

A tribute to Ilene Serlin, Ph.D, BC-DMT - 1948-2024 by Vivien Joy Speiser, Ph.D, BC-DMT

致敬缅怀 Ilene Serlin 博士, 理事会认证舞蹈治疗师 (BC-DMT) -
(1948-2024)

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I have known Dr Serlin since the mid-eighties when she was first hired to teach at the Lesley University Extension Programs in Israel and on campus in Cambridge, Massachusetts. We forged an immediate bond having both graduated from Dance Therapy training programs in the seventies and then, at that time, we were both completing our own doctoral work. We were young then, and heady with our own discoveries and the world was our proverbial oyster. At that time Ilene was already well grounded in Humanistic, Existential and Jungian Psychology as well as a deeply embodied understanding of Dance/Movement Therapy and the emerging field of Trauma Psychology. We developed a lifelong friendship grounded in a common understanding of the power of movement and its relationship to emotional health and growth. We connected in what has become a lifelong commitment

to our friendship and joined together in our common professional understanding as well as our beliefs and faith in Judaism and our love for the country of Israel. Ilene's indefatigable energy, curiosity, kindness and love for others was evident from the start of our friendship. She was always brave, in the face of whatever came her way and was unafraid to stand up for her beliefs no matter what the odds were against her. She was always an activist and moral force. She was a connector and brought people together in common cause. I always saw her as a force of nature, whole person heartedly engaged, and whatever project she embarked upon, she brought with her, dedication and open-hearted pure spiritedness. When she saw injustice or that something needed to be done, she did it. Ilene always believed that we all face basic existential issues and needs, and in every situation, whatever else was going on in any individual or group she was working with, she worked through the body, to address basic issues, which she conveyed both verbally and non-verbally. She helped others to find new strengths and

ways of transcending their circumstances. She was an influencer who was able to make things happen through cultivating and building stability in the body. In an increasingly uncertain world, Ilene always felt that transcendence was possible through caring for and understanding people, and by doing something towards the greater good.

Dr Serlin has written and published across a wide variety of fields including but not limited to psychology, humanistic and existential psychology, person centered approaches, arts and medicine, dance/movement and expressive therapy, and women's studies, and has taught at undergraduate, graduate and doctoral levels. Additionally, she has taught, trained and supervised students in many countries and is known internationally for her global work and she is renowned as a leading scholar in her fields. She has made significant contributions to the growth and development of trauma studies. She has contributed, in great measure to trauma psychology by introducing and documenting the impact of the arts as a way to work with trauma. She has especially pointed to the arts as a way to work with collective and intergenerational trauma. She has pioneered this way of working with the arts with Syrian refugees in Jordan, training counselors working with refugees in Portugal, long-term training and supervision in China and Istanbul. The arts bring a unique, nonverbal and symbolic approach to working with, expressing and transforming, trauma and Dr Serlin contributed in great measure to illuminating this area in trauma psychology, by introducing and documenting the impact of the arts as a way to work with trauma. She has especially pointed to the arts as a way to work with collective and intergenerational trauma, something standard verbal therapies cannot do quite as broadly.

She is on the Editorial Board of the CAET journal and was awarded the following recognitions of long-term and creative service: *Society of Humanistic Psychology*, APA, Rollo May and Trauma awards; *San Francisco Psychological Association*, Outstanding Contribution award (Past-President); *California Psychological Association*, 2019 Distinguished Humanitarian Contribution award; *Marian Chace Foundation*, Invited address; and the *Eleanor Criswell Award Celebrating Women in Humanistic Psychology*.

Dr Serlin believed that the creative and expressive arts therapies rely on symbolic and somatic forms of communication that do not require words and are often more indirect, safer forms of expression than are speech. She believed that the fractured modern world produces alienation, terrible loneliness and despair. In addition, climate change, migrations and dislocations, breakdown of communities and cultural loss, and widespread trauma add to a sense of existential dread. Ilene always reminded me that whatever real life situations we are all facing right now we have to make the best of it by finding our connection to each other. Ilene believed that working with body in working with cultural trauma is important and that the arts help in working with trauma because people often can't express emotion directly. She believed that when we work with the body, we are focusing on building strengths. That when you move your body you can help to get unstuck. When you dance it, when you draw it, when you sing it, when you express it, you come back to yourself. She believed that shutting down the voices in your head and just breathing, in and out begins the process of re-stabilization and grounding again. She believed that our bodies are our tools, they are the sources of our creativity and the way in which we can begin to rebuild resilience, allowing

for regrowth. She believed that finding our own stability helps in better facing those inevitable challenges of life.

During Covid she convened the APA Division 56 Covid International Task Force as well as the International Whole Person Approaches Work Group. This group, of which I was a member, met throughout the period of the epidemic and hosted many round tables and webinars as well as collected, compiled and distributed resources related to working with others during these traumatic times. The International Whole Person Approaches Work Group, was a committee under the APA Interdivisional Task Force on the Pandemic. This group focused on somatic and creative arts approaches to working with COVID-related trauma and taught us that as therapists we have to learn and utilize new ways and new strategies to soothe and hold and contain ourselves so we can hold others.

When in recent years, waves of anti-semitism began to sweep the world she joined with friends and colleagues in the American Dance Therapy Association as well as the American Psychological Association to stand up and rally the call against prejudice and injustice within these associations. She was instrumental in being one of the co-founders of AJP, the American Association of Jewish Psychologists who have instituted support groups across the country. Her devotion to her family and friends carried over into her professional connections. She saw the fight in front of her and rose to the challenge to fight anti-semitism and has influenced the work of this group, and even a second group, the Jewish Community Mental Health Initiative at the American Psychological Foundation as it endures now and into the future.

Ilene's passing has left a void to be filled by her colleagues, her friends, and the many students she has trained over many years in many countries. As she approached her illness with courage and tenacity, she has created rituals of dancing and moving the sounds of a changing voice. She has fought through every battle, and her voice rings loud and resonant and even when her voice has changed it has always been that same clear voice. She has always expressed her exuberance and appetite for people and for life, always expressing her joyfulness across cultures. Ilene believed in the basic goodness of human beings. Her aura lit up every room with her spirit, her incorrigible joy. We will all take her passion in urging us always to move forward, personally and collectively. I urge each one of us to find a way to carry forward her energy in a world that needs love and caring very badly. Ilene has taught us that when we are flooded by emotion, it's time to find a time, place and way to recharge. In my mind's eye I hear her voice as she reminds me to be still like a mountain, breathe in and out, and when I am ready, to open my eyes and move on. Shalom my dear friend, you have left an indelible mark and legacy on this world. Bravo, I applaud, love and salute you.