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Letters from Laura Ruth Bowyer Pickford

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WHILE WORKING ON OUR BOOK, *Sandplay: Past, Present and Future* (1994), we had the opportunity to speak with several people who were either instrumental in the early development of the sand tray or closely associated with its early innovators. One of the significant pioneers that we were able to contact was Ruth Bowyer Pickford, now age eighty-six and living in Glasgow, Scotland. From our telephone conversations and the photograph she sent us, Pickford appears to be a petite, congenial woman with a forthright smile and gentle manner. She was a professor at the University of Glasgow until 1973, when she retired with her husband, Dr. Ralph W. Pickford, who was head of the department of psychology at the same university.

Pickford used the sand tray as the basis for her research for nearly 40 years. For some of this time, she was closely associated with Mar-

garet Lowenfeld. It was with Lowenfeld's approval that she chronicled all of the sand tray research prior to 1970 in her book, *The Lowenfeld World Technique*. The publication of this book was an enormous contribution to the sand tray literature. In addition, she published numerous articles discussing her own innovative research that included: identifying sand tray norms for children and adults, developing scoring categories leading to a clearer understanding of trays, working on the importance of how sand is used in the trays, and studying the deaf population using the sand tray.

Although Bowyer's work was well-known to us before we began the research on our book, we became even more impressed with her contributions as we examined her research more closely. We wanted very much to have a personal contact with her; however, we had been unable to locate her. Then, one day as we were speaking with Margaret Lowenfeld's nephew, Dr. Beryl Wright, in London, he informed us that Laura Ruth Bowyer was currently living in Scotland. He also mentioned that she was using her married name, Ruth Pickford. Much to our surprise, we realized that Ruth Pickford (a name familiar to us as a writer on the therapeutic use of the sand tray) and Laura Ruth Bowyer (the researcher) were one and the same person! We immediately contacted her by telephone and were delighted with the lively and responsive letters that ensued. We felt that others interested in the history and development of sand tray would appreciate these letters as much as we. For that reason, we decided to excerpt some of her correspondence for the *Journal of Sandplay Therapy*.

Dr. Pickford's initial response to our first contact was one of great interest in our book, especially in the chapter about her work. We sent her a copy of the chapter in our first letter to her, along with a list of questions about her life and work. We also wondered if she would be willing to comment about her personal associations with some of the other sand tray pioneers. She responded openly and enthusiastically to our questions.

It was immediately clear by her first letter to us, dated April 14, 1993, that we were corresponding with a well-grounded academician. In this first short letter, she informed us that:

In the current number of the *British Journal of Projective Psychology*, I have an article, "The Sand Tray: Update 1970–1990," of which I will send an offprint, and I will ask the editor if he has an extra copy of the journal, as there is an article (with some inaccuracies of fact) about the introduction of Lowenfeld's sandplay in a residential school (which is by a man named Philip Jones). You would be interested in that, and a paper about mosaics perhaps, by someone using them in schools. I will of course answer the questions in your letter. This is just to let you know that your letter arrived safely.

In this first letter she also responded to the information we gave her regarding some of the other early researchers. She commented that she "was very interested to hear about Hedda Bolgar and Liselotte Fischer. I never met them, but enjoyed their work."

The following day, April 15, 1993, Dr. Pickford wrote a second letter in which she updated us regarding her colleagues, John Gillies and Robin Gilmour (see bibliography).

[They] were my research assistants in the work with the deaf children. Robin is now on the staff of Lancaster University and John was appointed to Glasgow University Psy. Dep. and this year was made Senior Lecturer (associate professor in North American terms). Just thought you might be interested.

Four days later, April 19, 1993, Dr. Pickford wrote a detailed response to our questions regarding Margaret Lowenfeld.

The Lowenfeld "World" technique was introduced into the Psychology Dept. of Glasgow University by the head of the department, Professor Ralph W. Pickford [Ruth Pickford's husband], after Dr. Lowenfeld had demonstrated it at a conference in Glasgow. Dr. Pickford used it with children in Notre Dame Child Guidance Clinic, where he provided a weekly afternoon's play therapy, and I found it installed, by one of his former students, in the main clinic of Ayr County when I was appointed to my first job as an educational psychologist in 1945. In the two years which I spent in the Ayrshire schools and clinics, the sand tray "World" technique was very helpful, e.g., in the treatment of enuresis, stuttering, fears, and I continued to use it after I moved to the University of Bristol. This was possible because the academic appointment involved a request

from Bristol Children's Hospital that whoever was appointed should be honorary psychologist to the hospital, whence children were referred for play therapy during time free from lectures (Saturday mornings and one afternoon weekly).

I had not yet met Dr. Lowenfeld, but wrote to ask if I could visit the Institute of Child Psychology (ICP) during an Easter vacation. Although the ICP was closed for part of the Easter holidays, she kindly came to London and opened it to show me her records, and later to let me observe her work with individual children and adolescents who arrived.

She [Lowenfeld] was a fascinating person, generous, warm, forceful, flamboyant, intuitive and creative. I spent a week or two in a hotel in Baywater, London, and walked to the nearby ICP every morning.

At another time, Dr. Lowenfeld invited me for a weekend to her beautiful house, Cherry Trees, in the country outside London. Ville Anderson was there, and told me that Margaret Lowenfeld saw Cherry Trees and desired it, and at once, characteristically, marched up to the house and announced that she wished to buy the property. By coincidence, the owners had been thinking of selling.

Over the weekend at Cherry Trees, Dr. Lowenfeld showed me the manuscript of a book that she had been writing on the instigation of the American anthropologist Margaret Mead. She [Margaret Lowenfeld] had never found writing a happy activity. Her training was in medicine, specializing in rheumatism, I think, before she became more interested in children's minds, and trained in psychoanalytic therapy. She was struggling with writing up the literature, and she could not be dissuaded from relegating mention of Charlotte Buhler to a single sentence in the appendix, saying that she did not understand the technique. This was because she was very angry with Buhler for, she said, turning the "World" technique into "a test" after Buhler went to America. (I was always surprised and grateful that Lowenfeld was not displeased with anything that I wrote about her "World" method!). Anyway, on that afternoon at Cherry Trees, she finally said, "Well, what about you writing up the literature?" and that is how I came to write the 1970 book!

Margaret Lowenfeld organized a wine and cheese party to celebrate the publication of the book, but I was sorry that I could not leave Glasgow at the time. Did you know that there is an Italian edition of the book? *La Tecnica Del Mondo di Margaret Lowenfeld*. She wrote to me in jubilation because an Italian psychotherapist had told her that she would like to have the 1970 book translated, and knew a suitable translator, if Lowenfeld would get the permission of myself and Pergaman Press. The translation was printed in Florence, Italy, in 1972.

It was a great pity that Lowenfeld did not manage to get her large manuscript into publishable form. The very richness of her gifted and inspired work with children may have made it difficult. However, Ville Anderson made an excellent job of editing it, with illustrations, in 1979.

Further occasions when I met Margaret Lowenfeld were: when I was still in Bristol, where she had a nephew whom she visited from time to time, and she would kindly invite me to tea. On one occasion, she was finishing a letter, and said, "I am writing to Margaret." I suppose this was to her friend, Margaret Mead.

In later years, my husband and I met her at international conferences. It was always a pleasure to meet her. She was so ebullient and enthusiastic.

On April 20, 1993, Pickford sent yet more answers to our specific questions. This time her letter focused on her own personal history. We also include here her synopsis of her husband's pursuits, for we thought it reveals the admiration she felt for him.

[I was] born on Dec. 1907 in the town of Brechin, Scotland. [My] parents' names were Laura and Harry Bowyer.

I have no preference about what names you use for me in the chapter; I will be happy with whatever you decide. I continued to use the name, Bowyer, for the research on deaf children (summarized in the *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, L.R. Bowyer and J. J. Gillies, 1972) because earlier reports were under that name. After marriage, however (in October 1971), I used the name Pickford because I was sharing in my husband's colour vision research (R.W.

Pickford, Ruth Pickford, J. Bose et al., 1978; R.W. Pickford and Ruth Pickford, 1981) in India and Africa. I apologize about the variation of Laura and Ruth. Why do parents not place first in order the name which they intend to use for their child? Once when I had a short spell in the hospital, a friend came to visit and was told that there was no patient named Ruth Pickford, only one named Laura Pickford!

My husband was Professor Ralph W. Pickford, born in Bournemouth, England, a Cambridge graduate, but his working life was spent in Scotland, in charge of Glasgow University Dept. of Psychology. He was a very versatile and well-known psychologist with numerous books and papers in three fields: (a) Colour vision, e.g., his book *Individual Differences in Colour Vision* (1951), published by Routledge & Kegan Paul. Also he designed a portable form of colorimeter (the Pickford-Nicholson anomaloscope) which an ophthalmology professor (Dr. Bose) asked if he would bring to Bishnapur in Bengal to measure a very rare form of colour blindness found there. (b) Psychoanalysis, e.g., a book, *The Analysis of an Obsessional* (1954), and a series of 120 pictures of postcard—size (Tavistock, 1963), the *Pickford Projective Pictures*, to be used a few at a time with children attending a child guidance clinic over a period of time. These have been modified for use in Pakistan. (There is a chapter by me in the book, under the name L.R. Bowyer, about the use of the pictures in remedial education, using the Carl Rogers kind of approach. (c) *The Psychology of Visual Aesthetics* (1972), and one by an American publisher, *Studies in Psychiatric Art*, (C. Thomas, Chicago, 1967). He was a guest lecturer regularly at the College of Art in St. Alban's, England, and later when I went with him, there was a request for demonstrations of the sand tray also.

We retired in 1973 but continued to teach one or two courses in the university Dept. of Adult Education (which I continued to do until last year, Dec. 1992). There was more time for music. Ralph played the clarinet and the French horn (in two amateur orchestras) and we were members of Glasgow Recorders Society (for which Ralph composed and arranged music). We played duets (clarinet and piano) at home in the evenings, and at weekends we played recorder duets in our cottage in the Scottish Borders. We also painted and

went to an evening painting class in a school near our home. Ralph also went to a morning arts centre school (when I was teaching child psychology at the University). My paintings, which I took up because of his example, were mostly animals, sometimes flowers — in water colours. Ralph died in 1986.

We did not have children because Ralph's first wife was an invalid (he looked after her devotedly). She was not strong enough to have or to look after children, and after she died in April 1971, and we married, it was too late for me to have children, although we would have liked to have a family—plenty of nieces and nephews, and their children!

Other personal information which might be of interest: In 1950 I was given a year's leave of absence to go to Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario, as a visiting professor of child psychology. The appointment included being consultant to Sunnyside, which was a home for preparing disturbed children for adoption, and had its own resident psychologist (since then a close friend) and social worker, etc. Queen's University paid some of the staff salaries, in exchange for which Sunnyside gave opportunities for students to better experience observing children. I introduced the sand tray to Sunnyside, and in 1954 when I was back in Canada for the summer supervising psychology interns in the mental hospital a few miles away, we borrowed Sunnyside's sand tray and toys in an emergency to help a schizophrenic patient in danger of becoming catatonic.

In 1960, Bristol gave me leave again, for the summer three months, to take up a research fellowship from Lauretta Bender [of the Bender Visual-Motor test] in Creedmore State Hospital, New York. This had nothing to do with the Lowenfeld material (e.g., was not using it) but the visit was very stimulating. I learned a lot, and became a member of the American Society for Research in Child Development.

I might mention an unusual (probably unique!) form of usefulness for the sand tray, in the social psychology laboratory class in Glasgow (I left Bristol in 1962 and no longer used the sand tray in any clinical work, but only in our research with deaf children). In this particular lab class, for social psychology third-year students,

we were duplicating Lippit & White's experiment on three styles of leadership—authoritarian, democratic, and laissez-faire. We decided to use three sand trays with five students at each, including a leader of different type in each group. It worked beautifully. Even though the students knew what the experiment was about, the material was in itself so interesting that, for instance, those under authoritarian leadership became really resentful at not being allowed to do as they wished. It was quite amusing.

On May 11, 1993, Pickford attempted to clear up a misunderstanding on our part that she and Lowenfeld had planned to collaborate on a book as well. She also continued to expand on the rupture between Lowenfeld and Buhler.

I am so sorry for just realizing now the source of misunderstanding about the idea of [my] collaboration with Lowenfeld. The American anthropologist, Margaret Mead, urged Lowenfeld to write a book about the "World" technique, and obtained a grant for her expenses from the Bollingen Foundation, as mentioned by Ville Anderson when she edited Lowenfeld's manuscript after Lowenfeld's death. Lowenfeld did write the book, which I think was going to be published by Routledge & Kegan Paul, but it never was. The help (not as authors) which Lowenfeld had from her colleagues Ville Anderson and Phyllis Traill would be in sorting out the enormous quantity of data, records, files, drawings, in the ICP. On my one visit to Lowenfeld's home, she showed me her completed, or almost completed, manuscript, and when I remonstrated with her for leaving out Buhler's work because sadly she had become estranged from Buhler, she asked if I would write about it, and write or re-write briefly the literature. This was certainly not planned, and could hardly be called collaboration. Lowenfeld's manuscript was left in the care of Ville Anderson, who made an excellent job after Lowenfeld's death in compiling (in 1979) as you say notes and illustrations prepared by Margaret Lowenfeld. As her book was not being published, I decided as you say, with Lowenfeld's generous blessing, to write about the history and literature myself.

In the same May 11 letter, Dr. Pickford also addresses how her research of the social and emotional development with deaf children began.

It happened because...[a close colleague] Dr. Klaus Weddell had been appointed to Bristol City child guidance service, with responsibility for children with special needs. He had come across an American journal paper suggesting that severely deaf children have fewer problems than partially deaf, and asked the psychology department if they could check on this. I thought it would be interesting to find out if the World technique would be a means of communication (as we did not lip read or use sign language). There was just about a month before I was due to return to Scotland to take up a post in Glasgow University Psychology Dept, and it happened that Dr. Marshall (who had been completing a research assignment for a psychiatrist interested in the catching up at age 9 of children who had been premature babies) had three weeks left before leaving, and offered to help. The results with such small numbers were not conclusive, and the work with deaf children was continued over a number of years in Glasgow.

We felt very fortunate to have had this opportunity for personal contact with Dr. Pickford who lived, witnessed, and was part of the rich history of the evolution of the sand tray. We deeply appreciated the fullness of her responses and the vivid vignettes of her own experiences that she so generously offered. Her personal view of the personalities and stories surrounding the pioneers of the sand tray added a great deal to our understanding of this early period in the development of the sand tray. Through her letters, we experienced the passion that these women felt about the power of the sand tray, as well as their most human everyday stories and conflicts. But most of all, it was touching to hear about Pickford's own life — the interweaving of her professional and personal sides — a woman who enjoyed playing duets with her husband, while also having an influential academic career. With the sand tray, she tapped into its potential as a research instrument, while still being aware of its unique capacity as a nonverbal clinical instrument. Her alive correspondence gives a full picture of this extraordinarily competent, well-rounded, and engaging modern woman!

For those of you interested in learning more about Ruth Bowyer Pickford's work, we include a bibliography of her sand tray publications.

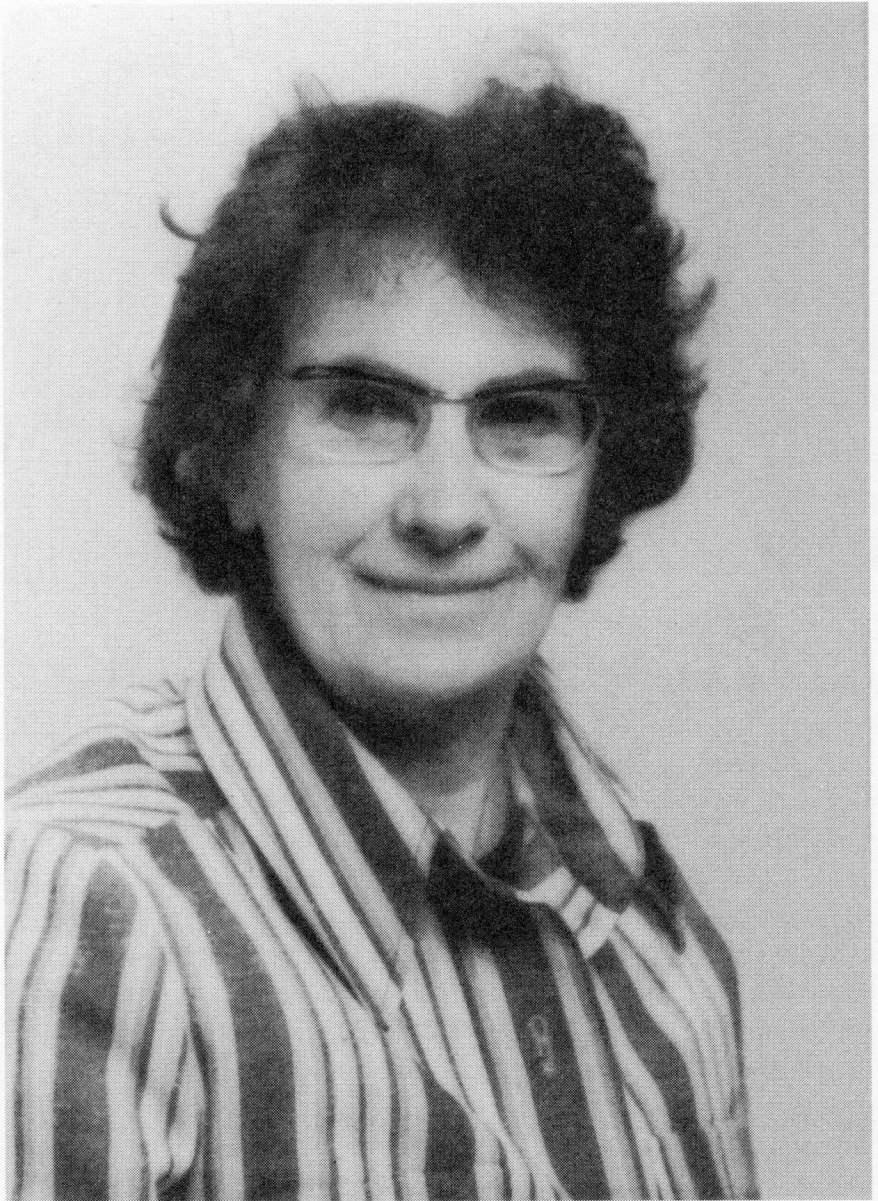
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Laura Ruth Bowyer Pickford