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Rae Unzicker Papers

1967-2000

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Photographs and drawings: Rae Unzicker
Press Kit
Resources for therapy and mental health
Resources for therapy and mental health: poetry and short stories
Resources for therapy and mental health: worksheets
Speeches and articles collected by Unzicker
Transcript from Donahue Show
Writings, notes, and speeches
Abstract for presentation at "Myths and Truths"
Advertisements
"Another Point View" Series
"Current Trends for 'Mental Patients' and Others"
"Cynic's Primer: How to Develop at Healthy Hate"
"Fried Eggs"
"From the Inside," book chapter in Beyond Bedlam
"Godfather"
"Hype and Hope of Stigma"
"Listening to Critical Voices"
"MADvocacy: Attila Doesn't Live Here Anymore"
"Making Trouble"
Memoir: You Never Gave Me M & M's, Manuscript with edits
Memoir: You Never Gave Me M & M's, Manuscript without edits
Memoir: You Never Gave M & M's, Notes and Synopsis
"My Own Story"
Newspaper and magazine articles on non-political issues
Newspaper and magazine articles on political issues
Newspaper articles on Problem-in-Living Center
Notes from speeches given at NARPA
Notes on Bodymind
Notes on presentation about speaking in public
Other writings: poetry, plays, inspiration
Other Writings: prose
"On Language and Liberty"
"On Passion: A Personal Statement," article
"Owning Your Own Experience"
"Plexiglass"
"Report on 1994 National Symposium: Involuntary Interventions"
"Resolved: That Involuntary Treatment is Never Justified"
"Right to Refuse"
Speech for AALS
Speech for APA Advocacy
Speech for NMHA
Speech given at AMI Conference
Speech given at "Education, Rights, and Responsibilities"
Speech given at NAPAS, two drafts
Speech on behalf of NAMP given at Alternatives '88
Speech on behalf of the National Association of Psychiatric Survivors
Speech to South Dakota Community Support Program
Speech to Seventh CSP Learning Community Conference
Speeches: miscellaneous notes and drafts
"These are the days..."
"There is no group of people more feared..."
"To be a Mental Patient..."
"Top Ten Reasons to Oppose Forced Treatment"
"Wake Up" story
"What It Takes to do the Possible"
"Why you haven't come a long way, baby"

Women and Mental Health

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Read collection overview

An important figure in the fight for civil rights for mental health patients, Rae Unzicker spent over 30 years advocating for change in the mental health care system. Committed at the age of 14, Unzicker knew firsthand the stigma and damaging treatments that came with mental health care. Once she was released, Unzicker's road to recovery was long, but after several suicide attempts and stays at other treatment facilities, she ultimately counted herself--along with her friend Judi Chamberlin, an early leader in the movement--a psychiatric survivor. Like Chamberlin, who grounded her advocacy in her personal experience, Unzicker argued for psychiatric patients to have the same rights as ordinary citizens, and she worked to expose the inhumanity in treatments used by mental health doctors, calling for a complete overhaul of the mental health system. Her advocacy reached the national level, when President Clinton appointed her to the National Council on Disability (NCD) in 1995, and two years later she was elected president of the National Association for Rights Protection and Advocacy (NARPA). Unzicker was widely known for her public appearances, conferences and speeches, and her writings, including numerous articles and contributions to the book *Beyond Bedlam: Contemporary Women Psychiatric Survivors Speak Out* and to the NCD report *From Privileges to Rights: People Labelled with Psychiatric Disabilities Speak for Themselves*. Rae Unzicker died at her home in Sioux Falls, South Dakota on March 22, 2001 at the age of 52, after a long battle with cancer.

Although a small collection, Rae Unzicker's papers document her activities as a leading advocate for the rights of mental health patients, including drafts and abstracts of speeches and videotaped appearances, correspondence and feedback related to workshops and conferences, a press kit, resources for mental health care (such as articles, poetry, and worksheets), and newspaper clippings. The most important materials, however, are her writings. It is through her poems, scripts for advertisements, newspaper articles, and her full length memoir, *You Never Gave Me M & M's*, that Unzicker's story and voice are preserved.

See similar SCUA collections:

Civil rights

Disability

Political activism

Social justice

Women

Background on Rae Unzicker

"To be a mental patient is to be stigmatized, ostracized, socialized, patronized, and psychiatrized."

From "To be a Mental Patient" by Rae Unzicker, 1984

Public servant and disability civil rights activist, Rae Unzicker spent her adult life advocating the fair treatment and equal rights for psychiatric patients, including their right to decide if and how they receive treatment. Unzicker's advocacy was grounded in her own experiences, for she knew firsthand the damaging atmosphere of psychiatric institutions. From the age of 12, she found herself in and out of therapists' offices, hospitals, and mental institutions. It was not until the age of 24 that her road to recover really started to see significant positive changes, although she continued to have high and low periods throughout her life. Despite her continual struggles, Unzicker considered herself a psychiatric survivor, and she was determined to create change in the care of mental health patients.

Born Carole Renetta Engles in 1948, Rae grew up in Ottawa, Kansas, where she graduated from high school in 1966. During high school, Unzicker was known for her poetry, oratorical skill, and interest in journalism. During her senior year, she won the American Legion Oratorical Award as well as a Senior High Journalist of the Year award and a journalism scholarship awarded to her by *The Ottawa Herald*. After



graduation, she continued to pursue journalism and worked on the yearbook staff at the University of Kansas, until her hospitalizations and relationship with her parents left her unable to neither attend nor afford classes. She did eventually graduate with a B.S. in Journalism in 1970. Rae Unzicker, ca. 1980

After a very traumatic year which included being raped and having a therapeutic abortion, Unzicker moved to Sioux Falls, where she made her home until her death in 2001. In Sioux Falls, Unzicker began working for the local news station, KSOO-TV. It was the beginning of a promising career, but suffering from the same doubts and anxiety that plagued her in high school and college, she attempted suicide multiple times which resulted in her termination from the news station. Despite the unfortunate outcome of her time at the station, it was during this time that she began seeing Dr. Robert Hughes, who was extremely influential in her recovery. He was the first to refuse to indulge her threats of suicide and the first to reward her with consistent positive feedback. It was this positive reinforcement and encouragement for her accomplishments that started to change the way Unzicker saw herself and how she reacted to situations. However, after another failed suicide attempt, Hughes refused to see Unzicker as his patient. This act changed Rae. She came to recognize that she had hurt someone who cared about her and whom she considered a friend, and from this, she pushed herself to join the "healthies," using the lessons Dr. Hughes had taught her.

Rae married Jim Unzicker (1932-1998) in 1974 and became a mother to five step-children. Together Rae and Jim operated a film and advertising company. After being married for a few months, Rae drafted a manuscript of her memoir, *You Never Gave Me M & M's*. This book recounted her childhood and early adulthood, including her stays in mental hospitals, those who helped her, her revelations about her condition, and ultimately her call for change in the understanding and care of mental health care patients. The final chapters of this book can be seen as a manifesto for her founding of the South Dakota Mental Health Advocacy Project in 1979. As the book recounts the horrors and turmoil Rae faced emotionally and physically, it ultimately ends with a message of hope, an honest and almost surprising message considering Rae's mental state only a few years earlier.

As part of her advocacy for the rights of mental health patients, Rae spoke at multiple conferences and workshops around the country and in Europe. She appeared on multiple television shows including *The Phil Donahue Show*. She even ran a campaign, albeit unsuccessful, for a position in the South Dakota House of Representatives. Despite her unsuccessful campaign, she continued to advocate for human rights in South Dakota and beyond. She was honored for her contributions to the betterment of society by *Women's Day* magazine, when she was named an Outstanding Woman in America in 1987. However, the ultimate recognition of her contributions to the fight for people labelled with psychiatric disabilities came when President Bill Clinton appointed her to the National Council on Disability (NCD) in 1995. She served on this council until her death in 2001, and she is often credited with the conception and editing of *From Privileges to Rights: People Labelled with Psychiatric Disabilities Speak for Themselves* (2000), which was a report to President based on testimony from people with psychiatric disabilities. The report called for those with psychiatric disabilities to be treated as citizens and to be afforded the same rights applied to all other citizens. Rae's work at the national level did not stop with the NCD. She became President of National Association for Rights, Protection, and Advocacy (NARPA) in 1997.

Rae was a prolific writer, and wrote numerous speeches and articles on the subject of mental health care. Late in her life, she published a chapter in *Beyond Bedlam: Contemporary Women Psychiatric Survivors Speak Out* (2000); this book offered a look at the experiences of women who were survivors of the psychiatric system, what lead them to treatment and how they were treated. In her chapter, "From the Inside," Rae describes how she felt that something was wrong with her from a young age, how her abusive home life and the unhelpful treatments she received in hospitals only made problems worse. She paints an abysmal portrait of mental health care, calling its "help" a lie. Written nearly forty years after her first experience with psychiatry, "From the Inside" served as a reminder of how much change was still needed in the care of mental patients.

Approaching the end of her life, her battle with breast cancer worsened as the cancer returned in 1999. Then in 2000, she was diagnosed with a brain tumor. Finally, she lost her battle with cancer at the age of 52 in 2001, in her home in Sioux Falls.

Described as energetic but tempestuous by David Kohn, one of her "refugees," Rae was a witty and charming woman and a phenomenal public speaker. Yet, she did have a darker, troubled side that she continually battled her entire life. However, it was ultimately her struggle that informed her career as a mental health activist, and is what drove her to pursue equal rights for all mental health patients.

Scope of collection

Rae Unzicker's papers document her activities as a leading advocate for the rights of mental health patients. Although small, the collection provides insight into Unzicker's life, thoughts, and passions. Newspaper clippings of Unzicker's articles from *Sunday*, a review column in a Sioux Falls paper, showcase her wit and zeal, as well as her interests in theater, local events, and politics, including a series about the local Problems Living Center. Transcriptions and drafts of her speeches and appearances reveal the major points of Unzicker's advocacy and exhibit her allure as a public speaker. Unzicker's papers also include a plethora of correspondence and feedback related to workshops and conferences; these letters give thanks, endorsement, and encouragement, and demonstrate the large number of audiences Unzicker reached with her appearances and words. Although

the collection lacks much of Rae's personal correspondence, it includes a particularly moving letter written to her parents; this letter of reconciliation offers insight into Rae's relationship with her parents as well as her recovery. Unlike her speeches or letters, which offer brief descriptions of her experiences with the mental health care system, Unzicker's memoir, *You Never Gave Me M & M's*, provides the most complete account of her childhood and early adulthood, including her first attempt at suicide, her first encounter with a psychiatrist, and the numerous highs and lows she faced on her journey to recovery. The collection includes two full copies of the manuscript, one of which has handwritten edits.

In addition to these materials, the collection includes videotaped appearances, photographs, a press kit, resources for mental health care (such as articles, poetry, and worksheets), Rae's poetry and creative writings, and newspaper clippings about Rae and her husband Jim as well as various issues in mental health care.

Inventory

Awards: articles, photographs, programs

1984-1987

Box 1: 1

Biographical Documents: resume, biography, and personal correspondence

1978-1993

Box 1: 2

Brochure: Birch, Bill

undated

Box 1: 3

Brochure: Shannon, Bill

undated

Box 1: 4

Campaign material and press kit: South Dakota House of Representatives

ca.1981

Box 1: 5

Canvas Bag: "WAPR AMRP Ireland '93"

1993

Box 3

Chamberlin, Judi: greeting card from Laura

undated

Box 1: 6

Greeting card, possibly from Laura Van Tosh, transfers Unzicker's papers to Chamberlin.

Conference and talk brochures

1982-1990

Box 1: 7

Invitation: Mason, Jeff

1991

Box 1: 8

Letters to Rae: thanks, endorsement, and congratulations

1980-1997

Box 1: 9

Newspaper Clippings: Jim and Rae Unzicker

1972-1992

Box 1: 10

Newspaper Clippings: state of mental health care

1972-1992

Box 1: 11

Newspaper clippings: theater performances

1967, ca. 1972

Box 1: 12

Two clippings featuring Unzicker in theatrical performances.

Photographs: albums of Rae Unzicker

undated

2 albums

Box 1: 13

Photographs: headshots of Rae Unzicker

undated
Box 1: 14
Photographs: Rae Unzicker
undated
Box 1: 15
Photographs: Rae Unzicker, Judi Chamberlin, and Laura Prescott
undated
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Photographs and drawings: Rae Unzicker
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Press Kit
ca. 1997
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Resources for therapy and mental health
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Box 1: 19
Resources for therapy and mental health: poetry and short stories
1984-2000
Box 1: 20
Resources for therapy and mental health: worksheets
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Box 1: 21
Speeches and articles collected by Unzicker
ca. 1985-2000
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Includes written materials by Judi Chamberlin, Laura Prescott, Estelle Reiner.

Unzicker, Rae: Transcript from Donahue Show
1980
Box 1: 23
Unzicker, Jim: Writings, notes, and speeches
undated
Box 1: 24
Unzicker, Rae: Abstract for presentation at "Myths and Truths"
undated
Box 1: 25
Unzicker, Rae: Advertisements
1977-1994
Box 1: 26
Unzicker, Rae: "Another Point View" Series
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Box 1: 27
Unzicker, Rae: "Current Trends for 'Mental Patients' and Others"
1989
Box 1: 28
Unzicker, Rae: "Cynic's Primer: How to Develop at Healthy Hate"
undated
Box 1: 29
Unzicker, Rae: "Fried Eggs"
undated
Box 2: 1
Unzicker, Rae: "From the Inside," book chapter in *Beyond Bedlam*
1995
Box 2: 2
Unzicker, Rae: "Godfather"
undated
Box 2: 3
Unzicker, Rae: "Hype and Hope of Stigma"
ca.1985

Box 2: 4

Unzicker, Rae: "Listening to Critical Voices"

undated

Box 2: 5

Unzicker, Rae: "MADvocacy: Attila Doesn't Live Here Anymore"

1985

Box 2: 6

Unzicker, Rae: "Making Trouble"

undated

Box 2: 7

Unzicker, Rae: Memoir: *You Never Gave Me M & M's*, Manuscript with edits

ca. 1975

Box 2: 8

Unzicker, Rae: Memoir: *You Never Gave Me M & M's*, Manuscript without edits

ca. 1975

Box 2: 9

Unzicker, Rae: Memoir: *You Never Gave M & M's*, Notes and Synopsis

ca. 1975

Box 2: 10

Unzicker, Rae: "My Own Story"

undated

Box 2: 11

Unzicker, Rae: Newspaper and magazine articles on non-political issues

1971-1973

Box 2: 12

Unzicker, Rae: Newspaper and magazine articles on political issues

1972-1994

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Unzicker, Rae: Newspaper articles on Problem-in-Living Center

1973

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Unzicker, Rae: Notes from speeches given at NARPA

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Unzicker, Rae: Notes on *Bodymind*

undated

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Unzicker, Rae: Notes on presentation about speaking in public

undated

Box 2: 17

Unzicker, Rae: Other writings: poetry, plays, inspiration

ca.1967

Box 2: 18

Unzicker, Rae: Other Writings: prose

undated

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Unzicker, Rae: "On Language and Liberty"

undated

Box 2: 20

Unzicker, Rae: "On Passion: A Personal Statement," article

undated

Box 2: 21

Unzicker, Rae: "Owning Your Own Experience"

1991

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Unzicker, Rae: "Plexiglass"

undated

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Unzicker, Rae: "Report on 1994 National Symposium: Involuntary Interventions"

1994

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Unzicker, Rae: "Resolved: That Involuntary Treatment is Never Justified"

1986

Box 2: 25

Unzicker, Rae: "Right to Refuse"

undated

Box 2: 26

Unzicker, Rae: Speech for AALS

undated

Box 2: 27

Unzicker, Rae: Speech for APA Advocacy

undated

Box 2: 28

Unzicker, Rae: Speech for NMHA

undated

Box 2: 29

Unzicker, Rae: Speech given at AMI Conference

ca. 1990

Box 2: 30

Unzicker, Rae: Speech given at "Education, Rights, and Responsibilities"

ca.1989

Box 2: 31

Unzicker, Rae: Speech given at NAPAS, two drafts

1997

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Unzicker, Rae: Speech on behalf of NAMP given at Alternatives '88

1988

Box 2: 33

Unzicker, Rae: Speech on behalf of the National Association of Psychiatric Survivors

1990

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Unzicker, Rae: Speech to South Dakota Community Support Program

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Unzicker, Rae: Speech to Seventh CSP Learning Community Conference

1985

Box 2: 36

Unzicker, Rae: Speeches: miscellaneous notes and drafts

undated

Box 2: 37

Unzicker, Rae: "These are the days..."

undated

Box 2: 38

Unzicker, Rae: "There is no group of people more feared..."

undated

Box 2: 39

Unzicker, Rae: "To be a Mental Patient..."

1984

Box 2: 40

Unzicker, Rae: "Top Ten Reasons to Oppose Forced Treatment"

1994

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Unzicker, Rae: "Wake Up" story

undated

Box 2: 42

Unzicker, Rae: "What It Takes to do the Possible"

1986

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Unzicker, Rae: "Why you haven't come a long way, baby"
undated
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Unzicker, Rae: Women and Mental Health
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Videos
1983-2000
Caplan, Paula: "Call Me Crazy"
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"Children's Express"
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Civic Dialogue NAMP"
1988
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Collins, Rhonda: "we don't live under NORMAL CONDITIONS"
2000
Box 4
Lawrence & Schiller: "Dakotacare History"
1996
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Light, Allie: "Dialogues with Madwomen"
1993
Box 4
Johnson, R. J.: "Look Who's Laughing"
1994
Box 4
"May 1988 CASE Management Conference, Keynote (Rae Unzicker)"
1988
Box 4
NARPA: "'Crazy Women' Madness, Myth, & Metaphor"
1990
Box 4
National Empowerment Center: "Recovery is for Everyone"
1996
Box 4
"Oprah, Peter Breggin, Dennis Clark, Leonard Frank, and Rae Unzicker"
1987
Box 4
PBS: "Prozac Show PBS"
1997
Box 4
"Rae: Mpls Shock Show (Ep)"
ca. 1987
Box 3
"Rae: Sally Jesse Raphael"
ca. 1983
Box 3
Ryerson Communications, Inc.: "This is Freedom: Self Determination Across America"
1998
Box 4
"Sally Jessy Raphael: Rae/Pat"
ca. 1983
Box 5

Administrative information

Access

The collection is open for research.

Provenance

Acquired from Donor, 2013.

Processing Information

Processed by Brittany Mayo, May 2014.

Related Material

For materials related to the civil rights for mental patients, see:

Judi Chamberlin Papers (MS 768)

Language:

English

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Search terms

Subjects

Antipsychiatry
Ex-mental patients
Mentally ill--Civil rights
Mentally ill--Commitment and detention
Mentally ill--Deinstitutionalization
Mentally ill--Legal status, laws, etc.
Mentally ill--Social conditions
National Association for Rights, Protection, and Advocacy
National Association of Psychiatric Survivors
National Committee on Patients Rights
National Council on Disability
National Empowerment Center
People with disabilities--Civil rights
People with disabilities--Legal status, laws, etc.

Contributors

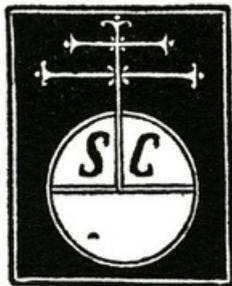
Unzicker, Rae, 1948-2001 [main entry]
Unzicker, Rae, 1948-2010

Genres and formats

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Newspapers
Photographs
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Disability
Political activism
Social justice
Women





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