

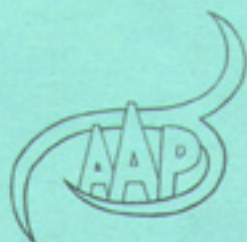
VOICES

THE ART AND SCIENCE OF PSYCHOTHERAPY

A Journal published by the American Academy of Psychotherapists

A WIFE'S-EYE VIEW OF CARL ROGERS

By HELEN ROGERS



VOLUME I, NUMBER 1
FALL, 1965

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**Carl Rogers.
Gentleness, 1911**



**Carl and Helen
Honeymoon**



**Carl Rogers at his mobile workshop -
one of Helen's painting in background**

Any attempt of mine to give impressions of my life with Carl will of necessity have to be anecdotal. In the course of such a lengthy span of years, 56 to be exact, that we have known each other, the experiences in sharing, the trials and joys of raising a family, the fun of trips we've had together - so many incidents and impressions come tumbling out of my memory - and I wonder how to select the few that might reflect the personality and interests of the man who has been my husband for 41 years.

One morning, many years ago, I was sitting in class in the second grade room of Holmes School in Oak Park, Illinois. (I mention this school for it was to become famous for having produced Ernest Hemingway and the children of Frank Lloyd Wright. We were all classmates together.) Into the room was ushered a small boy, who stood in front of us, with open book and read to us fluently; so fluently in fact that the teacher admitted him to second grade (his first school experience) with great delight.

So began my acquaintance with this shy, sensitive, and unsocial boy, who preferred to live in his books and his dream world rather than encounter the rough-tumble of the play yard or enter into competitive sports. He went directly home after school and while we lingered to bat the ball in a softball game, he was feeding his chickens or selling eggs to the neighbors, a little business of his own which his parents encouraged.

My home was only a block from his and occasionally we would encounter each



Summer 1960.
Over one mountain, about to climb another

other on our bicycles and have a ride together. I realize now that we lived in a beautiful, high-class suburban community and both of us came from privileged homes.

It was not until we went to the University of Wisconsin, and by chance rediscovered each other there, that we became seriously interested, fell in love, and made plans for our future together. I have always been so very grateful that Carl had insight and courage enough to insist on my sharing his graduate school experience with him. When he received his degree at Wisconsin in 1924, and wanted to go on to Union Seminary in New York City for his graduate work, he was most firm and positive in his idea to take me with him. He felt it to be absolutely essential that we share this new experience together, and grow, and make friends in this new world. He was so right.

I had just finished two years at an Art school in Chicago and, after pounding the pavement for many months, had landed a job as a commercial artist and was making the munificent sum of \$40 a week - not bad for a woman and a beginner in the field in those days. But I was eager and ready to explore new fields with Carl. I guess our parents realized it was useless to protest, and it was - so after a quiet little wedding we started out in our Model T to conquer New York on a shoestring. I'm sure there were a few others in those days who were so bold as to go to graduate school in the state of married bliss, but it was the exception instead of the rule, as now, and the odds against married students were many and frightening. It was one of the big moments in our life when we made this decision and luckily we have never regretted it. Those four years in New York City while Carl was getting his doctorate from Teachers College, Columbia University, were packed with adventure for both of us. The thrill of exploring the big city with its many cultural advantages of the theatre, the Art Museums, the Bohemian area of the Village - as well as the intellectual stimulation of studying under such giants in education as Kilpatrick, Dewey, Fosdick, and McGiffert - had a very freeing quality for two young provincial mid-westerners. We ran into snags in our relationship with each other, as every young married couple is bound to do. What I feel was most fortunate for me was Carl's ability to be open and frank and truthful in facing all our problems, including our sex life. We were able to establish a free communication with each other, never allowing misunderstandings or hurts to fester. It gave us a basis for growth and closeness which has lasted through the years. His ability to listen and be empathic was there in the very first years of our marriage.

I shall never forget the weekend we drove from New York City to Rochester in April, 1928, to be interviewed for what was to be Carl's first job. In three brief days of cold and miserable weather when our car radiator froze and the driving was hazardous, Carl accepted the job in the Child Study Department of the Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Children, while I surveyed the housing situation. We bought a brand new little Dutch Colonial house, putting \$25.00 down for security, and drove

back to New York thrilled and delighted to be launching out on our own. We had a two-year old son and our daughter would be born soon after arrival in Rochester. The 12 years we spent there was a period of great growth and developing of leadership for Carl and of writing his first important book, *Clinical Treatment of the Problem Child*. It was a beautiful city in which to bring up our two small children. We bought a piece of lake front property on Seneca Lake only 75 miles away and spent many enjoyable times, building our cabin and living quite primitively in the woods on the lake. Carl wanted a sailboat, so in the winter months which were long and snowy in Rochester, he designed and constructed "The Snark"—a 12-foot flat bottomed sturdy sailboat with center board, jib and mainsail. This was a project we both loved. I laid out the pattern for the sails on our livingroom floor, cut and sewed the sail cloth, complete with grommets and binding and rope and together we built the neatest little craft that was ever launched on Seneca Lake (or, at least that was our conviction).

The invitation to come to Columbus as Professor in Psychology at Ohio State was another "big moment" in our lives. During the 12 years we had spent in Rochester, Carl had become a real force in the community and had just been rewarded by being named the Director of the Child Guidance Center. For a psychologist to attain this coveted position, which was usually given to a psychiatrist, was a recognition of him and a great step forward for Psychology. We were delighted! Then came the opportunity which I knew he had always wanted - to teach in a big university. It was very difficult for him to make the decision to leave his new position which he had fought so many battles to attain, but to go into the teaching field as a full professor was not something to turn down lightly. So, with many protests from our teenage son who was loath to leave Rochester, we moved to Columbus in a blizzard in December, 1939.

Our Columbus days were short but very memorable and sweet. We lived there four years in which time we built a home with much loving care; our son found his wife-to-be, Cora Jane Baxter, and decided to go into Medicine as a profession; and our daughter became interested in world affairs and became an active member of the United World Federalists.

One little incident I must tell which occurred in our move to Columbus. It illustrates so beautifully the innate non-directiveness of my now famous husband. We were all dead tired from having driven for two days through blizzards and ice to reach Columbus. Carl was stretched out on the floor of our new house, our teenage son was helping unload. He came through the livingroom carrying a large article on his shoulders - walked through the unfurnished dining room and crashed into the low hanging chandelier. It splintered into a thousand pieces with a shattering clatter. Carl, lying on the floor in a near comatose state, turned his head, opened one eye, and said in a soft voice, "Son, you learn the hard way." It brought roars of laughter and has been a byword in our family ever since.

The invitation to go to the University of Chicago was not an easy one for me to accept. I knew it meant greater freedom for Carl to explore new fields and to establish a Counseling Center of the sort that would develop and put into practice his ever growing theories and convictions in his philosophy of therapy. I knew it was right to go. I also knew it meant leaving my beautiful rural home and finding a spot to live in the dirty, slummy area of the South side of Chicago. Luckily, our children had departed for college - David to Cornell Medical School in New York City and Natalie to Stevens College, Missouri. So we decided that apartment living was wisest for us in the big city. This being 1945, at the end of the war, housing was almost impossible to find. But luck was with us and we found a large, airy apartment with a fine view of Lake Michigan and within walking distance of the Counseling Center. This made living in Chicago very acceptable to me. I find I enjoy and need pleasant surroundings in which to live and my training as an artist makes it imperative that I enjoy my home. I am essentially a homemaker and have always felt that to make the wheels run smoothly and have an attractive home in which to bring our friends has contributed very substantially to the success and prominence to which Carl has risen. It was during this period in Chicago that it was brought home to me frequently that my husband was emerging as a very well-known and important person in his field of endeavor. At the most unexpected times - signing a charge-a-plate or giving my name and address for the sending of packages - the person would look at me and say, "Are you THE Mrs. Carl Rogers?" It was a new and joyful experience to find my husband influencing so many people in so many different walks of life.

Chicago also was to be a time of trouble for us, a time when the pressures became so great, in his counseling of disturbed people, that my husband began to lose confidence in his own ability to help others, and to be on the brink of psychosis himself. One morning he started out for work and in ten minutes came back to the apartment saying, "I can't do it! I can't go on - let's get out of here **right now.**" And we did. Within the hour we were packed and in the car driving away - south and east - no destination in mind. He calls this his "escape period." It lasted a number of months. We finally came to roost at our hideaway on Seneca Lake and spent a month of roughing it in our cabin in the cold temperatures of May in New York State. There were periods of real despair which we weathered together. It never occurred to me that he could not or would not recover. We roamed the hills and I taught him all I could about painting. We both spent many hours enjoying and exploring and painting the countryside.

Another hobby of his that developed in Chicago was the making of mobiles. We were intrigued with Alexander Calder's new idea of art in motion. Carl, coming from an engineering family, enjoyed the combined problem of balance and composition that you are faced with when making a mobile. I remember that once I had to be in the East for two weeks, when the second of our grandchildren was born. "Grandma" was called to take care of little Anne, so I left Carl and our daughter, Natalie, to care for themselves. I returned to find they had been having a "ball"

making mobiles, experimenting with cardboard, balsa wood, copper, aluminum. I found a mobile hanging in every room in the house, including the bathrooms! This hobby has continued to be a great source of joy through the years and Carl has made some unusual and very artistic creations.

One of the fringe benefits of being, at the University of Chicago was their policy of allowing professors to spend one quarter a year away from the campus. We took advantage of this in the winter months from Christmas through March and it afforded us many happy times in the Caribbean and in Mexico. We explored the little known Windward Islands of St. Lucia, St. Vincent and Grenada and settled down for two months on one trip, on the tiny Island of Bequia in the British West Indies. We learned to snorkel, collect and identify shells and enjoy the beauties of the tropical fish and coral seen in the clear warm waters of the Caribbean - a new and wonderful world.

It was during this time that our daughter, Natalie, married a promising young man, Lawrence Fuchs, who was about to get his Ph.D. at Harvard in Political Science. She shared his graduate school life and now with their three daughters they are living near Boston and Larry is a Professor at Brandeis University. They had two fascinating years in the Philippines when Larry was Director of the Peace Corps there.

Our son has gone on in his medical career to be Chairman of the Department of Medicine at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee, where he and his wife and their three children are making their home and sharing the problems of the south.

When we moved to Madison, Wisconsin, in 1957, and found a beautiful home on Lake Monona, I felt my "cup runneth over." This was surely a spot in which I could spend the rest of my days. Carl was happy too. He had given 12 years to the development of the Counseling Center and they had been most rewarding and productive years. Now he had the opportunity to have more impact on Psychiatry and do research in psychotherapy - two things which were of great interest to him.

Madison was a place of warm friendships, and long cold winters. Carl found the frosty white trees and the frozen lake to be great subjects for photography. He has always taken beautiful pictures on our trips and vacations in foreign lands. We loved the birds and the flowers and the very gracious living in Wisconsin. Professionally, it was not so satisfying as some of the earlier years. He found himself at variance with his colleagues in psychology, feeling "hemmed in" and not allowed to be of influence on his students. He felt the need of more freedom from rules and grades and regulations which seem to be an innate part of our big universities.

His year away from the University in 1962-63 as a Fellow in the Center for Advanced Studies in the Behavioral Sciences, in Palo Alto, gave him time to clarify

his ideas of what he feels to be basically wrong in our methods of teaching and learning. His “Passionate Statement” on graduate education in psychology was an outgrowth of these feelings and an endeavor to make constructive suggestions for change.

Now we are on the West Coast in La Jolla. The freedom and congenial atmosphere of the Western Behavioral Sciences Institute, where he has a permanent appointment as Fellow in Residence, is truly a fulfillment as well as a continuation of growth. People are “in tune” for a change and so are we! We love the view of the ever-changing sea from our windows. It makes us feel we are a very real part of the “process of becoming,” which has had so much meaning in my husband’s world.



Carl and Helen Rogers
“A 1965 toast to VOICES”