



PhotoTherapy Centre

604-202-3431 | jweiser@phototherapy-centre.com

www.phototherapy-centre.com

History and Development

Surprisingly, PhotoTherapy and Therapeutic Photography are not new concepts! 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 its first time 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 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.

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 had no way to know about each other's work. Those who happened to read the above 1977 *Psychology Today* article and respond to its authors, began 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** form 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.

After five years and three U.S. conferences, that original informal collegial network and its simple Newsletter evolved into 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.

→ To subscribe to our "PhotoTherapy Techniques News and Events" Email Notification List, [click here](#).

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 professional backgrounds — and experiences ranging through the whole spectrum 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 happen 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.

In February, 2011, the **Learning and Healing with Phototherapy Symposium** took place in Turku, Finland, but it was not intended as an International Conference. It instead 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 theoretical foundations, it unfortunately did not provide readers with very much 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 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 — gives readers examples and assignments to try on themselves and get started experiencing the Techniques!

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.](#)

→ To subscribe to our "**PhotoTherapy Techniques News and Events**" Email Notification List, [click here](#).

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 that course 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 three decades of the field's development with which she will soon found the "PhotoTherapy Archives" to preserve her holdings. 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 the past decade she has been brought to lecture, teach workshops, and give training intensives in North America, Spain, Italy, England, Russia, Finland, Sweden, Latvia, Mexico, Scotland, and Hawaii. [Click here to view the schedule for upcoming training and events.](#)

In addition to earlier related programs such as Krauss' "Center for Visual Therapies" in Cleveland, OH (U.S.) and Mannermaa's "PhotoSynteesi" ("PhotoSynthesis") in Helsinki, Finland, many newer Programs 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 Psicología y Fotografía" ("Latin-American Institute of Psychology and Photography") which is currently being formed in Mexico. A National Mental Health Center in Lucca, Italy, has also recently begun programs in both PhotoTherapy and VideoTherapy applications. Italy, in particular, has a large number of professionals long-experienced in using, writing about, and teaching these techniques. Read more about these people and their projects [here](#).

The continual fascination of the general public with PhotoTherapy is evident not only from people's willingness to participate as clients using these techniques, but also from its [wide coverage in the popular media](#) over the past twenty years. Numerous magazine and newspaper articles, as well as several in-depth radio and television features and interviews, have resulted in many presentations about it also being given to new groups such as art museum and gallery audiences, businesses, photographers, advertisers, photo hobby groups,

→ To subscribe to our "PhotoTherapy Techniques News and Events" Email Notification List, [click here](#).

special education teachers, visual anthropologists/sociologists, visual literacy and cross-cultural researchers, art and media critics, and many more.

Many of the PhotoTherapy pioneers are also photographers who have had formal exhibitions of their fine art photography with 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, BC.

Of course, the history of PhotoTherapy will continue to grow — and now that digital technology is providing 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 may have been unaware of its name, history, and the other people doing similar work across the world.

But now that the Internet provides a means for instant networking it is possible to now find and connect with others anywhere who are doing similar work, as well as stay up to date on facts and events in the field. Connect on Facebook with over 10,000 people around the world interested or working in [PhotoTherapy, Therapeutic Photography, Photo Art Therapy, and VideoTherapy](#).

What is most important to convey here, is that people everywhere are already using photography for the purposes of improving their counselling, education, communication, research, or personal discovery process — even if they have never heard of the word PhotoTherapy!

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 therapy and other mental health applications.

Discover people around the world working in **PhotoTherapy, Therapeutic Photography, Photo Art Therapy, and VideoTherapy** on the [Who is Doing What, Where page](#).

→ To subscribe to our "PhotoTherapy Techniques News and Events" Email Notification List, click here.