

**Editor's Notebook: Stephen M. Edelson, Ph.D.****Following the vision of Dr. Rimland**

In accepting the position of Director of the Autism Research Institute, I am aware that I am—to paraphrase Isaac Newton—“standing on the shoulders of a giant.” Dr. Rimland revolutionized the field of autism, bringing hope to an entire world of children once dismissed as “hopeless.” He also was my mentor, my colleague, and my best friend, and he influenced every step of my own work—literally from the time I was a teenager.

My interest in autism began in 1977 when, as an undergraduate student at UCLA, I worked directly under Dr. Ivar Lovaas. Behavior therapy was clearly an effective treatment for autistic children, but I was interested in figuring out these children's underlying biomedical problems and then treating these problems rather than just treating the resulting behavior.

I began reading the rather sparse literature on the biomedical problems of autistic children, and had an opportunity to review the medical files of more than 100 autistic children residing at a state residential facility, Camarillo State Hospital. I also did “rounds” for more than a year with a brilliant pediatrician, Dr. Elsie Yarbrough, at the facility. During that time I wrote several theoretical papers on topics including how self-injury may be a form of sensory self-stimulation; the possible relationship between serotonin and autistic behaviors; and how hypoxia, as well as anesthetics given during delivery, may cause autism.

Since Dr. Lovaas's main focus was on behavioral treatment, he really did not know what to do with my non-behavioral ideas. As a result, he introduced me to his friend, Bernard Rimland. I had read most or possibly all of Dr. Rimland's articles, and I was thrilled at the chance to meet and discuss autism with him. (I still have the directions, written by Dr. Lovaas, on how to drive to ARI.)

When I first met Dr. Rimland, I was only 19 years old. I remember a great deal of our first meeting. We discussed the possible role of the reticular formation in autism (one of his early theories), and he gave me a signed copy of his 1964 book, *Infantile Autism*. He very much liked my ideas about autism, and he encouraged me to publish all three of my papers. Eventually, my self-injury paper was published in the *American Journal of Mental Deficiency*, and I presented my other papers at a national professional conference. I was delighted by Dr. Rimland's enthusiasm for the efforts of a young and unknown researcher, and amazed by his willingness to take hours from his already-hectic schedule to assist me.

When it was time to select a graduate school, both Drs. Rimland and Lovaas sug-

gested that I study areas other than autism, since I already knew the rather-limited research literature on autism. I attended the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana and studied cognition (e.g., memory, concept formation, decision-making strategies). Dr. Rimland, an inveterate “matchmaker,” introduced me to Temple Grandin at this time. She was writing her first book, *Emergence: Labeled Autistic*, and was a graduate student at Illinois. As fellow graduate students, Temple and I would meet for lunch or dinner to discuss the latest findings in autism. When it came time to work on my dissertation, I returned to my roots and studied classification and discrimination learning in autism.

While I was in graduate school, Dr. Rimland and I wrote or called each other at least once a month. Whenever I visited my family during the holidays in Los Angeles, I drove down to San Diego to see him. His house became a second home to me, and he was never too busy to listen to the stories and ideas of a young graduate student—even though he was already a leading expert in his field.

After graduating from the University of Illinois, I called Dr. Rimland to tell him that I had returned to Los Angeles. It so happened that the day I finished graduate school was the day Dr. Rimland retired from the Navy. (He had worked as a full-time civilian senior researcher, while doing all of his autism work in the evenings and on weekends.) I remember Dr. Rimland commenting that this timing might be a “sign from above.”

After returning to Los Angeles, I spent four years teaching at Pitzer College (one of the Claremont Colleges) in southern California. Along with two of my best students, Rachel Firemark and Susan Kelso, I sponsored at least one autism event each semester. Among the many events, we invited Dr. Rimland to lecture at Pitzer on several occasions, and organized an art exhibit featuring many of Mark Rimland's artworks. During this time, Dr. Rimland and I also collaborated on several projects which included evaluating various autism clinics and regional centers in the Los Angeles area, developing a high-tech laser disc computer system to teach autistic children, and analyzing ARI's data on treatment efficacy.

I moved to Oregon in the late 1980s and began working full-time with Dr. Rimland, opening an autism center in Newberg (which later moved to Beaverton). This center was actually ARI's satellite office, with the purpose of conducting research studies. Our research involved assessing the efficacy of auditory integration training, vision training, and deep pressure. We also conducted studies on the presence of yeast overgrowth (*Candida*

*albicans*) in autism, the use of DMG and secrepan (a form of secretin), physiological correlates of self-injury, and intelligence testing. I was constantly impressed by the scope of Dr. Rimland's research interests, and by his determination to follow the lead of parents and “maverick” researchers who reported important clues about potential treatments or autism culprits. Many of those clues, ignored by others in the field, formed the basis of the treatments that are now recovering thousands of autistic children.

For many years, Dr. Rimland told me about the remarkable work of Sid Baker, M.D., and Jon Pangborn, Ph.D. When it came time to organize DAN! (Defeat Autism Now!), he asked me to assist in this project. Drs. Rimland, Baker and Pangborn ran the first two-day DAN! meeting, which was a turning point in the field of autism. It was a great privilege to attend that meeting, and to be in on the ground floor of what I believe will prove to be the biggest advance in the history of autism research since Dr. Rimland single-handedly destroyed the myth of the “refrigerator mother.”

Dr. Rimland and I worked on many other projects including collaboration on the book *Recovering Autistic Children* (formerly *Treating Autistic Children*) and several research articles; editing ARI's quarterly newsletter, the *Autism Research Review International*; maintaining ARI's websites, and analyzing all of ARI's research data. I moved to San Diego in May, 2006 to help Dr. Rimland while he was battling prostate cancer and, under his guidance, took over much of the operation of the Institute.

I am fortunate to have shared 30 years of friendship and professional collaboration with Dr. Rimland. Since my parents both passed away before my children were born, they called him “Grandpa Bernie.” He was not just a professional mentor but also a kind and generous friend, and I am deeply honored to be welcomed into his family and entrusted with carrying on his life's work. I am certain he is with all of us in spirit as we continue the remarkable journey he began—a journey toward hope for all autistic children and their families.

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Before becoming Director of the Autism Research Institute, Dr. Edelson served as Associate Director of ARI and also was the Director of the Center for the Study of Autism in Salem, Oregon. He is a member of the Autism Society of America's Professional Advisory Board, and received ASA's “Volunteer of the Year” award in 2000. He is a former president of the Society for Auditory Intervention Techniques, and is president of the Autism Society of Oregon.