

## Autism community loses a hero (continued from page 1)

Dr. Rimland founded ASA in large part to promote “behavior modification” (now known as Applied Behavioral Analysis, or ABA), a treatment then being pioneered by a very controversial young psychologist at UCLA named Ivar Lovaas. Authorities in the autism field scoffed at Lovaas’s claim that autistic children could be helped by something as simple and straightforward as behavior modification, but Dr. Rimland spread the word through NSAC and parents began fighting for this therapy for their children. Today, of course, ABA is the educational treatment of choice for autistic children, and many autistic children who receive early ABA improve dramatically.

Dr. Rimland knew, however, that educational treatments alone could not adequately address a devastating biological disorder such as autism. In 1967, he founded the nonprofit Autism Research Institute in order to create a worldwide research center and clearinghouse for biomedical treatments (which barely existed at the time). In 1985, he retired from his career as a psychologist for the Navy to devote the remainder of his life to autism research.

The first treatment Dr. Rimland investigated, based on reports from parents of autistic children, was high-dose vitamin B6. Other authorities in the autism field considered the idea that a vitamin could correct a brain disorder to be preposterous, but time and research proved them wrong. To date, 22 studies (including 13 double-blind studies) show that vitamin B6, typically combined with magnesium, benefits a large percentage of autistic children.

“One of the most remarkable things about Dr. Rimland,” says Dr. Edelson, “is that he realized in the early days that parents held many of the keys to solving the mystery of autism. From day one, he listened to them and respected them—and he followed their lead. If five or six parents reported, ‘DMG makes my child much better,’ he didn’t ignore them; instead, he organized a study to see if other children responded the same way. For a professional psychologist, even one who was the parent of an autistic child, this was a revolutionary viewpoint—and it’s a key reason why ARI has always led the way in identifying new treatments and uncovering the roots of autism.”

One important clue contributed by parents of autistic children put ARI squarely in the middle of a huge controversy: the debate about the safety of vaccines. Early in his work, Dr. Rimland received many reports of children who had no disability before receiving DPT vaccinations. As time went on, the number of reports snowballed, and included other vaccines. At the same time, as the number of vaccines received by children grew, autism rates began climbing relent-

lessly. When Dr. Rimland learned that most childhood vaccines contained thimerosal—a preservative that is nearly 50% mercury, a powerful neurotoxin—he realized that the escalating numbers of vaccines given to children could be the culprit behind skyrocketing rates of autism. His suspicions grew when he discovered that the symptoms of autism bear many similarities to the symptoms of mercury poisoning.

The medical establishment, not surprisingly, expressed great antagonism toward this theory. They turned a blind eye as well to strong evidence implicating wheat and milk proteins, persistent measles infection in the gut from MMR vaccines, and other environmental factors in causing or exacerbating autism.

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How can you say ‘thank you’ to someone who saved you, saved your child, saved so many of us? Bernie, every time I will look in my son’s eyes, every time I celebrate his accomplishments, every time I hug him and feel him hug me back, it will be because of you. You are the Martin Luther King of this, our newly awakening and recovering generation.

—Stan Kurtz  
Los Angeles, California

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bating autism. And they continued to scorn biomedical treatments, even when hundreds and eventually thousands of parents reported that these treatments worked – often dramatically. So Dr. Rimland began yet another new project, this time aimed at quickly identifying causes of autism and promoting the safe and effective treatments that mainstream medicine refused to investigate.

To accomplish this mission he created the Defeat Autism Now! (DAN!) project, jump-starting the project in 1995 by bringing together dozens of the world’s leading researchers in different fields to create a state-of-the-art treatment plan and prioritize research goals. This small first meeting grew into a worldwide DAN! movement that now includes huge standing-room-only conferences, major research projects, a manual for medical professionals, and hundreds of DAN!-trained physicians. A happy offshoot of this massive effort is the “Recovered Autistic Children” project, in which parents whose children improve or even recover because of DAN!-oriented treatment are spreading the word that “autism is treatable.” Dr. Rimland and Dr. Edelson also collaborated on *Recovering Autistic Children*, a book of stories about children who improved or recovered as a result of DAN!-oriented treatment.

In addition to these projects, Dr. Rimland

served as a technical advisor for *Rainman*, the Academy-Award-winning film that introduced millions of moviegoers to the world of the autistic savant. As editor of the *Autism Research Review International*, now in its twentieth year of publication, he also provided parents and professionals with crucial information about autism treatments and research—as well as with his trademark editorials, often scorching in their condemnation of established medicine’s failure to help autistic children.

Dr. Rimland achieved worldwide fame and a reputation as a giant in his field, and his friends ranged from Hollywood stars to national media figures and Nobel Prize winners. Yet unlike many professionals, he didn’t know the meaning of an “ivory tower.” In his few free moments each day, he responded to emails, letters, phone calls, and faxes (which often arrived at 2 or 3 a.m.) from thousands of distraught parents around the world. His vast network of friends knew him as an extraordinarily generous soul and an irrepressible “yenta,” whose greatest joy lay in bringing strangers together for the benefit of all. He was also a soft touch, incapable of saying “no” to any worthwhile cause—no matter how large or small. (The San Diego branch of the Autism Society was probably the only chapter whose Christmas party once featured an internationally-renowned autism researcher playing Santa Claus.)

How did Dr. Rimland find time to juggle enough huge projects for ten lifetimes, and also help out every friend (or stranger) who needed a hand? He spent seven days a week in his office. Some nights, he cat-napped on the office floor. And everyone who worked with him knew that if the phone rang at 10 p.m., it was Dr. Rimland with another idea – often an earth-shaking one. (Not all of his ideas and interests involved autism. He owned several patents for inventions, and was an inveterate “tinkerer.”)

Dr. Rimland’s remarkable wife, Gloria, gracefully handled his nearly-impossible schedule while keeping a home with three children running smoothly. The autism community owes a huge debt of gratitude to Gloria Rimland for the inspiration and moral support she provided Dr. Rimland throughout the years – as well as her willingness to share her husband with an entire world of “autism parents.” The autism world sends its deep condolences to Gloria and to their children, Mark, Paul, and Helen.

“Our community is greatly diminished by the loss of Dr. Rimland,” says Dr. Edelson. “His legacy, however, will live on in the work of ARI and the DAN! project – and in the joy of families whose children, dismissed as ‘hopeless’ and ‘incurable’ by the medical establishment, are now leading happy, healthy, productive lives. It’s exactly the legacy that Dr. Rimland would want.”