

THE POWER OF TWO

Dan Short, PhD & Aimee E. Short, MEd, LPC

Scottsdale, Arizona

by Marilia Baker

How do I love Thee? Let me count the ways...

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

The intention of this narrative is to recognize a married Ericksonian couple who work together and chose to follow more traditional pathways to professional partnership. As Roxanna Erickson Klein described (*The Milton H. Erickson Newsletter*, Winter 2013), *The Power of Two* “was conceptualized to celebrate the manner in which a partnership generates a synergistic effect,” and how the potential for influence – on each other, on clinical work, in publications, and on the community at large “is compounded synergistically to produce that effect.”

The first *Power of Two* column was dedicated to Elizabeth Moore Erickson, Milton Erickson’s wife (*Newsletter Centennial Issue*, Summer 2001). It recognized her influential role in her partnership with Dr. Erickson, and their collaborative efforts throughout 44 years of marriage – approximately 16,000 intense days of life together.

Dan and Aimee Short’s relationship is evocative, in many ways, of Dr. and Mrs. Erickson’s. Aimee has chosen to remain in the background in a supportive role, raising her family and focusing on significant, far-reaching clinical work with individuals and families, with a particular focus on infancy, early childhood, and pre-adolescent and adolescent issues. Aimee has a master’s degree in education from the University of North Texas, with an emphasis on play therapy and marriage and family counseling. She describes herself as “one of the few therapists in private practice who will make home visits or attend school meetings, when needed”.

In his preface to the French edition of *A Tribute to Elizabeth Moore Erickson* (2006), Claude Virot, MD describes the vital role of Erickson’s wife: “As it usually happens with all the greatest minds and most influential of individuals, the books dedicated to Milton Erickson’s work have multiplied like spring flowers, each one of them bringing in and enlightening a different aspect or facet of his, each one adding a fresh, new dimension to our knowledge of Erickson. Nevertheless, as with the flowers themselves, these influential individuals, even the very greatest, need the *right soil in which to blossom*, the fresh air in order to breathe, and the appropriate equation of light and sunlight under which to properly flourish. Erickson himself reminds us of that relationship, incessantly: *the context* is fundamental for each person’s blossoming, for overcoming obstacles, and for the appropriate process of healing.” Virot continues by asserting that “*the quality of the soil in which Erickson thrived was largely cultivated*” by a remarkable woman: his wife, Elizabeth. “Without this *uncommon* woman, Erickson’s genius might not have flourished to the extent that it did.” Aimee Short is that high quality, rich soil from which her husband, Dan, has flourished and prospered.

Dan and Aimee have known each other since 1988, while both were still in college in Texas. She was in her junior year at Abilene Christian University, studying radio and television communications, journalism, and broadcasting with the goal of becoming a news anchor. Dan had taken a semester off and traveled to Europe with a friend to transverse the continent on bicycle, “to explore the world, to have meaningful experiences, and to learn deeply about people and about myself.” Dan’s experience of growth and transformation is remarkably reminiscent of Er-

ickson’s canoe journey, also embarked upon in his college years. (*The Milton H. Erickson Newsletter*, Summer/Fall 2014) Both young men’s experiences are compelling examples of universal rites of passage, *transitions* which typically happen in late adolescence into early adulthood.

Anthropologist, Joseph Campbell, described these rites under the conceptual metaphor of “the hero’s journey.” Dan Short came back from the bicycle journey transformed: a young adult ready to tackle the world with different ears and eyes, plus well-defined career purposes. Stimulated by his new experiences, he decided to major in psychology. As a meaningful prize for the newly well chiseled self-knowledge, Dan was gifted with meeting “the kind of woman I wanted to invite to sail a lifetime with me, and be the mother of my children.”

This year, Dan and Aimee celebrated their 27th wedding anniversary. Dan says: “Without Aimee I do not think I would have learned to care as much about life and the opportunity to do good for the sake of others.” Their son Trevor, 18, is applying for college soon. Father and his son are now in the process of planning a trip abroad together before Trevor goes to college next year. Their daughter Elise, 15, recently accompanied her father on a teaching trip to Australia, helping him with book sales and other training activities. The family has traveled together throughout the U.S., and to Mexico, Spain, France, and other places where Dan has taught and trained.

Dan Short has had a distinguished career as counseling psychologist, researcher, author, international lecturer, and trainer, specializing in clinical applications of hypnosis and brief therapy. His many areas of scientific interest include clinical hypnosis with chronic or change-resistant problems. A psychologist in private practice in Scottsdale, Arizona, Dan received his doctoral degree from the University of Massachusetts at Amherst in 2000, where he studied with William Matthews, PhD, who was then actively involved in Ericksonian approaches to hypnosis.

Throughout his years of practice, Dan has maintained steady and scientific interest in Milton Erickson. This interest led him to accept the invitation to be Executive Editor of the *The Milton H. Erickson Foundation Newsletter* from 1996 to 2001. Likewise, in addition to his successful clinical applications, his many years of research and analysis of Ericksonian methodologies, led him to serve from 2001 to 2003 as Associate Director of the Erickson Foundation. In that capacity he was responsible, among other duties, for the archival preservation of Erickson’s life-work. Dan recalls the tenure: “I immersed myself in the in-depth study of 1,500 hours of audio recordings by Dr. Erickson.” He continues: “Without Jeff Zeig, it would have been impossible for me to have reached my current level of professional success. He has provided me with one opportunity after another. Similarly to Erickson, he is someone who recognized my strengths and encouraged me to make the most of them.”

One of the results of this initiative was the publication in 2005 of the now classic treatise *Hope & Resiliency: Understanding the Psychotherapeutic Strategies of Milton H. Erickson, MD*, which Dan coauthored with Betty Alice Erickson, MS, and Roxanna Erickson Klein, PhD. The book, which is primarily a textbook, has been translated into Spanish, French, German, Italian, Japanese, and Russian, and is widely used in therapist trainings by Erickson Institutes around the world.

Dan greatly appreciates his professional relationship with coauthors, Betty Alice and Roxanna: “Betty Alice is a cherished friend. All of her actions toward Aimee and me have always been generous and supportive, in a very hypnotic sort of way.” He continues: “I have benefited greatly from Roxanna’s intellectual acumen. There is not a single literary text that I have published without first seeking out Roxanna’s critical feedback, most often resulting in a noteworthy improvement in the final product. As a matter of fact, anytime I am faced with a significant challenge and need reliable advice, Roxanna is the first person I call.”

With his work widely featured in many publications, articles, book chapters, journals, and, his blog, Dan Short is quite a prolific writer. Recently, he has served

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as the lead author and series editor of *Principles and Core Competencies of Ericksonian Therapy. A Treatment Manual* (2017), an online publication sponsored by The Milton H. Erickson Foundation in conjunction with The Milton H. Erickson Institute of Phoenix. Scott Miller, PhD, cofounder of the International Center for Clinical Excellence (ICCE), is part of the lead team along with Jeff Zeig. Dan says: "I have always admired Scott Miller's groundbreaking work. Recently, Scott has taken time to coach me along, leading me to greater skills as a researcher and teacher. Without Scott's help, I could not have produced the *Ericksonian Core Competencies Treatment Manual*." (For a complete listing of Dan's publications please consult: <http://www.IamDrShort.com/book.htm>.)

Among many other professional activities, Dan currently serves as the Executive Director of the Milton H. Erickson Institute of Phoenix. In addition to offering clinical services and therapist training, he facilitates a monthly Group Consultation Meeting (GCM) with members of the Institute and professionals from the Phoenix area. Aimee is a member of the Institute and actively participates in the meetings.

As symbolic of their "power of two" and role-modeling, Dan and Aimee, in their professional role, both offer their clients co-therapy services, which is often essential and beneficial to clients and their families. Observing Dan and Aimee Short, and learning the ways in which they consciously conduct their home life, their relationship, and their professional life, I am reminded of psychologist Thomas Moore's remarks (*SoulMates*, 1994) on soul-making in marriage and intimate relationships. He writes: "... here we see how soul is *made* -- recall John Keats' phrase 'soul-making' -- and it does not grow on trees. A soulful relationship is not a simple gift; it asks for concentrated cultivation." Dan and Aimee are, si-

multaneously, the garden and the gardeners of their *power of two*.

For further resources consult <http://www.IamDrShort.com>.

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