

Afterword

Sue Rowan



What to say about John? There is just so much I could say, but as all the wonderful contributions so far have covered many aspects of John's professional life, let me talk a bit about John's personal life. Of course, when you love your work as much as John does, personal and professional tend to blend seamlessly into one; it's not easy to separate them out, but I'll give it a go.

John was born in Old Sarum (Salisbury), but travelled a lot during his early years due to his father's position in the RAF; he lived in 30 different places in his first 30 years. John spent part of his early life in Egypt, where his younger brother was born. His grandfather, William Robert Rowan, was an engineer who was very involved with development of the railway in Switzerland, and the family lived in a rather grand property called Schloss Binningen, which is now operating as a hotel and country park just outside Basel. There is mention of William Rowan on the hotel 'history' section of their website.

John has a family Coat of Arms (real, not purchased!) and a very impressive family tree which includes several

titled family members. I twice bought him a signet ring with the family coat of arms on it, and twice it fell off and got lost, so we agreed not to bother again. John has never been particularly concerned with his 'aristocratic' family background, and when I first met him, he told me he was a confirmed anarchist. I could never quite square this statement with the fact that he enjoyed good food and Remy Martin, but as he would tell me, it is possible to be both an anarchist and a lover of the good life!

John has always had great curiosity, and a willingness to embrace new things. He has also, in my view, always been on a quest to find 'the thing', starting in his youth with his involvement in Christianity, and then in politics. One of John's early and great influences was Harold Walsby, one of the founders of Systematic Ideology, which he set up in the 1930s (look him up on Google if you're interested in knowing more about that!). John was in his mid-twenties when he came across Walsby. There was a group of people who had been in the SPGB (Socialist Party of Great Britain), including John, who came together with Walsby to form the group. One of John's early jobs after meeting Harold was selling encyclopaedias door-to-door so that he could earn enough to live on, and continue working with Harold on his theories.

The 1960s and early 1970s were possibly John's favourite time, embracing the 1960s counter-culture with gusto. He went to a performance of New York's 'Living Theatre' in Camden and was so inspired and excited by it that he jointly set up his own version of it, called 'Be Now', performing in the streets and at art events all over London. Together with other local artists (some of whom became quite famous) John was part of the Hendon Arts group – another radical group, who often met in John's house in Finchley.

John worked in Market Research and Advertising in the 1950s and 1960s, and, whilst working in advertising, counts amongst his achievements pioneering the 'three-hour business lunch' when such things were almost unheard of. Yet another claim to fame....

Poetry has always been important in John's life. John collaborated often with Bob Cobbing, who founded

'The Writers Forum' and specialized in alternative poetry – sound poetry and visual poetry/artwork – and they performed together many times. Much of John's early poetry was published by them. John still writes great poetry (in my view!), and we are in the process of recording them and making them available on YouTube.

John also embraced the human potential movement (another milestone) with equal gusto. He attended groups at places like Quaesitor, and loved encounter groups. The Association for Humanistic Psychology (AHP) was a natural next step for him, and he joined in the early 1970s when Vivian Milroy was still editing *Self & Society* 'on the side', as it were, in his business office (which had nothing whatsoever to do with human potential!). Humanistic Psychology became a major part of John's life, and he has worked tirelessly to support it in any way he can. It remains incredibly important to him to this day.

John has always been political – usually with a small 'p' – and usually very much on the left. His works on feminism and politics have been well documented earlier in this *Festschrift*, so I don't need to say much about them here, except that they are still very much part of his life.

John and I met in 1976, in Muswell Hill. John was teaching a psychology class which I had just joined – most members of the class gathered in the pub afterwards, which is where we first got talking. We moved in together two years later. John has four children, four grandchildren and one great-grandchild from his first marriage to Neilma. I am so pleased that he has stayed in touch with his family, and I am hugely proud to be included in family gatherings and feel myself lucky to be part of it all.

John and I were so different in so many ways when we met, I don't think anyone, including ourselves, ever thought it would last. The first time we went away together was in 1978 to stay in a commune (Laurieston Hall in Kirkcudbright). This was not at all the kind of life I was used to, and I was horrified. We slept six to a room, in sleeping bags (I had never owned or used a sleeping bag, and had to borrow one); the toilet didn't even have a door, never mind a lock; and the food was vegetarian. I was a total carnivore at the time. We hired a car to get there, gave a lift there to several people we had never seen before or since (some of whom shared the driving), and I remember clearly being driven part of the way home, speeding along the motorway, by a young woman called Juliette who looked like an angel and drove like the devil!

The second time John arranged for us to attend a weekend gathering at Socialist Anarchist meeting (or some such), and told me that the sleeping venue

was again communal. I arranged for us to get free accommodation in one of Birmingham's best hotels (the sales manager was a friend of mine). So instead of the 'sleeping bags on the floor suffering other people's snoring and worse', we had a beautiful room in the hotel, and the evening 'turn down' service even left little chocolates on the pillow. Instead of being ashamed of what we'd done, John gleefully told everyone at the conference – who, to my surprise, were thoroughly in favour of our scheme.

That story really demonstrates how we work; in many ways we are similar and enjoy and want the same things, but there are areas of our lives in which our interests are quite different. One of our strengths has always been that we both enjoy entering into the world of the other, learning and growing all the while. John has never tried to force me to become part of his world – I never felt that I had to give up any part of myself in order to be with him or to be part of his life. I respect him hugely for that.

When I met John I was not at all used to examining or expressing my feelings. The first time I accompanied John to an AHP conference I was determined only to attend sessions where I could sit and listen to a speaker; I had no desire to do anything experiential. How little did I know! There wasn't one session that was anything but experiential, so I realized that I either had to get stuck in, or look like a prat (they were the only options I could think of at the time). I did get stuck in, and was honestly surprised to find that I rather liked this 'personal growth' business!

Another experience of choosing to do something I absolutely didn't want to, or look like a prat, was at the Esalen Institute in California. John was speaking there, and we arrived a day early, having driven down from Monterey. There was a fabulous pool overlooking the Pacific and it was a very hot day. I desperately wanted to swim but I didn't fancy doing it naked, which is what everyone else was doing. I thought long and hard about what would make me look more ridiculous; swimming naked, or in a suit when everyone else was naked. I opted, nervously, for naked, and it was the most amazing experience – I was so glad I tried it and have done it many times since.

John and I went to several AHP conferences in the USA, and I was lucky enough to see the likes of Jean Houston, Ilana Rubenfeld and many, many other amazing and ground-breaking speakers. This was the start of a long journey of self-development and personal exploration for me, and I am so grateful for those opportunities which I would never have had if I hadn't met John.

For a long time John didn't believe in the concept of 'holidays' as an entity in themselves, and it took some while to persuade him that it was possible to go away and enjoy yourself at something other than a conference, but I managed it. I'm glad to say he has taken to the concept like a duck to water.

The real, major turning-point in John's life came around 1980, when he started his training in Primal Integration with the great Bill Swartley. This training paved the way for John to become a psychotherapist and, ultimately, to his discovery of the spiritual path which he has followed ever since. This, I think, was 'the thing' he was always seeking.

Most people know that John meditates daily and has done so for the last 30 years or so, and it amazes me that he never misses a day; we could be out at a party until three in the morning and he will still be up, sometimes between 5 and 6 a.m., to meditate. Not only that, he does it in our unheated conservatory which is, literally, freezing in winter, and just wearing light clothing. When I comment on this, he simply says he doesn't notice the cold when he meditates.

John has a very strong spiritual connection to the Goddess, which guides him, and to whom he is devoted. I believe this connection to be one of the most, if not the most, meaningful in his life.

John is one of the few people I know who really doesn't covet anything. He gives lots of his time for free because he enjoys the interaction; researchers, presenting sessions, writing – all done for no financial reward. John's reward is the satisfaction he gets from encouraging people in whatever way he can. He is fiercely loyal to people and causes that mean a lot to him, and he demonstrates that in meaningful ways. When someone he thought of as a friend was forced to leave a teaching post in an institute, John refused to do any more teaching at that institute. The financial loss to him was significant, but he felt strongly that he should demonstrate his solidarity, whatever the cost. He makes regular contributions to charities he feels strongly about, and almost always responds when there is a new disaster in the world, and subsequent appeals for help.

John, along with the rest of us, is certainly not perfect, and can sometimes be dismissive, but he also has a very soft and caring side, which not many people get to know. John taught at Havering College for many years, running psychology classes for the extra-mural department. Every year he would get lovely letters from past students who had been inspired to take their studies further, and

who were now passing exams and gaining degrees. I also remember one woman he told me about who was always a bit disruptive in the class – asking odd questions and so on – but every year she came back again. John had the idea of putting her in charge of the 'book box' (you can tell how long ago this was!). The woman was so proud of having been given a responsibility that she took such care to get right, and it obviously meant the world to her that she had been trusted in this way.

Mine is by no means the only life John has touched; over the last 50-odd years there have been hundreds of clients, students, countless people at workshops and conferences, friends, acquaintances and readers of his books. Not all of those people will have had life-changing experiences, but they will almost all have taken something of their experience with them. Only last month we were at a conference in Northampton, and a participant spotted us walking on campus and ran up to say that he had attended one of our Gender workshops many years ago; he had met his current partner at that event and had been happily with her ever since. He was so appreciative of that workshop!

There are so many aspects of John I haven't mentioned because it is not possible to do justice to all of them; his work with the Institute of Psychotherapy and Social Studies (IPSS), setting up the Serpent Institute with Jocelyn Chaplin (see her article, earlier), the extra-mural class where he taught south London butchers on day release about self-awareness, the army nicknames of 'Rasputin' and 'Jesus Christ', his time in radical Christian organizations, the time he was almost arrested at a demonstration – the list goes on. If you want to know more, just ask him and he'll gladly tell you.

The John I know and love, with all my heart, is not only incredibly intelligent, knowledgeable, robust, funny, well read, supportive, generous and full of life; he is also my guide, teacher, companion, student and co-traveller. John is an extraordinary, amazing man, and I am a very, very lucky woman. ☺



Sue Rowan is a Life and Career coach in private practice, living in London. She particularly enjoys working with older women who are ready to embrace the next exciting phase in their lives. Sue is former (three-times) past Chair of the AHP, and was a Board member for over 30 years. As well as Coaching, she now also volunteers for Guide Dogs, training and socializing puppies for the first year of their lives.