

**SEEING AND BELIEVING:  
Using Photographs as Projective Catalysts  
to Help Tell Stories and Explore Feelings and Memories Safely**

**Experiential Workshop • 2010 Canadian Art Therapy Association Conference**

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*"

**50-word Conference Program Description**

Whenever a photograph is viewed, projection of meaning (and triggering of associated feelings and memories) spontaneously takes place. Workshop lets participants experience how "Projective PhotoTherapy" techniques work, through guided experiential interactions with photographs brought by Instructor. [Prior experience with photography unnecessary; workshop is for participants' education, not their personal therapy.].

**Presenter BIO**

**Judy Weiser** is a Psychologist, Art Therapist, and early pioneer of PhotoTherapy techniques. Founder and Director of the PhotoTherapy Centre in Vancouver, she authored the classic text: "*PhotoTherapy Techniques: Exploring the Secrets of Personal Snapshots and Family Albums*". After a 25-yr private practice specializing in HIV/AIDS counselling for Aboriginal people, families, and communities, she now consults, lectures, and gives training workshops world-wide about PhotoTherapy techniques. Often invited to attend ceremony and/or share helping skills in lower-Island Coast Salish communities, Judy was recently asked to be one of the Counselors supporting those testifying at the upcoming Truth and Reconciliation Hearings in Winnipeg. Judy can be reached at: [jweiser@phototherapy-centre.com](mailto:jweiser@phototherapy-centre.com) or 604-689-9709.

**ABSTRACT:**

The story of any photograph resides not in its surface details, but rather inside the mind (and heart) of its viewer. Although the meaning, or "feeling", of a photograph is commonly believed to reside in that image itself, it is actually projected (and thus created) when someone looks at it and tries to make sense of it. This holds true for all photos that people take, pose for, look at, keep, view, imagine, or remember (even photographs of themselves), whether these are in their own personal collections, seen on websites, or hung on gallery walls.

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Therefore each time a photograph is viewed, remembered, or even imagined, its meaning is created anew, and associated feelings, thoughts, and memories are triggered as if the viewer is right there, inside the reality of the image at that time it was created. Thus the importance of a personal snapshot lies less in what it is of, visually, than in what it is about, emotionally. Its "story" may have been originally constructed by its maker to give viewers a certain message, but all later interpretations of it will always differ, depending upon who is doing the viewing (and thus interpreting) -- and all will be equally valid.

Therapists trained in "Projective PhotoTherapy techniques" make use of these "secret" components of ordinary photographs -- whether the client's own, or those they "appropriate" from elsewhere (magazines, postcards, photocopied or digitally-produced images, and so forth) -- to help them connect with feelings and memories inaccessible by words alone, while this unconscious symbolic communication is silently taking place deep inside them.

Underlying beliefs and value systems (and expectations these produce), personal constructs, systemic family dynamics, narrative structures, and many other beneficial understandings are all embedded in the surface "facts" of a photograph -- and can be explored (by themselves or in combination with other art media) under therapeutic guidance, to bring forth meaningful insights, emotional messages, and long-buried memories.

This "Photo-Projectives" workshop is open to everyone interested, regardless of their level of training or education, art therapy theoretical orientation, or past art therapy experience. While personally interacting with numerous photographs brought by the Instructor, workshop participants will have the opportunity to learn how (and why) these Photo-Projective techniques work, as well as beneficial ways to apply them with different client populations (especially those usually marginalized or disempowered) and a wide range of issues and settings.

*\* NOTE: Participation is voluntary and for the purposes of participants' education, not personal therapy. Prior experience with cameras or photography is NOT needed.*

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## **Detailed OUTLINE for Workshop**

- 1) Instructor will provide a very brief introduction (to provide framework for experiential sessions), after which
- 2) Participants will begin by selecting amongst dozens of photographs displayed on the large table -- and then
- 3) Have several experiences with their chosen images (both as a group in guided role-plays -- and then in dyads [guided by handouts provided]).
- 3) At the end, the workshop presenter will re-group all participants together for a final debriefing and summary closure (as well as answer questions and encourage further discussion).
- 4) Additional handouts will be provided to guide the experiential process and to assist with later readings; case examples will be shared if time permits.

## **Workshop OBJECTIVES**

Workshop participants will leave being able to:

- 1) Explain what the five PhotoTherapy techniques are, and why the "Photo-Projective" technique is of particular importance (especially in arts/expressive therapies).

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- 2) Discuss their own personal experience\* with this particular technique (having been through a few different guided exercises and role-plays based on it)  
\*REMINDER: Participation is voluntary and for the purposes of participants' education, not their personal therapy.)
- 3) Know how to access additional information about using this technique in their practice.

### **Known Risks**

*(\*IMPORTANT: Participation is voluntary; workshop is for the purpose of education, not personal therapy).*

#### **Physical risks:**

The only "materials" being used for this workshop are old photographs to be held and looked at, and photocopied handouts to read from during experiential exercises. I believe these pose no physical danger to participants.

#### **Emotional risks:**

Workshop is clearly introduced as being "for educational training purposes only and not for participants' personal therapy", so therapy itself will not be conducted there. Whatever people voluntarily choose to share with others is up to them, but they will not be prodded to divulge more than they are willing to discuss. Therefore, I see no known emotional risks involved in this workshop.

**END!**