

*This is the editorial introduction to a special issue of **Clinical Psychology**, 7 (2001) dedicated to Dorothy Rowe*

## **Dr Dorothy Rowe 1930 - still going strong**

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Dorothy Rowe once commented that all the good people she knew appeared to be dying. Many of the good people I know have died too and I have done my best to honour them in print and, to a lesser extent, in emulating their courage, dedication or whatever other qualities died with them. Dorothy is still with us. I wanted to let her know how much she is loved and respected now, not wait until she too is carted off to wherever it is that Socrates, Jesse Owens, Florence Nightingale and Frank Zappa are currently having coffee. So, this is it, a small tribute to a remarkable person, a psychologist who has done a great deal more than most to bring psychology into the public eye.

Born in Australia in 1930, Dorothy Rowe worked first as a teacher and then a child psychologist in Sydney. In 1968 she came to England to work as a clinical psychologist in the NHS and to begin her research into depression. Towards the end of her time as head of the Lincolnshire Department of Clinical Psychology she started work on a series of books that have proved amongst the more popular of their kind. In turn she has become a media pundit and something of a celebrity. Thankfully she has avoided the fate of so many media psychologists of saying the obvious in difficult ways. Her writing is accessible, her linking of the political and the personal absolutely explicit: her willingness to comment on almost anything brings psychology into some surprising places. Of course this is a position deplored by some professional psychologists who see her work as trivial or trivializing. I wonder how many of them have had their books translated into as many different languages as Dorothy or who have had their work quoted by as many people as she manages to reach. I know counsellors and clients alike who have found in her writing both empathy and a simplicity that touches them to the core. They find hope and new ways of seeing things, they look forward to her next book in the same way others look forward to novels and don't begrudge her regular commentary on the lives of the famous or analyses of popular ills and foibles.

In the last year alone Dorothy has written for The Guardian, The Mail, The Express, The Daily and Sunday Telegraph and The Observer on everything from happiness to The Dunkirk landings. She had a column on parenting in Chat before it was fashionable to cover the pages of popular magazines with the comments of psychologists. She has been an agony aunt to the agony aunts and currently appears in Openmind as a regular columnist. In these columns she has managed to say much about what is wrong with our society, what hurts people and what is destroying hope for our children. She is acutely aware that what most need people need, apart from money, is the power of education and knowledge.

She is naturally iconoclastic and despises the poor writing and scientism characterizing so much of modern psychology.

Sharing a platform with Peter Breggin at a Shropshire seminar Dorothy had no difficulty in telling a personal story of a friend's passage through the psychiatric system while tossing in a couple of telling one-liners about the way that governments exist to control their populace while pretending to protect people. She uses the media in an astute way; she respects its power to get a message across and has a way of promoting her latest book from which many psychologists could learn. She generously tried to impart some of this wisdom in a Clinical Psychology Forum paper some years ago where she explained how to get published. Crucially, she reminds us that book authorship is neither the way to make your fortune nor the end of the story. Authors need to sell their work. It is a lesson that takes some time to sink in. Having laboured over a book for a year or more, its publication can seem like the summit of achievement. When **This is Madness** (Newnes, Holmes and Dunn, 1999) came out it gradually dawned on us that we had sold it to people, via book reviews, book signings, dragging it to workshops, responding to every journalistic query on condition they plugged the book and so on. Now **This is Madness Too** (Newnes, Holmes and Dunn, 2001) is with us the round has begun again. Dorothy herself appears in **Spirituality and Psychotherapy** (King-Spooner and Newnes, 2001) and it is thanks to her I have the barefaced cheek to mention three of my own books in this tribute. This kind of self-promotion seems frowned upon in the profession, as if selling our work lessens it in some way.

It could be argued that not telling people what you have done and writing your views down in a way accessible to a lay audience is part of playing the power game; remaining aloof and esoteric protects the psychologist from public criticism and exposure, a charge which could never be levelled at Dorothy Rowe.

I have a lot to be thankful to Dorothy for. Having been rejected by the Newcastle clinical psychology course I was offered a place on the Leicester in-service scheme sponsored by her Lincoln department. I have since found that the middle-classes tend not to be grateful when offered jobs and opportunities and see well-paid employment as their birthright. I remember being overwhelmed that I had been offered the chance to join a profession which enjoyed decent pay, yearly increments, virtually no risk of redundancy or the sack and fantastic academic and clinical freedom; and things haven't changed that much. Without Dorothy's faith in me I would not have qualified as a clinical psychologist alongside some of the more critical minds of my generation, would not have met, via Steve Flett, the likes of Glenys Parry, Dave Pilgrim, Bill Barnes and Jenny Firth Cozens and would never have mistaken personal construct theory and David Smail's iconoclasm for mainstream clinical psychology. I would not have met Kevin Sullivan, Ron Cattrall or Pat Carney, three of my dearest friends and would neither have met nor loved Jacqui Leal who, in her own way, did so much for Clinical Psychology Forum. After Jacqui's death it was Dorothy who was the

first of my friends to celebrate the laughter and life giving in my relationship with Isabel. As she put it, "Your friends are so glad you have a new partner; we can all stop worrying about you now".

Dorothy has also been a constant supporter and constructive critic of my work whether as a board member of The Journal of Critical Psychology, Counselling and Psychotherapy or as an interested reader responding with kind emails about various articles I have sent struggling into the public arena. Jobless and stuck in America in the mid 1980s, I asked Dorothy for a reference; she turned out to be the only British clinical psychologist of whom any of my prospective employers had heard. It's hardly surprising: her first book, **The Experience of Depression**, was published in 1978 and republished as **Choosing not Losing** in 1988. **The Construction of Life and Death**, published in 1982 was republished as **The Courage to Live** in 1991. The MIND book of the year, **Depression: The Way out of your Prison**, was published in 1983 with a second edition in 1996. **Living with the Bomb: Can we live without enemies?** was published in 1985, **Beyond Fear** in 1987, **The Successful Self** in 1988, **The Depression Handbook** in 1990. This was reissued in 1991 as **Breaking the Bonds**. **Wanting Everything** also appeared in 1991, **Time on Our Side** in 1994 and **Dorothy Rowe's Guide to Life** in 1995. **The Real Meaning of Money** appeared in 1997, and **Friends and Enemies: Our need to love and hate**, also from HarperCollins, in September 2000. A new edition of **Beyond Fear** came out this year.

Her books are published in German, Finnish, Danish, Swedish, Chinese, Spanish, Norwegian and Portuguese. This kind of fame has never affected her connection with us mere mortals. She always responds to letters and is as loyal to her friends as she is to her readership. She has a gift for making people feel at home with her despite her fame and a real knack with giving interesting presents to children; helped in part by her own love of stationery shops. She has her own website where, amongst the Frequently Asked Questions you will find "How can I live a happy and fulfilling life?" Now that's a proper question to ask a psychologist. Of course, she answers it. You may well want to look it up. That's real psychology, provoking us to get more interested in the ordinary questions of life. Meanwhile, the special issue of Clinical Psychology is for Dr Dorothy Rowe, friend and inspiration. Have a gin on me, my dear.