

Remembering John Rowan, 1925–2018

Editor's note: Our dear colleague and leading propagator of humanistic and transpersonal psychology in Britain, John Rowan, died earlier this year. Back in March there was a wonderful 93rd birthday celebration for John, and he died peacefully on Saturday 26 May.

In the forthcoming autumn issue of *Self & Society* journal, the speeches of appreciation made about John at his funeral will be reproduced in full. There are detailed obituaries for John on the AHPb website at ahpb.org/index.php/john-rowan-obituary-and-appreciation/, which has been widely circulated; and a shorter one by Keith Silvester on the *Guardian* website, here: www.theguardian.com/science/2018/jun/14/john-rowan-obituary

Obituaries and/or tributes are also due to appear in a range of major psy publications, including *Therapy Today*, *The Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, *The Psychologist*, *The Psychotherapist*, *The Journal of Existential Analysis* and the *Review of the Scientific and Medical Network*, amongst others.

In this Newsletter appreciation, we begin with a personal and very touching description of John's 93rd birthday celebration written by his widow, Sue, who organized this wonderful gathering – along with some beautiful photographs from the occasion. This piece is beautiful for all kinds of reasons; and it also gives us some insight into the emotional impact of finishing a therapy practice, something that all therapists must one day prepare

for – the day we're no longer able to work, and the obligations we then have to our existing clients in this work we do.

I then offer a brief report of John's funeral, at which his dear family, friends and colleagues gave him a send-off full of love, appreciation and gratitude for all he gave us.
Rest In Peace, dear friend and colleague.

Richard House, Editor

SUE ROWAN writes: It was in early January 2018 that John had to take the decision he'd been dreading – the decision to retire. John's health had been deteriorating slowly for the previous few months, and his latest admission to hospital had meant he'd been unable to work for the previous six weeks. Clients had been notified that John would be out of action until January 2018, and were told that he would be in touch with them again at that time. John knew in his heart that he physically couldn't continue working, but it hurt him so much to say those words out loud. John's peer-supervisor, Keith Silvester, came to visit one afternoon, and we knew it was decision time. And so it was done.

After Keith left, John became quite downcast and sad, wondering what he would do, now that the work he was so passionate about was over. It seemed to me that it would be a

v An animated John in a conversation with Andrew Samuels



▼ The magnificent display of John's literary oeuvre



▼ The glint has it: John enjoying his 93rd birthday celebration



▼ A loving exchange with Jocelyn Chaplin



travesty if John just drifted away from such a long and successful 'career' (although he would never have called it that – it was more like a calling to him), without marking it in any way.

Desperate to try and raise his spirits a little, and also to allow him to have something akin to a 'leaving do' and not just disappear, I suggested we have a party to honour the occasion. John thought this was a great idea, and brightened considerably at the thought of all his friends and family coming together to celebrate.

Originally scheduled for February, the party was delayed – partly because the winter was so awful but mainly because it took me quite a while to get it organized! The date finally agreed upon was the 25th March. This was fortuitous because John's 93rd birthday was on the 31st March, so it became a joint birthday and retirement party.

Windy Dryden came to visit John one afternoon shortly after we'd decided to hold the party and, hearing John's concern and disappointment that he'd had to retire, suggested a permanent, visual reminder of what John had achieved over the years, in the form of his book covers, photographed on to display canvases (John's daughter, Peri, an artist in her own right, designed many of John's book covers and a number of them are shown on these canvases). Both John and I thought that was an inspired suggestion, and I started to make arrangements for that to happen in time for the party.

We wanted to give any guests who wanted to say something on the day an opportunity to do so, and Andrew Samuels agreed to 'MC' the event. Andrew and I had already decided that the event must be upbeat and not funereal in any way. It was clear that John was fading, and we didn't want to focus on that at the party.

When he saw the two canvases hanging over the fireplace, ready for the party, John was astonished. He absolutely loved them (we'd added in some photos of him as well, which made it more personal), and insisted that everyone who visited the house in the subsequent months had to see them! He did make a comment, in his rather dry humorous way, that they 'would be good at a funeral', and he was OK with that (they were

subsequently on view there, as he predicted!).

The party was a huge success – there was so much love for John in that room it was palpable. Skilfully facilitated by Andrew, so many people shared their recollections about how their paths had met with John's. There was lots of laughter and many moving moments as well, as people recounted where they'd met, what they remembered (which he mostly didn't remember at all!), events they'd both participated in, and so forth. It was a momentous occasion because, although no-one spoke of it, it was, I think, clear to everyone present that this would probably be the last time they would be with John.

That night, John kept me awake until the early hours, talking about the party, going over it again and again, saying it was one of the greatest days of his life. And it truly was.

My great thanks go to Stephen Engwell, my brother-in-law, who not only put in hours of work to produce the canvases, but who also took all the photographs and made videos of all the speaker contributions. John was so overcome by all the wonderful things people said about him on the day, he couldn't take it all in. It was only the following day when I played the videos to him that he really *heard* all the funny, loving, complimentary things people had said about him, and it moved him to tears. You may find this hard to believe, but he honestly couldn't believe that he was so appreciated.

John had made it very clear that he wanted a good funeral (he'd planned it all a couple of years ago, and had been very specific about what he wanted to happen and whom he wanted to speak), and he hoped lots of people would attend. After the party, I asked him if he didn't think it was better to have been present when people were saying such wonderful things about him, rather than leaving it until the funeral. He agreed that it was, and that he'd never expected such tributes whilst he was alive – but that he still wanted a good funeral.

John was never a fan of the 'either/or'. He believed you could have both, and he usually did. Right to the last....

Sue Rowan, July 2018

▼ An intimate moment with old friend, Dina (Zohar) Glouberman



▼ John with Richard House



RICHARD HOUSE writes: One always has mixed feelings about attending a funeral – but it was true to form that John asked that those attending his send-off should be dressed as colourfully as possible. For John was a man of many colours – the kind of out-of-the-box thinker that I love, and which in my view the world desperately needs more of.

The funeral was held at the beautiful woodland burial grounds of Greenaces, Woodland Hall, Epping, and we were blessed with perfect weather. I arrived with Andrew Samuels in good time, and one of the first things I noticed was the display of John's numerous book covers (referred to by Sue, above), and the two Festschrifts with which John was presented on his 70th and 90th birthdays. It was touching to see so many people thumbing through these two wonderful appreciations of the great man and his work in and for our field.

The service itself was magnificent in every way – simple and profound, perfectly planned and administered, and with shamanic facilitator and friend of John's, Leo Rutherford, as Celebrant and leading the burial ritual – a role which he brought with great sensitivity and beautiful ordinary extraordinariness.

John had given very clear indications about his funeral, and his chosen entry music was Mozart's Great Mass in C Minor, and Gloria – Qui Tollis. Andrew Samuels then welcomed the assembled gathering, and Leo was invited to dedicate the space. Andrew then delivered the eulogy, replete with the kind of subtle insights about John and with his penetrating 'humanistic directness' for which Andrew is known and so admired. I was particularly struck by his comment that 'John was perhaps the most *intelligent* man I have known' (his emphasis). And also by his reference to John's hearty chuckle and his visceral physical presence: 'I meant it when I say that John was beautiful', he said. And who will ever forget Andrew's statement that John 'farted at both the humanistics and the Jungians!!' – and later, Mick Cooper's recounting of how John once wrote to him, 'I shit on goals!' That's our John – authentic and honest to a tee, or as Mick Cooper put it, 'absolutely committed to being authentic'. Anyone who knows anything about genuine authenticity knows

that to fully live it, it sometimes means saying unpopular things and even upsetting people – and John certainly wasn't prepared to sacrifice authenticity on the altar of being nice all the time and courting everyone to like him.

John's son Shaun then gave an incredibly moving, courageous and at times humorous family tribute to his dad's life and work, and to their own relationship. John's professional friends and acquaintances certainly learnt much about John the man from Shaun's riveting contribution. Then, following Shaun's tribute, Keith Silvester read John's chosen excerpt from Ezra Pound's *The Cantos* (1st Canto).

Apart from John's characteristically frank views about 'goals' in therapy, in his contribution Mick Cooper also referred to John's down-to-earth, warm and approachable nature; and to his lack of pretensions and 'incredible generosity'. The assembled gathering will also never forget Mick's description of John's insights into the 'good penis', the 'bad penis', and the 'nicey nicey penis'... – a kind of humanistic counterpart to Melanie Klein, one might say. And Mick memorably concluded by saying how John was 'the very embodiment of the humanistic and existential values that he so passionately believed in'.

Other contributions were made by Jocelyn Chaplin, Dina Glouberman and Richard House – before we heard another courageous and deeply moving tribute to John the man from his widow, Sue. As Sue said, 'as many of you knew "John the professional", I thought that I would share with you some things about "John the person"'. Again, those of us who only knew John professionally learnt so much more about John's personhood from Sue's multi-faceted, engaging and often humorous tribute. Humour is a wonderful gift at all times, but certainly at occasions such as this. Sue spoke at length about generosity, fun, curiosity and (again) authenticity – all of which John displayed in spades. John and Sue's marriage and companionship sounds from all accounts like one made in some kind of heaven.

Finally, Sue finished by reciting John's poem, 'The I's'. And with closing words from our host Andrew Samuels, we left the building with the coffin bearers to the sound of Wagner's Overture from

Tannhäuser. Leo Rutherford then conducted the burial service with great dignity and lightness of touch – and we all retired to the local public house for the wake and a great celebration and mutual sharings about John and his great life (and with the most delicious sweet-potato chips imaginable, that some might also never forget).

Finally, we've not included formal obituaries here, as they are easily accessible online (see the links mentioned above). And as already mentioned, the appreciation speeches made for John at his funeral will all appear in the autumn issue of *Self & Society*.

Rest In Deserved Peace, dear John.



▲ John Rowan – 'Father of British Humanistic Psychology'