

## NEXUS HENRY MAIER: INFLUENCES

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This has been written and said before and it will be written and said again, many times. A leader, Henry Maier's work will live at Nexus (all group care programs). A mentor, Henry Maier, is dead, but his work lives at Nexus (all group care programs).

How do we know? Because we can see and hear his work in care interactions. In our care interactions. Every time a worker and child get in the thick of it we will know that his work lives. I repeat, every time we get in the thick of it we will know that his work lives. Every time a worker puts his hand on a youth's shoulder and says "let's go to your room together", while slowly removing the hand as if pulling the youth along in a way that says I want to go with you, every time a worker and group of youth or youth are in synch, every time a worker and youth do a summersault side by side, every time an attachment interaction occurs, every time a discovery is made, every time a space is shaped, every time and so forth, we will know his work lives.

This humble, powerful man taught us so much. How can we forget? We never will. No, we never will. How could we? He taught and showed us, he taught and showed us. He did it with us, we tossed pocket Frisbee, side-by-side then apart, we really did.

I am repeating so I will not forget. I am repeating this to grieve. I am repeating this to remember. I am repeating this for Nexus. I am repeating this so I can be genuine, like him.

A youth returns to a group home after running away. The worker welcomes the youth back, does not punish the youth. They have cookies and milk. "It's good to see you. I'm glad you're safe", the worker says in a twist on Henry's "I'm glad you're here," a work in practice, an example that Henry recorded, of genuine care, that the worker might have learned from Henry at another place and time. An example learned from Henry at another time and place. Welcome back, genuine care.

It is so simple yet complex. He makes it that way. Simple, yet complex, so we can do it with understanding. We understand and do it, every day in every interaction, no matter how small, no matter how large, we care, because of him we care more, and act, we act upon the feeling of care we have, so simple, yet so complex.

We are walking together across the University of Victoria Campus, sitting at our Youth Work Learning Center and talking curriculum, eating out with friends, talking by the fountain in Boston. I eagerly open his letters—words from Henry and Jeanne, words from Henry and Jeanne, and

family—Jeanne his trusted companion and lover, mother of his children, editor, secret reviewer, who reads our work with him and offers hints, suggestions and criticisms. We owe her so much. We owe her so much, behind the scenes always, but not really, always but not really. Cheers. Cheers, to Henry and Jeanne.

She asked if we would want his library. He would want it here at the Youth Work Learning Center, she said. Here with Quinn, Peter, me, and all the youth workers some who knew him well and others who will now have a chance to know him through his words and what he read. We are so honored, so honored. We will have a library, a Henry Maier memorial library. His words, and the words that influenced him, will be here in one place, in our library for all of us to share. What a gift—for all to see, the words, here with us. He is already in our conversations and interactions and classes, and now his influence will be archived, a living archive to a man of great influence, an archive where students will interact with him, his words, the man with such a rich history of learning, a boy who came from Germany and worked here, with children, a worker, a scholar, and most of all a teacher and friend to all who believed in children and their development.

I wait at Nexus for him to arrive. He's been here before, and will arrive again. Here he is. His step is brisk. His step is brisk, I repeat.

"I'm glad you're here", he says.

We enter. The workers and children are present. There are private spaces and public spaces, here at Nexus. They are all in a public space now, the living room. Their pictures, posters, and paintings are on the walls. Everywhere you look you see expressions of youth.

Some are playing on the floor. He/we get down. Eye contact is made here, on the floor, at their level of play, not standing above. "Show me", he says. "Teach me how to play. Show me. Teach me how to play", you/I say. He plays, we play. We are part of what is being played, learning from them, teaching them.

He gets up from the floor. His knees are a little creaky, but it makes no difference, he gets down and up anyway. It's the only way he knows how to teach, doing summersaults and getting in at the level action and play, showing, showing-up, and doing with.

Think about what you want people to learn, not what you want to teach. We all have wonderful things to say, but what do you want them to learn, he says to me/you when asked what he's learned about teaching. Think about what you want people to learn, not what you want to teach.

The workers at Nexus watch and listen. He praises. He is sincere. He praises again. They, the workers and youth, cherish the meaning of their activity even more, because of his praise, his predictability and dependability, the added meaning he gives to their activity by being present, being present, with sincerity, praising, until they cherish the meaning even more.

Henry firmly shakes a boy's hand. A connection is formed. The boy runs off, spirited by his meeting with someone the youth workers speak

of fondly, and with admiration. Attachment frees. We are more connected and free because we read his work. Liberated by the beauty of what he says, empowered by the way he shows and says what we knew we could do but needed the help and words until he showed us and put it all in another light, a new light that shines on our work and says, we, the caregivers, are important and powerful. Our daily life events with children and youth mean something, even more than we thought, and now others know it too because they can read about it, see in his words how its done, with grace and dignity in the developmental rhythms of daily activities. But most important of all we can do it because of him, even better because of him. "Tell me what you do, not your title", he says when we introduce ourselves in his workshop. Tell me what you do, not your title.

Developmental group care is what we do. We learned it in his books and workshops, how to do it, well, always we will remember and teach it to others, the way he showed us in his workshops, books, and interpersonal interactions. To meet him was to know, to see it in him and the way he interacted with us, right before our eyes in him and us. The beauty of what he showed us, how to listen and be, to do and act, to comb hair, was hands, sit down to eat and play together. The scenes. The scenes he created in our minds. The mealtimes and bedtimes, the games, oh the games, always in his pocket a balloon, or dice, or something to play a game with, to learn—always in his pocket for the children, the toys. He pulls out a balloon at Nexus, blows it up, bats it toward a quiet youth, a developmentally ready youth, who is transformed into a playmate, with Henry. He did the same thing at dinner, not to long ago, or maybe years ago, I don't know, with the son of a youth worker, who was bored at the dinner with mostly adults. Henry transformed himself into a playmate for the bored child. We all watched and learned.

We sit down and eat. There is a rich menu, of food and activity, at Nexus. Henry serves a youth mashed potatoes, first the youth then himself. We have dinner a few years ago. He asks me to look up a number of an old friend for him in a phone book. We joke about who it might be—always ready, for the joke, a jokester himself in his own playful way.

I am a young writer and child and youth care worker. He invites me to breakfast in Banff, the great Henry Maier. In awe I sit across from him. He speaks with me, praises my work. I cherish the meaning of my activity even more, because of him, because of him, and me. Thanks Henry. Peace, always, he worked for peace. I will miss you. I will miss you. There is no replacement, only your work in me, in Nexus. There is no replacement. Oh, if we could only go to breakfast again. He made each one special. Each breakfast with a bright-eyed, eager student of his work, special. There is no replacement. Others will come. They will try to be like him, but they will never replace him. Only one, there is only one Henry.

"Want to see a trick?" a youth sitting next to Henry at Nexus asks.

"Show me," he smiles, ready, eager to see what the youth has to show him.