

Liza H. Gold, MD: Scholar, Educator, and Free Spirit

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My first AAPL meeting and board review course was in Denver in 1997, memorable for the blizzard. My nametag identified the hospital where I worked in Bergen County, New Jersey. A small, elfin-looking woman glanced at my badge, did a double-take, and said, “Bergen Pines!? That’s the hospital my friends and I always threatened to call if someone was acting weird! I grew up right near there!” And so I was introduced to Liza Gold, MD, and began a friendship that has lasted for more than 20 years.

Unlike everyone else at the Board Review course, Liza was not taking the forensic boards. She had come to that meeting, also her first, to explore forensic psychiatry because it seemed “interesting.” So I had no idea how seriously she would invest in this educational experience. But I quickly learned that when it came to education, training, and scholarship, Liza is committed to excellence. In fact, she attended the AAPL conference as a result of the academic curiosity that marks her professional and academic career.

Liza’s career began with specialization in the psychiatric treatment of women, particularly in relation to trauma. In 1992, upon moving to the Washington, DC, area, she began a private practice, which included working as an attending psychiatrist at the Center for Posttraumatic Stress Disorders at the Psychiatric Institute of Washington. Over the



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next five years, she treated female survivors of childhood physical and sexual abuse. In 1996, she became the Medical Director of the Center’s Day Treatment program, and in 1997 she left the Center for full-time outpatient private practice.

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Liza had not been exposed to forensic psychiatry until 1996, when a plaintiff's attorney contacted her about serving as an expert witness in a sexual harassment case. He was looking for a clinician with an impeccable reputation for treating traumatized women who had never testified in litigation. Liza was unaware that plaintiffs' attorneys sometimes use this legal strategy when the defense retains a well-known forensic expert. In this case, the defense had retained Robert I. Simon, MD.

This case piqued Liza's interest in forensic psychiatry but also made her aware that forensic work required specialized training. Bob Simon's report made clear that Liza had made any number of "rookie mistakes." Liza, always one to seek more information, realized she had limited options. A forensic fellowship was out of reach: Liza already had two small children, needed to work full time, and Washington DC had no local fellowship programs. Nevertheless, she persisted.

The second option was an "apprenticeship." Liza set out to find a mentor. Liza was optimistic about this academic model from her years at Harvard and Cambridge, which had emphasized individualized study, critical thinking, and supervision. She called a number of local forensic psychiatrists to see if they might assist her, but she hesitated to call Bob Simon. Still forensically naïve, Liza assumed Dr. Simon would have hard feelings because they had worked on the opposite sides of the same case. After initial efforts failed to yield results, Liza finally worked up the courage to call Dr. Simon. Liza was surprised to hear Bob answer his own phone, but somehow, as she recalls, she managed to stammer out something to the effect of "Please sir, I want to be a forensic psychiatrist."

Bob, gracious and friendly, was genuinely delighted Liza wanted to pursue forensic psychiatry. The adage "When the student is ready, the teacher will appear" fortunately turned out to be true in this case. Bob invited Liza to join a small discussion and supervision group that met regularly at his home. Not surprisingly given his own career, Bob's most heartfelt advice for establishing a career in forensic psychiatry was: "Write." Liza started writing, and Bob, who had been searching for a writing collaborator, found a perfect match in Liza. So began an invaluable mentorship that grew into a long and mutually supportive partnership.

The American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law (AAPL), Bob Simon's professional home, also became

Liza's professional home. Bob had encouraged Liza to attend the 1997 Forensic Board Review Course and Annual Meeting for a broader exposure to the field. At that meeting, Liza fell in love with the discipline of forensic psychiatry. Bob Simon's mentorship and AAPL's commitment to ethics, professionalism, and lifelong learning have been the cornerstones of Liza's career. Over the past two decades, this career has included national and international teaching, award-winning writing, ground-breaking forensic testimony, and years of service to AAPL.

In 1997, Liza could not have anticipated how gratifying her forensic career would be, in no small part because her work has given her opportunities to contribute in arenas beyond the field of forensic psychiatry. For example, Liza's interest in gender and psychiatry led her to explore the psychiatric and forensic aspects of sexual harassment. Retained by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission in 2012, Liza's testimony helped establish new case law regarding same-sex harassment.¹

Liza's social science and psychiatric expertise in sexual harassment also led to a 2016 invitation to become a member of The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine's Committee on Sexual Harassment in STEM academia. The National Academies published this interdisciplinary committee's research and recommendations in a groundbreaking and widely hailed report in 2018.²

Similarly, Liza's commitment to understanding the complex subject of gun violence and mental illness has been the basis of her expertise in suicide risk management and firearms as well as the subject of gun violence and mental illness. Liza happened to be staying with me in December 2012 when the Sandy Hook tragedy unfolded. I witnessed the evolution of her commitment to elucidating the nature of the relationship between gun violence and mental illness. As Liza did with any subject in which she took an interest, she drilled down and plumbed the depths, analyzing, integrating, and then clearly presenting the complex problems and suggested interventions in her book, *Gun Violence and Mental Illness* (2016).³

Liza's interest in gun violence and mental illness also led to an invitation to join the "think tank"⁴ that ultimately developed the novel legal strategy and model law of extreme risk protection orders (ERPO), otherwise known as gun violence prevention orders or "red flag" laws. Modeled on domestic violence restraining orders, ERPOs allow law enforcement to

remove firearms from a person at risk of harming self or others, whether or not that person has a mental illness, thus decreasing stigmatization of those with mental illness.^{5,6} Unlike most proposed gun laws, ERPOs have garnered widespread popular support. Since they were first proposed in late 2013, red flag laws have been adopted in at least 19 states and the District of Columbia.⁷

AAPL's educational mission has resonated with Liza's academic interests and joy in writing, which have resulted in a body of academic work recognized in 2011 by AAPL's Seymour Pollack Distinguished Achievement Award for contributions to the teaching of forensic psychiatry. Among other publications, Liza has written and edited six textbooks, including the *American Psychiatric Association Textbook of Forensic Psychiatry*,⁸ the *American Psychiatric Association Textbook of Suicide Risk Assessment and Management*,⁹ and two textbooks on the subject of psychiatric disability.^{10,11} Liza is also the only woman (so far) who has twice won, in 2006¹² and 2011,¹¹ the American Psychiatric Association's and AAPL's Manfred S. Guttmacher Award for outstanding contributions to the literature on forensic psychiatry.

Liza's commitment to education is also evident in the many educational roles she has occupied. She has taught Georgetown residents and medical students since 1998, currently as a Clinical Professor of Psychiatry at Georgetown University School of Medicine, and from 2001 to 2009 she served as Co-Director of Georgetown's Program in Psychiatry and Law. Liza has also served continuously on AAPL's Program and Education Committees since 2006 and became Co-chair of the Education Committee in 2018. Liza and Co-Chair Dr. Annette Hanson hope to take advantage of AAPL's new online presence, even though precipitated by current adverse circumstances, to help AAPL develop a range of online forensic psychiatry educational opportunities.

More informally, in 2015 Liza organized a "Forensic Salon" modeled on Bob Simon's monthly meetings, which met once a month at her office. This group provided local forensic fellows, psychiatry residents interested in forensic psychiatry, and early-career forensic psychiatrists with supervision, practical advice about starting a forensic practice, and dinner. Dr. Hanson, Co-Chair of the University of Maryland Medical Center Forensic Psychiatry Fellowship,

wanted her fellows at the University of Maryland to be able to take advantage of this unique early-career education. She joined Liza in organizing the group, and her computer skills allowed the Forensic Salon to expand to include online participation as well as in-person attendees. When the pandemic hit, the Salon was able to shift easily to an entirely online format, and it continues to offer support and career training to early-career forensic psychiatrists.

Liza's parents had encouraged her to pursue a career in medicine. Liza's love of academic scholarship blossomed immediately in her freshman year at Harvard/Radcliffe College, when she became fascinated by a course on the history of medicine. She went on to major in history and science, which allowed her to pursue her history interests while also taking all the required pre-med courses. Liza graduated magna cum laude in 1981.

Liza did take a one-semester leave in her junior year after the devastating, unexpected death of her youngest brother. This created a gap year, which Liza used to pursue her love of history and medicine. She was accepted at a new master's of philosophy degree program in the history of medicine at Churchill College and Cambridge University. She gloried in the academic scholarship Cambridge inspired and fell in love with Cambridge's history, magnificent grounds, architecture, and traditions. In 1982, she coxed a rowing crew in the "May Bumps," where she fondly remembers distinguishing herself for receiving a fine for using "ungentlemanly language on the river" after a boat of rugby jocks intentionally rammed and sank her crew's shell.

Liza had applied to medical school before she left for the United Kingdom, but her experience at Cambridge created a dilemma; she had become torn between pursuing a career in medicine and pursuing a career as a humanities academic by way of Cambridge University. New York University School (NYU) of Medicine had offered Liza a spot in the class of 1986, and Liza's father, a radiologist, encouraged her to take it. Like many medical schools of that era, NYU had been seeking out non-traditional applicants: more humanities, fewer pre-med and science types. It seemed to Liza that there would be opportunities to continue her history of medicine scholarship, so she made the difficult choice to forego a PhD in the history of medicine and returned to the United States to attend NYU Medical School in 1982.

As an unexpected bonus of a tendency to question authority, Liza and the NYU Dean of Students spent some quality time together. The dean, an African-American female psychiatrist, helped Liza satisfy her need for academic challenges by helping her create academic projects related to her interest in the history of medicine. When Liza graduated in 1986, she received the Alex Rosen Excellence in Medicine and the Humanities Award. After graduating, Liza moved to Boston to do her postgraduate training at Boston University Psychiatry Residency Training Program.

Another unexpected bonus of attending NYU Medical School had a life-changing impact. In her second year at NYU, Liza noticed a fellow student wearing a Churchill College scarf, with its strikingly ugly but highly identifiable pattern of pink and chocolate brown stripes on a black background. Liza and her fellow Churchill College alum struck up a friendship. When Liza moved to Boston, her medical school friend set up a blind date with his childhood friend, also living in Boston, Jeff Nyden, a PhD mechanical engineer. Several years later, Liza and Jeff got married. After their move to the DC area, they had their two children, Josh and Alix.

Liza's own father, M. Eliot Gold, was born in Dorchester, MA, the son of Russian immigrants. He attended Boston Latin School, Harvard College, and then Boston University Medical School. Liza, the oldest of three children, spent her early years in the Bronx but attended public school in Tenaflly, not far from Bergen Pines Hospital. Eliot Gold passed away in 1995.

Liza's mother Susan is a Holocaust survivor born in Poland. Susan and her parents, Liza's grandparents, survived the Holocaust by finding a farmer willing to hide most of the family in his barn cellar. But the farmer refused to hide Susan's 4-year-old brother, whom he feared would make noise that would alert the Nazis and destroy them all. Liza's grandmother, Yetka, was forced into a "Sophie's Choice" decision. Yetka's mother volunteered to take the toddler and hide elsewhere, although by then it was understood that an older Jewish woman with a toddler was not likely to escape detection unless they could disappear. The family eventually learned that they both were killed in the Belzec gas chambers.

Liza's mother and grandparents survived two years in that barn cellar. After liberation by the Russian Army, the traumatized family spent two years in a

displaced person's camp in Germany. In 1947, an American cousin searching for surviving European relatives sponsored them to come to the United States. The family settled in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, and Liza's mother started school in the United States at age 14 without speaking a word of English. Liza's mother attended Brandeis University through a scholarship program that actively sought out and sponsored young Holocaust survivors. Her grandparents worked 14-hour days in a small convenience store they bought with their relative's help. Liza still remembers the store's candy counter, a magical display of delights in colored wrappers that towered over her head.

Liza was close to her grandmother and remembers her as "unfailingly positive, hopeful, loving, and appreciative of what she still had." Yetka passed away in 1985 during Liza's third year of medical school. While at NYU, Liza often visited her grandparents in their Lower East Side Manhattan apartment. Liza's grandparents were so proud that she was going to medical school. Yetka was especially pleased because she believed going to medical school meant that Liza would marry "a nice Jewish doctor," which she considered actually better than becoming a nice Jewish doctor.

From a young age, Liza's intellectual curiosity was one of her most striking characteristics. Liza has always loved books and libraries and as a child always had her nose in a book. Liza's mother took her to the Tenaflly Public Library once a week, where she always checked out five books each week, the maximum number of books allowed for a child. Liza still recalls the joy of receiving her "adult" library card in 8th grade, because it meant she could check out ten books. During her college years, Liza spent many serene hours in the vast underground stacks of Harvard's Widener Library. Once, Liza found a late 18th-century French copy of *The Prophecies of Nostradamus*, which had not been checked out in over 100 years, sitting nonchalantly on a shelf. Surely it was rare and valuable. Defying library rules, she carefully carried it through dimly lit (and somewhat dodgy) underground tunnels to the rare books library, where she was hailed as a heroine for the volume's rescue. Liza has her own collection of 19th-century books seminal to the history of psychiatry, curated with the help of the late John Gach.

Liza is, at heart, a historian and a scholar. When she first became interested in forensic psychiatry, she

wrote a history of the subject, available in the first edition of the *Textbook of Forensic Psychiatry*.¹³ If you ask Liza about St. Elizabeths Hospital, be prepared for an exposition on Kirkbride architecture, the 19th-century asylum movement, and St. Elizabeths' unique role in psychiatric history in the United States.

Liza's delight in books and learning have found an outlet in her lifelong love of the works of J.R.R. Tolkien. Liza first read *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* at age twelve.¹⁴ In England, she traveled to many of the mystical spots suggested by Tolkien's mythology and Arthurian legend, exploring as far north as the Orkney Islands in Scotland. She has read *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Silmarillion* more times than she can count. She has been a member of the Tolkien Society for many years, and she could hold her own in a Tolkien trivia contest with Stephen Colbert. In 2018, Liza fulfilled her dream of attending Oxonmoot, the Tolkien Society annual meeting, in Oxford, where Tolkien was a professor of language and literature.

Fifteen years ago, Liza was thrilled to find "The Tolkien Professor," Dr. Corey Olsen, a scholar of medieval literature, who turned his college classes on Tolkien into podcasts available to the general public. Liza was so motivated by her desire to delve back into Tolkien's work that she learned for the first time how to download and listen to podcasts. Eventually, Liza and "The Tolkien Professor" became lively correspondents. Liza now serves as a Board member of Dr. Olsen's online university, dedicated to Tolkien studies and all manner of speculative literature.

Liza unwinds at her second home on the Rappahannock River in Lancaster, Virginia. She and Jeff kayak the river and creeks. Bald eagles catch fish, great blue herons strut on shore, baby osprey hatch and learn to fly, and some dolphins once stole her glasses. Liza and Jeff are also "eco-warriors." They grow hundreds of oysters each year for a Chesapeake Bay restoration program.

Liza's river bank is also a perfect location for one of her favorite pastimes, mudlarking. Her river home is on a tidal estuary in a part of Virginia inhabited by Europeans since the 1600s and even longer by indigenous peoples. People have been throwing their broken and unneeded items into the river for centuries, and the tide brings in and uncovers centuries-old bits

of this and that. Liza scours the shore and shallows with eyes peeled, looking for whatever the tide may cast up. So far Liza's mudlarking treasures include bits of Victorian decorated plates and Colonial pottery, a Civil War-era inkwell, old glass medicine bottles, and even a cannon ball.

Liza's time at the river allows her to recharge and continue her busy professional life. She recently began working for the Arlington County Department of Behavioral Health as a community psychiatrist providing long-term care to individuals with serious mental illness. She is a member of the District of Columbia's Superior Court Commission on Mental Health, continues her private forensic practice, and continues to teach at Georgetown and in the Forensic Salon. In addition, at any given time, she has two or three projects underway, some academic, some related to AAPL, and some crafty things just for fun. The most important part of Liza's life, however, has always been her family. Her husband Jeff has always supported her wholeheartedly; their two children, now college grads, are her pride and joy.

Liza, like all of us, is struggling to adapt to the changes in our world. Throughout her life she has drawn inspiration from her great-grandmother's self-sacrifice and her grandmother's determination to survive and build a new life from the ashes of the old. In these troubled times, Liza reminds herself and her family that they come from a line of strong women who have pulled through life's most difficult circumstances. Despite changes and losses, resilience and relationships help us grieve, adapt, and rebuild.

AAPL will also need to adapt to a post-COVID world. As AAPL President, one of Liza's goals is to help AAPL thrive in the new reality in which we find ourselves. She is committed to ensuring that AAPL not only survives but thrives to become a more transparent, diverse, and equitable professional home for forensic psychiatrists while still prioritizing AAPL's educational mission. For example, developing an online educational platform, made necessary by the pandemic, also means that AAPL will no longer be limited to providing educational opportunities during one week in October. The possibilities that an online educational platform creates are limited only by our imaginations. Liza welcomes discussion of the innovations in education and professional support made possible by a combination of in-person and online activities.

I'll end with one of Liza's favorite quotes from Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, poignant for our times: "The world is indeed full of peril and in it, there are many dark places but still there is much that is fair, and though in all lands love is now mingled with grief, it grows perhaps the greater" (Ref. 14, p 363).

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