

Case example: "CxG development of shared contexts enabling parents to create a holding environment for their children on a family holiday"

## **Summary**

*In this case example, an anam cara (actor A1: Jymmie) helps a mother (actor A2: Mollie) confront a problem arising as the result of her initial attempt at the procedure for selecting the "best decision option according to her "rational choice" decision analysis (Simon 1956, Bedi and Humphreys., 2026; i.e., "choose the best option for "finding a carer for my son A3: Patrick at home while my husband Darlow and I are away on an adults-only holiday" Mollie found herself left adrift in a sea of uncertainty, so A1: Jymmie and A2: Mollie develop a shared context for reconceptualization of the situation, which then forms the basis for the proceduralisation of this new shared context for cation. so that successful action can be taken by (A7: Barbara and A2: Mollie) at the CxG Environmental level: implementing (Ce=3" take your family summer holiday at Sunny Ridge Guest house sand Bantham beach"" this action proves very successful. But, on reflection, A2: Mollie wonders why Bantham beach proved to be "special" in nurturing this success, so she explored the reasons for this success with A7: Barbara -. Identified Bantham's specific environmental features and how these would facilitate the creation of a "holding space by A7; Barbara and A2: Mollie for their children (A3: Patrick, A5: Nancy and A6: Rosalind).*

## **1. Background**

Patrick Humphreys was born in 1945 and was the only child born to Mollie and Darlow Humphreys. The family home was located in Frome, Somerset (a small town in the south of England). Both parents were Academics: Mollie ran the History Department at Newton Park Teacher Training College and Darlow directed the Department of Education at the University of Bristol. As both parents were employed away from home most days, Patrick was looked after at home by a young live-in nanny and her mother (Patrick's godmother), who lived nearby.

Each year, at Darlow's insistence, Darlow and Mollie travelled from their home in Frome to take a 3-week holiday in an exotic location together as a couple. During that time, Patrick was left behind at home under the care of his live-in Nanny.

When Patrick was four years old, his parents bought a house in Bath, and Mollie, Darlow and Patrick moved to Bath, a city that was nearer to where his parents were employed. But Patrick's Nanny and Godmother remained in Frome. Darlow employed a series of part-time live-in au-pairs to look after Patrick alone at home (with little chance to meet and play with other children his age when Mollie and Darlow were away at work. Given this background, Patrick's opportunities to meet and form a relationship with a childhood anam cara were quite restricted.

## **2. CxG Modelling at the conceptual level: Mollie's decision problem**

In 1951, when Patrick Humphreys was 6 years old, his mother, Mollie became concerned about finding a context wherein Patrick benefit from could forming a relationship with a childhood Anam Cara, but she did not know how to solve it.

She tried adopting a "rational choice" approach (Simon, 1979), evaluating various "alternative care arrangements for Patrick" options, but none seemed to be satisfactory in cost-benefit terms, this left

her feeling "adrift in a sea of uncertainty" about would be a good option to choose in order solve her problem in a way that would for all members her family (i.e., Mollie, Darlow and Patrick).

Thus, Mollie was now stuck in a decision trap because she needed to implement both of two linked actions that she now realized were incompatible with each other. In order to escape from this conundrum, Mollie needed a new shared context for the activities involved in "taking our summer holiday":

### **3. CxG Modelling at the Operational level; Mollie's need to "Find a new context for "taking summer holiday and implement activities within in that context that solve my problem"**

So, Mollie (A2) contacted her own lifelong Anam Cara (Jymmie(A1) and asked her about "what should I do to overcome this Conundrum"?

Jymmie (A1) investigates Mollie's (A2) conundrum with her and then then crystallises it as it in her explanation that they need to share the conceptual element (CE-1) "Enjoy an adults-only holiday with Darlow" and "implement a care strategy that keeps Patrick happy while his parents are away on holiday without him" are incompatible".

Then A1; Jymmie introduces a concealed conceptual element (CE-2) to A2: Mollie by telling her: "You and A4 Darlow are academics with relatively long summer holidays. Recently, you have spent 3 weeks each summer on travelling as a couple to adult-centred resorts where you enjoyed walking, rest and recreational activities together, but you left Patrick at home at this time. Perhaps in future you should take your 'three-weeks-away summer holiday' each year as a family holiday with Patrick that would provide the opportunity for Patrick to find and develop a relationship with his own childhood soul friend. As a result, , you, Darlow and Patrick would be able to enjoy living together in a unified world, receiving positive affirmation from each other, and thus restoring your own self-love". (CE'-2)

Then Mollie (A2) says to Jymmie (A1) "That seems good, but I do not know I could actually escape from my conundrum by arranging a "really successful Family holiday in practice" (i.e., A2 has no experience of doing this and so cannot presently refer to CE'-2 in her working context.)

Thus A2 needs A1 to provide an explanation (CE''-2) to that extends their shared context.

Jymmie (A1) says to Mollie (A2) "Well, I have a practical idea (CE''-2) for you. I know of a small guest house, called Sunny Ridge near where I live in Devon, run by the Brewster family, it is located close to Bantham, a lovely secluded beach edged by low cliffs with tiny coves that provide shelter in windy weather. The coves lie behind a shallow sandy beach with pools and rocky outcrops appearing as the tide goes out. Sunny Ridge has a very loyal clientele, with families from many parts of England returning there summer after summer to Bantham beach where these families form ad-hoc groups together in various combinations and eat picnic lunches provided by Mrs Brewster. If you were to book your three-week summer holiday at Sunny Ridge, you would gain a very good opportunity to create your family holiday in association with the other families from Sunny Ridge who picnic there."



AnamCaras Jymmie & Mollie, Devon, 1935.



The Brewster Family in Sunny Ridge's garden, Devon, 1952

So, Mollie (A2) agreed with Jymmie (A1) on this now-shared contextual element (CE-3) and initiates the proceduralization of this new context by securing a 3-week family booking for Mollie, Darlow and Patrick at Sunny Ridge in July 1952. In this way, A1-A2 anam cara interactions enriched the shared context that could enable a "Successful family holiday with Patrick"

#### **4. CxG Modelling at the implementation level: Proceduralisation of a shared context for "Book family holiday at Sunny Ridge"**

Actors A1; Jymmie and A2: Mollie work within a shared context where A1 introduces the contextual element CE-1: "*Find a satisfactory way to employ carer for Patrick*" is incompatible with "Enjoy an adults-only holiday with Darlow" and "implement a care strategy that keeps Patrick happy while his parents are away on holiday without him.

Because of this, result, A1: Jymmie then proposes the introduction of CE'-2 "arrange a family holiday for Mollie, Darlow and Patrick at Sunny Ridge Guest House next summer."

Once both A1 and A2 agree on CE'1, a proceduralized context can be developed for the action "Book family Holiday at Sunny Ridge for July, 1952"

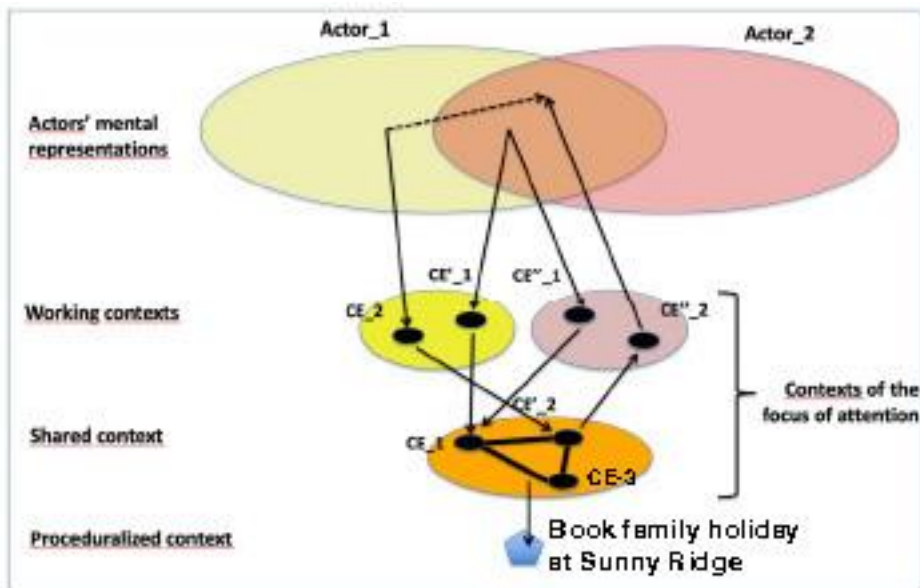
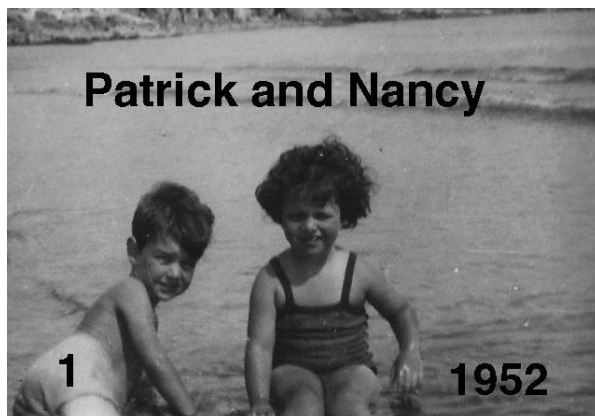


Figure 1: Building the proceduralized context for “family Holiday with Patrick in a newly shared context

When staying as a family at Sunny Ridge in July 1952, Mollie, Darlow and Patrick aimed to spend much of their time as a family on Bantham Beach, picnicking together with the Baron family (parents Barbara and Geoge and their children. There Patrick met Nancy Baron, (age 7) and her elder sister Rosalind. (age 10). Patrick was very keen to play with Nancy and Rosalind and to and to develop a relationship with his anam cara . Nancy reciprocated (see Picture 1,)



As a result, the Humphreys and Baron families arranged that both families would stay at Sunny Ridge for the same 3-week period in July 1953., so that they could again picnic together at Bantham which would delight the children in their families (see Picture 2).

### 7. “Family Holiday” InterludSummer 1954

In January 1954 Darlow decided that he wanted to have a summer family holiday with Mollie and Patrick, staying at a lakeside hotel in Thun, Switzerland. There, Patrick, Mollie and Darlow travelled together on heritage lake paddle-steamers and mountain railways. But Patrick missed very much having the opportunity to experience all this in the company of his anam cara Nancy. He begged his parents to arrange a Family Holiday at Sunny Ridge next year, when Nancy would be there too. So Mollie arranged with Barbara Baron that the two families would meet together at Sunny Ridge for three weeks in July 1955. Mollie promised Patrick that, on that holiday, the two families would spend much time together picnicking at Bantham Beach.

## 8. CxG Modelling at the environmental Level : Why Bantham beach was especially attractive to the children

Mollie remained puzzled about why Bantham beach, especially, was so attractive to their children, while there were many other nice beaches close to Sunny Ridge, (see map below). So she contacted Barbara and asked her if she knew why Bantham beach was so special for the children in their families.



Barbara explained to Mollie that there were two linked contextual elements underlying its attraction to the families' children. The first element (CE-5) is that Bantham Beach's environment has physical and social aspects that combine to offer an excellent opportunity (for parents like us) to create and maintain a "holding Space" for our Childrens' activities there. This is, a safe space that allows an individual to test autonomy while being psychologically held.

*Physically*, Bantham is a lovely secluded beach edged by low cliffs with tiny coves that provide shelter and privacy families and privacy for families picnicking within them (see Picture 2, above). The coves open to a large shallow sandy beach with natural padding pool pools and rocky outcrops appearing as the tide goes out. *Socially*, the local environment is pleasant and safe for children to roam. The "ham" (dunes named safter their shape) behind the beach is bounded by an estuary ot the seaward side and by a fenced track on the landward side leading from the parking area on the beach to a monitored gate marking the boundary of the Ham with Bantham village. The road continues past a row of cottages to a fork where a family-friendly Pub an reatauyrant is lated, together with a small genal store and cafe where one can buy ice cream, buckets abd tiys to take to re bach.

The second factor (CE6) is that I (A7: Barbara) have some experience in proceduralising "family holidays" to include the construction of a "holding space" for the children, employing Bolby's (1951) notion of a "Holding Environment" for our families picnicking there so that their "family holiday" can work out successfully (but differently) for the participant parents and children.

In order to create and maintain a Holding Space, one must be fully present within a safe environment, it is important:

- To listen rather than advise.
- To be with rather than make better.
- To offer myself rather than impose myself.
- To accept where my child is at any moment and to be with that moment – and where I am - at the same time.
- Not to worry about what a particular mood or situation might mean for me or us; just aim to keep the situation safe, creative and free.

### **8. Holding space construction and maintenance at Bantham Beach, 1955**

So Mollie (A2) Barbara(A7) decided to implement the now-shared context “ Create and maintain Holding Space together when next at Bantham Beach with our families” so that “family holiday” could work out successfully (but differently) for the participant parents and children.

But Patrick and Nancy, while active within the holding space that their parents created at Bantham beach in July 1955, were now 10 years old and sought more independence for developing anam-cara-related activities, while their parents shared the holding space agent tasks: involving safeguarding and observation, without invasion, direction or control (see picture 3, below). Some of Patrick, Nancy and Rosalind's anam-cara-related activities are shown in Pictures 4-6, below. Barbara Baron is acting as the agent creating and maintaining a holding space in accord with Winnicott's (2006) notion of a "safe space that “allows an individual to test autonomy while being psychologically held”



3. Parents safeguarding and observation, without invasion, direction or control.

4: Patrick Humphreys with his anam cara Nancy Baron and her sister Rosalind challenging the waves.



5: Patrick offering Nancy and Rosalind a ride in the sand-boat that he had built for them)

6: Patrick and his anam cara Nancy confront the waves at Bantham beach with their paddle boards.

This complete "holding space creation and maintenance" system worked out very successful, particularly as Bantham beach's physical geography itself provided a good holding environment.

## **APPENDIX: Actors and Contextual elements within the CxG modelling for this Case .**

### **ACTORS (A)**

*A1: Jymmie (Mollie's anam cara;. exprienced in applying the Logic of Appropriateness to escape from "rational choics traps)*

*A2: Mollie (seeker of new context for taking summer holiday)*

*A3: Patrick (Mollie's son: needs pleasing and chance to find and itersct with his own childhood anaman cara)*

*A4: Darlow (Mollie's Husband): prefers adults only holiday wit Mollie, bithas never experienced a family holiday with Mollie and Patrick. He does not know how "family holiday could be proceduralised so it could work out successfully)*

*A5 Nancy ( Patrick's Childhood anam cara)*

*A6: Barbara (Nancy's mother)*

*A7 roslind (Nancy's elder sister)*

### **Conceptual Elements**

*CE-1 (introduced by A1) "Go on adults-only holiday with Darlow thus pleasing A4 (Dqrlow) conflicts with "Keep A3 (Patrick) happy, as no "provide carer" strategy appears to achieve the "appropriate level of care', thus leaving A2 adrift in a sea of carer strategy uncertainty"*

*CE-2 take your 'three-weeks-away summer holiday' each year as a family holiday with Patrick that would provide the opportunity for Patrick to find and develop a relationship with his own childhood soul friend.*

*CE-3 take your summer holiday at Sunny Ridge guest house, Thurlesione*

*CE-4 Our children always want to spent time at Bantham Beach rather than at any other beach near Sunny Ridge*

*CE-5 Bantham Beach's Environment has physical and social aspects that combine to offer an excellent opportunity for creation of a "holding space" for the families' Children .*

*CE-6 Barbara (A6) has a good record for creating "holding space" for the children in her family*

*CE-7 Barbara (A6) and Mollie (A2) can work together to create a successful holding space*

## **References**

Bahn, G.H. (2022) Understanding of Holding Environment Through the Trajectory of Donald Woods Winnicott. Journal of the Korean Academy of Child and adolescent psychiatry, vol. 33(4):84–90. doi: [10.5765/jkacap.220022](https://doi.org/10.5765/jkacap.220022)

Bedi, J and Humphreys (2026) "Anam Cara Support for sustainability of young persons' decisions in challenging contexts". Journal of Decision Making, In press.

Bowlby, J and Holmes J. (2005) A Secure Base: Clinical Applications of Attachment Theory. London: Routledge Classics

Simon, H. (1979) The New Science of Management Decision (3rd Ed.), Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.