



Past Master: Don Klein

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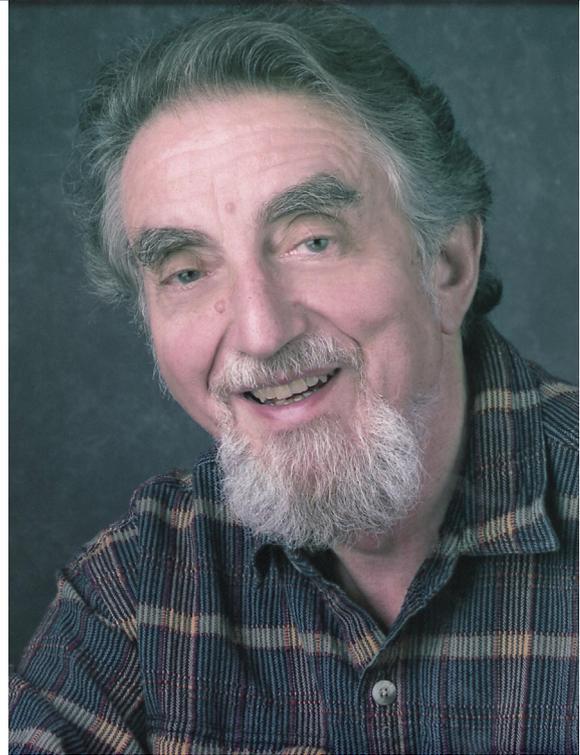
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Written by Don's son and NTL Member, Alan Klein

Dad was the son of Reform Jews who helped start the Reform temple in Worcester, Massachusetts, where he was born. His father was a chemist with Norton Abrasives, a privately owned company which avoided layoffs in the Great Depression by deliberately sharing the burden of wage cuts evenly across all employees, management and owners included. His mother was a Phi Beta Kappa graduate in mathematics - unusual for a woman in 1912!



In his freshman year at Syracuse University, he met fellow freshman, Lola Perl, at a dance. It was love at first sight and they were together from that day in October 1941, until she died in February 2000. One of the aspects of that meeting that reflected (and affected) his world view throughout his life was the fact that they only met because they both had to live in a Jewish fraternity and sorority, as others were not open to them.

Dad served as a sergeant in Karachi, India in WWII. Afterward, he and Lola married, and he finished his undergraduate work at Rochester University in Chicago, the only college in the country that did not have racial or religious quotas or restrictions. His intention was to become a labor organizer, à la Saul Alinsky, but he soon found out that, although he had the values orientation for the work, he did not have the temperament. So, after graduation, he headed to Berkeley for a PhD in clinical psychology.

His interests soon turned to communities. In 1953 he became the second director of the first community mental health clinic in the United States in Wellesley, Massachusetts. In 1954 he was encouraged to attend his first NTL workshop, and in 1956 he became a member of the institute. In 1965 he was an organizer of the Swampscott Conference, which launched the field of Community Psychology as a separate discipline, recognized by the American Psychological Association, and he served as one of the first presidents of that division of the APA. He wrote a seminal book in the field in 1968, *Community Dynamics and Mental Health*.

After leaving Wellesley's Human Relations Service, Dad went to Boston University, where he succeeded NTL co-founder, Ken Benne, as the head of Boston University's

Human Relations Center. In 1967 he accepted Lee Bradford's invitation to work full-time for NTL directing Community Programs. In this capacity he conducted several month-long laboratory programs in Bethel, training community activists to be more effective. He also led a number of race relations projects throughout the US for NTL. He left NTL's employment in 1973 (although he remained an active and dedicated member) to become a professor at the Graduate College of The Union Institute and University in its learner-centered doctoral program. He remained with Union until his retirement in 2005.

Besides being involved in community programs, Dad conducted a number of Power Labs for NTL, and, with Michael Broom, wrote the book *Power: The Infinite Game*. He also conducted several Diversity programs such as *Beyond Conflict: Managing the Dynamics of Difference* and *Theories of Difference*. He worked with fellow NTL member, Louise Diamond, in her work bringing peace to the island of Cyprus. He invented the 'SimuReal' large group change methodology in 1975 which allows a whole system to see itself, in both its formal and informal power structures, enabling it to work on important issues in a concentrated period of time, and to create new learning which participants can carry away from the event into their day-to-day lives as a system. One of his last undertakings was to co-found the Lewin Center in Bethel, Maine whose mission – in the tradition of Kurt Lewin – is to sponsor and support action-research programs related to social change and justice.

In his later years, he focused on the twin dynamics of humiliation and appreciation. His ground-breaking work on humiliation as a dynamic, different from shame or guilt, that involves a humiliator, the humiliated, and a witness (who may be simply in the mind of the humiliated), led



him to co-develop the Human Dignity and Humiliation Studies group, an international network of academics, practitioners, and advocates who are committed to reducing - and ultimately eliminating - destructive disrespect and humiliating practices all over the world.

His final book, *New Vision, New Reality*, sums up his thesis that an appreciative psychology needs to replace the projective, Western psychology which has dominated our world-view. 'Appreciative Being', as he called it, is a way of relating to life events via our human capacity for experiencing awe and wonderment at being part of the universe. Dad believed that every human being is born with this inherent capacity: to view events in our lives with simple clarity; to maintain a sense of humor and joyful perspective; and, above all, to avoid wasting energy on distracting thoughts, including the fear of humiliation.

On the brink of his 84th birthday, Dad spent his last month in a way that summed up his life and spirit perfectly. He went to New Mexico for a week to attend a conference on world peace, at which he met Mahatma Gandhi's grandson, who was then directing a peace institute in Rochester, New York. Gandhi told a wonderful story of his father teaching him, at the age of 16, a valuable lesson through counter-intuitive example and appreciative being, rather than resorting to what could just as easily have been humiliating punishment. Then Dad boarded the Queen Mary II for an all-gay (plus him) cruise to England at the invitation of one of his four sons; and, finally, he flew to a gathering of the Community Psychology Division of the APA in California. During a colleague's plenary panel discussion, in a Question and Answer session, he was moved to go to the microphone to recount the story of one of his former graduate students, a tough-minded millionaire commercial furniture factory owner who maintained that, while profit was his bottom line, love was his top line, and who acted on that 'top line' in his daily interactions with his employees. He also defined the practice of Appreciative Inquiry in this way: he picked up a partially filled cup of water and said 'The optimist would say this cup is half full. The pessimist would say it is half empty. The appreciative inquirer would ask, "I wonder how we got this much water in the cup because if we could figure *that* out, we could probably fill it all the way up!"' He put down the cup and walked back to his seat to thunderous applause, high-fiving a graduate student on the way. Within a minute after sitting down, he said that he was feeling dizzy and collapsed. Efforts to revive him were unsuccessful.

Seventeen years earlier, Dad had had a major heart attack. He worried a lot after that time that he had missed his opportunity to die peacefully and with his full dignity intact. He did not want a slow demise in which he could not function as he wished to do, becoming a burden to others. He clearly had figured out the way he wanted to go, and that is how he went – a final and important lesson for us all!

