

**Using Personal Snapshots and Family Photos in Counseling for Addictions --  
How PhotoTherapy Techniques Help People Explore Meaning and Make Desired Changes**

**Morning Workshop Presentation • 2006 Personal Meaning Conference**

**Burnaby, B.C. • Thursday, July 20, 2006**

by

Judy Weiser, R. Psych., A.T.R. -- Founder & Director of the PhotoTherapy Centre

Author of *PhotoTherapy Techniques -- Exploring the Secrets of Personal Snapshots and Family Albums*

**Brief Listing for Program:**

Ordinary personal snapshots are like 'mirrors with memory', reflecting what and who has mattered most in people's lives -- thus their value lies more in what they are about *emotionally*, than in what is shown on their surface visually.

Based on this, PhotoTherapy techniques use personal snapshots, family photos, and pictures taken by others (and the feelings, thoughts, and memories these evoke) as catalysts for therapeutic communication, personal healing, clarifying needs and goals, and finding meaning in one's life. Because photos can serve as powerful bridges into thoughts, beliefs, values, and expectations in ways that words alone cannot do, they can be *especially* helpful in counseling people with addictions, who often resist the more traditional "talking" therapies.

This Workshop will begin with a slide-illustrated presentation covering the "what", "why", and "how" of PhotoTherapy techniques (with several case examples to illustrate), and then provide participants with an opportunity\* to personally experience (through interacting with photos brought by the Presenter) one technique that has been of particular benefit in counseling people with addictions and related problems. (*\*Experiential is for the purpose of participants' education, not their personal therapy*). Prior experience with cameras or photographic art is not required; Workshop is open to all interested.

**Longer Summary, with References and Objectives: see next page...**

## **Workshop Objectives:**

After this event, those attending should be able to:

- 1) List, describe (and explain the differences between) the five basic PhotoTherapy techniques.
- 2) Explain why and how PhotoTherapy techniques are of *particular* benefit in helping people with addictions explore their lives, find a sense of meaning and purpose (and hope!), and support their attempts to make desired changes.
- 3) Know how to access other practitioners and additional information about this subject (including receiving handouts about recommended readings and networking contacts).
- 4) Speak from personal experience about how the meaning of a photograph lies more in its perceiver than in the visual image itself, and explain why this is relevant for therapy work, and especially in counseling those with addictions.

## **Full Description:**

Personal snapshots serve as 'mirrors with memory' reflecting what and who has mattered most in people's lives -- thus their value lies more in what they are about *emotionally*, than in what is shown on their surface visually. Their significance always has more to do with what the image *means* inside people's minds and hearts, that what their eyes are viewing -- a visual form of phenomenological narrative process.

Based on this, PhotoTherapy techniques use personal snapshots, family photos, and pictures taken by others (and the feelings, thoughts, and memories these evoke) as catalysts for therapeutic communication, personal healing, clarifying needs and goals, and finding meaning and a sense of purpose in one's life.

Photographs have 'secret lives' that help them serve as powerful bridges into deeper beliefs, values, and expectations in ways that words alone cannot do. Activated as symbolic self-constructs, transitional objects, personal and family narratives, and metaphoric communications from deep inside, ordinary snapshots can be of *particular* benefit in counseling people who are marginalized or disenfranchised and thus less comfortable with traditional verbal-only counseling approaches.

In PhotoTherapy-based counseling sessions, photos are taken, viewed, posed for, actively reconstructed or "sculpted", worked with in memory or imagination, or even explored through interacting with photographs taken by others. They are worked with not only reflectively (looking at pictures and discussing their emotional contents), but also in more active "homework assignments" designed by the therapist for clients to create, collage, or collect photos toward specific therapeutic goals.

**Longer Summary** continues on next page....

Additionally, these techniques can be used not only for formal personal counseling purposes, but can also be helpful in any situation where people want to find out more about themselves and their lives -- using ordinary snapshots to explore their lives because these serve as "footprints" of the heart, and mirrors of their lives, pointing not only to where they've come from (literally and emotionally), but also toward where they might next be heading.

Thus PhotoTherapy techniques have proven very useful in individual, family, or group counseling settings to help people explore their lives and make desired changes. And the related techniques of "Therapeutic Photography" have proven similarly effective in non-therapy settings, for people who don't necessarily need therapy but just want to explore themselves on their own -- as well as in personal growth, community-building, cross-cultural/diversity situations, conflict resolution, and many other applications where the personal "lens" can focus inward as well as out.

This work is about "photography as symbolic communication", rather than "photography as art": *using photographs as an active agents of exploration and change...* and thus worth far more than the proverbial thousand words! Using these techniques requires *no* prior familiarity or experience with cameras or photographic art and is extremely "user-friendly" for both clients and therapists.

*In this half-day Workshop*, psychologist and art therapist Judy Weiser, Founder and Director of the PhotoTherapy Centre of Vancouver, will share how she has used these techniques during her more than thirty years of therapy practice -- the last 15 of which has been specialized to using these techniques to help street-involved Aboriginal youth and adults who are affected by HIV/AIDS (and often drug users), to find meaning and purpose in their lives and thus bring back a bit of hope, in order to lessen the emotional, mental, and spiritual (and cultural) effects of living with these conditions.

This Workshop will begin with a slide-illustrated presentation introducing the "what", "why" and "how" of the inter-related system of PhotoTherapy techniques -- and then provide an opportunity\* for participants to personally experience (by interacting with photographs brought by the Presenter) one of the major techniques that is particularly useful in working with people with addictions and related problems. (*\*Please note: Participation in experiential portion is voluntary -- and its purpose is for participants' education, not their personal therapy*).

*Please note:* While this workshop is about using PhotoTherapy techniques during counseling, non-therapists ("interested others") are also very welcome to attend.

**Presenter's Bio & Publications:** *see next page...*

### **Instructor Bio:**

Founder and Director of the PhotoTherapy Centre in Vancouver, Judy Weiser is a psychologist, art therapist, author, consultant, and trainer with over 25 years experience specializing in two areas of counseling:

1) PhotoTherapy Techniques (using people's own personal snapshots and family photos to connect with feelings, thoughts, beliefs, and memories during their counseling sessions, in ways that words alone cannot do) -- and

2) Counseling marginalized/disenfranchised people who are infected or affected by HIV/AIDS, particularly inner-city street-involved Aboriginal youth and adults, who are often also addicts and affected by residential school backgrounds.

Past Editor of the *PhotoTherapy Journal*, author of the book, "*PhotoTherapy Techniques: Exploring the Secrets of Personal Snapshots and Family Albums*" and the informational website explaining the field (<http://www.phototherapy-centre.com>), she has written numerous chapters and articles, and given over two hundred presentations and training workshops world-wide, on both of her specialty topics. She can be reached at: 604-689-9709 or [jweiser@phototherapy-centre.com](mailto:jweiser@phototherapy-centre.com).

### **Publications\* by Judy Weiser on PhotoTherapy Techniques:**

\*Please note: Most of the articles and chapters listed below may be downloaded *for free* from:  
[www.phototherapy-centre.com/biography.htm](http://www.phototherapy-centre.com/biography.htm)

- 2004(a) -- PhotoTherapy techniques in counseling and therapy: Using ordinary snapshots and photo-interactions to help clients heal their lives. *The Canadian Art Therapy Association Journal, Fall, 17:2*, 23-53.
- 2004(b) -- The continuum of arts-based healing practices: Arts-in-Therapy/Arts-as-Therapy. *Creative Arts in Counseling Chapter Newsletter (Canadian Counseling Association), Fall, 1:2*, 3.
- 2003 -- A picture is worth a thousand words: Using PhotoTherapy Techniques in Counseling Practice. *Bulletin of the Private Practitioners Chapter Newsletter (Canadian Counseling Association), March, 3:2*, 3-4.
- 2002(a) -- PhotoTherapy techniques: Exploring the secrets of personal snapshots and family albums. *Child & Family, Spring/Summer*, 16-25.
- 2002(b) -- PhotoTherapy techniques: Exploring the secrets of personal snapshots and family albums. *B.C. Psychologist, Winter*, 26-27.
- 2001 -- PhotoTherapy techniques: Using clients' personal snapshots and family photos as Counseling and Therapy tools (Invited feature article in "*Special Double Issue: Media art as/in therapy*"). *Afterimage: The Journal of Media Arts and Cultural Criticism, 29:3 (Nov/Dec)*, 10-15.
- 2000 -- PhotoTherapy's message for Art Therapists in the new Millennium. *Journal of the American Art Therapy Association, 17:3*, 160-162.
- 1999 (*Book; 2nd Edition*) -- *PhotoTherapy Techniques: Exploring the Secrets of Personal Snapshots and Family Albums*. (*1st edition: 1993*), Vancouver: PhotoTherapy Centre Press [ISBN: 0-9685619-0-X].
- 1990 -- "More than meets the eye": Using ordinary snapshots as tools for therapy. In: Laidlaw, T., Malmo, C., & Associates (Eds.), *Healing voices: Feminist approaches to therapy with women* (pp. 83-117). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

**Publications:** *continued on next page...*

- 1988(a) -- "See what I mean?" Photography as nonverbal communication in cross-cultural psychology. In: Poyatos, F. (Ed.), *Cross-cultural perspectives in nonverbal communication* (pp. 245-290). Toronto: Hogrefe.
- 1988(b) -- "PhotoTherapy: Using snapshots and photo-interactions in therapy with youth. In: Schaefer, C. (Ed.), *Innovative interventions in child and adolescent therapy* (pp. 339-376). New York: Wiley.
- 1986 -- Ethical considerations in PhotoTherapy training and practice. *Phototherapy*, 5:1, 12-17.
- 1985 -- Training and teaching photo and video therapy: Central themes, core knowledge, and important considerations. *Phototherapy*, 4:4, 9-16.
- 1984 -- PhotoTherapy: Becoming visually literate about oneself. In: Walker, A.D.; Braden, R. A.; and Dunker, L. H. (Eds.), *Visual literacy: enhancing human potential* (pp. 392-406). Virginia Polytechnic State University Press.
- 1983 -- Using photographs in therapy with people who are 'different'. In: Krauss, D. A. and Fryrear, J. L. (Eds.), *Phototherapy in mental health* (pp. 174-199). Springfield, IL: Charles Thomas.
- 1975 -- PhotoTherapy: Photography as a verb. *The B.C. Photographer*, 2, 33-36.

### **Publications\* by Judy Weiser on HIV/AIDS-related issues (including addictions):**

\*Please note: Most of the articles and chapters listed below may be downloaded *for free* from:  
[www.phototherapy-centre.com/biography.htm](http://www.phototherapy-centre.com/biography.htm)

- 2003 -- "How does it feel?": Eight reasons why asking yourself this question may make you healthier. *The Positive Side (Canadian AIDS Treatment and Information Exchange)*, 6:3, 4-7.
- 2000 -- Emotional, mental, and spiritual counseling for Aboriginal HIV/AIDS issues: How it improves physical health (and personal stories to prove it!).
- 1999(a) -- Heart, mind, spirit, and AIDS: Emotional, mental, and spiritual issues affecting Aboriginal HIV nursing care. *Invited Plenary Address, Conference of the Canadian Association of Nurses in AIDS Care*; Winnipeg, April 23, 1999.
- 1999(b) -- Adapting traditional healing practices (for use in HIV counseling and education). *AIDS Action: The International Newsletter on AIDS Prevention and Care (Special issue on "Working with Traditional Health Practitioners")*, 46:Oct-Dec, 7.
- 1998 -- Taking the Medicine Wheel to the street: Counseling Aboriginal street youth about HIV/AIDS and educating those who help them. In: Rowe, W. and Ryan, B. (Eds.), *Social work and HIV -- The Canadian experience* (pp. 160-182). New York: Oxford Press.
- 1996(a) -- HIV/AIDS psychotherapy: What psychologists need to understand. *The Canadian Health Psychologist*, 4:1, 18-23.
- 1996(b) -- Psychosocial consequences of living with HIV/AIDS: Or, "What I learned from my clients and friends". *The Social Worker*, 64:4, Winter, 18-33.
- 1995 -- Psychology and HIV/AIDS. *B.C. Psychologist*, Spring, 5-6. (Available by mail only)
- 1992 -- Report of the "Art Therapy and HIV/AIDS" Study Group. *American Art Therapy Newsletter*, 25:3, 12.
- 1990 -- A quilt to comfort the terrors of the dark: The NAMES Project Quilt. *Gallerie: Women Artists*, 9, 16-18.
- 1989 -- Stitched to the beat of a heart, to comfort the terrors of the dark. *Journal of the American Art Therapy Association (Viewpoints Section)*, 6:3, 113-114.

**Links of Importance:** *continued on next page...*

**Links of Importance:**

**"PhotoTherapy Techniques in Counseling and Therapy" informational website:**

**<http://www.phototherapy-centre.com>**

*(Includes pages explaining all techniques in detail, history of field, about the book and video, about training opportunities, list of upcoming workshops and lectures, Judy Weiser bio and publications lists, page listing student Theses and Dissertations, pages for recommended readings in both PhotoTherapy and Therapeutic Photography (and a page explaining their differences), a page of related links, as well as a page of information about what others in the field are currently doing)*

**"PhotoTherapy and Therapeutic Photography Discussion Group"** (no membership required; over 400 postings about/by people from over a dozen countries):

**<http://members.boardhost.com/phototherapy/>**

**PhotoTherapy book: "PhotoTherapy Techniques: Exploring the Secrets of Personal Snapshots and Family Albums"** (Contents, reviews, free download of first chapter, etc):

**<http://www.phototherapy-centre.com/bookvid.htm>**

**Judy Weiser Curriculum Vita available upon request but is summarized at:**

**<http://www.phototherapy-centre.com/biography.htm>**

**Judy Weiser Publications on PhotoTherapy and on HIV/AIDS-related psychosocial issues -- all available for free download, at:**

**<http://www.phototherapy-centre.com/biography.htm#Publications>**