

# Operants

## A Newsletter of the B.F. Skinner Foundation

Third Quarter 2007, Vol. I



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### Criss Wilhite - The B.F. Skinner Foundation's New Archival Committee Chair



Criss Wilhite, New Archival Chair

The B.F. Skinner Foundation is pleased to announce the appointment of its newest Archival Committee Chair -- Criss Wilhite.

A Board Certified Behavior Analyst since 2001, Criss earned her undergraduate degrees in Art and Philosophy, and a Masters of Arts in Psychology from California State University, Fresno. She has taught core courses in Psychology at Fresno State since 1986.

It was in graduate school that Criss first studied Skinner -- "I first learned of Skinner in a research course. My professor was a radical behaviorist and had us read *Selections by Consequences*. It was the perfect introduction." She became the

lone Skinnerian in the department for many years.

From 1997-1998, Criss served as a consultant to families of children with disabilities for Applied Behavior Consultants, Inc. in their Fresno office. When ABC left the area, she formed her own company and continued consulting with families and schools until 2005.

In 1998, Criss developed the department's Applied Behavior Analysis Program, and has served as the undergraduate program's director since then. It has grown to include three BCBA

faculty members, over 85 active undergraduates, 18 graduate students and is a board-approved program. She is optimistic about the future of ABA -- "The number of Certified Behavior Analysts in Central California has grown so much. Many public schools now require these certifications for their special education programs... I'm hopeful that eventually, public schools will naturally incorporate ABA into their general education system as well."

In addition to teaching Behavior Analysis courses, Criss currently teaches 'History of Psychology' each semester. She has presented numerous times at CalABA and ABA on her work with families of children with disabilities, college teaching and the philosophy of Behaviorism.

Criss has numerous goals for the Foundation as its new Archival Committee Chair. She wants to continue developing bibliographies and subsets of bibliographies. (In fact, she mentioned that she already has three students assigned to this project.) She plans to continue working with Terry Knapp on the various projects he began, compile photographs from the files of those who knew Skinner, and catalogue Skinner-related information from Bloomington, Indiana. In general, Criss said she hopes to gather as much as possible from people who have archival material regarding Skinner.

The Film Archives of the Foundation is a big topic on Criss's agenda. "This project will require funding and technological expertise," she explained, "so the most important thing for right now is to find committee members who have the appropriate skills for those tasks."

Perhaps one of Criss's most interesting ideas is to compile stories or anecdotes from various people regarding Skinner. "These stories are always so positive. Everyone says how easy Skinner was to access, how ready to help, and how unassuming he was. Even the smallest interactions made big differences in peoples' lives," said Criss. Please do not hesitate to send any stories of your own to the Foundation. We are considering turning this idea into a regular *Operants* column and would love to hear from you!

On a more personal note, Criss is also an artist, and lives in the Sierra Nevada between Fresno and Yosemite National Park. She lives with her husband, Harrison Madden, Professor Emeritus of Psychology at Fresno State. She has two children and two grandchildren.

Criss sees her position as Chair of the Archival Committee as an opportunity to use her present skills and to develop new ones for a project dear to her heart.

Please join me in welcoming Criss to our organization!



Criss Wilhite

## **Jennifer M. Thompson: A school teacher and a behavior specialist**

By Anna Zilberberg

Pictured below: Jennifer Thompson



Jennifer M. Thompson holds a full time job as an elementary paraprofessional for the Welles-

ley, MA Public Schools, works as a group leader for the Advances Learning Center, and is also a graduate student at UMass Boston completing her Master's Degree in Teacher Education. On June 27<sup>th</sup>, 2007 Jennifer found time in her busy schedule to visit the Foundation office in Cambridge. She was kind enough to share with us her views on the current state of Skinnerian science, public education, and applied behavior analysis. Moreover, Jennifer told us her own story of how she became inter-

ested in Skinnerian science and devoted her life to ABA.

Jennifer was born and raised in Buffalo, NY in a small and close-knit family. Her father is a steelworker and her mother is a secretary. With one other sister, Jennifer grew up in the environment that was solely based on education and extra-curricular activities. From early on in her life Jennifer expressed passion for caring for homeless and injured animals. She would often nurse injured animals back to health and then release them back into the wild. When Jennifer started high school, caring for animals turned into helping and caring for disabled children. Her interests then centered on different practices and theories in the special education field.

Having “an innate passion for the disabled population,” she decided to major in Early Education at the University of Buffalo, Amherst, NY. As an undergraduate, she took classes related to child mental health, social and ethical values in medicine, family violence, mental retardation, and developmental disabilities. Jennifer first learned about B.F. Skinner in a course called “Sensory and Perception”. She was immediately drawn to his theories and found Skinner’s research designs the most interesting. This first brief encounter ultimately determined her career choice.

After completing her Bachelor’s degree, Jennifer enrolled in a Graduate sequence in Applied behavior Analysis for Special Populations at UMass Boston. The graduate studies she completed have consisted of classes related to assessing, designing, implementing and evaluating ABA programs and teaching strategies, through the application of ethical considerations, generalization strategies, and application to special populations and settings. While in graduate school, Jennifer read numerous articles and books by B.F. Skinner.

In 2005 Jennifer entered the workforce. For nearly two years she served as an ABA counselor and teacher for Melmark of New England, a residential program for autistic and brain-injured children. Jennifer admits that working at Melmark was one of the most challenging, yet rewarding experiences of her life: “I have been utterly committed during the 19 months at Melmark to increase the independence of students and improve their quality of life. I developed management skills and learned patience”.

Now Jennifer works at the Advances Learning Center, in Watertown, MA as a social skills group leader. She also works in an elementary school as a behavior specialist. Throughout her career, Jennifer has had to deal with many difficult cases. One of

her students tended to take food and coffee cups from strangers on the street. Another was highly functional but engaged in severe self-injurious behavior. While every case is unique, said Jennifer, Applied Behavior Analysis works for the majority of children she sees. Jennifer noted that ABA can work for all, but consistency is the key. Jennifer expressed regret that ABA is not widely used in public schools: “Teachers are required to pass numerous exams and acquire a number of certifications. However, many of them lack sufficient training in ABA, and, as a result, inadvertently employ detrimental tactics”.

Jennifer applies ABA principles while teaching at both of her jobs. She achieves results by using verbal praise to reinforce desired behavior and avoiding edible reinforcers. Also, Jennifer rarely resorts to using punishment, avoiding saying “no” and redirecting students instead. She supports the use of Functional Communication Training (FCT) and promotes Antecedent Management (controlling environment to prevent undesired behavior).

Jennifer also supports alternative therapy methods such as music therapy, massage therapy, and neurotherapy. To overcome the stress of her demanding occupation, Jennifer practices yoga and goes snowboarding in the winter. She maintains a bal-

anced life-style and has a lively sense of humor. In her spare time, Jennifer manages to read up on her favorite writers, Skinner being one of them. Jennifer even has a picture of B.F. Skinner on her MySpace page and is proud to admit that she is constantly spreading the word about Skinner and behavior modification.

We wish her infinite strength and best of luck with all her endeavors!



Jennifer Thompson at the Foundation Office in June, 2007.

## President's Column By Dr. Julie S. Vargas



In August, the International Association for Behavior Analysis held a two-day conference in Sydney, Australia. The Foundation supported the first evening's reception and held an auction. A total of 362 people from 15 countries attended the conference, and it seemed as though all of them packed into the room for the reception and the auction.



Simon Dymond took the stage as the auctioneer. He explained that bidding would be in American dollars, not Australian, because most countries are familiar with US currency. Simon did a fine job as auctioneer, tossing in humor along with the bidding, and everyone enjoyed the event.

The Florida Association for Behavior Analysis holds its annual conference during the last week of September, and the Foundation typically holds an auction there. However, as the supply of items belonging to B. F. Skinner or bearing his signature dwindles, the Foundation will be holding fewer auctions in the future, reserving them for special events where appropriate audio-visual arrangements and tables suit the auction format.



## Looking Ahead... Upcoming ABA Conventions

★ The 28th Annual Berkshire Association for Behavior Analysis and Therapy (BABAT) Conference will be held on *October 11th and 12th, 2007*, at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. Featured speakers include Brian Iwata, Dorothy Lerman, Richard Foxx, James Carr, Mark Dixon, David Palmer, Gina Green, Mark Sundberg, Raymond Miltenberger, and Sung Woo Kahng. For more information, go to <http://www.babat.org/>

★ The 27th Annual Meeting of The Florida Association For Behavior Analysis will be held on *September 19 - 22, 2007* in Jacksonville, Florida at the Hyatt Regency Riverfront. Register **o n - l i n e   n o w   a t** [www.fabaworld.org/register](http://www.fabaworld.org/register)

★ The 17th Annual New York State ABA Conference will be held on *November 1th and 2nd, 2007* at the Turning Stone Resort and Casino in Verona, New York. For more information, please visit: <http://www.nysaba.org/index.asp>

★ The 2nd annual ABA Autism conference will be held from *February 8 - February 10, 2008*, at the Hyatt Regency At-

lanta in Atlanta, Georgia. For more information, please visit <http://www.abainternational.org/autconf/index.asp>

★ The 26th Annual Western Regional CalABA Conference will be held on *February 21 - 23, 2008* at the Hyatt Regency Orange County in Garden Grove, California.

Conference Questions?  
Email: [conference@calaba.org](mailto:conference@calaba.org).

## Volunteer Support

You can support the B.F. Skinner Foundation by contributing your time. The Foundation is looking for a volunteer in the Boston - Cambridge area, no more than a half hour traveling distance from its office. (Address below.) We're looking for someone:

- 1 - with a background in Skinnerian behavioral science
- 2 - who can be with the B.F. Skinner Foundation for at least two years
- 3 - who can help part-time up to 20 hours a week (or more)
- 4 - who is willing to learn new things
- 5 - who is literate in Apple/Mac applications

There is no age limit. We can sort out hours and days. The volunteer must overlap with current staff, but otherwise the vol-

unteer would work on her or his own.

Address:

B.F. Skinner Foundation  
12 Arrow Street  
Cambridge, MA 02138  
617-661-9209

## Letter from the Editor



Dear Reader,

Welcome back to all of you who traveled to Sydney for the 4th International ABA Conference! I

hope you enjoy Julie Vargas's report on the Foundation auction. Feel free to contact the Foundation if you wish to receive additional copies of pictures from that event.

Please join me in welcoming the Foundation's new Archival Committee Chair, Criss Wilhite. We are eager to see her work and ideas improve the Foundation's archives.

Also new to our organization is volunteer Timothy Piskura. We're very grateful for his donated time and efforts, and I look forward to interviewing him for a future *Operants* issue.

I would also like to thank Jennifer Thompson for coming into the Foundation offices this

summer and sharing her career and views with us. It is always inspiring to hear of a young person's career developments. Thanks, too, to Anna Zilberberg for initiating and writing this article.

Best of luck to you all with the beginning of the academic year. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any suggestions for *Operants*. Comments, concerns, or article ideas are always welcome.

Thanks so much for your support!

-- Elizabeth McGlinchey, Editor