

Louis Linn: 1914-2009

Louis Linn was born in Newark in 1914, received his early education in that city's public schools, graduated from the University of Pennsylvania and earned his MD at Rush Medical College of The University of Chicago. He began his training in psychiatry and neurology at Trenton State Hospital and continued at the New York Psychiatric Institute and Montefiore Hospital. He served as a Captain in the United States Army from 1942 until 1946, spending 33 months overseas, and upon discharge he began his private practice of psychiatry and joined the staff of the Mount Sinai Hospital. Shortly after joining Sinai he created the Day / Night Hospital, pioneering the field of partial hospitalization. Several years later he moved to the Bronx for a few years to help create the Community Psychiatry Movement. Lou, in addition to editing and writing books on, among other things, Hospital Psychiatry and Religion and Psychiatry, published over 100 peer reviewed articles, a stunning number for someone who was never a full time academic, and he published on a vast array of subjects. Among his many noteworthy articles were contributions on the emotional aspects of organic disease, the psychiatric consequences of rhinoplasty and of cataract removal, the

uses of amytal and of ECT, The maternal consequences of child birth, child development, the phenomenology of dreams, the psychiatric consequences of the Andrea Dorea tragedy and occupational therapy. This is a very incomplete list of his contributions but it will serve to give an inkling of the vast reach of his interests. What a simple list cannot suggest, however, is how innovative, indeed how radical, many of these contributions were. Here is just one example. Psychoanalytic dogma posited that all psychiatric symptoms were the product of psychic conflict and therefore that the removal of any symptom, without a resolution of the conflict, would result in the replacement by some other symptom. In 1969, in collaboration with Herbert Spiegel, Lou demonstrated that, to the contrary, the removal of a symptom resulted in the patient's enhanced self-esteem and mental health. The subsequent developments of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy have shown just how correct this was. Lou, who had been trained as a psychoanalyst, initially wrote with the greatest regard for Freudian contributions, particularly to the understanding of medically ill patients, but over time he rebelled against orthodox Freudianism. He was an early proponent of the use of newly developing psychotropic medications

as opposed to exclusive reliance on psychoanalytic treatment.

Perhaps the following experience was a foreshadowing of his future.

As a young analyst his father-in-law, the prominent neurologist Israel Wexler, brought Lou along on a visit to Dr. Wexler's friend Albert Einstein. Upon hearing that Lou was training to be a psychoanalyst Professor Einstein leaned over to Lou and confided, "Dr. Freud was very smart, but you know, he wasn't always right." Lou, who over the years increasingly rejected much of Freud's work and who became critical of Freud's character, loved to tell that story.

Lou was a master of many theories, psychoanalytic, social psychology, cognitive and so on, but he was never a captive of any. Lou's curiosity and his pragmatism, both of which were unbounded, would never allow that. For him theory was just a tool, never to be reified and confining. When Al Fay introduced Cognitive Behavior Therapy to Mount Sinai forty years ago he met almost universal skepticism, but Lou, from the first, supported Al and nurtured his work. The origins of his unique curiosity remain, for me at least, a mystery, but I do have an idea about at least one element of his pragmatism. Lou's beloved older brother, Benny, delighted in taking Lou with him wherever he went and exposing the young lad to an

endless variety of experiences. Once, when both were young, and Ben, though older, smaller than Lou, they went to the cinema to see a popular new film. The line for tickets was long and slow moving. Suddenly an older and much larger boy shoved into line in front of them. Indignant, Ben tapped the giant on the back, he probably reached for his shoulder, but got not much higher than his kidneys, and when the brute turned around to face them Ben, in Lou's delighted recounting, said, "Haven't you any more sense than that." The giant oaf sneered, "No, I haven't." Ben, in words that Lou cherished, replied to the monster, "Well, in that case, never mind."

In his last months, indeed up until the very end, Lou remained curious and creative. With the invaluable help of his devoted secretary, Carol Ivanovski, at late as last Tuesday, Lou was working on a paper on Darwin. Not just on Darwin. Great as Darwin was, Lou's paper was on The Origin of Species, The Big Bang and The Evolution of the Human Mind. No small subjects for Dr. Linn.

Lou was a great teacher as well a scholar and part of his secret was that endless curiosity. You may have been his student but once a

question was posed he became your colleague and collaborator in discovering new insights. He questioned and examined right along with you. His wisdom as a clinician was also boundless. It is no accident that so many of his most senior colleagues turned to him when they required help getting through any of the painful circumstances life serves up to all of us. He was the doctor's doctor.

Lou also had a great sense of humor. His witty remarks in conversation and at conferences were supplemented by his skill in delivering a joke, preferably a slightly off-color one.

I would like to share one personal story and I do so in part because I believe that for many colleagues Lou Linn served as an ego ideal. In 1972, just out of the Navy and new to Mount Sinai and the practice of psychiatry I was in the process of forming a professional identity. A colleague suggested that I attend one of Dr. Linn's conferences. I did and was dazzled by his brilliance, wisdom and humanity. On returning home I said to my wife, "Now I know what I want to be when I grow up."

I can't resist one more Lou Linn anecdote. Some time in the 1980s Lou, knowing of my interest in group therapy and characteristically

wanting to learn something new, decided to attend a two day experiential teaching group that I would be leading. He was then about 70. The group turned out to have a membership of Lou and nine insightful and attractive young women. At the end of the experience the membership was required to critique the group. There was unanimity. All of the young women wanted to take Lou Linn home with them.

And I agree with those fine, wise women. We should all strive to take Lou Linn home with us, and keep his humanity, his curiosity, his joyfulness, his generosity, his enthusiasm and his humor, in our thoughts and hearts. We will have better homes and careers and lives for having done so.