

An eBook

MY EXPERIENCES WITH MILTON ERICKSON



ROB MCNEILLY

This book is offered as a humble gesture of appreciation of the continuation of Milton Erickson's heritage into the future.

also

an acknowledgement of my parents

Tom & Ella McNeilly

two ordinary people

who blessed me their gift of life

and with their love

Q: How many Ericksonian therapists does it take to change a light globe?

A: It takes 19. One to change the light globe and 18 to explain how they think Erickson would have done it.

Rob

INTRODUCTION



I wanted to document some of the experiences that led up to my interest and increasing interest in Milton Erickson's work and in using his approach and teaching it to other interested people.

When I was in a family medical practice in Melbourne, Australia, I became interested in hypnosis through a personal crisis, like I guess a lot of us in the helping professions have had. I started to learn about hypnosis and it was in a rather traditional authoritarian mood where I learnt to instruct someone to look at a spot, relax their body and gave them instructions that their eyes were getting sleepy and were going to close.

I found this interesting and somewhat effective, but there was something about me having to pretend to be the expert and tell them what to do that didn't sit well with me. I was perfectly happy to do this when someone had a medical problem. If they had pneumonia or if a woman wanted help with a baby or if someone had a cut that needs stitching or something like that, I was quite happy to take on the authority and say, "Well, this is what we need to do."

But it turned out that working with human dilemmas that the medical model doesn't really fit. There's no best way for helping someone who was feeling overwhelmed or hopeless or helpless or having flashbacks or any other kind of human dilemma. If someone has a cut, it's pretty clear that there is a way of dealing with this. There was a certain procedure that, no matter who it is, sewing up a cut is pretty well reproducible.

I got interested in this in the early 70s and at a conference in Adelaide John Hartland, who was President of the International Hypnosis Society and had written a textbook on medical hypnosis was talking about his visit with this strange unconventional therapist, Milton Erickson in Phoenix, Arizona. Hartland spoke about sitting in Erickson's sitting room watching television one evening and found himself coming out of hypnosis.

I thought, "This man's written a textbook, he's President of the International Hypnosis Society, how come he didn't know what had happened that he went into hypnosis." And it was intriguing for me. I didn't think much about that, but in

1976, I went to an international hypnosis conference, in Philadelphia. And the first night there, Herbert Lustig was launching his newly produced films of Milton Erickson working with two people. It's a classic, *The Artistry of Milton H. Erickson*. It's absolutely wonderful.

I arrived in Philadelphia, the first time in the States and it was a long journey. I was living in Melbourne, so it was a Melbourne, Sydney, Hawaii, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Dayton, Philadelphia trip. They called it the milk run. I arrived in Philadelphia, all bright eyed and bushy tailed, ready to learn something.

And Lustig put on the first reel of the then film – it's now a DVD – of *The Artistry*. And I started to watch and I just kind of zizzed off. And I thought, “Oh, damn. I've come all this way and I'm here to learn and I've gone to sleep. It must be jet lag.” Anyhow, the reel finished and I opened my eyes and then they put on the second reel. I'm watching and I was gone again and woke up at the end of it. I thought, “Rats. I've missed this one too.”

I recall that the next morning, halfway through a glass of orange juice for breakfast, I suddenly dawned on me I hadn't gone to sleep. It wasn't jet lag. I'd gone into a trance. I thought, “Well, now, this is interesting. What is it about this man?” I was intrigued. I got wind of the fact that he was to be present at this conference to receive a special award, but it was an extra \$10 for the dinner but I was feeling poor and I thought, “Oh, I can't afford that,” so I didn't go.

I came back from the experience of watching that movie the first time and sleeping or actually going into trance. When they put it on the second time several nights later, I made sure I was there and I made sure I'd keep my eyes open and I was able to kind of be present to it enough to really appreciate what was going on there. There was something about it that captivated me.

What intrigued me was that here was Erickson, not behaving like some kind of an all-wise authority figure, some expert who was doing his stuff, but rather, here was a human being having a conversation with another human being, really interested in them and helping them to explore what was going to be useful to them, rather than imposing something from his own experience.

I came home intrigued by this and spellbound. It became clear that there was something here that was really appealing to me, that really fitted with me that I really liked. And I thought, “Well, go to the source.” Perhaps a more cautious person might have written a letter, but I looked up his phone number and rang his office in Phoenix expecting to have a conversation with the secretary to find out about how I might have a chance of learning with him. He picked up the phone!

I told him who I was and I said I would like to learn with him. And he said, “Come on over.” Then he said, “When you get here, give us a ring from the airport and Betty will come and pick you up and you can come and stay in the house.”

I was chuffed about that and I thought, “This would be great.” And several months later, there I was, on the plane, arriving in Phoenix Airport and I followed him up on his offer and phone him “I'm Rob McNeilly. I've come from Australia and I'm here to learn with you.” And he said, “Find your own way here tomorrow after you've booked yourself in to your hotel.”

At first, I thought “Aw”. He said he was going to be kind to me and that was an interesting lesson because, in reflection, I must have sounded pathetic and needy. I learnt subsequently that you don't get to be pathetic and needy around that man. If you were expecting him to do something for you instead of you taking the initiative, good luck. If you were wanting to do something, he would support you to an extraordinary degree, but he was not going to initiate anything.

I found some accommodation and it turned out to be about four or five miles from his house. The next day I fronted up at his house. It took me about an hour to walk there. The next two weeks I would go back to the motel and make some notes about what I had experienced in that day and at the end of the time, I made a decision to not look at the notes and just keep them and look at them sometime down the track.

I was looking at these notes again recently and realised how distorted my memory has been. My memory is that I saw him the first day on a Monday, but it turned out that it was a Friday. And interestingly, it was a Friday almost exactly 40 years today, ago. But I wanted to make a recording of this

to share with you my experience. So many books have been written about Erickson about people's interpretation of Erickson.

I wanted to write about these days and share some of my experiences in case this is of interest to you, even inspiring. I know that I was very strongly influenced by my time with him that first time in 1977 and another two weeks in 1978 and, finally, a week in 1980, just before he died.

Chapter 1



1977



DAY 1



I looked at the notes that I made just over 40 years ago and it's fascinating for me to see that what I'd written evoked strong memories, but some of what I remember happening that very first day - a Friday - I was absolutely sure that it was a Monday, but it was a Friday! And one of the stories I remember very clearly that Erickson telling me that day he actually told me 10 days later but the mood was as I remembered.

I'm going to share with you a mixture of my memory of what happened and what I'm reminded of in the notes that I took at the end of the day when I went back to my motel.

On that very first time I met Erickson in person, Betty ushered me into his sitting room and there he was in his wheelchair and, already in the sitting room was Lee, a therapist who had come down from Canada to learn with Erickson who'd been there the previous day.

Erickson asked me what I wanted to learn, what I wanted from my experience with him. And I said to him

that what I'd learnt about the use of hypnosis for pain management in my training in Melbourne, although I got the gist of it, it didn't make sense. It didn't really gel with me. He just nodded and indicated a small stool that I should sit on.

I'm sitting on this stool, listening to this old man speaking in a very strong Southern accent and his speech was not clear because of the aftermath of polio that he had when he was 17. His tongue wasn't well coordinated in his mouth, so altogether, his speech was not exactly easy to follow. So, I was sitting on this stool, leaning forward with my elbows digging into my knees, leaning forward, straining to make sense of what he was saying.

And he asked Lee if he would show me what had happened the previous day. Now, bear in mind that my training in hypnosis up to this stage had been very traditional, very scripted, "Look at the spot, relax your body, your eyes are getting sleepy, you're going deeper and deeper," and so on. It was a very formal trance induction. Anyhow, Lee said, yes, he'd be pleased to.

Then Lee said, "I was sitting in the same chair, listening to you" and IO looked over to see that Lee was going into trance, had closed his eyes, and his head had slumped forwards! I thought, "My goodness, what's going on here? There's no induction. There's nothing about going into hypnosis." It seemed totally weird. In retrospect, of course, what Erickson was doing was asking Lee to show me and, in order for him to show me what happened, he had to recall his experience,

and in recalling it, he was able to re-experience it. So beautiful, but surprising at the time.

Then Erickson began to tell some stories. And my memory is that he told a number of stories. As he told these stories, he gave no indication to me that I should go into hypnosis, no indication to me that I should close my eyes or do anything. He just let me be there in any way that I was.

The first story that I made a note of here was about an artist who'd painted a number of different kinds of paintings, still life, portraits, landscapes and so on but although he always wanted to paint a circus painting, somehow he'd been unable to do that. Erickson started this story about the artist and then he started telling about a young girl, who'd been on a boat with a family group. Something had gone wrong with the boat and it sank. The 13-year-old girl heard the adults saying, "There's no way that we can swim the miles to the shore." When that 13-year-old girl was picked up on the shore, suffering from exposure and nearly unconscious, she was muttering under breath, "I can take one more stroke, I can take one more stroke" A very evocative story.

Erickson then continued on with the story about the artist saying that this man went into trance, and Erickson then made a comment, which I thought was extraordinary. He said "Your first wife made a clown of you, but clowns cope". What a weird comment. I then noticed that my hands were numb. It had nothing to do with pressure, my hands became numb spontaneously which is interesting since I said I'd wanted to learn about the use of hypnosis for pain manage-

ment. When I came out of hypnosis at the end of that two and a half hour experience, my hands were normal, so it must have been a hypnotic phenomenon.

He then went on and made another comment, not really a story, a comment. He said, “In a boring lecture, the chair really punishes you and time goes so slowly that a minute seems like an hour. You can be in the same seat and a lecture is interesting the time flashes past and an hour just seems like a minute.” It was a story about time distortion, where he was really simply disclosing an experience that we've all had. He made it apparent. He also knew that I was from Australia and said that when one of his daughters was four, she said she was going to Australia and that she did, in fact, go to Australia when she was 23. He then he spoke about the kookaburra bird and sitting in the blue gum tree, an allusion to an Australian song.

He then continued about the artist who came back some-time later with a circus painting tucked under his arm and said, “I went into my studio the first thing the next morning with a thermos of hot coffee and some fresh sandwiches. I took a sip of the coffee, a bite of the sandwich and wondered what I was going to paint. A few moments later, I looked at the canvas and here was this completed circus painting. The style looks like my style. I've signed it. It's my signature. I must have painted it, but I don't remember. Could it be that I went into trance and painted this painting while I was in trance?”

Erickson then began to describe the painting. He said, “The big top was a pale blue colour.” And as soon as he said that, I started to feel slightly uncomfortable for some reason. I was wearing a pale blue denim shirt. And then he said, “The lower part of the big top was a deeper blue.” I started to get more uncomfortable because I had jeans on, a deeper blue than my shirt. I started to feel increasingly self-conscious. He then described the animals in the painting. There was a donkey, there was this, there was that. Then he said, “And right out in front were two huge boulders.” I was a young fellow and my jeans were quite tight and I felt so embarrassed when he said there's two huge boulders out in front. I was so embarrassed that I didn't wait any longer to go into trance. I couldn't get out of the stool. I was stuck there, so I just went into trance as a way of avoiding the embarrassment. I've never known anyone use embarrassment as a way of helping someone to go into hypnosis before.

Then, as he continued with two more stories, my elbow started to dig into my knees. It was acutely uncomfortable and my head felt increasingly heavy, like a huge lead ball, dragging on my neck. It became quite painful. And I felt that at any moment, I might fall flat on my face on the floor because I was starting to feel dizzy. A lot of discomfort! Again, it's interesting that I'd asked to learn something about pain management. So, all of that was happening, the elbows, the dizziness. I felt a lot of discomfort, both physical and emotional.

And then he told the story that has become almost a talisman for him about a woman who was suffering from terminal cancer and arrived in his office in a wheelchair. And here's Erickson in a wheelchair and the woman said, "All of the doctors and their wisdom, using all of their drugs that they have available to them haven't been able to help me with my pain. I'm wondering how I thought you might be able to help with just a spoken word. I'm starting to have some doubts."

Erickson continued, "I told her that I could see she was in terrible pain. I could see it by her eyes. But if that door there were to open and a large hungry tiger were to come into this room, licking its chops and looking straight at you, how much pain do you think you'd feel?" And she said, "Oh, my goodness. I don't feel any pain, just thinking about that. You've given me a new way of thinking. I'm going to take that tiger back to the hospital with me. I'm going to keep it under the bed and if they ask me if I want some drugs, I'll say, 'I'm keeping the tiger.'" And the story went on that she was free of pain with only an occasional aspirin and died peacefully after some time.

He also told me about an American soldier, who'd been a Japanese prisoner of war and had spent some time in what they called the hole. It was a pit in the ground which was dark and narrow so that there was room to stand up, but not enough to sit down or lie down and he was in this hole for a number of days. When he came out of the hole eventually with no trauma, no problem, people asked him, "What did

you do in the hole?" and he said, "I prepared some gourmet meals." He had gone through the whole experience, preparing the gourmet meals and eating the gourmet meals and had a very nice time. When the war was over and he went home, his wife decided that she was going to do the cooking.

We were about two hours into our experience at this stage and I came out of hypnosis I said to Erickson, "I can see a hint of what you're saying, but I'm not sure that I really get what you were getting to with it." I'd had the two-hour version, then came the 10 second version. He said, "What we perceive depends on how we direct our attention." Not where, but how. I still think that was the most marvellous distillation of awareness and experience. What we perceive depends on how we direct our attention. Just wonderful.

That was it for the day and several days later, Lee was no longer driving me to and from Erickson's house so I walked the hour to and from the motel where I was and his house. I hadn't realised that the inner soles of my boots were worn through and I got blisters on the first day of walking. And as I walked there, to and fro for the next 10 days, I had blisters on my blisters. Public transport was not an option as it was too awkward and taxis were too expensive. I had to walk.

I remember trying to put my feet down so that the blistered wouldn't hurt, and then I began to notice some things about Phoenix. Phoenix was an irrigation city where every house had a raised boundary so that the front garden was somehow dished. In the middle of the garden was a tap, like

a valve. And in order to water the garden, they just loosened the valve and the ground filled up. It was not like I was used to with a hose and sprinklers. It was fascinating to see something so different.

I also noticed the way houses were built. The roofs were made of plywood, covered with tarpaper then painted. They had no guttering because in Phoenix, as a desert place, it was either a drought or a deluge so that guttering wouldn't hold the water. This was a very different way of constructing a house, very unfamiliar to me. And also I have always been interested in cars and there was a lot more types of cars in Phoenix than I was used to seeing in Australia.

I started to get fascinated by the gardens, by the buildings, by the cars and I discovered that my feet could put themselves down very adequately without me doing anything.

So, somehow, I'd been able to translate what Erickson had been speaking about in his stories and how we direct our attention and it actually worked. It was amazing and very useful and it' has continued to inform my experience ever since.

DAY 2



Here we are, day two. This was a longer day. Depending on his energy level, Erickson sometimes would be there with us for a couple of hours. Now, this time, it was about 4.5 hours from about 11:00 in the morning until 3:30 in the afternoon.

Lee kindly picked me up at the motel and drove me to Erickson's house. In Australia we drive on the left, and when invited me to get into his car I went around to the left-hand side of the car, which in Australia would be the passenger side, but of course, in America, it's the driver's side. So Lee said, "Oh, you want to drive, do you?". I went around to the other side.

We got to Erickson's house and somehow, as Erickson was talking, my left arm started to levitate spontaneously. I don't remember him inviting that. It went down and then when it started to lift a second time, Erickson instead of saying, "Oh, your arm has lifted a second time" talked about double sneezes. So, always indirect.

And then later, there was a catalepsy in my left arm. My eyes were closed and I could feel my hand getting closer and closer to my face. It felt like it was about to touch my face, but there was such an interesting distortion of my perception that as it continued to get closer and closer, it felt like my face had come out to meet my hand. It was like marshmallow and it felt like my hand was sinking into marshmallow as I touched my face. I remember this strange feeling quite vividly.

Erickson spoke about learning to walk. When you first start to walk, you move your left foot, then your right foot. And as you move your left foot, you move your right arm. When you move your right foot, you move your left arm and learning to move left with right, right with left was a difficult learning and, after a while, it became an automatic learning. ... an Interesting invitation not only about walking!

He recommended that we could take a book and read it backwards. Read the last chapter and try and predict what the second-last chapter was. And when you've read that, try and predict what the third-last chapter was. A most unusual process. He also suggested, if you didn't want to do that you could read the first chapter and try and guess what the next chapter and the other chapters would be, and try and predict them.

He spoke about training an Olympic rifle team although he'd had almost no experience of using a rifle, but he trained an Olympic rifle team to get a gold medal simply by asking them to learn how to become aware of their body, how to get

their feet comfortably on the ground, how to get their legs comfortably on their feet, how to get their body comfortably on their legs, and to let the muzzle of rifle nestle comfortably in their shoulder, comfortably and firmly. And then to have their finger squeezing the trigger gently as they looked down the sight, which could meander over the target and they didn't need to know when the rifle was going to go off. They could just gently, gently squeeze the trigger as the sights meandered over the target. Fascinating. And also, they were to regard each shot as the first shot. There were apparently a number of shots, so by making each the first shot, there was no worry about fatigue.

He spoke about athletes doing shot put where an athlete might know what the record is, but they don't know what the record might be. He started to make some doubt about what the limits of possibilities are in shot put by extending their expectations. And again, not only for shot put.

He spoke about a lady, who was depressed, a patient. She was lonely and had no friends. Erickson asked her to drive around and look for a harassed-looking mother and to give this harassed-looking mother a gift without it appearing as a gift. The woman bought a bunch of flowers, looked around and found someone to give the flowers to and made some kind of a pretext by saying that she bought them for her sister and her sister was out of town and would this woman mind taking the flowers from her because she couldn't find a rubbish tin. A month later, this woman re-

ported that Phoenix was now full of friendly people. The following month, it was crowded with friendly people.

I didn't make any sense of the next story that he told me and I don't know what you can make of it, but he said one of his sons introduced himself to a girl who is now his wife in front of her then boyfriend. He introduced himself as a cousin, actually, an illegitimate half-cousin which is not talked about in the family. He organised for a friend to take the boyfriend out to dinner and then the girlfriend, now the wife, said, "I've got a lot of things to say to you." and she was interested to say all those things to him all the way to the restaurant where they went as a couple.

He spoke about a client who wanted orgasms. He told her men can have an orgasm as a wet dream without any physical stimulation and said, "You can too." This was a theme that I heard him repeat several times about a woman being able to have an orgasm. Maybe it was a focus in the '70s, but it was something that he put attention on.

He told a long story about a girl who was anorexic, maybe late-teens, maybe early-20s, I can't remember the exact age. But he asked her to promise to follow his instructions explicitly and said that people with anorexia [and I don't know that he really meant this to be totally globally true], but he said that women with anorexia have a messianic complex and they have to do everything perfectly. So, this woman had agreed to follow Erickson's instructions explicitly, perfectly.

Erickson said to her, "You know that I'm your medical advisor and so, I can advise you to do anything that I think is

going to be useful for you medically and you are duty bound to follow." He knew that she was going on a holiday with her mother and Erickson said to her, "After each meal," she was to use a cod liver oil mouthwash. How disgusting! So, of course, they packed the mouthwash, but guess what ... when they came back from the holiday, she had not used the mouthwash. That was the beginning of her loosening her rigidity that she'd had.

The last story he told that day was that he had told all his children that they should behave in a spontaneous and unexpected manner if they're ever cornered. He wasn't advising me or Lee to do that. He was just saying he told his children to do that. And it's interesting for me to report that I've been in several situations that could have been challenging or potentially dangerous and I was able to somehow take that idea and get out of trouble without any bad effects.

So, that was my second day.

DAY 3

Lee and I were both there with him, just the three of us for about two hours on this Sunday. I was surprised to be there on a Sunday. No rest for that man. I think in retrospect that by doing something, having conversations, gave him an opportunity to have his focus external so that it wasn't internal and where he had so much physical pain. I think it was therapeutic for him as well as very much for us.

He started with a puzzle that you may well have come across in other places. "How can you plant 10 trees in five straight rows, four trees in each row?" Ten trees, five straight rows, four trees in a row? I first thought 10 trees, there are five rows, four a row, you'll need 20 trees for that. We puzzled over it for a while and then he eventually gave us the answer. He drew a five-pointed star, where you get to have five rows, four trees in each row and you only need 10 trees because the trees are in more than one row. He didn't say that a tree can only be in one row. So, that was an interesting puzzle.

He then went on to speak about breasts and how a woman had come to see him because she was embarrassed about what he called her midget-sized breasts. He had noticed that by observing women's elbow, before they went through puberty that the elbow would deviate, as he said, over a breast that was going to develop. And he said that by observing that, he could predict whether someone was going to have midget-sized breasts, medium-sized breasts or jumbo-sized breasts. He also spoke about this woman who was embarrassed about her small breasts and how he was able to get her to blush and then to get the blushing to spread down from her face onto the front of her chest. And he said that increased blood flow from the blushing on her chest created an increased size in her breasts.

I don't think that he was suggesting that that should be something to use routinely, but always I noticed that he was wanting to somehow expand our perception of what might be possible. "You don't know what's possible."

And another puzzle ... he said, "Read the following parenthetical inclusion in all possible ways." So, to read what's in brackets in all possible ways ... [710] ... Lee and I were pretty clever. We could see that it could be 710, 017, 107 and so on. Then he said, "Yes, but it can also be, when you turn it upside down, OIL." So, the idea that how you look at things creates a different outcome, another invitation to expand our way of looking at things.

DAY 4



Lee and I were there together for about 2.5 to three hours, which was to be Lee's last day. And there were also two other people there, a young social worker and a young psychiatrist, who said that he'd noticed that friends of his who'd been to see Erickson are subtly different.

Erickson said that one of his daughters had been faced with a mad, large dog, coming home. And this dog was coming towards her while she was on her bicycle. She did something unexpected. She got off her bicycle. She stood menacingly with a large rock and the dog retreated.

He also said, "When you talk about your own family and situation, this then results in your client making their own association. If I talk about my mother, anyone listening can't help but think about their mother. If I talk about my sister, they'll think about their sister."

And finally, that day, he gave some advice that I underlined in my notes. He said that, "When you make the changes in a patient, you do something very small, just one small thing, it begins a whole chain of changes." He spoke about the way a snowball at the

top of a mountain can gather mass as it rolls down the mountain until it can become an avalanche, which takes on the form of a whole side of a mountain. I was intrigued by this unfamiliar notion, of starting small, something doable to begin with, which then could gather its own momentum.

DAY 5

his was the first time that I had walked the hour from my motel to Erickson's house and back again which was the beginning of my "walk of blisters". More about that later. The day began about 11:00 in the morning with myself and two other people there with Erickson. He started by talking to the man that was there and said, "When you brake when you're driving a car from 10 miles an hour, 20, 30, 60, 70, do you look at the speedometer? And yet, you stop the car just in the right place without needing to think about it. Your unconscious mind does it all for you."

He spoke about an artist who, when he was looking for inspiration for a painting, would drive randomly out into the desert. One Saturday, he found himself beside a smelly swamp and the stench was so bad that he drove off immediately. After a while, he found himself back at the same swamp, again unintentionally. This time, he noticed that there was a bit of driftwood in the water, a little way from the shore, but the stench again drove him away.

When he found himself back there a third time, he thought, "Well, there must be something here." This time he saw the driftwood and it looked interesting. He didn't know what to make of it, but it looked interesting. So, against his better judgement he walked out into the smelly, slimy, black water and retrieved the bit of driftwood. He took it home and looked at it from every possible direction and couldn't make any sense of it or find any connection. In frustration, he threw it on the ground and, as it landed, it landed in exactly the same position that it had been in when he saw it in the swamp. And the shape reminded him of a stooping man. He tried to make a sculpture of that and it wasn't satisfied and, eventually made a lithograph inspired by this bit of driftwood and said that it was one of the best pieces of art that he'd ever done. Erickson summed it up by saying that his unconscious mind had recognised the value, the relevance of the piece of driftwood long before he consciously did.

He spoke about a client who had an anxiety problem and the only thing she could remember were two phrases, 'clump of bamboo' and 'butterfly sleeves'. The phrases meant nothing to her. Erickson helped her to experience the emotion of fear in re-

lation to these two phrases, without any need to attend to the intellectual content. After that, she gradually remembered that when she was about six years old, she'd walked halfway across a large pipe traversing a deep ravine near her house. She'd become suddenly paralysed about halfway across for half an hour. She slowly backed up, using her childhood logic and was so scared she hid behind a clump of bamboo. In the middle of this story, he suddenly turned to me and said, looking me straight in the eye, "Robert Bruce is a clump of bamboo." Bruce is my middle name. I still have no idea what that was about, but it had an impact. She made the clump of bamboo connection, but she couldn't remember anything related to the other phrase 'butterfly sleeves' until some time later, she happened to be looking through a family album and here was a photograph of her at that same age with a party dress on with butterfly sleeves. And he emphasised that he helped her to experience the emotion without having to have the intellectual component then allowed her to have the intellectual component without having to go through the emotion.

One of the people in that small group said that she had a problem and wanted Erickson's help. She had been, for a long time, eating compulsively, alternating with taking diet pills she disapproved of. Erickson gave her clear and direct instructions. He said, "Get good and comfortable with your feet on the floor, your hands on your thighs. Look at this spot. You can be alone with me in this room and you can respond with a "yes" or "no" answer to my questions, nodding your head for yes and shaking your head for no." He then asked, "Do you want to get pregnant?" There was a small "yes" and

a big "no". "Does your husband want a baby?" "No." "Are you certain?" "No." Erickson made an aside "Problem with communication." He then continued, "Are you willing to stand naked in front of a mirror each day and slowly get the feeling of your body as you really want it to be?" "Yes." "Are you prepared to face the changes that are required of you?" "Yes." "Do you think you can get through the day without such a big need to concentrate all of your worry on eating?" "Yes." "Do you realise your problem is bigger than you thought?" "Yes." "Are you prepared to awaken from the trance feeling much more comfortable with yourself or at peace within your mind?" "Yes." Erickson finished by saying, "You came with a large problem and it has become smaller."

DAY 6

The day began with the three of us with Erickson, the three that had been there the previous day then another three people arrived. There was some catalepsy, which later evolved into arm levitation with no-one closing their eyes, but just a natural beginning with catalepsy, evolving into an arm levitation.

Erickson spoke about three cases. He went into a lot of details about them, reading from the case notes and getting the people in the room to read the notes themselves. The first one was about a transcript of an interview with someone and he noticed that every positive statement was followed by a negative statement which was consistent throughout the whole transcript. Erickson commented that this is an indication of manic depression, which is now called bipolar. He came to that realisation not by needing a clinical history, but simply by reading the transcript and seeing the language pattern, positive, negative, positive, negative, positive, negative.

He spoke about a woman, and my notes are a little bit sketchy here and so I can't really do justice

to it, but what I've written here is that she had a zany insight into her madness which led Erickson to discover that she was catatonic schizophrenic and also a prostitute. I'm sorry I can't fill out the details about how all of that happened, but some of his observations were really totally intriguing.

The third case is one of my favourites about Ruth. Jeff Zeig wrote this up quite extensively in a book, *Experiencing Erickson*. If you don't know that book, that case history, I'd encourage you to seek it out. He received a phone call from Ruth's husband at 5 o'clock one Friday afternoon and the man said "I've been given three weeks' compassionate leave to have a psychiatric assessment done on my wife. That leave expires at 9 o'clock tomorrow morning. Could I have a 6 o'clock appointment, please?" I don't know about you, but if someone tried that on me, I'd say, "Oh, yes? No thanks." But he said he was interested to meet them.

Ruth came into Erickson's office and she makes three statements to which he replied, "Madam, I don't know any of my colleagues that I hate sufficient to refer you to. Please leave." The three statements were, "I've got a terrible headache and that mess on your secretary's desk doesn't help. You'd think that hospitals would provide decent furniture for patients and doctors. You'd think doctors, who are supposed to read textbooks and know what they're about would at least put them back in the shelves tidily." Erickson said those three comments were all destructive, which led him to make that statement.

She was admitted as an involuntary patient shortly after that and Erickson had intermittent contact with her over the next 14, 15 years and made absolutely no inroads into her de-

structiveness. He said she was the most destructive person he'd ever met.

There are some marvellous details in Jeff's book and I recommend it, and Erickson knew how irritating she could be, how she really relished upsetting people. She was always trying to get him stirred up but he wasn't going to play her game. One day, she said to him, "Is there any way that I can upset you?" And Erickson replied, "Yes. By staying alive." That prevented her from suiciding. It was a way of utilising her disruptive behaviour in a way that's beneficial. So typical of the man.

Later on in the day, he was talking in a more general way and he said to someone in the room, I can't remember who, who'd been in a trance "Do you think you're still in a trance?" And that person thought that they weren't in a trance and he went, "Do you think you're still in a trance?" Somehow, that question threw a little doubt about yes or no, in trance or not in trance. And he made some other comments, such as, "Do you realise yet that blah, blah, blah, blah, blah?" Such a beautiful creating a possibility ... "Do you realise yet that...?"

He also spoke about the way language is not precise, how different people, different cultures, different environments have different interpretations. "Someone arrived for a dinner party and the hostess let him into the house and said, "Do you want to wash your hands before dinner?" And the man replied, "No thanks. I washed them behind the rose bush before I knocked on the door." So, washing your hands

doesn't necessarily mean washing your hands. An invitation to an expansion of possible understandings of what people say.

He finished the day by saying that his parents remembered the good times that had gone and they had looked forward to the good times yet to come. There was something charming about the way he said this.

DAY 7

Day seven was a remarkable day for me. Starting at about 11:00, for the next three hours, I was the only person there with Erickson. He had a client, one of the few clients that he was still seeing at that time and invited me to sit in for the session - an extraordinary privilege.

This woman said that she had an aeroplane phobia. Erickson asked for details about the phobia and she described the way she was feeling fine and then when there was a flight coming up, the closer it got, the more anxious she became. As she got onto the plane, her anxiety increased, the plane took off and the anxiety peaked. When she was in the air, it was not so bad. As it started to land, again, the anxiety returned and she still felt anxious for some time afterwards and it would dissipate.

I'm thinking, "Yes, it sounds like an aeroplane phobia. I've heard that before. It sounded very familiar." But he was not satisfied with that. He wanted to know her full name, her age, where she grew up, her educational standard and her interests. He wanted to know about her marriage details. He wanted to know about her first husband's age, where

he was brought up, what sort of work he did, his educational standards. He wanted to know about the second husband, his age, his background, his educational standard, his training, what sort of work he did. And in the conversation, when she said that he'd had a recent affair that she had noticed two weeks after it had begun. Erickson later commented that he thought it couldn't have been the first affair if she noticed it so soon.

Then, Erickson began the therapeutic work with her by creating an arm catalepsy in me. My eyes were open. He lifted one of my hands and there was some catalepsy. And he lifted her hand and told her to be comfortable, to close her eyes. And then, as her hand began to slowly drift down towards her lap, Erickson told her it would lower into her lap. He said to her, "When you first started to walk, it was difficult and it became easier and automatic as the learning dropped into your unconscious mind. And later, in reading, the same process," and spoke about these in minute detail. "Then around puberty, you began to throw a ball like a girl instead of like a boy. Because of the changes in your body and the widening of your hips and your lowering of centre of gravity, you began to run like a girl, instead of like a boy. And these learnings then dropped into your unconscious mind."

He said to her, "You can go into a trance easily any time by counting one to 20, going into a trance one twentieth of the way

with each count. And when you reach 20, take a deep breath and close your eyes. You can come out of the trance by counting 20 to one, silently to yourself. And at the count of one, taking a deep breath and adjusting to the awakening state. When you are in trance, you are not to try to think about your problem, but rather let your mind drift in any direction it pleases.”

Just before he finished the trance with her, he turned to me unexpectedly and he said to me – I was so shocked - he said to me, “Do you think she’s attractive?” And I said, “Yes, I think she’s attractive.” Such a non-sequitur. I've never been asked, and never be expected to be asked something like that.

He asked her to, “Look into a mirror each day and to see if you can work out why two strangers found you attractive and you yourself feel you were plain.” Erickson also told her that she didn’t have an aeroplane phobia. What she had was a fear of losing control and a socially accepted way of expressing that fear. He redefined her phobia!

He told me that controlled people can only maintain that control for so long, then they get overwhelmed.

I've got no idea what the outcome was but she was very different at the end of that session than she was at the beginning of it. It was fascinating.

After she left, he made a very unexpected and, for me, a profound statement. He said there can be no psychological theory that will fit all people of all ages of all races in all situations. He said that personality patterns are much more

important. That idea that there can be no theory that will adequately explain everyone was a profound disruption to my thinking. As a doctor, I'd learnt that you treat pneumonia this way, you treat a cut this way. There's always a way of doing something, but Erickson’s saying, “In this work, no, it’s not like that.”

He then went on to talk about insomnia. And he said that insomnia is a self-punishing condition. And like anything that Erickson said I think was to have an effect in the situation that he spoke in, rather than to be held as an absolute truth.

He spoke about a man who lived with his son and they shared the housework. The son polished the floor because the father hated it and Erickson said, “I can help you, but you're going to have to give up eight hours of sleep.” And the man said, “I've been giving up nearly eight hours of sleep every night for years. Of course I can do that.”

Erickson gave him strict instructions to get a can of Johnson’s floor polish and a polishing rag and at the usual going to bed time, he was to start polishing the floor and he was to polish the floor all night long until it was getting time to get up. He’d only lost two hours’ sleep. The next night, instead of going to bed, he was again to polish the floor all night long. He would only have lost another two hours’ sleep. On the fourth night, at the usual going to be time, the man said to his son, “I think I’ll lie down and rest my eyes for a moment. He woke up at 7 o'clock the next morning. Erickson chortled. He thought it was just hilarious and wonderful too.

He told the man to keep the polish and the rag on his dressing table and where he could see it from his bed. And if he was not asleep in 15 minutes after he wanted to, he was to get up and polish the floor all night long. And then he chortled some more and said, “The man hasn’t lost any night’s sleep since.” Such a great story. And I found variations of that to be so helpful in my practice. So have other people.

He spoke about another man who was having trouble sleeping. This man put himself through medical school and had promised himself that when he had time, he would catch up on some reading. He promised himself he was going to read all of Dickens and all of Sir Walter Scott. He hadn’t got around to it so Erickson told him he was to read standing up at night. When he asked if he might sit, Erickson said “Only if you don’t go to sleep”. If he was not asleep in 15 minutes, he was to get out of bed and read all night. Again, some reading got done to begin with, but after a while, rather than go through the chore of reading these books all night, he went to sleep. It’s a way that I’ve found so helpful in my work and other people that I’ve shared that with.

If someone has a problem, I like to say, “What do you like to do?” because we can usually find some resources in that area of their life. If someone says that they have trouble sleeping, I also want to know what they hate doing. It’s a very nice activity for us to know about and have the possibility of using.

DAY 8

I was the only one with Erickson. As I was new to this area, to this way of working, I was very wide-eyed, bushy-tailed and more than a little overwhelmed. I asked Erickson if hypnosis be useful for depression. As part of my traditional training in hypnosis, I was taught that depression is a contraindication to hypnosis, which didn't seem sensible to me and, of course, we know now that this is totally fallacious. He made some interesting comments and like a lot of his responses to a question, they were not so much precise and accurate as fashioned to be useful to the person asking the question. The gist of how he responded was that he liked to convey to the client his doubt about whether it was really depression and to offer the idea that there may be something else, something that this person was missing, something else that they are overlooking, something that was important. And if he could sew that seed of doubt, that doubt could spread and, as it spread, it was then able to activate forgotten ways of behaving and give way to a new outlook.

He spoke about a girl who had a very domineering grandmother. The mother was determined not to be the same and made herself into

a buddy of the daughter. The daughter became a big girl when she was in college, then later, when she came home each vacation she became a little girl again. She had a male friendship start when she was in college, which she broke up because of her uncomfortable feelings. Erickson commented that she had a strict catholic upbringing.

He explained to her, and I'm not quite sure how he did this, but he explained to her that those uncomfortable feelings were sexual. And he explained that her mother was her mother, not a buddy. The daughter came to realise that the mother was just as domineering in her own way as the grandmother. Erickson then commented that her father took to drink. What that has to do with anything is your guess, not mine.

Now, what's that story got to do with hypnosis and depression? That was his response to my question. So, I don't know what you make of that, but that's what happened.

DAY 9

I was the only person with Erickson again and he alternated clinical stories, with a kind of a hint, like a recommendation of what to do. He began by saying there was a boy of four, who said, “I hate you,” and Erickson replied, “You love me and you love some of the things I do and you hate some of the things I do, but it’s the things which you hate.”

He emphasised that the important thing is to have an attitude of expectancy and complete confidence that a client can go into hypnosis, a complete confidence that a client has all the resources they need to resolve their problem.

He then spoke about taking any idea, any problem idea and then taking it out of its context, put it into a different context. Erickson told a man who had a fear of heights, “Are you scared of falling off this floor? No. You couldn’t fall off this floor even if there were no walls. But if you elevated this floor to a height of 6,000 feet, you’d be scared. So would I. Now, look at your feet and get to know just how much area you need to be comfortable.”

He then went on to talk about there being three different kinds of love. A child says, “I love my

mommy, my daddy, my rattle” but that’s the ‘me’ in you that I love. The adolescent says, “I love your looks. I love your grace. I love your appearance. I love your hair,” but that is my perception of you. The adult love says, “In your happiness, I will find my happiness, and that creates the separation of the selves”. Isn't that wonderful?

He spoke about a man, who has found himself in jail for two weeks for speeding and there was another man in jail with him who was there for murder. And the murderer said, “Yes, two weeks, but at the end of that, they hangs me.” Where do you go with that?

Then comes some advice. From my memory, he said that this was what he told his children. Well, it may have been just general advice. “Run. Don’t walk, but run to the rubbish bin with any hurt feeling.” I’m a bit slow with that one, but it’s nice to be reminded about it.

He said that he taught all of his children to realise that if one child got a \$300 present and the others got a 25-cent present, not to mind. It’s the feeling behind the gift. They were told to be glad when another sibling got an expensive present because that made their expensive present that much closer.

A day of home-spun wisdom.

DAY 10



Erickson spoke this day about two cases.

One was a man, who had a problem with stuttering. Erickson asked him to write the numbers one to ten and all the letters of the alphabet and then two pages of anything he wanted. When Erickson looked at the writing, he noticed that the numbers were not in any order and the alphabet was backwards. He noticed the words that he'd written on the two pages about anything that every alternate word had the last two letters reversed and said, "This is a problem with communication." Extraordinary observation skills. Erickson gave the man the task to read a whole book, word at a time, but backwards. And he reported that there was a 90% improvement in just a few days. Previously, he'd had any number of different people trying to help him over 16 years. And over a few days, 90% improvement. Pretty amazing.

He also spoke about a woman, who was 10lb overweight and just couldn't get a way to lose those 10lb. Erickson gave her very definite instructions that she was to look at herself each day in the mirror and examine all the revolting fat and to eat as much as she could to put on another 5lb. She phoned him in a

week saying she had really begun to enjoy her food, but had lost 2lb. Erickson told her that she should expect to discover something very important over the next week. She subsequently reported that she became so active that sometimes she met herself going out, just as she was coming home. True story. So, what do you make of that?

DAY 11

At the beginning of this day, Erickson asked me to go to the Phoenix Botanical Gardens and I said, “No. I'm not interested in going to the Botanical Gardens. We've got beautiful botanical gardens in Melbourne. I know what botanical gardens are. I'm not here as a tourist. I'm here to learn, so I'm not interested in going.”

He just nodded his head and then proceeded to tell me about a lawyer, who lived in Flagstaff, some distance north of Phoenix and this man had failed his bar examination three times but he had one more chance to sit the exam the following Saturday. Erickson told him that since he was thinking of shifting to Phoenix that he was to take particular notice of the scenery as he drove home after seeing Erickson that day, to notice the houses, the hills and everything else that he could see.

The following Saturday, he would find a parking place without too much trouble near some building on the day of the exam and would find himself inside this building and there may be other people there, but he didn't need to take any notice of them. He would find himself looking at a white sheet of

paper and, as he read it through, it would make no sense at all. On reading it a second time, it would begin to make some sense.

Then, he would pick up the pen and notice how a trickle of ink would flow from the pen onto the writing paper and it would continue to trickle and flow until it stopped. Then it would begin again and, soon enough, he would get into his car and notice again the scenery going the other way and notice how different it was.

Some months later, the lawyer's wife called Erickson saying that since Erickson had helped her husband to pass the exam so well, she wondered about a hypnotic delivery. She was on the way to the hospital to have the baby. Erickson told her to be interested in the nature of the contractions and just how it all felt, wondering about whether it would be a boy or a girl, whether the name they'd chosen would be the right name and whether the facial features would be like her or husband's or her uncle Fred's and so on. “And next time,” he said, “Maybe you could give me some more time.”

For her second delivery, she came three days before the baby was due and Erickson told her much the same thing. Some time later, Erickson rang the husband to get some legal advice and asked how child number one and child number two were getting on. He also asked about number three and was told, “He was born a week ago.”

And then “out of out of nowhere” Erickson made a statement. “You make just one small inconsequential change in the patient and that is the beginning automatically of other changes.”

DAY 12



On the previous day Erickson had asked me to go to the Phoenix Botanical Gardens and I said I wasn't slightly interested. So he began the day by asking "Did you get to go to the Phoenix Botanical Gardens?" and I said, "I'm not going to the botanical gardens." He just nodded again and then went on to tell me a story. He pre-empted that by saying that he thought it was very important in doing this work to study anthropology, to pay a lot of attention to different cultures. He was a friend of Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson and told the story about an Armenian-born Italian woman, who had been told since she was a small child that she would have to keep her parents in luxury and could not marry until they were dead.

Erickson asked her to draw some things, including a face. She drew other objects well, but when it came to the face, what she drew looked like a badly-drawn stone. And Erickson discovered that she bathed in the dark under a nightie and was certain never to be nude. Erickson asked her to bring a nude drawing of herself. The first drawing had no

body and Erickson looked at me and said, "Nobody has me and I has no body."

The second drawing that she presented had a scowling face. The next time she came and said, "I'm going to go into three trances," which she did. And then asked Erickson what happened. Erickson told her that she had had an orgasm in the first trance, not in the second. And in the third trance, she was beginning to have an orgasm and then decided not to continue. He then said she married happily after her parents died. Like so many of Erickson's stories, people lived happily ever after. They got married, moved the country and had lots of children.

He also made a comment that a person can be walking in a straight line down a footpath and without realising, slow down next to a bakery ... there's something about the smell of freshly-baked bread. A person without realising it might slow down as they pass the dentist if there was some dental work needed. A fat man on a diet, might find himself walking faster past a restaurant and that any person will slow

down at an intersection without knowing just when and how
and look both ways. What do you make of all that?

DAY 13



On Monday Erickson had said, “I want you to go to the Phoenix Botanical Gardens.” “I’m not going.” Tuesday, “Did you get to go to the Phoenix Botanical Gardens yet?” “I’m not going.” Wednesday, “Did you get to go to the Phoenix Botanical Gardens yet?” I said, “Dr. Erickson, I’m not going to the Phoenix Botanical Gardens. I’m not here as a tourist. I’ve come here to learn. I know about botanical gardens. I’m not going.” He just nodded his head silently and then the day continued.

He said, “Whenever you encounter neurotic behaviour, you accept it and reverse it.” And he said that whenever someone has a problem, you start to create some doubts. If someone has a problem about vomiting, “What if you could vomit?” If someone has a problem about urinating, about being incontinent, about having trouble going too far from a toilet, “What if you can’t urinate?” If someone has a worry about premature ejaculation, “What if you can’t ejaculate for 20 or 40 minutes?” or even say, “27.5 minutes.” If someone has worried about going to sleep, “What if you have trouble

waking up in the morning?” A very interesting reversal of concern and worry. It’s most fascinating.

Erickson then went on to talk about Herbert, who he said was psychotic, an inpatient at a psychiatric hospital. Herbert was absolutely certain that he had no stomach and was quite adamant about this. And Erickson said, “Tomorrow morning, I’m going to prove to you that you’ve got a stomach.” He was fed with tube feeding and the next morning Erickson administered the tube feeding. The tube went in and into his stomach and as Erickson poured the food in, which was mixed with cod liver oil he made sure that he did a lot of pauses so that a lot of air went down the tube. Then when the tube was pulled out, the man belched and said, “Yuck. Rotten fish.” Herbert was now convinced he had a stomach. Herbert said, “Okay, you’ve proved that I’ve got a stomach, but I’ll never be able to swallow anything voluntarily.”

Erickson said, “Tomorrow morning, I’ll prove to you that you can swallow voluntarily.” So, that night, Herbert was tied to the bed and Erickson made sure that the tube feeding

he had that night was very, very salty. When they woke him in the morning and untied the restraints, the salt had made him so thirsty that he just grabbed the glass of water that was close to him and drank it down. He could swallow spontaneously.

Herbert said, “Well, I've got a stomach and I can swallow voluntarily, but I do not have an anus.” Well, you might be able to guess that that night's tube feeding had a lot of purgative in it. So, the next morning, he was tied to the bed overnight and the next morning he'd soiled his trousers, his pyjamas, his bed. He had an anus.

Herbert said, “Well, you've been able to prove that I can swallow, that I've got a stomach, I've got an anus but I can never have an appetite.” So Erickson sat him down in the kitchen with the cook who loved food and was instructed to cook his favourite dish. He sat Herbert down next to the cook and when Herbert saw the cook eating with such relish, such enthusiasm, he said, “Oh, can I have some of that? It looks delicious.”

Erickson made a comment that he had fun going to a restaurant and eating a meal and then waiting until a family at another table were finished and about to settle the bill reads to leave and he would order something that was delicious to him and really made sure that everybody could see how much he was enjoying it. He said those other people always ordered something else. There's something about seeing someone else really enjoy food that gives a person an appetite.

Erickson knew that this man was an expert card player so he organised for him to be sitting at a table with three other people in the hospital and he was to play with them. One of the other three was playing poker, another one of the three was playing solo, another part of the three was playing gin rummy. And Herbert, who was an expert card player said, “This is driving me crazy. What does one do to get out of here?” So typical of Erickson. There was no insight. There was no explanation. He generated an experience and Herbert was able to get out of the hospital.

He then went on with a kind of a sex education lecture and spoke again about female orgasms. This must be maybe a timely thing or something that was fashionable back in the '70s, becoming fashionable, and said that a man can have a wet dream while he's asleep without any physical stimulation and a woman could also have wet dream, but she could take in her dream, she could have special pleasure in a soft feeling all over her body. And he said that if a woman can have an orgasm in any part of her body, what does that mean? To make your own understanding of that.

And he finished the day by saying that he had plenty of faults and the faults that he had were his permission, the faults that he had and was going to keep were his permission for Betty, his wife, to keep the faults that she was going to keep. The faults that she had and was going to keep were, in turn, her permission for him to keep the faults that he was going to keep. Then he eyeballed me and maybe he thought I was a rigid prude or something, I don't know, but he really

eyeballed me and said, “Make sure you keep some of your faults because living with an angel is sheer hell.”

DAY 14



This was the second-last day I was to be with Erickson. I was to be there the following day on the Friday and then I was flying home. So, just to remind you, Monday, he said to me, “I want you to go to the Phoenix Botanical Gardens,” and I said, “No, I'm not going.” Tuesday, “Have you been yet?” “I'm not going.” Wednesday, “Have you been to the Phoenix Botanical Gardens yet?” “I'm not going.” Thursday he started, “Did you get to go to the Phoenix Botanical Gardens yet?” I was getting exacerbated. You know, was this man deaf or what? I said, “I am not interested in going to the Phoenix Botanical Gardens.” “Okay,” he said, “and when you go, look out for the Boojum tree and you will know that it's a Boojum tree because it's like no other tree you've ever seen.” And I started to feel ready to give up hope of resisting this man, he was so persistent.

Then he continued with the day's teaching and made a comment about smoking. He said, “Smoking is a voluntary act and there's always a provision for the future in it.” And he said that he liked to suggest to someone that they could continue smoking, but he'd like to make some additional element

to that. He spoke about a policeman, who was obese, was drinking too much and was smoking. All of his supplies were a very convenient store just around the corner. Erickson gave him strict instructions about things to follow. He suggested that he buy supplies just enough for one meal and that he should buy them from a place at least a mile away. He could have a drink of beer at a bar, not at home, at a bar, but that bar had to be at least a mile away. And if he wanted to have a second drink, that's fine, but the next bar must be at least another mile away. If he wanted to buy cigarettes, he'd have to buy them from the other side of the town and that he should keep the cigarettes in the attic, the matches in the basement and if he wanted to have a cigarette, he should go up to the attic and get one cigarette, go down to the basement, get one match, come up and smoke the cigarette. If he wanted another one even straight away, that's fine. He goes up to the attic, takes one cigarette, go to the basement, take one match, just one cigarette at a time. And perhaps or maybe because he had been a policeman, he knew about fol-

lowing orders. So, that was how Erickson's ideas were acceptable to him because, as a policeman, he could follow orders.

Erickson spoke about a woman who had hysterical paralysis of her legs. She had all of the investigations and her muscles and legs were just fine, but she couldn't walk. And Erickson discovered that she worked on a farm and her father was widowed and she was expected to do all the housework, do all the cooking and work long hours on the farm. She had a pretty tough life. Erickson gets her to go down to the physiotherapy room and there were some muscle stimulating machinery that gives an electric shock to the muscles. He put the electrodes on his legs, flipped the switch and that threw him to the ground. He did it three times. Then he said to her, "Now, it's your turn." She comes back the next day and she's got an arm around two attendants for support, shuffling her legs. She said, "I don't think I need any treatment today. My legs are starting to work." And Erickson said, "Let's not run any risks." So, he puts the electrodes on his legs, increases the voltage, throws the switch. It throws him to the ground three times. Then he said, "Now it's your turn."

The next day, the woman comes into the physiotherapy room by herself, pushing a chair in front of her. She's getting some strength back in her legs and said, "I don't think I need any treatment today. My legs are starting to work even more." to which Erickson replied, "We don't want to run any risks." So, he puts the electrodes on his legs, increased the voltage even further, flicked the switch. Three times it threw

him to the ground. Then he said to her, "Now, it's your turn."

That afternoon, that woman walked all around the hospital grounds. When she was discharged, Erickson left a note in her clinical records that if she rang up and asked if Dr. Erickson was still at the hospital, even if he wasn't, she was to be told, yes, he's still there. So, that way, there was no point in getting her hysterical paralysis back because she knew what the treatment was. And it was because Erickson himself had taken the shocks, there was no way that that woman could regard it as punishment and that's what made it effective.

Erickson made a comment that is so helpful to let a person see somewhat inappropriate doing the inappropriate action that they're doing. When they get to see their action in someone else's behaviour, they can see it objectively. He spoke about Big Louise, who used to go on a destruction bender every month and half a dozen burly attendants would hold her down and give her injection of apomorphine, which got her so occupied vomiting that she lost interest in doing the wrecking.

Erickson said to Big Louise, "Next time you feel one of those rampages coming on, let me know. I promise, I will not use it to hold you down and give you an injection." A few weeks later, Erickson gets a message, "Big Louise wants to see you." So, he goes up to her room and he's sitting on the bed with her, talking about this, that, the other, everything and nothing. All of a sudden, the door bursts open and a bunch

of half a dozen dainty little nurses come in and they start wrecking Louise's room, tearing the curtains, breaking the furniture, doing all the things that Louise had done. And Louise kept saying, "You're nurses. You shouldn't be doing this."

Once they'd wrecked everything, they left and Erickson said to Big Louise, "Come on. There's the rest of the hospital." They go out into the passage and there was another nurse there that Erickson had asked her to expect the unexpected. He grabbed the nurse's cap, threw it on the floor and ground it into the ground with his feet. He got her glasses and threw them as far as he could. Then he said to Big Louise, "Let's rip her clothes off." The nurse fled. Big Louise said, "I've got some thinking to do."

The next day, Big Louise said, "What do I need to do to get out of here?" And Erickson said, "Well, you know, the record is every month, so you'll have to wait for at least a month before it's going to be okay or they'll accept it." So, a couple of months went by with no problem and Big Louise was discharged.

He also spoke about Little Ruth. She was a young girl, a pretty young girl and she would go on a rampage also. And when the nurse wasn't looking, she would give the nurse a karate chop and break her arms. She was really quite vicious. Erickson did much the same thing with her as with Big Louise. The next time she was wrecking things, he joined in and he helped her and that brought her out of her bad trance, but Erickson was saying it gave her an opportunity to see her behaviour in another person, who was inappropriate. She

could see it objectively. She stopped the rampage, she got out of hospital and Erickson said – he had such an evocative way of speaking sometimes – she got herself pregnant, a casual relationship with a man and had a baby and had it adopted out. He said, "She gave away that Black bastard." After that, she became well-adjusted and self-supporting. A nice outcome.

He spoke about his favourite way of helping someone to lose weight by having them to dream or have a trance experience of seeing themselves at their ideal weight, sitting at a table, cramming food down their throat so fast that there was food everywhere and they were messing their clothes. He said that would always lead to a weight loss. And I must say, I've used that with a number of clients with good results.

He offered some throw-away ideas and he said, "We all translate things into our own language, the language of our own experience and we can use the words that a client uses and we can use that best after we establish a good relationship. And using a trance helps to create that relationship without any need to be any conscious understanding of it."

When he told a PhD student, who was dropping out all the time, he told him in trance, "You can drop out of a long line of dropouts," his family had been dropouts. By dropping out of dropping out, could continue with the PhD.

DAY 15



This was to be my last day with Erickson. I was flying home the following day.

Yesterday after I said I wasn't going to the botanical gardens for the fourth time he said, "When you go, look the Boojum tree. It will be like no other tree you've ever seen." So, guess where I went the Thursday afternoon at the end of the day's teaching. I went to the Phoenix Botanical Gardens. It was difficult to get to. I was frustrated by the whole experience. I had to go right to the centre of Phoenix, then catch a bus. It took me more than an hour to get there. And by the time I arrived, it was nearly closing time. I had about 10 minutes.

So, here I am at the Phoenix Botanical Gardens and, guess what, they were not like botanical gardens that I was expecting. In Melbourne, like most places with a botanical garden, there are rolling hills of green grass, of exotic trees, of lakes with swans and ducks and so on. No, this a desert botanical garden. It was full of cactus plants. It was a shock for me to see. And botanical gardens ain't botanical gardens. I

knew what botanical gardens were like. If anyone knew something and said to Erickson, "I know something," pretty soon, you find out that you're not quite as certain as you had been.

I'd never had much to do with cactus plants, but I looked around and they were really quite fascinating, extraordinary, and an amazing variety. And then, suddenly, I saw this thing and I thought, "Oh, my goodness. I've never seen anything like this." I bet that's the Boojum tree. I went up and had a look and all the other cacti had labels on them with the name on them. There was no label on this. I hurriedly went and found the curator and I said, "Have you got a minute? Could you come and have a look at this with me? Is that the Boojum tree?" He said, "Yes, that's the Boojum tree." Now, if I had said nothing more about the Boojum tree and if you happen to go to the Phoenix Botanical Gardens, you would recognize the Boojum tree simply with just that information. In case you don't get a chance to go there, I'll describe how it looks. I'm not sure I'd call it a tree. It was about 10 feet, about three metres tall. But coming out of this trunk, I'm reluctant to call them branches, but they were kind of

things coming out like the branches might on a tree, but they looked like, if you can imagine, a long, skinny, grey-green upside down wrinkly carrot with hairs coming out of it, a very, very weird-looking arrangement, the Boojum tree.

So, anyhow, I arrive on the Friday morning and here we are, the last day. I had a grin on my face as I told him about my visit to the Phoenix Botanical Gardens. He was also amused and I sensed that there was a little bit of self-satisfaction that he'd got me to go there.

Some people have asked him, "How come, when you ask someone to do something really absurd that they end up doing it?" And he said, "When I ask someone to do it, they know I really mean it." And when I'd heard this, I said to him, "And what happens if they still don't do it?" Then he said, "Well, then I pile on the guilt." So, he had a way of getting people to do things that was quite remarkable.

He also said to me that he thought it would be a good idea for me to visit the Grand Canyon. And I said, "Well, I don't think so. I'm flying out tomorrow, but I'm flying north, so maybe I'll get a view of it out of the plane window." And he said, "I want you to go to the Heard Museum." I said, "Oh, okay. Well, I might have a bit of time after we finish today to go to the Heard Museum." I went and enjoyed the experience of discovering some southwestern Indian artefacts.

And I told him about a dilemma that I had. At this stage, I was in general practice and I'd become interested in hypnosis, which is why I made the trip to Phoenix to spend some time with this man. And I was wondering about leaving

general practice and starting up a hypnotherapy practice. And I was very sincere about this. He could tell. And he said to me, "No, don't do that. Just stay in general practice. Keep doing a little bit of hypnosis like you're doing and maybe after a few years, you might be ready to start to do that." And I remember feeling just a little disappointed because it's not exactly what I was wanting to hear. I was hoping he would give me some encouragement to leave, but he didn't. The weird thing was that was May. Within two months, I'd left general practice. And it always seemed a puzzle to me that I'd asked his advice, I respected his opinion and I'd done the opposite.

It was only after talking to Jeff Zeig a few years later when Jeff told me that, when he thought of putting on the first international conference in 1980, he'd spoken to Erickson and Erickson said, "No, don't do it. It won't be popular. People won't want to do it. It will cause trouble." So, Jeff dropped it. Three months later, he approached Erickson again and said, "You know, I'm thinking of putting on this conference. You know, you gave me all that training without charging. I'd like to do something to acknowledge what you've done for me as a way of saying thanks." Erickson said, "No. I told you, don't do it. Forget about it." Three months later, Jeff said, "I've been thinking about that conference and I'd like to put it on." And Erickson said, "Who are we going to invite?" When Jeff told me that, I thought, "Ah-ha!" If someone is in doubt, encourage them to not do it and that way, they can wait until they've got the motivation and incentive to do it themselves.

Jeff told me something else funny too. When he decided to put on the conference and he was looking for cosponsors and went to various organisations. And he got a bad reception. Erickson was right. People didn't like it. And they said, "Erickson is a fraud. He's a liar, he's psychotic. We're not interested." And Jeff was so upset with what he was getting from people and in particular, the way they were saying disparaging things about Erickson that he rang Erickson up and expressed his upset to which Erickson replied, "Welcome to the world of adults."

Erickson finished the day's teaching this last day by saying a little boy can be ready for an outing, all clean and dressed and ready to go. And the mother will say, "Stand there. Don't move." A half hour later, the boy is covered in dirt and he didn't move.

REFLECTIONS AFTER 1977

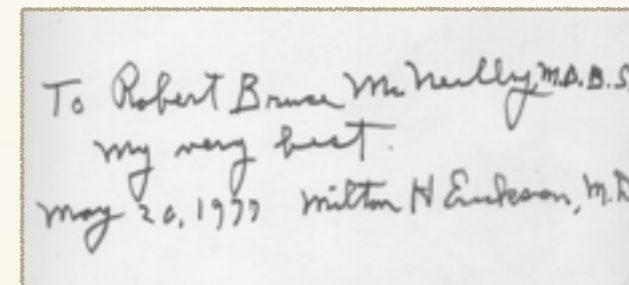
After my trip with Erickson in 1977, I came home enthusiastic, though I think enthusiastic is probably an understatement. It was almost like a religious conversion. I think some of my friends when they saw me coming used to cross the road to avoid me giving them another sermon about how wonderful Erickson was. I was very strongly influenced by him and the work that I was doing, the hypnotic work was very different, more effective, more enjoyable, more playful.

I decided that I would put the notes that I had taken in my time with Erickson aside and not look at them. And I was feeling quite chuffed because I'd become very creative. I was coming up with these wonderful approaches, wonderful notions, wonderful strategies to help people do things and get over their problems.

Six months later, when I decided I'll have a look at those notes, a lot of my original creative ideas, were in fact, just a rehashing of what Erickson had been speaking about. I'd somehow absorbed what I'd learnt from him without really recognising that I had done that. It had become part of me.

Since I've made these recordings, I've had some further reflections and remembered some other experiences that have come to my awareness.

One of them was when I was there in '77, I asked him if he had a copy of that first book that he wrote with Ernie Rossi, *Hypnotic Realities*. And he said he did and so, I asked him, if I gave him \$20, would that cover the cost. The next morning he presented me with a copy of *Hypnotic Realities* with my \$20 inside it and a note saying, "Unacceptable." He wrote an inscription in the book, which at the time, I thought, "Oh, that's nice." He wrote, "To Robert Bruce McNeilly MBBS, my very best. May 20, 1977. Milton H. Erickson MD." And I thought, "Oh, that's nice, you know, 'my very best wishes.'"



To Robert Bruce McNeilly M.B.B.S.
my very best.
May 20, 1977 Milton H. Erickson, M.D.

Several years later I happened to be looking through this book again and I read ‘my very best’ in a different light. And I thought, “Oh, my goodness. He’s saying that I’m his very best so I’d better lift my game.” Now, I’m not so blind or arrogant as to think that he was saying that I was his very best. But typical of the man, there was more than one way of interpreting what he said or what he wrote and there was often a contribution that he was offering in his communication which I continue to appreciate.

Another memory that I have is that he asked me to push his wheelchair into the house at the end of the day one day and as I was pushing his wheelchair through a gate to get access to the house. I put my hand over the gate to unlatch it and Barney bit my thumb and I’ve got a body memory of that on my right thumbnail of Barney biting me. I later discovered that Barney was Erickson’s dog and it turned out that Erickson had a client that has been written up somewhere that when he first met Erickson, Erickson forbade him to go back home and organised for his parents to install him in a unit close by the Ericksons’ house so that he and Erickson could speak regularly. This case is in J. Haley and Madeleine Richeport’s beautiful video documentary - Milton H. Erickson: Explorer in Hypnosis and Therapy and also in Alex Vesely’s wonderful documentary - Wizard of the Desert.

This man saw Erickson regularly for therapy, but as well as that, he came around at the Erickson house and watched television with Milton and Betty every night of the week. I thought this was extraordinary. Also, Betty went down to the

dog pound and got two dogs. Barney was one and that was the Ericksons’ dog and there was another dog belonged to this client. And Erickson made a point that this other dog was the patient’s dog. “It’s not my dog. It’s the patient’s dog.”

I don’t know how many years this went on, but when Milton died in 1980, this fellow continued to come around and watch television with Betty every night. Now, when Betty died, I don’t know what happened, but it wouldn’t surprise me if he’s now going around to Robert Erickson’s house, because he’s the only Erickson family member living in Phoenix, and watching television with Robert and Kathy. Now, this is my conjecture. I’ve not checked it out and it’s just my fantasy, but what a wonderful commitment to someone. How many of us would be willing to go that far and have a client come and watch television. This man is interviewed in Alex Vesely’s film and has some wonderful things to say about the difference that made to him.

The other memory that’s come to my awareness is mentioning to Erickson that while I was still in general medical practice and becoming interested in hypnosis, I was thinking of leaving general practice and starting up a hypnotherapy practice. And he listened to me and then he said very earnestly, “Don’t do that. Just stay in medical practice. Keep doing your hypnosis and maybe some years down the track, you can start to concentrate more on hypnosis.” And I thought, “Ah, okay. That’s good advice.” And it puzzled me that only a few months later, on the 4th of July that year, I left general practice. He told me very clearly and very definitely, “Don’t

leave,” and a very short time later, I’d left. That puzzled me for years until something started to fall into place and make sense to me.

Anyhow, there are probably more memories, but I wanted to add those to what I've already spoken about, hopefully to add just a little bit more texture to the experience because it was a highly textured experience, not one that is easy to kind of tie down and document, but very much as an experience that continues to stay with me all these years later.

Chapter 2



1978



I didn't keep any notes of my visit in 1978 so my recollections are more than a little bit fuzzy, so intermingled with stories that I've read, books that I've read or videos that I've watched that I'm not quite sure what came from where.

I put in a lot of thought before I returned the second time in 1978. He'd been given gifts from people all over the world and I thought I would like to give him a gift. Part of the Australian Aboriginal culture is a throwing stick called a woomera. It has a barb on one end and that gives extra momentum to a spear so the spear goes further. It was also the name of a rocket testing place in South Australia - The Woomera Rocket Range. I thought Erickson's interested in Native American Indian artefacts and he helps to give extra momentum to what people are already doing, so I thought that a woomera would make a great gift. It was quite an awkward thing to carry on a plane and I arrived feeling quite pleased with myself and gave him the gift and said, "This is a woomera and this is what it does." And he looked at it quite disinterestedly and just put it down. He didn't say thank you. He didn't comment about it. He didn't ask questions about it. It was just as if nothing had happened.

He was not interested in being polite. He didn't say, "Oh, thank you very much. How thoughtful, blah, blah,

blah." He actually wasn't that interested, so he didn't pretend. He just put it down and ignored it. And my first reaction was to feel a little bit crestfallen, having gone to all the trouble of thinking about this and bringing it here and giving it to him and he didn't want it. But the lesson for me was if he didn't appreciate it, he didn't appreciate it. No big deal.

On the third day that I was there, there was no one else there, just me. I was in Erickson's study, where he had his teaching when Betty wheeled Erickson in in his wheelchair, and I was still feeling very much in awe of the man. I'd travelled halfway around the world again to spend time with him and here I was, just him and me, the great purple god and me. I became self-conscious and I'm thinking, "Oh, what should I say? I've got to find something intelligent to say, some good questions." And I became more and more paralysed with my self-consciousness. Erickson was not slightly helpful, which is actually something that I've come to appreciate about him - if you didn't take the first move, well, you're going to be waiting a long time.

He just looked around as I got more and more uptight and self-conscious and the more uptight and self-conscious I became, the less interested he seemed to be in being helpful. I don't know how long it was, my guess is that it may have

been 10 minutes, but he picked up the phone and said to his wife, “Betty, take me back into the house” and dismissed me for the day!

I travelled halfway around the world to be with this man. I'd walked an hour to get from where I was staying to his house and the day was gone. I learnt such a good lesson. If you don't make the first move with that man then you're not going to get any help at all. So, the next day, I had some questions. And that was a good day.

One of the things that he spoke about that day was about four graduate students, who'd come down together to learn from him. And Erickson was colour-blind and liked to surround himself with the colour purple. He had a purple leisure suit, like pyjamas. He had a purple bolo tie. He sat on a purple cushion. He had purple slippers. And he said these four graduate students gave me this gift of a purple telephone, which was sitting on his desk. And these four graduate students, two of who thought that they would pass their majors and fail their minors and two of who thought they would fail their majors and pass their minors. The two that thought they were going to pass their majors and fail their minors, failed their majors and passed their minors and the two that thought they were going to fail their majors and pass their minors, passed everything. In other words, “They took what they needed from their time with me and they made their own use of it.” And afterwards, I thought, “That's a bit neat.” Passed in majors, failed in minors. Failed in majors,

passed in minors, blah, blah, blah. I thought, “No, that's a bit neat.” The cynic in me surfaced.

In 1980, when I visited him for a week, a week just before he died, in that stage, he was teaching at the teaching seminars and there were groups of people. And during a break in that week, I was talking to one of the other people visiting and one of the other people learning with Erickson. And he said, “Yeah, I came down with three of my colleagues, who were also graduate students. And we gave him the purple telephone. It was very difficult to find someone who would cast that purple plastic cover for the telephone. And two of us thought that we'd pass our majors and fail the minors and two of us thought...” And I thought, “Oh, my goodness. I won't doubt that man anymore.” Remarkable. So, that was fairly memorable.

Something else that I noticed about his work is that he had two different contrasting ways of speaking. Sometimes, he'd have a string of stories that somehow had a theme, but also, he would pepper the conversation with some throwaway lines, just dropping them in. I found that this there's a number of these that have stayed with me over the years. And I think, if they'd been given like advice, “This is what I think would be a good idea for you,” they would not have stuck the way they have stuck with me when he just dropped them in and then moved on.

One of these pivotal examples I have is that in the middle of something, he said, “You don't ever need to be afraid of anything that comes from within yourself.” Now, it's a sim-

ple enough statement but that idea of not needing to be afraid of anything that comes from within yourself has had a very strong influence on my experience in many different situations, certain body sensations, certain performance potential anxieties, I didn't need to be afraid of anything that comes from within myself. That comment was marvellous.

Another statement that he just dropped in like a throw-away line, he said, "Run. Don't walk, but run," there was a pause there, "to the rubbish bin with any unwanted feelings." "Run. Don't walk. Run... to the rubbish tin with any unwanted feelings." What great advice. And I'm a bit of a slow learner with that one, but it's there informing me.

I was so touched in the second week that I was there in '78 that he said to me at the end of the day, he said, "I think it's time you called me Milton instead of Dr. Erickson." I was so touched that he said that. It felt like somehow, I'd joined the ranks of the initiati, like I was more of a colleague and less of a disciple. It was very helpful to me to hear that.

He was generous. He gave me a book, called Topsy Turvy, a fascinating book where there was a series of drawings with a caption and when you turned the book upside down, a different picture appeared and a different caption, Topsy Turvy. Very interesting and relevant to the way he was inviting us to have more than one perspective on something.



He also gave me a very intricate paper cutting, very intricate. And Betty wrote on a piece of paper that came with it that it was from Foshan, China. Now, I don't know how Erickson came across this, but he gave it to me as a gift and I cherish it. It's so beautiful. It's a picture of a butterfly on some flower, golden and green and red colours on it. When you look at the back of it, you see the way there's been a framework of gold paper and in the holes that give this picture the colour is an overlay from the back with different coloured pieces of paper that gave the colour to the picture. And, again, I think there's a metaphor about what goes on behind the scenes. There's what's in front and then what's behind that actually helps to inform that.

Artists when they're painting something talk about 'underpainting'. They paint something and then paint something over the top of that and what's underneath somehow influences what's in the front giving extra texture.

I also told him about the crisis that I was in about my first marriage and told One remarkable life changing experience happened when I was speaking to him about the dilemma that I was in about my first marriage. There had been

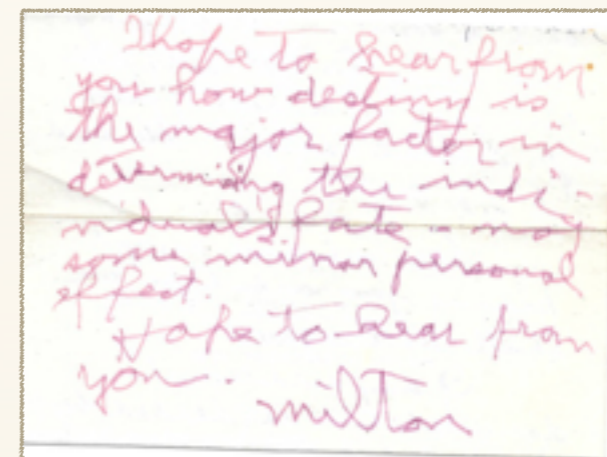
a lot of conflict and I really wanted to leave the marriage, but felt a certain obligation. We had children and responsibilities and I was wanting to and not wanting to hence the conflict. He listened to my dilemma and the circumstances and then, when I got to the end of my speaking about the situation, he just looked at me and he said, “Your marriage is finished.” And I said, “Oh, I just feel like I've been kicked between the eyes. It was a shock.” And he was not at all helpful with it. He just left me with it. And it felt brutal at the time, but it was exactly what I needed. I needed a kick to get me off the fence.

On the second Monday Erickson began the day my saying that when a client comes to see you, you need to know the background - where they are in the family, their educational standard, whether they were brought up in the city or the country, their ethnic background, etc., etc., etc. The next day he began by saying that when someone comes to see you, you don't worry about their background, you work with what's in front of you. When I heard that I thought I'd left it too late, that he was losing it, but he wasn't. He was so comfortable varying his starting point, his perspective, and that led to a lot of flexibility in his work, as well as inviting flexibility in our work.

There were probably other things that happened, but I was left with that shock that he told me the marriage was over. Not long after I got home, I get this letter from him and the letter in his handwriting – you can see it's not easy to read and you can see also he's written here in purple. He

wrote, “I hope to hear from you how destiny is the major factor in determining the individual's fate, not some minor personal effect. I hope to hear from you, Milton.” And by the way, he signed it ‘Milton’ since during that second week, he said to me, “I think it's time you stopped calling me Dr. Erickson and started calling me Milton.” I was pretty pleased about that.

But this letter started ‘I hope to hear from you’ and it finished ‘I hope to hear from you’. So characteristic of a lot of his communications. He'd start something, then there would be some blah, blah, blah and then you would get the same thing. And then the blah, blah, blah in the middle tends to get sort of lost. I read this and I could understand the words, but I didn't get it. It took me a few weeks to realise that he said, “I hope to hear from you, blah, blah, blah. I hope to hear from you.” So, the bit in the middle had kind of got lost in me somehow. And the bit in the middle was ‘destiny is the major factor in determining the individual's fate, not some minor personal effect’. And within several months, I'd left that marriage.



So, 1977 I said I was thinking of leaving general practice. He'd said, "Don't do it," and I did. In 1978 I said, "I'm thinking of leaving my marriage," and he said, "It's all over," and I followed through with it. So, there was nothing about that man that was consistent.

These are some of the experiences that I had in those two weeks.

Chapter 3



1980



I returned for a week in 1980. I said good-bye to him on the Friday and he died 10 days later. He was not well. He was drooling and he was in a lot of pain. He was in bad shape. And he didn't get to have the benefit of the conference that Jeff Zeig was going to put on for him, which was scheduled for some eight months later, but he did get the pleasure of knowing before he died that there were several hundred people who had already registered.

Jeff Zeig invited me to contribute to that conference and I was very overwhelmed by the possibility. I've got no psychiatric, psychological qualifications, just medical and I was really quite overwhelmed by the possibility. I'd been in touch with a colleague, David Calof from Seattle and said, and asked him if he had any advice from his previous conferences. And David wrote, "My advice about December is to pretend to be afraid and also to pretend that you're a shitty therapist with no internal resources." And when I read that, I felt arrogant enough to feel better.

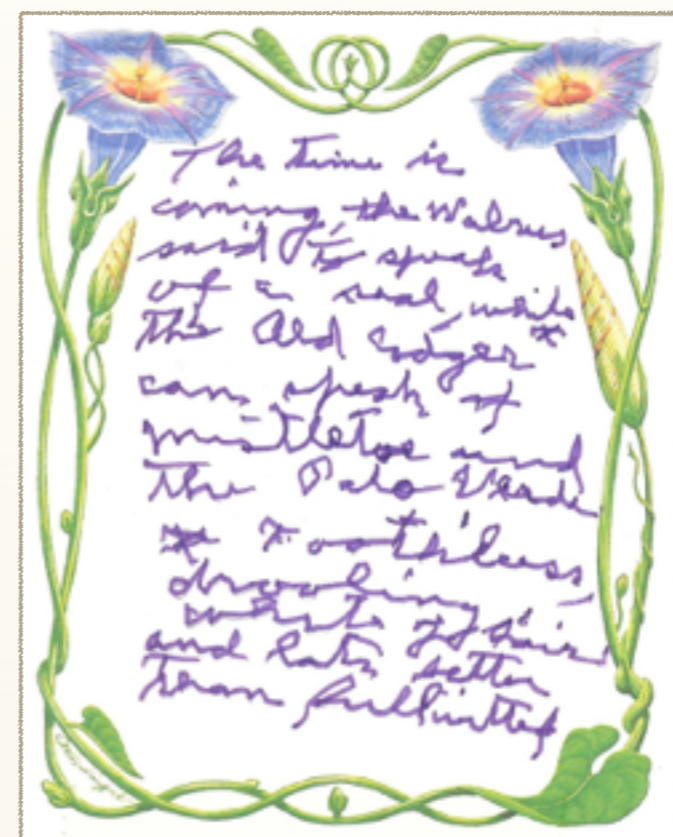
My son, who at that stage was 12 had some conflict about reading so I wanted to buy a book and get Milton to write something in the front of the book to encourage him. On the way to his office one day, I came across a bookshop that was just opening and there were books all over the floor. There was no order. When I asked the owner if he had any books about Milton Erickson he'd never heard of him. I said, "Well, he's a world-famous psychiatrist who lives in Phoenix." which was news to him. So, I just looked randomly around the books that were on the floor and somehow, I was attracted to pick up a book by Carlos Castaneda called *A Journey to Ixtlan*. I didn't know much about him but for some reason, I picked up this book and I bought it. And I took it to Erickson, explained the situation to him and asked if he would write something. He asked me what Andrew liked to do and I said he's very keen on riding his bicycle. Erickson wrote in the front of this book, "To Andrew James McNeilly, when riding a bicycle, rough spots require balance and many hours spent in reading and thinking requires rough, hard thinking. March 1980. Milton H. Erickson MD."

I didn't give it any thought at the time, but I read it on the way home and thought, "This is very strange. It's got a similar kind of a mood that I noticed was around Erickson" and this intrigued me. Later that same year, in that first international conference that Jeff Zeig organised, I asked Jay Haley and Betty Erickson [Erickson had died at this stage] if they knew of any connection between Erickson and Castaneda. Betty said, "It's very interesting that a lot of people were wondering around the Sonoran Desert at the time that Castaneda wrote these books. And they were looking for Don Juan, the main character in the books. Some people even thought that Erickson was Don Juan. And Betty chuckled and said that when Milton read that, he said, "I'm much better than Don Juan." He was not humble, in some ways. There had been some conjecture about whether even Carlos Castaneda was a real person. Was Don Juan real? Apparently not. But was Carlos Castaneda a real person? And this other person in the conversation said that she had been a student of Castaneda's and that, according to her understanding, Castaneda had read Jay Haley's book, *Uncommon Therapy*, had some dreams and began writing so there was a connection there, probably.

But when I gave Erickson that book to write in the front of, he must have known about that, but he didn't let on. He didn't say anything. He just left it there and I found out about it later. So typical of the man.

A lot happened in that week, but much of it is too personal to write about,

Towards the end of the week, it was obvious that he was not well and he wrote a note "The time is coming, the walrus said, to speak of a seal, while the old codger can speak of mistletoe and the Palo Verde, toothless, drooling, white of hair and little better than dull witted." He knew he was dying. I'm sure of that. But it was a tender moment when he gave me that note, and I cherish it as a very peaceful communication.



postscript



I'm aware that what I've spoken about does not do justice to the richness of the experience and many people spent time with that man in those last years of his life and learnt so much from him.

He's been dead now for nearly 40 years and I'm just amazed how much appreciation I still feel actually that it seems to increase with each year of his insights and what he was pointing to. And I like what Confucius said that, "When someone points at the moon, the wise man looks at the moon before he looks at the finger." And I think that there's been a lot of talk about Erickson's work like looking at his finger, looking at him, rather than looking at what he was pointing to.

I would encourage any interested in doing good work to spend some time exploring what he wrote, the audio recordings, the video recordings of him working and, of course, the conferences about his work.

Thanks for sharing my ramblings, my reflections, my thoughts and I only hope that somehow in what I've been say-

ing that there's something of benefit to you, if you're learning, and for your effectiveness in your work.

When I visited Milton Erickson in 1977, he hadn't formalised what developed into his "Teaching Seminars". This started to happen during my second visit in 1978.

Jeffrey Zeig has published a wonderful book "A Teaching Seminar with Milton Erickson MD". Jane Parsons-Fein has produced a wonderful video recording of one of these seminars - "In the Room with Milton H Erickson MD" and I recommend them as additional opportunities to experience something of what Erickson was about.

Jay Haley and Madeleine Richeport-Haley produced a delightful documentary about Erickson's contributions "Milton H Erickson, Explorer in Hypnosis and Therapy" and Alex Vesely has created a delightful film "Wizard of the Desert". Both of these give further texture to Erickson's origins and evolution.

It is 40 years since I first met this remarkable man, and 36 years since he went to that “Big psychotherapy school in the sky”. His influence permeates my work, teaching and personal life, as it has for many people, each in idiosyncratic ways.

At Ericksonian Conferences, as in books written about him, there is such a wide variation in how individual therapists have evolved their own direction, their own interpretation, not as clones of Erickson [“Don’t try to be like me - you couldn’t anyhow. Be yourself”] but a refinement of their own uniqueness. This is so characteristic of Erickson’s heritage which I value highly.

Others who learnt with Erickson have become respected colleagues and friends and characteristically have a mood of inclusiveness, mutual respect and support without any hint of competing or negating, something that is all too often present in other groups.

I was a contributor to the First International Conference on Ericksonian Approaches to Hypnosis and Psychotherapy in Phoenix in 1980, and many of the subsequent Conferences over the 36 years since. I have had the pleasure and privilege of teaching my version of what I learnt from Erickson in every state in Australia, as well as Denmark, Singapore, Finland, UK, Brazil, Japan, Ireland, Czech Republic and USA. It is a personal joy for me to see how people who explore this approach almost universally become enthusiastic about incorporating it into their clinical work.

an interview by *Alex Vesely*



Here is a link to a recording of Alex Vesely interviewing me as part of his splendid film about Milton Erickson - Wizard of the Desert. It's a wonderful film and I recommend it with enthusiasm.

<https://sy.simplerusercontent.net/uploads/asset/file/997341/Alex-Vesely-interview-copy.m4v>

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