

# In Memoriam



Bernard Rimland, Ph.D.  
1928 – 2006

Bernard Rimland was a brave man who faced up to the threat of losing a child to terrible illness. He marshalled all his energy and all his wit to save that child. From the adversity emerged a true hero of our age and the greatest champion of autism the world will ever know. Bernie contoured the science of autism and its treatment, and he inspired a vast movement which perpetuates his work.

For fifty years Bernie toiled in autism, every day, always very late at night. As first-generation immigrants from Russia, his parents undoubtedly expected hard work from Bernie and his sister. It is hard to imagine that Bernie did not exceed their expectations.

Over the five decades he took but one abbreviated vacation with his devoted spouse, Gloria. Incredibly, for the first 28 years of Bernie's immersion in autism, all the work was done in the evenings and on weekends, outside his full-time job as psychometric analyst for the United States Navy in San Diego.

Bernie and Gloria understood from the very first that their son Mark was

having problems, because he was an unconsolable infant. There was no diagnosis. Autism was described in the decade prior to Mark's birth but still mostly unknown to practising clinicians. Bernie had completed graduate work in psychology at San Diego State University 5 years prior but had not heard of autism. By power of observation, he correctly diagnosed Mark's condition from one of Gloria's college textbooks.

The couple found that the medical community had nothing to offer in terms of treatment. They objected strenuously to the prevailing doctrine that cold, unfeeling "refrigerator mothers" were the cause of the autistic child's social withdrawal. Bernie became a fact-finder, gathering information from doctors and libraries around the world.

Publication of his first book *Infantile Autism: The Syndrome and Its Implications for a Neural Theory of Behavior* forever changed our view of autism. Henceforth, autism could be viewed as a cognitive disorder, with biological roots. Bernie freed autism from Freud.

After publication of the book, legions

of parents contacted Bernie to share information about their autistic children, including response to therapies. In 1967, he founded the nonprofit Institute for Child Behavior Research (now the Autism Research Institute, ARI) to act as a clearing-house for information about autism. Bernie decided to join hands with the parent community and drive the science from the grassroots. He would learn from the parents what seemed to be helping their children and focus research in these areas. In retrospect, injecting parents into the science of autism was one of Bernie Rimland's most important contributions. ARI, which now enjoys the leadership of Bernie's dear friend and colleague, Stephen Edelson, grew into a worldwide network of parents and professionals sharing data and pooling funds for the diagnosis, treatment and scientific investigation of autism. The ARI quarterly, *Autism Research International* reaches 8,000 subscribers in fifty countries.

Bernie co-founded a highly-successful companion organization, DAN! (Defeat Autism Now!) which educates thousands of parents and professionals each year in biomedical treatments for autism.

Bernie was interested in any treatment which was observed to improve symptoms in autism. Since 1967, he served on the Editorial Board of the *Journal of Orthomolecular Medicine*, where he published several articles. He credited Hoffer's successes with vitamin therapy in psychotic adults as the impetus for megavitamin trials in autism. Bernie became an advocate of vitamin B<sub>6</sub> and magnesium, which were established as effective in a long series of randomized clinical trials. He lectured six times from 1979–1996 at the annual international *Nutritional Medicine Today* Conference.

Bernie created the National Society for Autistic Children, now known as the Autism Society of America. He promoted a treatment known as Applied Behavioral Analysis (ABA), which has become the

educational treatment of choice for autistic children.

Bernie coached Dustin Hoffman in his autistic role in the Academy Award-winning motion picture, "Rain Man." Unafraid of controversy, he reported an alarming increase in the incidence of autism over the decades, as well as a shift in the type of autism, towards proportionately more regressed autism and fewer early-onset cases. Only recently have the institutional opinion-makers embraced what Bernie insisted for years—autism is an epidemic, affecting 1 in 166 children in the United States. For Bernie, the increasing incidence of autism and its changing profile implied one or more environmental triggers.

He spoke out bravely about autism after childhood vaccination, including vaccines preserved with mercury.

Of all the things written about Bernie, one account, published in the *San Diego Jewish Journal* in 2002, cuts to the man's core: "My mother used to tell me about one of her brothers, who was a mathematical genius. During the war (World War I), an elderly Jewish gentleman was being harassed by German soldiers. My uncle interceded because he couldn't stand the injustice. The soldiers beat him and left him there, bleeding to death. My mother would finish this story by telling me, 'So don't be like him!' Instead, it inspired me to fight injustice." There it is: Bernie the defender, protecting the children and families against the mighty injustice of autism. Until death.

Bernard Rimland had greatness. He was fundamentally humble, and his humility was graced with such warmth and humor. He enjoyed a free mind, meaning that he was able to believe what he saw, rather than seeing what was believed at the time. His courage was intrepid. He loved his wife, Gloria, sons Mark and Paul of San Diego, and daughter Helen Landalf of Seattle. His compassion extended to the multitudes, and will echo through time.