

# In Memoriam: Dr. Wolf Wolfensberger

Wolf Wolfensberger, a Professor Emeritus at Syracuse University, died on February 27, 2011. Hired by Burton Blatt in 1973, Wolf founded the Training Institute on Human Service Planning, Leadership and Change Agency and was best known for popularizing the principle of normalization in North America and developing the concept of social role valorization. He is widely regarded as one of the most influential scholars in the area of developmental disabilities in the 20th century.

MONDAY, MARCH 7, 2011

## Memories of Wolf

I am writing this note in Geneva and am very sorry that I cannot get back to North America in time to attend Wolf's funeral.

I have been flooded with emotions and memories over the past several days. It is 40 years ago that Wolf arrived in Canada and hired me as his first assistant. As always, he was very honest in telling me that he hired me because he couldn't find anyone in Canada who was qualified for the job, and considered me the next best thing. My two years working for him provided a lifetime of experiences and lessons. He was a tireless taskmaster – but we also had lots of fun. Soon, there was a whole group of Wolf's Warriors ready to do his bidding. That included research, writing, editing, preparing overheads and challenging the status quo. Wolf gave us the courage and the tools to take on the establishment and created the support group that provided the refuge when we needed it.

Once we invited someone who had been playing the bagpipes on campus to lead us down the hall to Allan Roehrer's office where we sang a chant suggesting a change in director of a project that in Wolf's mind had gone bad. There was our car trip to Nebraska, with everyone – including Betty Anglin sleeping on the floor of your yet unsold Omaha home. (We thought Betty was old for such a trip then, but I'm sure she was younger than I am now.) There were our "Wolf's Warriors" t-shirts, commissioned especially to impress Frank Menolascino on his visit to NIMR. There were the dinners for visiting dignitaries at the Wolfensbergers' home, with incredible meals prepared by Nancy.

The news of Wolf's death has reconnected many of us who had worked together with him in Canada. While we each may have had our differences with Wolf over the years, the fundamental values and commitment have remained strong. My godson who has autism just turned 20, and I know that he would have had a very different life without Wolf's influence in Canada. Certainly my life would have been a lot less rich if Wolf hadn't taken the chance in hiring me.

Wolf challenged every person who knew him to seek out injustice and confront it. It was frustrating to never be able to meet his standards, but rewarding to try.

Diane Richler

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Posted by RachaelZ at 7:18 AM 0 comments

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SUNDAY, MARCH 6, 2011

## wolf memories

The glimmer in his eye was a window to the thinking that occurred behind them. I remember the constant index cards on hand in the shirt pocket in case a good idea come upon him at some point of the day. I remember Wolf's thrill as I found a slide of the *Bobo de Seville* painting. Equally thrilling was the research he wanted on the Greek god *Dys* as part of the debate between the usage of handicapped vs. disabled. He was excited with my find of the Werner Herzog film about the feral child *in German*. Equally good was his new vacuum at the T.I. to take care of the constant mud brought in by visitors - as well as the tutorial we all got on its operation.

These details made up the day to day life, but there were also those profound ideas of his that created so much dialogue as well as many attempts at societal change. May we all remember Wolf's efforts and principles and continue to move them forward. May he rest in peace and know that his work will be continued, despite the difficulty and constant "obfuscation" (his word, not mine).

Marcia Tewell  
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***Ring the bells that still can ring. Forget your perfect offerings. There is a crack in everything. That is how the light gets in.***

**L. Cohen**

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## I Remember Wolf -- Fred Harshman

I first came to know about the man with the unusual name, Wolf Wolfensberger, when his book "Changing Patterns In Residential Services" turned up in the library at the Saskatchewan Training School where I was the new Chief Social Worker. The ideas in it captivated me, especially the concept of "normalization". Then in 1970, I believe, I heard him speak at the CAMR national conference at Vancouver. I was more than a little impressed with his vision of the future and analysis of the past and present. I heard him speak again in Toronto on "citizen advocacy". I was working at the Edgar Rehab. Center near Barrie, Ontario at the time. I stood up and expressed my agreement with citizen advocacy and ended up being quoted in the Toronto Globe and Mail -- a situation that caused me considerable grief with my superiors. However, a few weeks later I received a call from perhaps Diane Richler, to meet Dr. Wolfensberger and Dr. Roeher at NIMR. I knew this would be a key moment in my life. We talked for about an hour and I took that "vocabulary and spelling test" Wolf loved. Not long after I began my 10 year career as an NIMR change agent in the field of mental retardation and developmental disabilities.

Working with Wolf, Allan Roeher, John Elias, Aldred Neufeldt and the wonderful team of "Wolf's Warriors" was an incredible experience in ways described so well by so many others. I just want to add a few remembrances that come to mind that were perhaps unique to Wolf: that spelling test he used to screen prospective staff; the little note book we had to carry at all times; his love for low cost hotels; his love of precise language; the paper saving notes with writing going up and around the margins; the little scraps of paper he pulled out of the drawer recording your assignments and due dates; the crushing post mortems we endured and learned from; video taping every presentation for posterity and a teaching tool; doing up those ever changing OH transprences; pushing ourselves to be able to handle the long hours and heavy work load; always being prepared and expecting equipment failures, forgotten organizational assignments, and crisis moments; the need for laughter and socialization; how to use slide and OH presentations; the endless touring of facilities and programs during our travels looking for cutting edge programs, work and ideas; how to recruit leaders and potential change agents into the fold; and the importance and use of training events to shape people's thinking and our own; how he generously included many of us by name in his books and writings.

These are a few of the unique and defining little things I fondly recall about this most influential and beloved

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Posted by RachaelZ at 3:59 PM 0 comments

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## Share Your Memories

This blog was created to share stories and memories of Dr. Wolf Wolfensberger. If you have a story to share, [send us an email](#). Thank you!

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Dr. Wolf Wolfensberger

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