History and Development

PhotoTherapy and Therapeutic Photography techniques are not new, although before the internet, many people simply did not know they existed and had been used for over 100 years by the turn of this past century!

The earliest written documentation of the use of photo-based therapy techniques found thus far dates back to 1856 by Dr. Hugh Diamond, less than twenty years after photography itself was invented... And the earliest use of Therapeutic Photography seems to have happened even earlier, with the use of "magic lantern" slides in 1844 by Dr. Thomas Kirkbride as social entertainment ("as a means of education and amusement") for patients at his mental hospital during their otherwise-empty evening hours when doctors were not onsite.

The more recent history of PhotoTherapy began when Canadian psychologist Judy Weiser, who had been using photos in her work counselling Deaf Native children starting in 1973, published her first article in 1975, using the term "PhotoTherapy Techniques" in that article's title marking the first time its name had ever appearing in print.

Two years later, in the United States, a brief notice appeared in the magazine Psychology Today in 1977, asking people who were using photography in their therapy or counselling work to contact the author. When over two hundred people responded, the "PhotoTherapy Quarterly Newsletter" was begun as a means of communicating with this growing network.

The first Educational Workshops taught about PhotoTherapy techniques began in 1975 in Canada (taught by Weiser), and in the U.S. (by Krauss, Stewart, Zakem, Entin, and others) a few years later. The first PhotoTherapy Workshop taught in Europe (by Weiser) happened in Leeuwarden, Netherlands in 1990. And the first "6-day Intensive Training in Judy Weiser's PhotoTherapy Techniques" Workshop happened in Canada in 1984.

One note of historical interest is that all this took place before the invention of the Internet (search engines, emails and digital networking) — which means that most of these early people practitioners, theorists, and educators had no way to know about the existence of each other's work. Those who happened to read the above-mentioned 1977 Psychology Today article and respond to its authors, comprised the early the North American network, but those in other countries often had no way to know about others nearby...
The first *International PhotoTherapy Symposium* in Illinois in May, 1979, drew participants from five countries and presentations from most of the field's early pioneers including Entin, Fryrear, Gassan, Hogan, Krauss, Stewart, Walker, Weiser, Wolf, Zakem, and many others whose publications formed the foundation of the field's literature base. Although none of these people have ever claimed to have invented PhotoTherapy on their own, they are nevertheless collectively the co-inventors of its current form of practice — and thus deserve recognition in any serious study of PhotoTherapy's foundations. (For a list of these recommended early pre-internet publications, contact Judy Weiser)

After five years and three U.S. conferences, that original informal collegial network and its simple Newsletter became the *International PhotoTherapy Association*, which began publishing the more formal journal *PhotoTherapy* as a benefit of membership. But after a decade of publication, that journal became a victim of its own broader success, ceasing publication in 1987 because other Professional Associations (psychology, psychiatry, social work, art therapy, and similar others) had begun featuring articles about PhotoTherapy in their own journals directly.

Similarly, although several International PhotoTherapy Association Conferences initially took place independently, by the mid-1980's it had become evident that a wider group of mental health professionals could be reached if PhotoTherapy presentations and training events were held during the annual gatherings of such larger groups instead. As a result, the *International PhotoTherapy Association* chose to de-activate in 1988, because its original purpose of raising awareness about PhotoTherapy techniques had successfully been met.

The fourth International Conference took place in Toronto, Canada, in 1984 (organized by Walker and Weiser), with presenters and participants from many countries and various professional backgrounds — and experiences ranging from PhotoTherapy (using photos during formal therapy sessions) to Therapeutic Photography applications (using photo-based activities as the therapy itself).

The fifth International Conference took place in Turku, Finland, in June of 2008 (organized by Halkola) and was the first to take place in Europe. The event featured three days of Pre-Conference Workshops followed by the formal Conference itself. Its key Invited Plenary Presenters included the early pioneers of both fields (Weiser, Krauss, Walker, Dennett [for Spence], and Martin), along with many newer key people in both fields (Wheeler, Halkola, Avilés-Gutiérrez, Parrella, Mannermaa, and Anor), along with many additional current practitioners, researchers, and educators. (for more information about these people, see this website's page "Who is Doing What, Where"

In February, 2011, the *Learning and Healing with Phototherapy Symposium* took place in Turku, Finland, although it was not part of the tradition of previous International PhotoTherapy Conferences. Instead, it was solely EU-focused because it was organized as part of a three-year "multi-country EU research collaboration" that had studied "the applications of phototherapy to promote wellbeing and reduce social exclusion" within the
countries researched. It featured other presenters, but only as additions to the main EU research study focus.

Most of the early North American pioneers from the 1970's and 1980's continued teaching, writing about, and using these techniques in their practices for several more decades. For example, most provided a chapter about their own work in the 1983 book: *PhotoTherapy in Mental Health* (Krauss & Fryrear, Eds.). But although that book contained numerous examples of solid clinical applications, as well as two excellent chapters (by Krauss) on underlying theoretical foundations, it unfortunately did not provide readers with hands-on information about how they could actually begin using the techniques themselves.

Since not everyone could afford to attend workshops or conferences to get personalized training in these techniques, a newer and more practical-focused book authored by psychologist, art therapist, and PhotoTherapy pioneer Judy Weiser was published in 1993, in order to fill that gap. "PhotoTherapy Techniques: Exploring the Secrets of Personal Snapshots and Family Albums" — which is now in second edition (1999) and third printing — provides a full Chapter for each technique (explaining the "what, why, and how" of it), as well as photo-illustrated case examples and many photo-interactive assignments to experience each technique for themselves, and then how to begin using each in work with their clients (or in non-therapy applications during Therapeutic Photography applications).

Additional professional publications on the topic have steadily increased in number — and graduate students all over the world continue to produce new PhotoTherapy-related writings and research in the form of Masters Theses, Doctoral Dissertations, and other special-topics papers or research project reports every year. Click here to view a comprehensive list of Theses & Dissertations and here to receive a list of pre-internet recommended readings.

PhotoTherapy has even been taught occasionally for university credit in Clinical Psychology and Art Therapy graduate programs, beginning with the *Photo Counselling* course at Kent State University's Counselling Department in 1979, taught by Dr. David Krauss. It has also been taught in several postgraduate Art Therapy training programs and Continuing Education courses for Mental Health Professionals needing "CE Credits" for maintaining their professional license. For a brief time, there was also an online course for Art Therapists available through the *American Art Therapy Association*, although it no longer exists.

In 1982, the *PhotoTherapy Centre* in Vancouver (Canada), opened for the purpose of serving as the consulting, training, and resource base for the field worldwide. Its Founder and Director, Judy Weiser has been gathering archival material for over the past 35 years of the field's development which she will soon use to establish the *PhotoTherapy Archives* to preserve these holdings and donate them to an appropriate repository once digitized, to keep them available for no-cost use by others into the future.
Weiser has also been teaching introductory and advanced-level experiential training workshops, lecture presentations and other related events since the early-1970's, both by invitation around the world and in private individualized training intensives at the PhotoTherapy Centre. During past decades she has been brought to lecture, teach workshops, and give training intensives in Canada, England, Finland, Italy, Latvia, Mexico, Netherlands, Russia, Scotland, Spain, Sweden, and United States. Click here to view the schedule for upcoming educational and training events.

In addition to earlier related organizations and programs such as Krauss' Center for Visual Therapies in Cleveland, OH (U.S.) and Mannermaa's PhotoSynteesi ("PhotoSynthesis") in Helsinki, Finland, many newer other ones (and Associations) have formed over the past few years. This strongly attests to increasing interest in using photography, photographs, and people’s interactions with these, during therapy in psychology, social work, art therapy, and other mental health field applications (PhotoTherapy) and in using photography and photographic interactions oneself, as naturally-therapeutic personal healing activities on their own (Therapeutic Photography).

Some of these newer ones are the Finnish PhotoTherapy Association centered in Turku, Finland; PSYphoto based in Moscow, Russia; the Photo Therapy Institute at the Musrara School of Photography in Jerusalem (which hopes to soon be connected with a "Masters in Art Therapy with a PhotoTherapy Specialization" from the European Graduate School in Switzerland); GRIFO (Gruppo di Ricerca in Fototerapia), an interest group that meets regularly in Italy; and ILPFOT: Instituto LatinoAmericano de Psicologia y Fotografia ("Latin-American Institute of Psychology and Photography") in Mexico.

Italy, in particular, has a large number of PhotoTherapy and Therapeutic Photography projects and professionals long-experienced in using, writing about, and teaching about PhotoTherapy — as well as many long-standing Therapeutic Photography and/or Social Action and Participatory Photography Projects providing activities for people to make positive changes in themselves, others, society, and the world even when not under the guidance of therapists.

For example, the Centro di Salute Mentale ASL2 ("National Mental Health Center") in Lucca, Italy, has also recently begun programs in both PhotoTherapy and VideoTherapy applications for their patients — and there is now even also a Masters Degree Program in Video, fotografia, teatro e mediazione artistica nella relazione d’aiuto ("Video, Photography, Theatre, and Artistic Mediation in the Helping Relationship").

More details about these (and other important) photo-based therapy/healing projects can be found here.

The continual fascination of the general public with PhotoTherapy is evident not only from people’s willingness to participate as clients of therapists using these techniques — or even try these themselves in self-directed activities — but also from its wide coverage in the popular media over the past 30+ years. Numerous magazine and newspaper articles — as well as several in-depth radio, television, internet, and youtube features and interviews —
have resulted in many presentations about it also being given to non-professional groups such as art museum and gallery audiences, businesses, photographers, advertisers, photo hobby groups, special education teachers, visual anthropologists/sociologists, visual literacy and cross-cultural researchers, art and media critics, and many more.

Although the "art part" of photographs used in PhotoTherapy applications is not relevant, as it's the "heart part" (emotional meanings) that matter, many of the PhotoTherapy pioneers happen to also be photographers who have had formal exhibitions of their fine art photography (which usually involve interactive elements — where viewers share their emotions, thoughts, memories, and more, in response to viewing the photos on display).

For example, the Beyond Seeing Gallery Exhibition produced by Joel Walker and Judy Weiser in 1982 in Vancouver, Canada, We Shall Never Die Exhibition by Joel Walker in the Institute of Cancerology in Mexico City, and others.

There have also been many public presentations and exhibitions of Therapeutic Photography and/or Social Action (Participatory) Photographic Projects — for example the annual Perugia Social and Therapeutic Photography Festival each year in Italy — as well as events where pioneers of both PhotoTherapy and Therapeutic Photography have come together to compare and contrast their practices for an audience of combined interests; for example, the 1990 event where Jo Spence (Therapeutic Photography pioneer) and Judy Weiser (PhotoTherapy pioneer) and Patti Levey (early Photographic Self-Exploration pioneer) came together for a Panel at the Emily Carr College of Art in Vancouver, Canada.

Of course, the history of PhotoTherapy will continue to grow — and now that digital technology provides an ever-expanding range of new imaging tools and additional opportunities for cyber-therapy applications, its potential becomes even more exciting...

PhotoTherapy techniques have long been used by people who might be totally unaware of its name or history, and — especially before the appearance of the internet and search engines — the existence of other people doing similar work elsewhere without knowing about each other.

But now that the Internet provides instant networking possibilities, it has become much easier to find others with similar interests, or who are doing similar work, as well as stay up to date on facts and events in all aspects of these fields.

One of the easiest ways to keep updated and make new contacts with others of similar interests, is to join the Facebook Group for PhotoTherapy, Therapeutic Photography, Photo Art Therapy, and VideoTherapy -- Several thousand members there means that discussions and sharing of new information are always very interesting and exciting!

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What is most important to convey here, is that people everywhere are already using photography for the purposes improving well-being, reducing social exclusion, and contributing to positive change self, others, or society — even if the have never heard of the words PhotoTherapy or Therapeutic Photography!

And since people's interactions with themselves and others depend primarily on nonverbal communication, it seems only logical that the visual language of photography will become increasingly used to access and activate such emotionally-based information in both therapy and non-therapy applications.

Discover people around the world working in PhotoTherapy, Therapeutic Photography, Photo Art Therapy, and VideoTherapy on the Who is Doing What, Where web-page.

RECOMMEND MORE HISTORICAL FACTS TO BE ADDED TO THIS LIST