children.” This statement by Bruce Perry, in my view, is spot on. Subsequent to our field’s *paradigm shift* away from brow-beating, coercive methods in trying to help maltreated children, we have embraced the reality that these youngsters’ brains are in need of specialized TLC.

Specifically, Dr. Perry spoke of the brain not being a “democracy”, that some regions are more important than others, in terms of its ability to ride herd over stress hormones. Further, he highlighted the notion that lower brain regions such as the brain stem, midbrain, and limbic system are less plastic than higher brain regions such as the neocortex (the patch of brain geography governing judgement, decision making, self-evaluation, complex planning, etc). And that there are widespread implications of this notion for the psychotherapy we do.

Ira Chasnoff likewise did a stellar job in his keynote of putting much needed meat on the bone for us in terms of the tragic epidemic of alcohol and drug malignment upon children in utero. The many facial pictorials of Fetal Alcohol Syndrome Disorder, and his accompanying explanation, was simply the best and most comprehensive of any FASD presentation I have ever attended.

In addition, Dr. Chasnoff emphasized the dire importance for alcohol/drug use prevention among pregnant women, deemed by him as “pre-treatment”. For my part, I plan to visit this remarkable researcher’s website at www.ntiupstream.com in order to scope out the array of resources contained there.

Being a high-functioning history nut, on Friday afternoon I walked down to the Alamo, accompanied by my good friend, fellow history nut, and original ATTACH co-founder 21 years ago, Dr. Michael Pines of Connecticut. Visiting national shrines such as this—where thousands of brave men on both sides fought and died—always provides a type of reverent

spiritual experience for me. And in my opinion the very best conferences exude a type of spirituality often exceeding my limited ability to describe.

On Saturday, I unfortunately missed Steven Walker's inspiring keynote. However, that evening it was my pleasure to spend a couple of hours visiting with Steven and a small group of perennial ATTACH compadres there at the hotel. At the time of this writing, the soreness of my abdominal muscles resultant to wanton non-stop laughter and jocularly has almost abated. (I am also happy to announce that my left rotator cuff injury—incurred from lifting Arleta James' new 17 lb tome: *Brothers and Sisters in Adoption*—is almost healed as well.)

Anyway, Steven, after getting to know you, I would be an even bigger idiot than is currently the case, to bet against realization of your future goals. Let it eat, my brother.

Earlier, on Saturday afternoon, I chose Dr. Greg Keck's "Adopted Adolescents". If you've never attended one of Greg's presentations, you're missing out. Seldom does one find a better Tex Mex combo-plate-seminar replete with wisdom, candor, experience, humor, and practicality. (Plus, I'm pretty sure that having attended his presentation, Greg will shield me from further bodily damage incurred by his dastardly Cleveland-based co-worker, Ms. James.)

Summing up, this clinician gives our 2009 ATTACH conference a resounding thumbs-up. To steal from Shakespeare, this year's meeting was a rose by any name. I can almost hear Bob Wills' Texas Playboys, originators of Western Swing music, performing "San Antonio Rose"—with Leon Rausch on vocals and Al Stricklin on piano of course—gently streaming in the background.

Or perhaps I simply need my meds re-titrated.