

**The Carl Rogers Symposium 2002:
Honoring His Life, Our Work, A Global Vision**

By Natalie Rogers

This Symposium was an exciting, inspiring first! 350 people from 23 nations gathered at the University of California San Diego to honor Carl Rogers, by sharing our dedicated work in the many fields he influenced, and by revitalizing our commitment to person-centered values. It was our hope that we would collectively create a vision for a world without violence. This was a first because we included nine fields of endeavor as major themes: Psychotherapy, Education (Higher Ed., and K through 12) Organizational Transformation, Expressive Arts, Peace and Conflict Resolution, Health and Spiritual Life, Research, and Politics, Civic Engagement, and Diversity.

Of course honoring Carl was an ongoing, multi-layered, spirited energy as people discussed his ideas and reminisced about meaningful events.

Maureen O'Hara, president of Saybrook Graduate School (the host institution of this event) graciously opened the Symposium by inviting 20 people to greet us, each in their own language. Immediately, the acknowledgement of our international diversity electrified the group. Maureen acknowledged the format of this conference was new to many people. It included "Open Space" so that participants could efficiently schedule any unplanned events they wanted to convene spontaneously. She also highlighted her long association with Carl with several delightful vignettes which helped to bring Carl's presence into the room.

The real depth of the conference happened in the dozens of presentations small and large. A wide range of topics included: the person-centered approach in diversity training, a person-centered school in Los Angeles, recent developments in psychotherapy theory, person-centered sand tray therapy, and building for peace in Palestine and Israel.

Dr. Howard Kirschenbaum, educator and author of 22 books including the biography *On Becoming Carl Rogers*, created a moving multimedia presentation of Carl, his life, and his theories.

A new book, *Carl Rogers the Quiet Revolutionary an Oral History*, was released the week of the Symposium. This is Carl Rogers, in his own words, as interviewed by archivist David Russell.

Dr. Jerry Freiberg (author of the 3rd edition of *Carl Rogers' Freedom to Learn*) reviewed his very successful educational programs for cooperative learning. The programs, in hundreds of schools, emphasize shared responsibilities for teachers and students.

Dr. Marvalene Hughes, the first African American woman president of a four year institution in the U.S., "Lifted the Veil" of her rewarding personal relationship with Carl and went on to inspire us with her international work with Afghanistan women.

John Vasconcellos, California State Senator, acknowledged that our traditional politics is failing us. With a long career of dedication to humanism in politics he asks us to join him to revolutionize all systems of governance —every institution, from our families to the United Nations, to acknowledge, nurture and support our innate capacity as human beings —a politics of trust.

My own opening offered some questions to consider followed by a presentation of the new archival CD-ROM, *Carl Rogers: A Daughter's Tribute.* Of the 200 photos I selected ones from his early childhood as well as video clips from the award winning documentaries, "The Steel Shutter," and "Journey Into Self."

I posed seven difficult questions to the participants, admitting that I do not have the answers but hoping to stimulate discussion. Three are listed below.

1. How do we face our own blind spots, or our own personal and collective shadow? What does not work in our individual and group experiences? Often we get our deepest learning from those things that have not gone well... events that have perhaps turned people away, or not let them in.
2. How can the person-centered approach meet the needs of and appeal to people of diverse ethnic groups and cultures, here in the United States and around the world?
3. How can we find ways to face and transform our separate and collective fears about the destructive forces threatening humankind and our planet? How do we use that energy for social change?

My opening remarks included the question, "what can we learn from each other and how can we support each other's work? As humanistic psychologists, educators, peacemakers, spiritual guides, expressive artists, and researchers, we have a large web of people that, if working together, can manifest positive shifts into a troubled world." By the end of the Symposium, I came away with a new sense of hope that our varied and creative collective of person-centered practitioners can become instrumental in empowering people emotionally, spiritually and politically to affect much needed change.

More than one hundred psychotherapists were facilitated by Drs. Elke Lambers and David Mearns (from the UK) in deep dialogue, discussing, debating, and sharing personal experiences and theoretical expertise as therapists and clients, enriching and furthering the practice of client-centered therapy.

We had more than 10 person-centered expressive arts therapists (including me) from England, Russia and the USA offering experiential workshops in "Art as Healing." They provided evidence for the effectiveness of using arts as part of the communication and counseling process with angry adolescents, with victimized children, and as teaching tools in schools and universities.

Steve Olweean, Gay Barfield and others brought forth their past and present work in Peace and Conflict Resolution in various parts of the world. In an email after the Symposium, Steve says: "more than a conference, really, my experience of this event has been an inspiring gathering that has created powerful synergy and a revitalization of the heart and minds of many who were instrumental in Carl's peace work in the world. As a number of us have observed, this seems to be quickly leading to a critical mass.... There is a rebirth of person-centered approaches to peace and reconciliation in the world by purposefully pooling our collective energies, skills and commitments for a larger impact."

Last but not least was the remarkable Saturday evening event. Dennis Kucinich, Democratic congressperson from the state of Ohio is a progressive political voice insisting the United States must have a Department of Peace! His speeches and Website have given many of us a voice that has been increasingly repressed in this country. Having had only a couple of hours sleep before joining us, he nevertheless brought cheers from the crowd as he helped us envision a world with compassion, restraint and forbearance and a commitment to peace, democracy, and economic justice at home and throughout the world.

For the benefit of the Symposium's international audience, Kucinich's talk included some of his "Prayer for America," statements of dissent to the Bush administration that can be found on his Website (www.thespiritoffreedom.com). Someone in the audience urged Kucinich to write his views to the daily *Tabloids* in England so that people in Europe realize there are voices of dissent in the United States. He promised to do so.

On the lighter side, music and dancing continued both indoors and out until the wee hours of the morning.

Peter Yarrow reminded us that his singing group, Peter, Paul and Mary, had been part of every activist movement in the '70s and '80s. He led us in song Saturday evening and stayed on for Sunday morning. After a final community meeting where we shared conference experiences, Peter brought the circle together, arm in arm, singing "We Shall Overcome." Tears and joy!

In this brief report, I haven't even touched on the elegant work in Organizational Transformation, Spirituality and Healing, and Research. I regret mentioning only some of the people and events, knowing that many others contributed so much as well. This is just the bare skeleton of the Symposium. To get the richness of it all you can listen to the audio tapes recorded by the Conference Recording Service (FAX: 510 527-8404) or go to the Symposium Website for papers, photos, and on-line continued discussion: www.saybrook.edu/crr/

Resources:

To order the CD-ROM, *Carl Rogers: A Daughter's Tribute*, go to the Website: www.mindgardenmedia.com

To order the book: *Carl Rogers: The Quiet Revolutionary, An Oral History*, go to: www.penmarin.com

Natalie Rogers, Ph.D., is an author, artist, psychotherapist, and founder of the Person-Centered Expressive Therapy Institute. Her book, *The Creative Connection: Expressive Art as Healing*, joins person-centered theory and the expressive arts to facilitate deep inner work. She is the daughter of Carl Rogers.