Honoring AATA Past-President Gwen L. Gibson, MA, ATR-BC, HLM

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AATA Past President (1979-81) Gwen Locke Gibson passed away peacefully on Saturday afternoon, May 21, 2016 at her residence at Arden Courts, Towson, MD.

For 47 years, Gwen served the AATA as a charter member, officer and committee member. She was a practicing art therapist and presented on art therapy at meetings nationally and internationally. She made working with her on the Board a pleasure. She was gracious, kind, hardworking and thoughtful. Or, as she said in her 1973 letter to President Felice Cohen, Gwen often did her “thinking by typewriter” and her reports document her future thinking for the AATA in the AATA archives. For example, the need for centralized management services, regional affiliations, and collaboration.

As the AATA President-Elect, Gwen worked with President Judy Rubin who graciously read my draft statements and contributed additional information.

Gwen’s significant role helping members in obtaining licensure and preparing for AATA’s 1978 conference is remembered in a note by Bobbi Stoll, ATR-BC, HLM, who was chair of the conference:

So much fell in Gwen's lap immediately on her election to office of President-Elect, and she became an advocate for many of the seemingly outrageous requests being made by the dually-focused conference chair in California. I was fully behind her efforts to get an Executive Director and an organizational office address and phone. It didn't happen in time for the 1978 conference but Gwen's savvy and persistence overcame any existing obstacles.

For most of the remaining year, planning the conference continued without a central office and staff. Gwen, my only contact with the AATA, went to bat for something that seemed strange and different, but in the end contributed to larger-than-expected conference attendance and success in qualifying for an MFT license based on a graduate degree in "Clinical Art Therapy." Gwen and I both celebrated the 1978 conference successes and the following year she was installed as President during the conference in Washington, D.C., which she'd also coordinated in her final year as President Elect.
I am convinced that Gwen's patience and tolerance of the many unaccustomed meetings and promotions in the 1978 conference contributed to its success and to the first license granted to an art therapy graduate.

As Judy, Bobbi and I thought about working with Gwen for years, I flashed back in my memory to her numerous hand-typed letters and calls with a historical perspective. Gwen was working on the development of AATA during the 70’s when others were developing models for personal use computers. She was our link to past events and future ideas before hyperlink became a daily word.

Gwen was also a super link between art therapists, AATA and other professional associations. She was a live social media woman. She welcomed and introduced art therapists, psychiatrists and other health care professionals at multiple meetings and conferences. She gave presentations and wrote articles for multiple professional journals.

For the book *Architects of Art Therapy*, Gwen contributed a chapter (Gibson, 2006) about her personal and professional life. In it, her intelligence, integrity, and dedication to the mission of helping others shines through. Her concluding thoughts reflected the gracious Gwen that was known and admired by those who were privileged to work her:

In my years of practice, it has been a privilege to work with afflicted persons who sought understanding of their pain and misery. When patients trusted me with their confidences, innermost hurts and fears, I felt humbled to be considered trustworthy and reliable. (p. 173)

Gwen often noted the importance of imagery in her therapeutic work and writing. In one of her articles (Gibson, 1994), Gwen conjectured the ancient healing process and the use of symbols. In Gwen’s memory, we are reminded of the ancient Egyptian reference to passing from one side of the Nile River to the other side. Gwen has passed to the other side but her legacy remains with the AATA.

References
