

IN MEMORIAM: NAT RASKIN

Nat Raskin was a quiet giant in client-centered therapy and the person-centered approach. Nat was only sixteen years old when he first encountered Carl Rogers. He was a student, a colleague, and a therapist of Rogers over his long affiliation with Carl.

Nat was a quiet but major contributor to the theory and practice of the approach. One of his succinct statements about the “new” therapy was written in 1946 and quoted in Rogers’ 1951 book, “Client-Centered Therapy”. It has become a classic statement that ought to be periodically reviewed by all who might be interested in “Person-Centered Therapy”. Nat summed up the following about the “nondirective” level of response of the counselor/therapist:

There is [another] level of nondirective counselor response which to the writer represents *the* nondirective attitude. In a sense, it is a goal rather than one which is actually practiced by counselors. But, in the experience of some, it is a highly attainable goal, which ... changes the nature of the counseling process in a radical way. At this level, counselor participation becomes an active experiencing with the client of the feelings to which he gives expression, the counselor makes a maximum effort to get under the skin of the person with whom he is communicating, he tries to get *within* and to live the attitudes expressed instead of observing them, to catch every nuance of their changing nature; in a word, to absorb himself completely in the attitudes of the other.-And in struggling to do this, there is simply no room for any other type of counselor activity or attitude; if he is attempting to live the attitudes of the other, he cannot be diagnosing them, he cannot be thinking of making the process go faster. Because he is another, and not the client, the understanding is not spontaneous but must be acquired, and this through the most intense, continuous and active attention to the feelings of the other, to the exclusion of any other type of attention. (Rogers, 1951, p. 29).

Nat was a scholar, a celebrated Professor at Northwestern University and a notable researcher. In the activities of conventional psychology, he managed to hold his sensitive and sincere “person-centeredness” to those with whom he interacted as well as with his clients.

I met Nat at the first meeting of the Association for The Development of the Person-Centered Approach in 1986. We were leaving the meeting, waiting for the shuttle bus when Barbara Temaner Brodley suggested that someone should start an on-going workshop for those interested in the person-centered approach. I said that I would check a “magical place” for the site, the Roosevelt Rehabilitation Center in Warm Springs, GA. This was the site of the Little White House where Franklin D. Roosevelt administered the country for half of each year. Nat said in his characteristic way: “Great”, and along with Fred Zimring and Dave Spahn, the five of us started the Warm Springs Person-Centered Workshop. Students at the University of Georgia did much of the preparatory work. The five of us were the initial designated facilitators but dropped the idea of designated facilitators after the first workshop. Nat originally suggested that we simply did not need to discriminate between staff and participants. I don’t remember Nat missing any of the workshops until illness kept him from the 20th meeting. He stated several times that Warm Springs was his favorite workshop where he felt most free to be a person. He and his long time colleagues, Armin Klein and Jerry Bauman, were affectionately referred to as the three Amigos during workshops. It was during the first workshop in 1987 that Nat identified a difference between Rogers’ Person-Centered Theory and other tributaries from the theory of Client-Centered Theory. He succinctly stated this difference as that of systematic/unsystematic activities. He elaborated in a Renaissance newsletter that read in part as follows:

The (client-centered) therapist may go further and, in a spontaneous and non-systematic way offer reactions, suggestions, and questions, try to help the client experience feelings, share aspects of her or his own life,

etc. while maintaining a basic and continuing respect for the client as architect of the process. (v. 5, 3 & 4, 1988)

He continued:

The difference is that these (other) practitioners have a preconditioned notion of how they wish to change the client and work in a systematic fashion, in contrast to the person-centered therapist who starts out being open and remains open to an emerging process orchestrated by the client. (v. 5, 3 & 4, 1988)

Nat's personhood and presence was obvious in several organizations including the Association for the Development of the Person-Centered Approach (ADPCA). I feel fortunate to be co-authored with him in the statement of the history of this organization for the ADPCA website just a few months ago. Nat's presence was facilitative to many. I am convinced that his memory and contributions will continue to be facilitative to many more as well as to me.

Jerold D. Bozarth
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