

Nathaniel J. Raskin: Encounters in Groups and in His Writings

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Abstract

Writings by Nathaniel J. Raskin are annotated with mention of his views on person-centered supervision, education, and his relationship with Carl Rogers. The author reviews his 1974 client-centered therapy demonstration. Experiences of Raskin in person-centered groups are described. The reference list updates an earlier bibliography (Raskin, 1989).

Nathaniel J. Raskin, client-centered therapist, teacher, mentor, researcher and writer, died on April 3, 2010. He was a significant figure and influence in the history of client-centered therapy and the development of the person-centered approach. I am writing things about him and the person-centered approach that I feel are worth underlining lest they be forgotten as the past recedes from view, potentially taking with it the radical essence of the Rogerian paradigm.

When I first met Nat in 1995 he was still practicing therapy, attending international person-centered group meetings, and serving as a consultant to the Chicago Counseling and Psychotherapy Research Center, the training organization that continued after Rogers' original Counseling Center separated from the University of Chicago. As I was *Author note*: Nina Raskin assisted me in gathering biographical information, and some of the wording of the fourth through seventh paragraphs comes directly from her. This paper omits discussion of many of Nat's endeavors such as international trainings, early use of group therapy with in-hospital patients, and sensitivity training of teachers before school integration. Among Nat's personal papers are presentations, articles from the AAP journal *Voices*, and studies and workshops from APA and the Northwestern University Medical School. Kathryn Moon can be reached at kmoon1@alumni.uchicago.edu or 5530 S. Shore Dr., #4C, Chicago, IL 60637.

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learning the person-centered approach through participation in its large, “community” groups, Nat was there, acceptant and available, sturdy and responsible, in his ever-democratic, person-centered way. In that same decade, at a time when activity in the Chicago area client-centered person-centered network was at low ebb, hungry for more group experience, I called Nat and asked him to start a therapy group so that I could sign on as a paying participant/client. He told me that he didn’t want to do that but he would be happy to join with me in making a group happen. And so four of us did just that, renown therapist-author-educator Nat, his wife Nina, who drove Nat when he would not have otherwise been able to attend and who served lovely refreshments whenever the meetings were at the Raskin’s beautiful, modern home, and two beginners, myself and my husband Bert Rice. Nat’s steadfast attendance at our Chicago groups was an enormous gift to the Chicago community. In recent years, while Nat and Nina continued to attend the meetings, Kevin Kukoleck and Brian Burgess have joined us in keeping the Chicago meetings happening.

It is Nat’s steady loyalty, generous and humble leveling of the hierarchical terrain, passion for client-centered therapy and embodied capacity to be trusting and empathic in relationship that led to my deep appreciation of him, through reading his writings and through enjoying his participation in groups. Listening to the speakers at his memorial service brought to mind for me Rogers’ concept (an idealized abstraction) of the *fully functioning person* (Rogers, 1969, p. 295). I thought about the fully functioning person the day of Nat’s funeral as it seemed that he was the same person to each of us, richly authentic, reserved and sparing with his dry wit, remarkably steady in his trust for the other, not naïve, but so very acceptant, receptive, alert and informed by whatever he was reading. At the same time, even as I write this, I can think of two group occasions when, without apology, he snapped in reprimand at someone he perceived to be harmful to another.

Nat was married to Nina Raskin for 55 years, had two daughters, Nancy and Julie, and two grandchildren, Hannah and Benjamin. He was an early student of Carl Rogers and became his colleague and friend over the long years of their association. He was a fellow of Division 12 of the American Psychological Association, a

former president of the American Academy of Psychotherapists (AAP), and a founding member of the Association for the Development of the Person-Centered Approach (ADPCA). He loved group encounters, was a co-facilitator for the first annual Warm Springs Workshop, an annual participant at subsequent meetings, co-founder of “cctpca”, an international email network for those interested in the person-centered approach and an active member of the Chicago network group meetings. In addition to planning many professional events, he convened the first conference of the ADPCA at the University of Chicago in 1986. He was a Consultant to the Board of the Chicago Counseling, Psychotherapy and Research Center.

Nat grew up in New York City. In the first pages of his book, *Contributions to Client-Centered Therapy and the Person-Centered Approach* (2004), he speaks of the devotion of his Russian immigrant parents. He was a child prodigy who skipped over several years of schooling. He knew from an early age that he wanted to be a psychologist and never wavered from that goal. He attended City College in New York City, majoring in psychology, and graduated in 1940. One of Rogers' first graduate students, he received his master's degree from Ohio State University. He was then drafted and served as a Classification Officer in the Army Air Corps in the Second World War. After the war he enrolled in the Ph.D. program at the University of Chicago under the G.I. Bill. There, where Rogers opened the first university counseling center, he continued to study with Rogers and was a part of client-centered therapy's most exciting era of training, research and theory development.

After completing his doctoral degree in 1949, Nat returned to New York City where he taught at Hunter College, served as Director of Research Planning at the American Foundation for the Blind, and in 1955 married Nina Schultz, who he continued to love deeply for the remainder of his life. Three of the nine paragraphs of Nat's preface to his book are about Nina! She is an artist, a therapist and a social worker, and she was the abiding light of his life.

In 1957 Nat and Nina moved to Chicago where Nat was Chief Psychologist at Children's Memorial Hospital with an appointment at Northwestern University Medical School. He left the hospital position five years later but continued on the Northwestern faculty until the age

of 70. He was a faculty member for 35 years, a maverick, teaching in his person-centered way, and providing a unique learning experience for his students. Upon his retirement in 1992, he became Professor Emeritus.

Nat's lifelong association with Carl Rogers, who died in 1987, began at Ohio State University when Nat was nineteen years old. For the occasion of Nat's 1978 inauguration as President of the American Academy of Psychotherapists, Rogers wrote a letter to the Academy.

Raskin was one of the leading figures in our first major attempt to put the investigation of psychotherapy on an objective and scientific basis. He wrote the first and last articles of our 'coordinated research in psychotherapy' [Raskin, 1949/2004a,b] . . . filling one complete issue of the *Journal of Consulting Psychology*. Nat drew all six studies together in a masterful way, showing statistically and graphically their interrelated and mutually supportive findings. As is typical of him and his modesty, Nat was careful to thank everyone who in any way helped his project. His footnote reads a little bit like the response of an Academy Award winner . . .

More important to *me* is that during a time of great personal distress during my Chicago days [circa 1950], Nat was a person to whom I turned for help, and from whom I received much help. I still feel deep gratitude to him for being my 'helping person' during a time of painful need.

I feel that Nat Raskin has never received full recognition for all that he has done. His landmark study [Raskin, 1974/2004], based upon recorded therapy interviews from six differing therapeutic orientations, is not nearly as widely known as it deserves to be. I am pleased that the AAP has published it as a special monograph, but it contains sobering learnings for therapists, and needs to be much more widely studied.

Over the years Nat has been my most loyal friend. I have come to love him very much. (published in Raskin, 2004, pp. [iii-iv])

That love was mutual. In our Chicago area group meetings Nat often referred to his forty-nine year friendship with Rogers, and, when invited to give a plenary talk at the 2007 ADPCA conference in New York, his subject was “My Relationship with Carl Rogers from 1940-1987.” When Rogers died, Nat wrote:

. . .how can iron and steel be so gentle, sensitive, and thoughtful? . . .

There was affection in our relationship, which definitely grew over time, and that neither of us, both being shy, self-conscious, and reserved, found it easy to express. (For over 20 years, we knew each other as “Dr. Rogers” and as “Raskin.”) But each of us was able to become explicit about it. After a very gratifying and a very difficult year in La Jolla in the period 1980-1981, there was a period when I wondered if I would hear from him if I did not take the initiative. And then came a letter saying that he thought of me often, and missed our walks and talks. (Raskin, 1987, pp 421-422)

It was through his writings that I first encountered Nat Raskin. I will mention a few that have been of special interest to me as well as a few that Nat mentioned in interviews and presentations. A selected bibliography of his publications through 1989 appeared in the *Person-Centered Review* (1989). Subsequent articles, along with a few earlier ones that I consider to be of biographical interest even though they did not appear in the 1989 bibliography, are included in my references. Both the 1989 list and the list at the end of this article are supplemented by the extensive bibliography of presentations, in addition to articles that are listed at Alberto Segrera’s International Archive for the Person-Centered Approach (<http://www.bib.uia.mx/aiecp/default.html>).

Nat was a historian of the person-centered approach (see, for example, Bozarth & Raskin, 2009-10; Raskin, 1948/1998/2004, 1986/2004a,b, 1990a, 1990b, 1990c, 1990d, 1996/2004b, 2001/2004). Like Rogers, he wrote very openly about his development as a person,

with attention to the relationship between his self-development and his development as a therapist (Raskin, 1978/2004). Several chapters in his book (Raskin, 2004) describe his personal experiences with teaching and encounter groups. Nat was present and engaged as student, researcher, and therapist from the earliest days of “nondirective therapy.” According to Rogers (1959), “The client’s trend toward experiencing himself as the locus of evaluation is most clearly shown by Raskin’s [1949] research (p. 217). Rogers also wrote that “. . . Seeman and Raskin (1953) have written a thoughtful analysis and criticism of 55 of the research studies in therapy and personality which have been stimulated by this point of view and completed during the years 1942 – 1951” (p. 244).

While still in college, Nat published his first article, “Psychological Effects of Malnutrition.” His first article on the subject of psychotherapy (Adomaitis, 2005, p. 29), “The Development of Non-directive therapy” (1948/1998/2004), was written for a course at the University of Chicago. This paper connected what was later called client-centered therapy to its antecedent threads in the larger field of psychology. Also, while still a student of Rogers, Nat wrote a description of the nondirective attitude that is quoted again and again in the writings of other client-centered therapists, beginning with Carl Rogers (Rogers, 1951, p.29). In the last decade of his life, Nat used this same quote once again to describe the implicit client-centered attitude, “Did I understand you correctly?” (Raskin, 2001/2004, p.2):

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. (Raskin, 1947/2005, pp. 330-331; also cited in Rogers, 1951, p.29)

I've tended to think of this statement as one definition for the nondirective attitude. Rogers connected it to empathic understanding, describing it as "an immersion in an empathic process" (1951, p. 29) and "sensitive and sincere 'client-centeredness'" (Rogers, 1946, pp. 420-421, cited by Rogers, 1951, p. 30). Nearly thirty years later it was *empathy* that Nat tended to emphasize. He wrote, "In the theory and practice of client-centered psychotherapy, there is no concept more important than empathy" (Raskin, 2001/2004, p.1). He asserted this again at the last Chicago area group meeting that he attended, a few months before he died. His approximate words were "All you need is empathy!"

In addition to his work with adult individuals, Nat worked extensively with children, families, and groups. His two-part article on person-centered groups (1986/2004a,b), and the 1993 client-centered child therapy paper he co-authored with Charlotte Ellinwood (Ellinwood & Raskin, 1993) were both very helpful to me for beginning practice with children and elementary school groups. Nat and Charlotte had worked with Virginia Axline at the Counseling Center and were both, along with others, part of the Counseling Center group that first developed client-centered family therapy. As Ellinwood (1990) later wrote "There always was a play therapy (later called child therapy) program at the center, initiated by Virginia Axline and carried on by Nat Raskin, Jules Seeman, Edyth Barry, and myself over the years" (p. 410). Referring to the 1949 to 1951 play therapy group . . . Charlotte wrote, ". . . I believe the seeds of client-centered family therapy were planted in the discussions of that group" (p. 411). Nat and Ferdinand van der Veen, a member of the group, went on to write a book chapter (Raskin & van der Veen, 1970) on client-centered family therapy.

In a 1999 invited presentation to the training seminar group at the Counseling Center Nat said that Axline's play therapy groups for therapists were very significant for him in his development. On that occasion and several other times he quoted Virginia Axline quoting 13 year old Herby who was exuberant about his experiencing of his newly found self:

Three boys, aged eight, were experiencing group-therapy sessions. During the eighth interview, Herby suddenly asked the therapist, "Do you *have* to do this? Or do you *like* to do this?" Then he added, "I wouldn't know *how* to do this." Ronny asked, "What do you mean? You play. That's all. You just play." And Owen agreed with Ronny, "Why, sure you do," he said. But Herby continued the discussion, "I mean, I wouldn't know how to do what she does. I don't even know what she does. She doesn't seem to do anything. Only all of a sudden, I'm free. Inside me, I'm free. (He flings his arms around.) I'm Herb and Frankenstein and Tojo and a devil. (He laughs and pounds his chest.) I'm a great giant and a hero. I'm wonderful and I'm terrible. I'm a dope and I'm so smart. I'm two, four, six, eight, ten people, and I fight and I kill!" (Axline, 1947, p. 19)

In that 1999 seminar, Nat went on to say about himself, "I started to catch up with Herby in the late 1950's when I joined the American Academy of Psychotherapists. I was struck by how much I learned about myself in small groups" (Raskin, 1999).

He said that much of his experience in what felt like thousands of groups, mostly person-centered groups, occurred within the context of forty years of teaching, during which he never lectured. The first sentences of his paper on "Learning through human encounters" are:

As a psychotherapist, I have learned to value a certain kind of human encounter. It is probably true also that, because I value a certain kind of human encounter, I am a psychotherapist. When I enter the college classroom, I take this valuing with me. (Raskin, 1975/2004, p. 98)

He read to us ten principles of *his* learning theory:

1. I know who the other person is and he knows who I am . . . 2. I am interested in people and in the meaning of the subject matter to them, not in subject matter itself . . . 3. I believe in human being-to-human being encounter rather than one based on professional role . . . 4. I believe in encounters which are mutually interesting and meaningful . . . 5. I value questions, insights, behavior which occur or develop spontaneously . . . 6. Each person in a group is a source of knowledge and insight; correspondingly, I recognize that I, like any other teacher, leader, or status figure, have areas of ignorance, doubt, uncertainty . . . 7. It is up to each student to decide what would be meaningful for him to produce and whatever is produced is valued for its meaning to him . . . 8. What is produced is produced for the student himself and, if he wishes, to be shared by the group; it is not produced for me, a status figure . . . 9. What is produced is evaluated, not just by me, but by the student and, if shared by the other students, by them . . . 10. It is up to each person to decide how personal, or self-disclosing he wishes to be. (Raskin, 1975/2004, pp. 100-103)

In my opinion, Nat's writings adhere very closely to Rogers' theory and practice. Perhaps an exception was in a workshop presentation on client-centered supervision, "Dilemmas of Being a Person-Centered Supervisor" (2007) where Nat discussed what he considered to be "a tension between the ideology of client-centered therapy and the traditional concept of supervision" (Raskin, 2007, p. 5). In that discussion Nat described his own efforts at integrating person-centered values and the supervisory role in his work with resident physicians, social workers and graduate psychology students. Then he points out the contradictions in Rogers' (Hackney & Goodyear, 1984) and C. H. Patterson's (Freeman, 1992) self-described intentions and recorded practices as supervisors. In response to Rogers' statements and transcript, Nat wrote:

It appears that Rogers is critical but does not want to be hurtful . . . This glimpse of Rogers discussing and

doing supervision demonstrates the client-centered dilemma: “I don’t want to direct you, but I have such strong feelings about providing empathy to clients that I have to tell you how I would respond.” (p. 9)

In response to Patterson, Nat wrote: “Evaluating but not judging? Such a specific insistence on how to be empathic? Patterson has not resolved the dilemma. Can anyone?” (p. 10) In his own practice, I believe that Nat was willing to offer supervision to non-client-centered therapists, and willing in a client-centered manner to follow responsively the lead, agenda, personal values and intentions of the therapist seeking consultation.

Nat’s dedicated willingness to empathically follow the lead of another characterized his way of being in groups and is revealed rather interestingly in a demonstration therapy session with an individual client that he did for the American Psychological Association (APA) film series, *Systems of Psychotherapy*. He later said to psychologist Ray Adomaitis, that he “was conscious of the camera and there were times when I did not focus on the client who was not a real client but an actress” (Adomaitis, 2005, p. 27). He told Ray:

One video about which I had reservations was the one I was asked to do to represent client-centered therapy for the APA’s Psychotherapy Videotape Series in the early 90s (Raskin, 1974/2007). I felt so bad about it I asked them not to use it and to get Fred Zimring to do one instead. They said it was too late for that and anyway, I had done a good job. I have learned to live with it. I have seen quite a few videos and live demonstrations of client-centered therapy that have made me want to protest . . . (Adomaitis, 2005, p. 26-27).

The manner in which Nat handled the dilemma of interviewing an actress (Madaline Younger) who was playing a role (“Claudia”) rather than being herself highlights how deeply and consistently he worked within his own person-centered values, with empathy and acceptant awareness of the other person.

In his reflections at the end of the film, echoing his career-long valuing of empathy, Nat said that his first criteria for judging the

session was whether or not he was successful in understanding what his client was trying to tell him. He characterized person-centered therapy by an *attitude* of trust and a consistent tendency for the therapist to follow along with and not interfere with the client.

Nat *was* embodying a nondirective attitude of trust (Raskin & Rogers, 2000/2004, p. 245; 2005, p. 130) as he facilitated actress Madaline's telling of her content-driven narrative, accepting her working pace and role-playing self-presentation, Nat was empathic to Madaline's wish to do her job. This becomes clear when he reports at the end that he departed from his usual way of working; instead of waiting for the client to begin the session, he began it himself by checking his understanding with "Claudia" about what she had previously told him in advance of this session. After the interview, Nat says,

I did that not because it's the kind of thing I would usually do but because she had let me know that she would be more comfortable . . . [if she did not have to be the one to start the session]. So to me, I believe in being person-centered and I feel it was more person-centered to be responsive to what was more comfortable to her than it would have been for me to go by the book and let her begin the session. (Raskin, 1974/2007)

Much as, according to Nat, Rogers' intrinsic attitude was, "Is that the way it is for you?" (Raskin, 1947/2005, 2001/2004), Nat's checking with Madaline at the very beginning of the session was an unspoken "Is that how you hoped I'd start us off in this filmed endeavor?" Because of the unnatural nature of the APA film, the therapist we consequently watch and hear seems less engaged, less engrossed with "Claudia's" experience than Nat tended to be with others in his therapy work, in his teaching and in groups. Nat's real engagement was perhaps more with Madaline, the actual person in front of him.

The responsive-to-Madaline therapist is the person I grew to love in person-centered group encounters, the man who was probably about eighty years old when he got up from a person-centered group meeting to play bean bag catch with a therapist who wanted to demonstrate that we can "do" techniques and still be client-centered,

and the man who in his middle eighties, sprang from his chair to help with the meal set-up for a large group.

The Warm Springs International Workshops were his favorite of the big group meetings (Raskin, 2002b). At those workshops he enjoyed his annual getting together and rooming with his two long standing friends Jerry Bauman and Armin Klein. All three friends, along with 2000 other participants, attended a 1979 large group meeting of the American Association of Humanistic Psychology. In a 1980 presentation on the self-concept (Raskin, 1980/2004) Nat described the intense fear he felt and publicly expressed during a personally ground-breaking experience of self-disclosing at a microphone to that very large group.

I savor a nugget of wisdom from Nat, something he said in Warm Springs, Georgia in 1999. The 1998 summer ADPCA conference sustained a remarkably conflict-ridden series of events. I was feeling shocked and tremendously disappointed by actions taken by some participants. I raised this for discussion in the subsequent winter Warm Springs workshop. Nat responded by telling me that he did not think in terms of ideals shattering. Rather, he considered us all to be like children, taking baby steps in relationship together, learning to walk, stumbling, falling, picking ourselves up and trying again.

His openness to the data of life is brought home to me through two details. The first is the dedication he wrote for his book:

This book is dedicated to the millions of human beings in the world who could benefit from psychotherapy, but don't know about it or can't afford it, who are trying to cope with basic problems like having enough to eat, receiving adequate health care, insufficient education, and battling prejudice, and to the individuals and organizations who are trying to help them.

The second is from Nina's email announcement to the Chicago client-centered community about Nat's death and the last morning of Nat's life:

Nat Raskin died today after a short illness. He became progressively weaker during this past week but we drove to the botanic gardens yesterday afternoon and his last words this morning were: "This orange juice is

delicious." So he died as he lived, loving life. (Nina Raskin, personal communication, April 3, 2010)

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