The Remarkable Rawley Silver, 1917 - 2016

Myra Levick, PhD, ATR, HLM; Bobbi Stoll, ATR-BC, HLM; & Judy Rubin, PhD, ATR-BC, HLM
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To honor the life of Rawley Silver, EdD, ATR-BC, HLM, three AATA Honorary Lifetime Members – Myra Levick, Bobbi Stoll, and Judy Rubin – discuss her impact and share some memories that highlight her enduring and indefatigable spirit.

Myra Levick, PhD, ATR, HLM

I think of Rawley Silver as a kindred spirit, in the sense that we were both artists and became art therapists in the 60s, before there was an art therapy association and before there was any formal training in the field. I do think her passion evolved as she moved from medical social worker to art teacher with children and intuitively began to recognize the power of art as a language for impaired populations.

I met her in the early years of our professional development and came to respect her commitment to research and credibility. Many years ago I had the opportunity to get to know her a little more personally. She hosted me at her home during a weekend when I was invited to speak at a university nearby. Rawley was a lovely lady, diligent in her watch over the scholarship that bears her name, and generous in her wisdom.

Rawley Silver was a trail blazer and her many scholarly and research contributions to art therapy are a legacy we value. She will be missed and long remembered.

Bobbi Stoll, ATR-BC, HLM

Rawley was a member and avid supporter of the International Networking Group of Art Therapists from 1989 to 2010. She made contacts with art therapists in many other countries hoping to develop a partnership to expand her research with children from other cultures and ethnic groups. Many of these alliances were significant in validating her important research on art therapy with children. When she was unable to establish a working alliance with the single
art therapist from a Third World country, she repeatedly called me, as Key Networker, in the hopes of identifying an art therapist in that country.

Rawley relentlessly pursued her research long after her retirement and I was continually surprised at how long and hard she worked in relative isolation before publishing or publicizing her work. She seemed to require her research to be faultlessly documented and most likely to be repeated in replicable in subsequent trials.

I frequently compared Rawley to a hard working ant in her tenacity, efficiency, and in the enormous volume and weight she carried to her research. Our loss is greater as her quiet, effective style will remain unmatched.

Judy Rubin, PhD, ATR-BC, HLM

I first met this amazing woman by mail 50 years ago and soon after in person. Throughout that time, I was deeply impressed by her kindness as a person, her dedication as a professional, especially to research, and by her devotion as a wife and mother. Some of our encounters were at meetings of art educators, since we shared that background as well as an interest in art for children with disabilities. Of course, we also shared an investment in the emerging field of art therapy and an interest in standards.

Our last in-person contact was in Sarasota, when she attended a talk I gave for the Florida Art Therapy Association (FATA). I went to her apartment the following day, where her charming husband served us all drinks and hors d'oeuvres. She was eager to show me her files as well as her art, and we continued to email and to talk on the phone until her death. She always sounded chipper, upbeat, and sharp as ever, despite having to be on oxygen and use a walker.

Her son Jonathan recently sent the following anecdote:
“I recall a story Rawley told with obvious enjoyment . . . She was a special ed. student at Columbia University at the time. There was massive blackout that cut power to most of New York City. She was in an upstairs night class when the lights went out, and the students were understandably frightened about how to leave the building in total darkness. A blind student stood up and said not to worry, she would lead them down the stairs, in a line with each one touching the shoulder or arm of the person in front - a lesson about what constitutes disability, with special appeal to someone attuned to visual perception.”

Please join us at the Annual Memorial Service at the conference in Baltimore  
On Saturday, July 9, from 2:30 – 3:30 pm  
To honor the life of Rawley Silver and art therapists whom we have lost in the past year.

Members of Rawley Silver’s family at the GW Graduate Art Therapy Program  
Saturday, May 31, 2014, enjoying a Rawley Silver exhibition.  
Rawley’s son Adam Silver (center), with family members (and Dr. Donna Betts on far left).