Special Article

Introduction to the Special Issue: A Tribute to Ralph M. Reitan

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This special issue of the Archives of Clinical Neuropsychology was created to honor Ralph Reitan and his accomplishments. His death marks the end of an era in clinical neuropsychology and the loss of a major neuroscientist and psychologist. It has been said with good reason that Reitan is the founder of clinical neuropsychology, and his long career extended from its birth to the present period of substantial maturity. When he began that career, there was no field called clinical neuropsychology, and the testing of neurologically ill patients was done by psychologists using their standard, established instruments such as intelligence and projective tests. Reitan took the new tests he learned from Ward Halstead and generated an extensive research literature and clinical model that constituted the basis for what we now call clinical neuropsychology. With his passing, the field will no longer have the benefits of his pioneering research and teaching.

The contributors to this Special Issue were asked to write a paper honoring Ralph with whatever content they chose. Thus, we have papers that are largely biographical, papers that mainly contain personal reflections and reminiscences, and scientific papers that comment on some aspect of Ralph’s theory and research. We also include a complete bibliography which illustrates the extent and breadth of his work.

It was our feeling that, while Dr. Reitan had numerous friends and colleagues, the contributors to this issue are those with whom he had the greatest scientific collaborations, notably as his students or as co-authors of many publications. During their careers, some of them had differences of opinion with Ralph, resulting in a stimulating atmosphere of scientific controversy. Despite the disagreements, all of these people shared Ralph’s commitment to science and the use of scientific methods to advance the field. The controversies became interesting and instructive.

Ralph began his seminal work at the Indiana University Medical Center. After 19 years, he moved to the University of Washington in order to have the opportunity to teach psychology graduate students. Then, in 1977, he moved to the warmer climate at the University of Arizona with the intention of writing more extensively without the obligations of the medical environment. The contributors to this Special Issue have all been influenced by Ralph and his work. Many of the contributors worked directly with him at one of these institutions (and one of them [Jan Janesheski] worked with him at all three), while others were strongly influenced by his publications and presentations.

Homer Reed, James Reed, Carl Dodrill, and Jan Janesheski are contributors who worked with Ralph at the Indiana University Medical Center. Homer Reed, along with Hallgrim Klove (and Ralph, of course), were the original “blind interpreters” of the neuropsychological data obtained from the Neuropsychology Laboratory’s patients. Homer began his work there in the summer of 1959 and was an Associate Professor of Psychology (Neurology) from 1960 to 1966. He also was a co-presenter at many of Ralph’s workshops in the 1960s. James Reed worked in the Neuropsychology Laboratory from 1964 to 1968. He started out as a Special Post-doctoral Fellow in Psychology and Neurology from 1964 to 1965 and then was an
Associate Professor of Psychology (Neurology) from 1965 to 1968. He subsequently was a co-presenter at Ralph’s workshops, beginning in 1969 and continuing into the 1980s. Carl Dodrill worked in Ralph’s laboratory from 1966 to 1969, initially working on his master’s degree. During that time, he also did neuropsychological testing and a variety of other learning experiences. In 1973, Carl joined the faculty at the University of Washington as Ralph’s colleague in the Department of Neurological Surgery at the School of Medicine. Judith Ann (Jan) Janesheski began as a Technician at the Neuropsychology Laboratory at Indiana in 1962 and continued there until 1970. She moved to the University of Washington and helped set up the Neuropsychology Laboratory in the Departments of Neurological Surgery and Psychology. She was Chief Psychometrist there from 1970 to 1977. She also worked at the Reitan Neuropsychology Laboratory in Tucson, AZ, from 1983 to 1984. She was an integral part of the Reitan workshops for several decades.

Igor Grant first “met” Ralph by phone and correspondence in 1970. At the time, Igor was a senior psychiatry resident, and he sought Ralph’s guidance in his research on the persistent effects of marijuana on brain function. He subsequently spent parts of two summers in Ralph’s lab in Seattle studying the casebooks and learning about neuropsychological interpretation. Ralph later helped with a pilot study Igor conducted on polydrug users; this study was a springboard to Igor’s research career on substance abuse. Igor has expressed his indebtedness to Ralph for being “a mentor who was pivotal in shaping [his] career as an academic neuropsychiatrist” (personal communication).

Sureyya Dikmen and Robert Heaton met Ralph as clinical psychology interns in 1971 at the University of Washington. Sureyya was Ralph’s first formal PhD student and received her degree in 1973. She returned to his lab in 1974 to oversee Ralph’s NIH-funded study on traumatic brain injury. She collaborated with him on numerous papers on TBI while he was in Washington as well as after he moved to Arizona.

Bob Heaton’s first exposure to neuropsychology was as an intern with Ralph. As with many of Ralph’s students, Bob learned neuropsychology by spending a great deal of time studying the “black books” which contained the blind interpretations of the test results of neurological/neurosurgical patients. With the help of Jan Janesheski, Bob set up the first neuropsychology laboratory in Colorado.

Alan Finlayson first met Ralph as a student of Byron Rourke in the early 1970s. Alan studied with Ralph as a postdoctoral student in 1974–1975 at the University of Washington. He later had interactions with Ralph in Tucson regarding brain-injury rehabilitation and Ralph’s REHABIT program.

In 1977, Ralph was invited to join the faculty of the University of Arizona’s Psychology Department by Lon Wheeler, PhD, who was Department Chair at the time and was also co-author with Ralph of several seminal papers in the 1960s. Ralph offered a four-semester course in Clinical Neuropsychology to the graduate students, and Jim Hom and Janice Nici were in that first class. Janice departed after 1 year for her clinical internship and postdoctoral training; when she returned to Tucson, she conducted research with children under Ralph’s supervision. Jim was Ralph’s first PhD student at UA; he completed his dissertation under Ralph’s supervision as well as 2 years of postdoctoral fellowship with him. Janice and Jim both became presenters at Ralph’s workshops, starting in the early 1980s. They also enjoyed many dinners with him at Scordatto’s and Charles’s restaurants where Ralph would come up with many reasons why he “needed” to pay the bill!

Ralph maintained long-lasting collegiate relationships with many neuropsychologists. These included Gerald Goldstein and Elbert W. Russell, both of whom worked in Topeka, Kansas, with Philip M. Rennick who was a postdoctoral fellow of Ralph’s. Rennick, Goldstein, and Russell, along with Connie Poggiani (who had been senior technician at Ralph’s lab in Indianapolis) formed what may be described as the “Topeka group” of Ralph’s friends and colleagues.

Ralph influenced thousands of psychologists to enter the field of clinical neuropsychology. A primary avenue for this entry was through his extensive workshops and presentations. Those who have attended these workshops have been uniformly impressed by the intensive nature of the teaching as well as the extensive materials he distributed during these sessions—some complained that they needed an extra bag to cart their materials home! In addition, Ralph was known to be extremely generous with his time and expertise in offering advice and consultation.

Among the long-term colleagues who were impacted by Ralph were Kenneth Adams, Arthur MacNeill Horton, Cecil Reynolds, and Charles Golden. Ken worked on two multicenter clinical research projects on which Ralph served as an advisor. He recalls Ralph’s generosity and willingness to contribute to the field of clinical neuropsychology. Mac’s first involvement with Ralph was during one of his 5-day workshops in 1976. He and Ralph became personal friends over the years, and Mac was involved with Ralph through various organizations in which they both were active including NAN, ABN, the Reitan Society, and CCPN. Cecil’s first contact with Ralph was in 1978 when he attempted to purchase HRB test materials for the University Clinic at the University of Nebraska. He recalls Ralph’s intensive questioning of his credentials before he would agree to sell it to him! Subsequent interactions with Ralph were through various organizational and editorial boards. Over the years, he and Ralph enjoyed a libation or two together. Charlie’s interactions with Ralph were through conversations at various meetings. He credits Ralph as a significant influence on his work on the LNNB.
We mourn the passing of some of Ralph’s long-term colleagues and friends who would have been able to offer interesting insights and perspectives on his life and work. These include Hallgrim Klove, Charles Matthews, Philip M. Rennick, Byron Rourke, and David Sena. We are sure that there are many others who could have made substantial contributions to this issue.

Special acknowledgment should be made of the person who worked most closely with Ralph during the last part of his career. Deborah Wolfson first met Ralph as a workshop attendee in the mid-1980s. Over time, she became his trusted colleague and began teaching at the workshops. He credits her with keeping him focused on his goal of writing, and she was his co-author on numerous publications that he produced up until his very latest years.

Ralph remained active nearly to the time of his death, and so we had a monumental task, describing an almost 70 year-long professional history, including hundreds of publications as well as extensive teaching and clinical activities. We hope one will come away after reading this material with an increased knowledge of Ralph Reitan as a person and of his history and contributions as a scientist and a clinician.

We will enjoy a cold gin martini (extra dry, no olives, no twist) in his memory and honor.