

## Jean Sanville: A Life in Dialogue

Jean Sanville, beloved clinical social worker and psychoanalyst, died peacefully in the early morning of Nov 4 at her home in the Brentwood Hills of Los Angeles. She was 94.

Jean was a brilliant teacher, a devoted and wise clinician and healer, a prolific and gifted writer, and a generous mentor to hundreds of therapists in the U.S. and around the world. The Academic Dean of The Sanville Institute for Clinical Social Work and Psychotherapy, called her "a giant in clinical social work and the psychoanalytic community."

For Jean, psychoanalysis did not stop at the walls of the consulting room. She knew how culture impacted and was impacted by personal and family development. She loved people of diverse cultures as she loved and embraced difference itself. Her community was the whole world and all its creatures. She served as consultant in Peru, Dominican Republic, India, Sri Lanka, Mexico, Indonesia, Singapore, and Japan. President Forbes Burnham of Guyana invited Jean to present a series of talks on national television to build mutual understanding and peace and stem the tide of internecine warfare that was ravaging the country.

Her capacity for empathy was boundless. When she read the devastating news of the Asian tsunami of 2004, she resonated with the grief of "our island," Sri Lanka, where she had spent a memorable summer with her husband Richard Sanville. With a generosity of spirit, warmth, and ability to see and respond to the goodness in people, everyone whom Jean touched and who touched her became kindred; "hers."

Her favorite saying was "Life begins in dialogue, and psychopathology can be seen as a derailment of dialogue." This dialogue was not an abstract concept but a living emotional reality she embodied daily, not only with patients, but also with students, colleagues, friends, fellow writers, and others. A favorite film of hers, "The Amazing Newborn," demonstrated nearly forty years ago how newborns are able to visually reach out for their mothers' eyes, helping create a primary mutual connection from the very beginning, contradicting existing theories.

The power of what Jean called reparative intent was another of her creative lodestars. Genuine dialogue was therapeutic and could help "re-rail" earlier derailments. The ability to play, with ideas and with one another, figured prominently in her writing and teaching, and permeated her relationships. She would often correct those who used the word illusion to mean delusion. "No," she would say, 'illusion' comes from the Greek, *ludere*, which means to play." The play of illusion was for her a developmental achievement and a source of mutual enjoyment. Her curiosity and sense of wonder was palpable and contagious.

Jean was born on Dec 6, 1918 in Tionesta, rural Pennsylvania, at the gateway to the Allegheny National Forest and the Pennsylvania Wilds. Tionesta is a Native American word that means, "waters meet," the waters of the Allegheny and Clarion rivers, and Tionesta Creek. As in her writing, teaching and in her mind itself, where ideas comingled freely -- psychoanalytic, artistic, cultural, political and social --- so in Jean's house too did countless, groups, colleagues and friends find a welcoming space where they came regularly to "multilogue," to find and provide intellectual sustenance, where the play of ideas could be engaged freely and take root.

Her mother, Ruth Bovard, was a school principal, and her father Forest Bovard, a physician. Jean would joyfully accompany her father on home visits at night in horse and buggy. She knew illness and loss early on and her efforts to understand led to disappointment with organized religion, though she conveyed a remarkably profound spirituality. She credited finding Karl Menninger's *The Human Mind* on her father's bookshelf as the catalyst for wanting to pursuing a "new profession," clinical social work; a decision she never regretted.

Jean graduated from University of Colorado, Boulder in 1940, and received her MSW from Smith College School for Social Work in 1949, where she remained on the faculty, taught frequently, and supported the program to remain psychodynamically-oriented. Her library and her papers were bequeathed to Smith College.

Her refusal to sign the required "loyalty" oath, like her friend and colleague Erik Erikson, cost her position as Associate Professor at the UCLA School of Social Welfare but she accepted Erikson's invitation to come to Harvard. Later Jean would also serve as Executive Secretary of the Hacker Foundation for Psychiatric Research and Education, where she studied the "intermarriage" of creative expression and personality.

She was fierce in engaging the struggle for social workers and all non-medical therapists to have the right to full psychoanalytic training. A trailblazing pioneer and organizational midwife, she was co-founder of the California Society for Clinical Social Work, Founding Dean of the California Institute for Clinical Social Work (CICSW), and co-founder of the Los Angeles Institute and Society for Psychoanalytic Studies (LAISPS). Such was her scholarship and writing acumen that LAISPS named its most important writing award the Jean Sanville Award, for original scholarship in psychoanalytic writing. In 2005 CICSW was renamed in her honor, the Jean Sanville Institute.

Jean is survived by her sister Alice Bovard Reynolds, brother-in-law Dr. Dean Reynolds, niece Julie Bovard Peterson, nephew Dean Lee Reynolds, and her step-children Bob Shor and Heidi Oleszczuk. She was preceded in death by her son Peter Livermore and her step-daughter Sabrina Sanville.

Jean was fluent in Spanish and loved poetry. "The Explosion" by Nobel Prize winning Spanish poet Vicente Aleixandre, is a poem she translated into English. The poet paints a light that

*"...Suddenly gathers, suddenly, in a whole lifetime ....*

*that unrolls and unfolds, like a huge wave, like a huge light*

*that lets us look on each other at last."*

Jean Sanville and her life were just such a light.

*by Jean's colleague Joseph Bobrow*