

Dear friends from the *Rapaport-Klein Study Group*,

A couple of days before the last meeting of June 1-3, 2012, when I had arrived in New York, I called Bob Holt to say hello, and he said that he regretted not being able to be present at the 50th Anniversary of the Group, but wanted to send a message to all of us for this important occasion. He wrote this message and sent it by email to Doris Silverman, but it arrived right after Doris had left for Stockbridge.

I am here with Bob now in Truro (Mass.), I came with John Kerr to visit him for few days, and Bob showed to me his message. I copy it below, so that all of you can see it. If you agree, I can also post it on the web site.

Fondly,
Paolo Migone
June 4, 2012

On our Golden Anniversary

Dear fellow members of the *Rapaport-Klein Study Group*, I regret that age and infirmity overruled wish and sentiment to keep Joan and me away from this celebratory meeting. As the senior member, however, I thought it fitting for me to send you these words of greeting and congratulation.

Fiftieth anniversaries mean much to me, because in just 14 more months Joan and I will celebrate our own Golden Wedding, a beginning that is somehow greener in my memory than the one you are hailing today. But I find my thoughts turning further back, to the origins of our group, which began of course as the *Rapaport Study Group*. It was so like David to be the invisible *fons et origo*, the founder who was nevertheless not physically there at the beginning. It was a role he relished, not to be lionized or acclaimed in public, but to be the power behind the throne, the invisible puppeteer discreetly pulling strings that made the show go. No, that's not a true analogy either, because David hated manipulativeness and any form of *dishonesty*. Somehow, he relished his self-presentation as "just a little Jew from Budapest"—perhaps a maneuver that spared him from grandiosity while implicitly making an opening for his partisans to make passionate rebuttals in his favor. Even as he impatiently waved plaudits aside, I suspect that he really loved the praise that he got, because he had truly earned it.

David was both charismatic and highly sociable, never happier than when at the center of a party group telling jokes, singing folksongs, but never grabbing and holding the center of attention in a narcissistic way. It was clear, also, that he loved to put on a dramatic performance when he spoke. So he was certainly not a simple man, and though many people sought to get close to him, he was in some ways a very demanding friend who ruthlessly cut people off his list if he felt that they had not lived up to the code. He was also a tough teacher and a tough boss.

So why do so many of us feel the need to keep alive something of his spirit and his work, when he so often gave us a hard time? Perhaps the ambivalence in tough love gives it staying power. Those who had served under David, who had worked for and then with him, gained an enormous lot from the experience, but also shared the same resentments, with many stories to tell of how demanding he could be, how uncompromising in holding us to standards so high as to feel unattainable. I guess you don't start a movement, attract disciples and faithful followers just by being a nice, smart guy.

The band of intellectual siblings Rapaport left behind shared mixed feelings, but with the sense of having been through a rare, even a transformative experience—a contact with what we call a great man or a genius, a truly exceptional person, despite his flaws and limitations and the more human because of them. So it seemed inevitable that, once we had gotten over the initial grief and devastating loss, we felt the need to get together and keep alive his tradition.

I think of that tradition as a set of values, primarily: A fierce *devotion to the search for truth*, through science but not in any limited understanding of that discipline, encompassing *intuition*, an almost esthetic sensitivity to nuances of human emotions, relationships, fantasies, and to states of consciousness well beyond that tight focus that favors *logical clarity*. All that was coupled with an equally dogged determination to *fight self-deception*, the delusory satisfactions of quick solutions, and the siren song of plausibility. *Think it through, get it right, and make it clear!* Rapaport had, and taught, immense *respect* for the prodigious works of Freud for their intrinsic merits, not because the Old Man was the founding father of psychoanalysis and the prince of the profession he created. He was willing to suspend the impulse some felt to reject the whole corpus of thought because some parts of it were fallacious, muddy, or simply mistaken, and to look for true insight on a deeper, hidden level to which one could dig only by respectful effort.

He also had the rare gift of an *architectonic* sense, a feeling into the overall Gestalt of a work. It required a persistence that few other scholars had, to come back to Freud's writings year after year, seeking and finding hidden connections, hierarchical organizations of ideas, and latent narratives. It was the kind of deep understanding that led Erikson to remark once that he didn't know what he himself had been thinking until he read what David had written about it.

But the values Rapaport upheld and personified were not purely intellectual. He also admired and to some extent shared the devotion of the best psychoanalysts to the welfare of their patients, to participate in and relieve their emotional distress and mental suffering—let me summarize it by Murray's term *nurturance*. Only in his last years did he undertake professional psychotherapy with Riggs patients, but no one who worked closely with him did not feel his concern for our personal problems and his occasional, tactful interventions to help us solve them or at least bear up under them. A related value, conspicuously present in him, was *generosity*: not only did he quietly give away a large part of his income to needy people all around the globe, but he gave recognition and praise without stint to work he thought worthy, no matter by whom. Two related values of his come to mind: *loyalty* to causes as well as persons he loved, and a basic *faith in people*. He invested enormous amounts of his time and effort in studying, showing genuine interest in, and in various ways facilitating the work of his subordinates. That would have been impossible without an implicit conviction that they were capable of recognizing his devotion and responding productively.

I can easily imagine David's deep embarrassment if he were to have heard such words spoken about him. While he would have admitted some of it, the general effect would have struck him as "over the top." I recognize the danger of becoming too one-sided in praise, and I still feel the sting of his rejective criticism, which went as far as contempt for the phoniness he found in something I had written, in a letter to me of August 27, 1953. It took me over a week to subdue my wounded feelings enough to respond, telling him first that

my initial reaction was to tell him to go to hell! Yet I could see the validity of his critique, *tactless* though it was, and came to respect his *blunt honesty*. He could be exasperating in other ways, too, as anyone knows who ever tried to get him to go first through an open door. No, I disclaim the mantle of hagiographer. It is simply difficult not to seem to exaggerate when you must speak the truth about someone so extraordinary.

Let me interpolate here an account of my major present task, preparing for public dissemination the correspondence between David and me between the time he left Topeka in 1948 to his death in Stockbridge at the end of 1960. With the invaluable assistance of Arnie Richards, his daughter Tamar and her husband Larry, plus that of my wife Joan, I am annotating the sometimes cryptic letters, clarifying who the people casually alluded to were. Since the letters of greatest lasting interest are discussions of theories and issues, usually as fleshed out in manuscripts we exchanged for critique, I try to track down what the eventually published material was and to clarify obscure allusions, in footnotes or the like. The process has immersed me in the intellectual world of over half a century ago, and in the evoked emotional reality of our friendship. In the process, I got access not only to my own correspondence files but to others at the *Library of Congress*, wherein I discovered some remarkable reminiscences of David's about his earliest years in this country. Paolo Migone has just published Italian translations of two of those in his journal *Psicoterapia e Scienze Umane* (2012, Vol. 46, no. 1; www.psicoterapiaescienzeumane.it/english.htm); I hope that the first large installment, including those letters and about 150 more (the less meaty ones summarized), will appear online in Arnie's web site <http://internationalpsychoanalysis.net> later this summer.

My intention in writing the present paragraphs is to help focus some of this celebration on the ways David inspired us with the desire, the real need to preserve and carry on his tradition. By necessity, it stresses what is valuable and worthy of preservation and cultivation. I hope that it will arouse in you the determination not to shut up shop but to keep this fellowship going, supporting one another in our efforts to emulate not just Rapaport but also his uniquely charismatic student-become-coworker, George S. Klein.

George had one great asset which David envied, recognizing that despite his strong wish he lacked it: the kind of creativity and lab know-how that generated empirical experiments—practical ways of putting theoretical propositions and hunches to test against the reality of hard data. Klein was so fertile of such productive ideas that I often had to argue for finishing what we had already begun before launching off into another, exciting direction. I too wished that I had such an ability to see promising ways to study striking phenomena experimentally or to put segments of theory into laboratory coats. His enthusiasm for such experiments had an infectiousness that made the atmosphere of the *NYU Research Center for Mental Health* electric with excitement—one of the Center's most memorable attributes. He brought some of that electricity along with him in the meetings of this study group for the rest of his short life.

Let us honor him as well as David Rapaport, then, as we look back over a half-century of fellowship and toward further decades of carrying on a great tradition. For we are, if not the only group dedicated to the twin goals of improving and making more scientifically useful the theories of psychoanalysis *and* subjecting them to controlled, empirical tests, surely the longest-lived. Rejoice, and press forward!

Bob Holt