

the person, and thus understand the importance of explicating as much as possible the richness of the concept through vignettes and clear explanations. One must explain the hierarchy of roles, the overlap of roles, the interactiveness of roles, the everchanging nature of roles, the aspects outside of the person that command roles and script roles and all that is inside the person in roles that acts on the outside, and the effects of one's roles on others. And most importantly, it becomes important to emphasize the totally unconscious as contrasted to self-conscious nature of how we live roles.

If one goes back to Shakespeare and his play "As you like it," a rereading of act 2, scene 7, should lead us to marvel at the remarkable insight that was Shakespeare's. For he was not speaking of the actors interpreting the scripts of brilliant playwrights, nor was he speaking of the deceit that is at the heart of man's nature, but rather he was attempting to

come to some understanding of the complexity of one man, everchanging yet ever the same, and the complexity of the world, ever the same yet ever changing. "And one man in his time plays many parts, his acts being seven ages. At first the infant, mewling and puking in the nurse's arms: then the whining school boy, with his satchel and shining morning-face creeping like a snail unwilling to school. And then the lover sighing like furnace, with a woeful ballad made to his mistress's eyebrow. Then a soldier, full of strange oaths, and bearded like the pard, jealous in honour, sudden, and quick in quarrel, seeking the bubble reputation, even in the canon's mouth..." One should marvel that this is one person moving from one recognizable but inimitable role to the next and continuously developing and changing, continuously remaining coherent and whole.

## Wolfensberger: Tales from the Twilight Zone

Michael Steer

*Note: Wolf Wolfensberger had occasion to review this text before we decided to publish. His only comment was cryptic: "Si non è vero, è ben trovato!" (loosely: If its not true, it is nonetheless well invented.)*

There can have been few more stimulating places in the world to have studied than Syracuse University during the early to mid-1970's. At that time, some of our field's immortal names daily haunted the stacks of the university's magnificent Bird Library; Burton Blatt, Dean of the School of Education, author of Christmas in Purgatory and Exodus from Pandemonium; Thomas Szasz, the "Rambo" of the (then) infant anti-psychiatry movement; Sol Gordon, the sensational sexologist; David Krathwohl, co-author of Bloom's Taxonomy; Dan Sage of "Sage and Burello"; Biklen, Bogdan and Taylor at the internationally renowned Center on Human Policy; and of course the highly controversial Wolf Wolfensberger.

As a faceless and overly obsequious Canadian graduate student, I first "experienced" (as the scent salesladies say) Wolf at a tutorial organised by the Faculty to expose unstructured and unwashed post-adolescent thought processes to new ideas and famous (sometimes infamous) "names."

Syracuse was good at arranging lots of such (semi-idolatrourous) occasions for its grad students. In my view it was a particular strength of an otherwise very strong, highly student-focussed program.

### The Young Wolf

At first encounter, Wolf was much younger than I had expected him to be. In appearance he reminded me of the TV pictures I had seen of Oppenheimer, the nuclear scientist. His rather ascetic, haunted face, esoteric vocabulary, somewhat guttural accent and indeed his entire manner were all entirely appropriate to the tutorial and to a prestigious academic with his name and reputation. There were perhaps eight students and Professor Dan Sage (my program advisor) at the event, sitting in crescent formation, with an intense Wolf facing them, armed only with a notepad, pencil, enormous energy and a truly formidable mind. Wolf led off and battled ensued.

As an Anglo-Saxon, schooled during the Second World War to dread our Continental relatives, I recall having felt overwhelmed with Wolf's "german-ness." Most of the sparring between those in the group who had previously managed or been employed in institutional settings and Wolf, who in an absolute and unambiguous fashion stripped all dignity from their past careers, went completely over my head. After all I had been Principal of a residential school for blind children for the preceding five years and he obviously hadn't meant his incredibly pointed comments to refer to me!

The jousting continued for over an hour and on the way back from Huntington Hall, stumbling across "the Beach" (a small piece of lawn, littered on sunny days with the bodies of undergraduate basking



shark) to the security of the Special Education Division, I recall thinking appreciatively "Wow." As many American graduate students will affirm, a "Wow" scores well on most Likert-type scales of appreciation.

## Oh Granny, What Big Teeth You Have

**T**hen the PASS workshops started and so did the rumours. In those days PASS was only in its second edition. Faculty and students in the Special Education Division heard on the whisper grapevine that the PASS 2 conciliation sessions were so protracted and Wolf's expectations so demanding that some participants had become physically sick from exertion at various high or low points in the interminable events. Some it was said had enjoyed seizures induced by paroxysms of rage and there might even have been a few student deaths from unknown but dreadful causes.

The news was intoxicating to Dan my program advisor, whose images of a successful professional preparation program corresponded with certain humiliation scenes from "An Officer and a Gentleman." Into everyone's life a little rain must inevitably fall and despite my heart-rending entreaties, I was duly registered in two of Wolf's sequential units, from which few (if any) it was said had ever emerged with a grade, let alone a "passing" grade. And grades were of course, for potential human service administrators one of the few tangible reasons for submitting to the anguish of graduate school in those days, perhaps still.

The classes were wonderful. Wolf of course was a brilliant lecturer and the extent of his preparation was a lesson in the "seriousness" I had long been searching for in most things to do with the human services. Expectation was extraordinarily high and the peer competition sometimes daunting, but always appropriately fierce. There was a paper to be completed each week and a formidable reading list with spot quizzes which the unprepared might fail and have the failure count as part of the final all-important grade.

The papers were returned each week covered with red-penned highly detailed comments, sometimes more red ink than original submission. The experience was at once enormously instructive and absolutely horrifying. Sometimes, the final comment would be a definitive "RESUBMIT" which meant next week, two papers should be submitted and if, perish the thought, with the same result, compound interest so that the final week's submission might, in theory at least, result in each class member submitting a dozen or so reworked papers. But this was only part of the tribulation.

For the first time in my life, I had to sit still for lengthy periods of time, listen hard and think quickly. Above all, I knew that I had to be prepared, stay very organized, read aggressively for retention and with alacrity. The course load was a particularly heavy one, since like most of my peers, I was also enrolled in four other classes during the semester, including one in advanced statistics and techniques of research; both "guillotine" courses with (all importantly) high failure rates.

The best classes were the Sunday marathons which Wolf gave as "make-ups" for some of the regularly scheduled classes he missed because of his gigantic public speaking commitment. We would meet on campus at 8.00 or 9.00am and "go hard" all day and into the early evening, with Wolf's wife Nancy bringing in vast quantities of pizza for lunch.

Wolf would take about an hour to warm up and then go into high gear for the remainder of the day. At one of the sessions I recall Wolf having concluded a teaching module that had been brimming with arcane content and had asked for questions about the concepts on the overhead transparency, which like the eye of the Cyclops had been a dominating feature of the presentation. A hirsute young person sitting in front of me asked if Wolf would explain the final issue of an unbelievably dense and lengthy list. Wolf's quick response was "Mr. Blackman, your understanding of this issue would depend upon your complete conceptualization of the desiderata - I will move on." I recall again thinking "Wow" - and moving on.

## Invincibility

**O**n another occasion, Wolf dwelt at length on the notion of "Invincibility." The focus of the lecture was on institutions, their longevity and the notion that in our battle to do away with them, we "might never, ever win." The institution preservation movement, with its stranglehold at that time on the American Association on Mental Deficiency, seemed invincible. Some things, like the poor and institutions, would (we all believed) always be with us.

To illustrate his point, Wolf told the story of how as a boy he had stood beside the bridge in his native village in Germany watching, as part of a crowd, the returning German Army flushed with the success of its invasion of France. They poured across the village bridge hour after hour, day after day in their trucks or tanks and wearing their "stahlhelm" flying their Nazi eagle standards, singing their victory songs to the hysterical cheers of the crowds - "And as the hours and days passed" said Wolf - "The thought suddenly became clear to me - It's true - It's true OUR SIDE IS INVINCIBLE! - I felt like standing at attention" said Wolf "And shouting with the crowd SEIG HEIL!" And to illustrate his point he did just that, as the classroom door opened and the Dean escorted a small group of wide-eyed visitors into the room. Wolf chose to ignore them, but it was indeed



a moment to savour. The point of the story was, of course, that some three years after the incident, the supposedly invincible Third Reich was in ruins. Quite suddenly, the worm had turned and the conqueror was no longer invincible.

On another occasion, Wolf informed us that the class would be unable to meet during the following week because he had an engagement out of state, so that we needed to arrange a mutually convenient date and time to hold a make-up session. After five or six minutes of searching our diaries for a suitable space, we concluded that our individual schedules clashed and that there was no possibility of consensus. Wolf's response was that in that event we should meet at 4 o'clock on Monday next - to which someone responded "But Wolf, I can't come then, I have another class at 4 o'clock on Monday?" "You have a class at 4.00am next Monday," said Wolf. "I am increasingly impressed with this University. It seems to be taking the task of educating you very seriously. I am **trrruly** impressed. If this is indeed the case I will excuse you from attending my class!"

## The Wolf Awakens

In my final year at Syracuse, I was part of a small faculty team chaired by Dr. Jim Winschel whose job was to prepare the Special Education Division's annual budget submission to the State. It was an exacting task which had to be completed outside of regular class time, generally on weekends and holidays. As the budget submission deadline approached, I was left with having to quickly package the Training Institute's budget for presentation, but had little data. It was a late Sunday evening and a spectacular up-state New York thunder and lightning storm was raging. I phoned Wolf's home. Nancy answered and said that Wolf had only just returned from the airport and was in fact upstairs in the "Wolf Den" resting, but since the matter was an urgent one I should drive over and she would interrupt his tormented dreams.

When I arrived at the house, the storm was at its height, rain sheeted down and the sky boomed with thunder and periodically crackled with lightning. Nancy answered the door and escorted me up the stairs to the fabled Wolf Den. I entered. It was a long, corridor-like room papered with tiger-striped wallpaper. There was a desk, chair and bookcase and a picture of Whistler's sombre mother on one wall. The room was lit with a neo-Gothic lancet window I recall; and I imagined entire shelves of mysterious leather-bound and chained arcana further back in the shadows. At the far end of the room lying on a "camp bed" was the fabled Wolf covered from toe to chin with a white sheet. As I slowly approached him,

the lightning crackled across the sky, and through the Gothic Window everything was thrown into bright relief. Wolf turned his eyes slowly towards me, bared his teeth in a smile and I once again thought "Wow."

## The debt to Wolf

As an avid reader of Richard Scheerenberger's two lengthy catalogues of the heroes of our field, I sometime ago concluded that it would be difficult to find another name in the entire history of service provision to people with intellectual or developmental disabilities in this, or in any other era, who had made a greater contribution to public policy world-wide, than has Wolf Wolfensberger.

It is difficult to convey to the post PASS-PASSING reader the extraordinary impact of concepts, for example, "age-appropriateness" and the two juxtapositions (deviancy image and deviancy program) or indeed the developmental model which have these days become ordinary, widely accepted (if sometimes misapplied) professional terms.

Wolf's impact on the field in the early-to-mid 70's was absolutely phenomenal, and today, so many of the seeds that were sown in those years (sometimes at great personal cost) have borne fruit.

I wish I could adequately describe the intensity of the personal thrill I experienced at an early training event when the "model coherency" concept became suddenly clear to me. It was akin to "pure" excitement. I wish I could adequately convey the feelings I experienced at a very early PASSING event here in Australia some years later, when the difference between "normalisation" and "social role valorisation" suddenly became transparent to me.

I wish I could convey the sense of power that derives from visiting a traditional program for people with disabilities and in a very short time, being able, with reasonable accuracy, to synthesise data from direct observation into a coherent format, so that helpful suggestions can be made to decision-makers on how the current situation might be improved. These feelings are all a small part of the personal debt I owe Wolf.

Wolf's influence can be seen in a variety of human service programs world-wide - from Aden to Zanzibar (as we used to say when the British Empire was in its declining years) and these "tales from the Twilight zone" might best be appreciated as a small tribute to the human face of one of the few really great teachers, scholars and thinkers of our time.