

Natalie Rogers (1928–2015): a personal appreciation

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I last saw Natalie Rogers last year when I visited and stayed with her in her home in Sebastopol, California. She was 86 and in a lot of pain. Paraphrasing Bette Davis's famous phrase, she told me: 'Ageing ain't for sissies'. Despite her condition, she was a gracious and generous host, opening her home and archives, and giving me permission to browse her books and papers. It was a great privilege, and I have fond memories not only of good and interesting professional conversations, including about a project regarding her father's work (as part of which I also met her daughter, Frances (Fuchs)), but also of deepening our personal friendship. I drove her out to Bodega (where Alfred Hitchcock filmed *The Birds*) and we had a lovely dinner at a restaurant overlooking Bodega Bay. We talked of cabbages and kings, about family and growing old – or as her father, Carl Rogers, once put it, 'older and growing'.

I had first corresponded with Natalie in 2000, with a view to her coming over to the UK and specifically doing some work with us at Temenos, an organization which was then – and still is – committed to person-centred education and training. Our correspondence eventually led to her visiting twice. The first time was in October 2003 when, as part of Temenos's tenth anniversary celebrations, she and Tess Sturrock facilitated a workshop on Person-Centred Expressive Therapy. During this visit she got to know the directors of Temenos – me, Louise Embleton Tudor and Keemar Keemar – quite quickly, both professionally and personally.

Natalie expressed both her support for Temenos's philosophy and programmes, and her appreciation for our support of her work. I think this was important and significant, as she had not always felt supported or appreciated by colleagues in the person-centred world. As the daughter of a famous father, she suffered the usual comparisons and projections. Her book *Emerging Woman: A Decade of Midlife Transitions* (Rogers, 1980/1995) speaks to her journey to becoming a woman in her own right, especially following her divorce in 1970 after a 20-year marriage. The chapter titles of the book reflect this clearly: 'The Right to Be Me: Confronting Sex Role Expectations', 'Uprooting and Rerooting: A Transition', 'Solo: A Midlife Choice', 'On Love, Loving, and Lovers', 'Opening', and 'The Impact of Women on My Life'. I remember her saying that her mother, Helen, who among others things was an artist, had just as much influence on her life as her father, an experience and reality that was sometimes overlooked by those who assumed the greater influence of her father, Carl. Indeed, Natalie dedicated her last book to her mother: 'The source of and inspiration for my creativity' (Rogers, 2011, p. xi).

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In some ways Natalie was not an easy person: she could be somewhat demanding and sometimes a little sharp. Another way of putting this is that her congruence was quite challenging. At the same time, she could also listen to and receive challenges, and appreciated honesty in others.

A year later, in 2004, Natalie visited Temenos again, when, in addition to running another workshop she delivered a lecture, the first Temenos Lecture, on the subject of 'Expressive Arts for Peace: Using the Creative Process to Connect to the World', which was later produced as a DVD (Rogers, 2004). During this visit she also worked with the Temenos management group in a way which reflected her creativity and helped us with our creativity.

When, in 1980, she moved from Boston to the San Francisco Bay Area, she trained in gestalt therapy and, influenced by that, her own artistic abilities and the person-centred approach, she developed a person-centred expressive art therapy training programme with an emphasis on how the creative process is our life force energy. To Carl Rogers' (1954/1967) ideas about conditions which foster creativity, i.e. *psychological safety*, which is established by accepting the individual as of unconditional worth, by providing a climate in which external evaluation is absent, and by understanding empathically, and *psychological freedom and permissiveness of symbolic expression*, Natalie (Rogers, 1980/2000) added a third condition – that of *offering stimulating and challenging experiences*. While the first two conditions are the soil and nutrients for creativity, this third, external condition recognizes that the seed of creativity needs planting, recognizing and stimulating, including the provision of some structure.

At the lecture in 2004, in response to a story Natalie told about suggesting to a client that he use chalk rather than painting with a paintbrush, one member of the audience challenged her quite insistently about being directive – and, therefore, so the accusation went, not person-centred. Natalie responded with good grace, asserting that Carl's ideas about directiveness were not always consistent, and that they also changed – and that, in any case, she was Natalie Rogers, not Carl Rogers!

I, and I am sure many others, would say that Natalie's greatest professional contribution was pioneering the field of expressive arts therapy and encouraging the development of creativity. She wrote two books on the subject, *The Creative Connection: Expressive Arts as Healing* (Rogers, 1980/2000) and *The Creative Connection for Groups: Person-Centered Expressive Arts for Healing and Social Change* (Rogers, 2011), as well as many articles, and produced a number of DVDs. Her training programme continues through the Person-Centered Expressive Arts Institute under the leadership of her students and colleagues.

Natalie was more interested in practice than theory, and yet she was very reflective on and thoughtful about her work. When she visited in 2004, I suggested that we – Natalie, Keemar, Louise and myself – have a dialogue about the theory that underpinned her work. We did, and wrote an article based on a transcript of that discussion and subsequent correspondence (Rogers, Tudor, Embleton Tudor, & Keemar 2012). In it we discussed creativity; expressive arts and the person-centred approach; organism and environment; non-directiveness; and the application of person-centred expressive arts therapy to healing in the social/political environment. It was a good theoretical encounter; we enjoyed it; and I know that Natalie was pleased with the article. She maintained her links with Temenos, being involved in a conference in 2011 via video link; and with me and my family after we emigrated from the UK to Aotearoa New Zealand in 2009.

I was sad to hear that Natalie had died and, at the same time, glad that she was no longer in pain. I am very grateful to have known her, to have had the opportunity to work with her, and to regard her as a friend as well as a colleague. I am also grateful that she introduced me to her daughter, Frances. In offering this appreciation and farewelling her, I leave the last word to Natalie herself: 'Creativity is like freedom: once you taste it, you cannot live without it. It is a transformational force, enhancing self-esteem and self-empowerment'.

Notes on contributor

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