MILTON H. ERICKSON, M.D.
AN AMERICAN HEALER

EDITED BY BETTY ALICE ERICKSON, M.S.
and BRADFORD KEENEEY, PH.D.

INCLUDES INTERVIEW WITH ALDOUS HUXLEY
and DVD OF A CLINICAL SESSION
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MEMORIES OF MY FATHER

The Atmosphere
Inviting patients into the home office set the stage for a relationship of wholeness, integrity, respect, and many more therapeutic possibilities than are allowed by the rigid environment of today's professional settings. There was no concealment about who the doctor was as a man with values, as a part of a family, and as a professional who believed in his work and had the confidence to show all of this to his patients. This full exposure was a statement about Milton Erickson as a man and healer.

The therapeutic atmosphere was further enhanced by the presence and involvement of the entire family, from Mom to the teens and the younger children, to the family dog when it was appropriate. Many times it was integral to a patient's therapy to observe interactions among a healthy and active family, each member with his or her own interests and responsibilities.

I enjoyed interacting with the waiting patients and respected our rule that it was the patients' decision and privilege to choose whether to converse or to sit quietly. Sometimes I would lie on the floor playing with my toys or reading a book, "available for conversation." I remember many patients actually getting down on the floor with me, playing dolls, teaching me origami, asking for cards, or otherwise actively initiating play—I remember those times as wonderful.

No markers other than a simple "32 West Cypress" sign were outside to alert new patients that they had found the office. I once asked why this was and Dad replied, "Our invisible sign works just fine." I suspect it was part of his larger commitment to assist patients to function in normal society, in everyday settings.

We lived in a modest neighborhood in Phoenix, where it was unusual for a physician to live outside the country club areas. Dad
and Mom spoke openly against that philosophy, stating it was not a service to the children to bring them up with skewed expectations and with the idea they are somehow better than those around them.

We lived on a street that encompassed a variety of styles, from very large beautiful mansions at the corner of Central, to “rooms for rent” farther down the street. People of all walks of life lived side-by-side in a friendly, cooperative, and mutually supportive manner. We knew all of the neighbors, and Dad referred many out-of-town patients to the boarding house next door; many of them would sit on the porch in the warm evenings before air conditioning was so prevalent. In this setting, we could become familiar as neighbors, people, and sometimes friends.

In 1970 my parents purchased the home on East Hayward, and there my parents remained for the rest of my Dad’s life; Mom is still there. The home on Hayward had two significant features: a large yard with the most magnificent specimen of Palo Verde tree any of us had ever seen, and a home office. The new residence had similarities to the house on Cypress—both were small homes in large yards; they had modest, homely looks; and they were within diverse residential neighborhoods.

**The Office**

In both locations the office was part of the home. Patients or students came through the living quarters into the office. The dining table stacked with work in progress provided evidence that the family made accommodations for Dad’s professional work.

The office, in both locations, was lined with bookshelves and adorned with a vast and diverse array of artifacts. Some of them were gifts, memorabilia, archeological finds, and works of art. Dad had an aboriginal piece brought from Australia by Betty Alice that he loved to show off. He would start by having the student guess the origin of the unusual and distinctive piece. Guesses were invariably wrong, and then he would begin to throw out clues: the straight lines, subtle
colors, and careful details. He would talk about the culture and how the environment influences the artist. Eventually Dad would point to a boomerang with similar markings and give away the puzzle.

He had puzzles for all ages. One was a series of cards with some cowboys, and some bucking broncos. In order to get each cowboy on a horse, the student had to reach outside of normal thinking. The only way to solve the puzzle was to place the cards in a sideways design, match the head of one horse with the tail of another, using the legs of the cowboy as a bridge to complete the visual illusion. The clever gimmick changed the perspective of the whole entirely.

One of Dad’s favorite props was a foam rock. With numerous groups of students he went through an elaborate demonstration that often took more than one teaching session. He would start by talking about ironwood, letting students heft certain specimens, such as a carving of an octopus sitting on a rock, so they experienced the surprising density and weight of the wood. Students would admire the collection of specimens, the delicacy, the fineness of detail, and
then feel their surprising weight. Either preceding or following the lesson of unexpected density, Dad would add his foam rock to the lesson. Sitting in the wheelchair he would make a silent, slow presentation—leaning over, reaching, struggling in a most tedious manner before the group. He capitalized on his physical frailty to create the illusion that the weight of the stone was great but that some urgency existed in his hefting the stone to his lap, declining all offers of assistance. Once the rock was in his lap he would rest, further creating the illusion that he needed to recover after such a formidable task. This interlude gave students the opportunity to see the magnitude of the small boulder with its realistic shape and texture. Anticipation and curiosity built: What could be so important about a seemingly ordinary rock? Then suddenly, with an unexpected flick of the wrist, Dad would nimbly toss the specimen at a startled student who inevitably leapt out of the way. Finally, a student would bend over to retrieve the specimen and lead the chorus of laughter as the joke was revealed. Having made a serious point that “things aren’t always what they seem to be,” Dad laughed along with the group.

**Community Ties**

The Heard Museum was only a block from our home on Cypress Street, and we each individually and also as a family spent considerable time there, knew the curator, and attended most of the special events. Changes that came about were topics of family discussion. When the museum decided to create a membership organization, our family was the very first to sign up. We grieved when building plans meant moving some of the palm trees that inhabited the large lot. We celebrated when the spring Indian fairs were a huge success and drew crowds. We took great interest when a new display was put together, and each of us would slip over to visit, previewing it for Dad, and helping him to come if the display was of particular interest. And even today family members share a sense of pride that we helped the Heard Museum become the gem it is today.
Likewise, Dad cultivated within the family a sense of connection with other community resources. The botanical garden, North and South Mountain Parks, Squaw Peak, Encanto Park, the public library, Boyce Thompson Arboretum, Sunset Point, the Superstitions, stretches of Dreamy Draw Wash, the Salt River bed and the Estrella Mountains were all locations that we became very familiar with. We had experiences and associations with those geographic places that were expanded, reinforced, and cemented within us through our discussions. Whether this process of becoming grounded in the community was happenstance, deliberate planning, or coincidental is uncertain, but regardless, it is an important part of the atmosphere in which Milton H. Erickson raised his family and treated his patients.

Innumerable students and patients were directed to one or more of these public places, sometimes given specific directives to look for a particular feature such as the Boojum tree at the botanical gardens, or the scientist sculpture at Encanto Park. When they returned from their assignments, the experiences provided a platform from which further experiences and learnings could take place. When a ship leaves a dock, the view of the port ties the crew together for a journey. The experiences of one enrich the others. The view changes each moment, and the forward movement eventually overcomes the looking back, but the sweet memories of choice moments sustain many conversations as the journey progresses.

Countless students were directed to Squaw Peak. And countless came back to comment that the experience was life changing—the effort necessitated by the journey, the presence of life in the harsh environment, the changing perspective, the clear view of the valley, and the extraordinary within the ordinary.

After Dad died, we decided it would be fitting to scatter his ashes on the mountain. A group of us went up at midnight on the night of a full moon. Dad had never been all the way to the top, although one group of students had valiantly carried him in the wheelchair nearly to the summit. That night he made it. Then we convened at the
chosen site, part way up and overlooking the west, to return his ashes to the soil.

*Life Together*

Dad and Mom worked as a team. Dad was able to be as productive and creative as he was because Mom was behind him supporting him in every way—physically, emotionally, intellectually, in all practical matters, and professionally. He returned love, appreciation, and respect for her in a multitude of ways that went far beyond the special gifts he chose for birthdays or holidays. In fact, even in celebration he was able to convey that it was not the occasion itself that was important; the occasion was merely an excuse to appreciate the celebrant.

My own birthday happened to fall the week of the annual American Society of Clinical Hypnosis meeting. That meant that, for all practical purposes, Dad was out of town on my birthday during my formative years. This was not ignored, but rather dealt with directly, proactively, and cooperatively. Months in advance, Dad initiated a discussion: “Looking at the calendar I see I’ll be gone on your birthday again. What would you like to do to make your birthday special?” He would participate actively while I planned a menu, decided whether I wanted to go on some special outing, or selected a date that he was available to join in. It gave me a basis for anticipating conflict, and for heading it off well before its inception. It is a skill that has spilled over into other areas of my life, from relationships to household maintenance to health care.

The respect that was so effectively modeled by Dad and Mom and extended to the family involved a style of daily living. Dad always encouraged Mom to explore her passions in the same way he expected support for the interests he had. He helped her to plan family vacations and to visit sights that she was particularly interested in, regardless of whether it was something he was interested in. And when interests overlapped, he sought opportunities for each family member to enhance the others.
When Mom would take us on a family trip, Dad was always eagerly awaiting our return, and we all rushed into the office to give him the details of our adventure. I remember one occasion when we had been up to Rainbow Bridge, and our recounting of the trip went on for hours as Dad gleaned from us the sensations of the grit on our skin and in our hair and mouths, the beauty of the sky and the majesty of the canyon. I had been timid about some of the climbing, and so he quizzed me about the internal sensations that I felt as I saw Allan and Kristi walking sure-footedly on the slick rock trails. My brother was enthusiastic about drinking water that required you sieve out tadpoles with your teeth. Mom expressed her discomfort with some of the homemade ladders we explored, which leaned against the canyon walls. I loved the night sky with the billions of stars and Milky Way so clear it felt like you could touch it. Dad came outside to admire the thick red dust that remained on the car, in our clothes, and in our baggage. Allan even got out the small folding shovel and pushed it into the ground to demonstrate the depth to which the car had been trapped in the sand, and we marveled over the lucky appearance of the Indian boy who had worked with Allan to free us. Rainbow Bridge was only one of a series of remote and isolated spots that we visited. Thinking back, I realize how courageous my mother was, to undertake these trips with young kids and not a lot of emergency resources. Fortunately, things rarely went wrong, and Dad always praised the effective resolution of unexpected problems. We all absorbed our experiences and adventures as events that Dad shared with us. We would not have, and could not have done this without his active participation in the planning, the preparation, and the enjoyment of the journeys. Although he was not able to accompany us physically, he was there moment by moment in spirit, and we took care in remembering the details so that we could relate them all to him and let him share in the elements that he most enjoyed—the telling of the story.

As long as I can remember, there had been students, arriving indi-
vidually or in bunches, who were committed to studying the works, the techniques, the words, and the person of Milton Erickson. Fascination with the professional work reached over into curiosity about the home and family. Dad truly loved it when students came and he gave generously of his time and his wisdom. Students’ interest in Dad’s unique approaches and successes definitely pushed his own work forward. He loved to present his cases, to stimulate questioning, and to be the center of inquiry and intrigue. The epitome of his pleasure was when he could roll his clinical prowess, his teaching abilities, and his family relationships all into one grand scenario where everything was happening at the same time. So Dad would create intersections for his students and family whenever it was possible. For me, this provided ongoing experiences of learning hypnotic techniques, and ongoing contact with the students. I would sit in the office during discussions, I would prepare lemonade for the groups, and I would show them various features in the landscape of the home or yard. And sometimes I would go out in the evenings with them when their lessons for the day were concluded.

Dad taught me in a very dramatic way what it is to be in a group of professionals who are passionate about their studies. I met people of all ages and stages in their careers. The students had often gone to great lengths to seek my father’s guidance and knowledge—sometimes they had a thinly concealed personal problem they sought to resolve, and other times they had a commitment to improve professional skills.

Dad was able to connect with each person in the group in a way that made them think his words and stories were specifically targeted to them, and yet they were presented in a way to preserve dignity. In my view, the stories were general, universal, often repeated with tailoring and modifications for emphasis. Dad was uniquely effective in connecting with people through nonverbal nuances—pauses, eye contact, shifting closer, leaning to one side or another, speaking to one ear and then the other, manipulating his voice and, most important, giving the knowing smile. It was fascinating to listen to the students at
the end of a day express wonder at the ways that Dad responded to their specific questions (often never expressed) and anxieties—as if they each were the only student in the room and others were merely bystanders to a lesson specifically targeted to them. Dad knew how to create a generative atmosphere, where the enthusiasm of one student had positive effects on another, and this created a circle of reinforcement and ongoing desire to learn more, to seek further, and to enhance oneself and others.

**Family Life**

Dad was a disciplinarian and established firm standards early: Each member of the household participated in maintenance of the home and family activities. Our jobs were not equitable and neither were our strengths, abilities, or talents, but our efforts to work as a team were something we all worked hard at. And we all enjoyed the benefits.

We all did extensive yard work, some of which was arduous. As with our vacation experiences, Dad remained an integral part of the team by taking an active interest in the smallest details of the experiences. He would participate in the planning, the decision making, reviewing, and extracting from each of us the minutiae of the sensory experiences. Finally, as a team, we would appreciate the success of the work, and comment on all of our contributions.

Maintaining the woodpile was hard work that often needed attention and supportive effort from several kids. As we walked about the neighborhood we scouted for recently trimmed trees. Then we hauled them home in a wagon that Allan built, and saved them into lengths that would fit into the fireplace. The logs were long and heavy and often required two of us to lift them onto a sawhorse. We used a two-man saw that necessitated adaptation to the rhythm and the strength of one's sawing partner. Since we were different ages with individual attributes, the differences were marked. Each time we worked, we learned a lesson about adapting to a partner and the benefits of working at a steady pace.
Tending the woodpile opened the door to the next level of cooperative interactions. It was a skill to build the fire and the privilege to learn that skill had to be earned. In our evenings around the fire innumerable questions were raised and discussed: How cold was it? Did we want a fire for just a few hours, or did we want one that would continue to warm the house most of the night? Was the log dry? Was the log an unusual shape that would need special banking? Did it have a lot of sap that would send sparks flying?

After I had nagged about wanting my own chance to build the fire, I remember Dad giving me a “test” to see whether I was ready. Allan brought in the large log for the evening and the rationale for the choice was carefully explained to me. My task was to select the remainder of the wood in appropriate proportions. It was explained that if I had watched closely on previous evenings, I would have an idea of the proper proportions. Dad established that if I did not know this step, I had more to learn before I was “ready” to share the privileges of stacking the wood and striking the match.

Smaller logs and kindling are valuable resources and not to be wasted. Each piece had its special position in the making and in the maintenance of the fire. If one does not conserve the resources and use them in appropriate proportions, then more foraging will be needed to get through the cold season. A good balance mimics the proportions seen in nature. Of course I failed my first test, and later my second and third, but eventually I learned to make a fire in the rain with a single match. I am proud of this skill and am grateful that Dad enforced the long interval of learning needed. The lesson has served as a foundation in many aspects of life.

Dad never hesitated to model the enjoyment of life as well as hard work. We had a homemade bird feeder outside of the breakfast nook windows. When we were in the kitchen, Dad would sometimes turn his gaze towards the bird feeder and comment on the “visitors.” We kept a list of bird species spotted on the feeder on the homemade bulletin board. As the list neared 100, we consulted a field guide to
verify new visitors. Out in the yard was an array of birdhouses, including one made of a log that had been brought from Michigan. Our interest in nature taught us a great deal about finding opportunities everywhere, being unobtrusive, taking inventory of positive experiences, using resources, and relishing the beauty that surrounds us.

For everyone, daily life is replete with occasions for learning. What makes a lesson significant and memorable is not so clear, but Dad had a way of seizing opportunities to make a point in a way that would be remembered. He has been lauded for his exquisite sense of timing, and that is surely part of it.

One such lesson remains with me half a century after the event took place. It was common for Dad to lie down for a short nap, and Kristi and I were permitted to lie down with him, read, play on the bed, talk, or do whatever we chose. Sometimes Dad would tell us a story, and sometimes we would read comics together. When Dad was ready to get up again, it was our job to help him put on his shoes. He wore a standard style of brown leather dress shoes, which were kept highly polished. Dad was lying down and telling us a story. The story was a very long one, so we were putting on his shoes as he talked. We had a lot of trouble that day, struggling for quite a long time. Finally the shoes were on, the story concluded, and Dad sat on the edge of the bed with his feet on the floor. He said quietly and firmly, “Now, look at your work.”

We must have been very young, because we didn’t immediately recognize that we had put his shoes on the wrong feet. Dismay set in as we recognized the need to begin our work anew, and we asked him to lie down again so that we could re-do the job. It was much easier to put the shoes on correctly the second time.

For years I pondered this story, wondered how many times Dad may have tried indirectly to notify us of the error in progress. And I also thought about his discomfort as we pushed, jammed, and shoved his tender feet into those stiff shoes. I even tried on my own shoes in reverse to evaluate the experience from “his point of view,” assessing
that it was impossible that he was so engrossed in the story as to not have noticed. I went back to him some time later to ask, "Why didn't you just tell us?" I remember his reply: "You needed to learn to look at your work."

His willingness to endure discomfort, his patience in watching his children err so that they could learn to evaluate their own work, has stuck with me and given me guidance as a parent, as well as in my own life.

**Emphasis on Formal Education**

When I was in first or second grade, Dad bought necklaces from an Indian trader. They were made by Leekya, a well-known master Zuni artist who specialized in fetishes. Dad showed the necklaces to Kristi and me, who were quite young at the time, and we got to wear them for a little while. Then he announced they were our "College Graduation presents." They stayed in the safety deposit box for many years. Finally, with great ceremony, Dad presented a necklace to each of us on graduation. There was never any doubt that he communicated to us that formal education is an asset. Although he did little to influence our choice of a career, he consistently reinforced sufficient and proper education to get there.

My parents were hopeful that each of us would go to college, and most of us have graduate degrees. At the same time, Dad emphasized that we should know the limits of our education so that we would not reach beyond our own reservoir of knowledge. When I would come to him with a comment about a patient, he would sometimes ask, "Where did you get your medical degree?"—a harsh reminder that my observations needed credentials before they had credibility. Simultaneously though, he also taught us that we could learn in many ways, from anyone, and that wisdom and education were not synonymous. More importantly, that respect is not reserved for those with the highest credentials, but rather is earned by those who have the wisdom to use their unique knowledge with dignity. Whether a
man's knowledge comes from a trade, hobby, special interest, life experience, or highly trained profession is of little importance—it is the earned knowledge and its application that are admirable.

White Tummy Stories
When we were youngsters, Dad used to entertain us with stories that he made up as he went along. Frequently he used a central character called White Tummy. The stories often started with the same rhythmic beginning: “Once upon a time there lived a frog who had a green back and a white tummy. For that reason, he was known as White Tummy. White Tummy lived in a pond in the woods and he liked to spend his afternoons sunning and eating flies.” This would be followed by a colorful description of the multi-hued flies, including the great big purple juicy ones, and White Tummy’s habit of snapping out his long tongue to capture a fly and draw it into his mouth. Sandwiched between the trance-inducing litany, which invoked every sense and lulled the listener into a quiet expectation, was a tale of adventure. Sometimes the tales were mere enjoyable moments in the life of a frog, and sometimes they contained lessons about coping with troubles or events that one of the children was facing. If the child had a recent injury, it would not be unusual for White Tummy to have a similar impediment that turned into an unexpected asset. If the child had a bad day, White Tummy was likely to discover that muddy turbulent water in his pond led to an unexpected discovery.

When the family felt a sense of loss and grief over the death of a beloved dog, Roger, Dad began writing letters in the voice of Roger from the Great Boneyard Up Yonder to White Tummy. The letters turned into a series that eventually omitted the frog and were addressed directly to family members. Whereas stories were told to those of us who were handy, the letters were sent to a wider group. Dad, as Roger, started scratching out stories with the same proliferation as the more serious articles he wrote. Our secretary (always ours even though she never did anyone’s but Dad’s work) would transcribe.
his barely legible notes, then Dad would proofread to assure they were correctly done. Then she would type as many copies as were possible with onion skin paper and carbons, sending them out to a variety of lucky family members. For me, the letters eased my transition of moving out of the home, giving me continuity and warmth of familiar day-to-day interactions even though I lived on my own.

Purple

Dad’s wearing purple was one of the ways that I recognized that our family life was unique and different. Dad enjoyed the color purple and he liked the association that people made between the color and him. Over a long period of time he had adopted the color purple as kind of a trademark, and people always looked for purple shirts, socks, ties, and so forth to give him as gifts, which he wore enthusiastically.

When I was in high school, Dad had an interval of poor health in which he wore clean purple pajamas every day, not feeling up to dressing in the light woolen slacks and nice shirts that he usually wore. As he did not want to receive people in his pajamas, he spent several weeks consulting with patients on the telephone.

It struck me that if I could sew a suit as comfortable as pajamas, that looked as respectable as street clothes, it would give him a chance to see some of the patients who were asking for appointments. I found a dignified purple cotton blend, clearly a day-wear fabric, and I modified a pajama pattern to look more like a suit. The outfit delighted him. In fact, he was so happy with it he rarely went back to his “old look.” From that time on he wore purple suits.

Dad was meticulous in grooming, always wanting his hair neatly cut and combed, his eyebrows and mustache trimmed, and the details of his clothing in order. He topped off his outfits with bold jewelry, wearing silver collar points on special occasions. He consistently wore neckties, either a standard or a bolo, from his large collection, which included many purple ones. One had a swirled design on it and he called it his “hypnotic tie.” In his later years Dad always wore bolo
ties—ones that he had especially selected or that were meaningful gifts. One of the ones he had made was a silver rendition of his favorite portrait of Mom. When I was a young child, he bought a batch of Kachina bolo ties, which were very dramatic. He had each of the girls choose one for their “future husband,” and each of the boys chose one for themselves. Then he kept a couple for himself, and gave a couple to special friends. The ties were handmade and individually designed. Despite their regional acceptance, they were bold, even gaudy, and made a statement. I remember once overhearing someone “complain” about talking to “someone who had a damn doll hanging around his neck!” It puzzled me enough to wait until Dad came out of the office so I could check it out myself. It was only the Kachina bolo, something that looked perfectly normal to me.

**Spirit of Adventure**

Exploration, discovery, travel, and self-expansion are family values that Dad emphasized and reinforced. In everyday life the experiences that could have become routine and repetitive were welcomed opportunities for expansion. He modeled flexibility and interest. Special attention was given to tasks that occurred many times so that they never became routine, but required active involvement and choice making.

Kenilworth Elementary School was a mile from our home. It was two long blocks to the west and about ten to the south. I remember frequent discussions initiated by Dad about which route I would take to get there. He would ask, “Have you walked up Central and then turned west on Palm Lane, or have you gone up Third Avenue and turned on Granada?” In reviewing the route I had taken, he called attention to the fact that there were at least 20 possible “correct” paths, all of which led to Kenilworth. Dad would query me in a way that made me wonder whether I had missed an interesting landmark on one of the streets, or even in an alley. I would randomly choose my path as I walked and be very attentive to the appearances of the homes and plants on each street in my anticipation of Dad’s eager
interest. He even expanded my routes by asking whether I had ever considered going up Seventh Avenue or all the way over to Roosevelt to come down to Central. Although I did do this occasionally, it added more distance to what already seemed to be a long route.

As I think back on those conversations, I can see how Dad was honing my own abilities to find a goal and to stick with it, not to wander too far astray, to look and listen and learn as I went along, and, most of all, to enjoy the experience of being in the moment. As a parent, he was also gathering a lot of information about how I was spending my time, who I was with, and what I expected of myself. Further, he was using my eyes and ears to extend his own joy of day-to-day living.

Learning Hypnosis

Work with hypnosis was considered an everyday matter in our household. Each member of the family was required to learn some basic factual information about the topic and to be able to identify common misconceptions, but we were not required to study or explore hypnosis unless we had a personal interest in doing so.

Dad was able see my own genuine interest in hypnosis, and supported me by offering circumstances and occasions for practice. I was only about 10 years old when he taught me the basics of trance. In his initial work with patients he would offer them the option of watching me enter trance before experiencing their own. As my interest and knowledge grew, he began to include me regularly with his groups of students. He even brought me to the American Society of Clinical Hypnosis meetings and to lectures he gave, using me as a subject in those settings.

With practice, I developed the skill of drifting rapidly into a trance. I learned to explore the sensory variations that I found to be particularly intriguing, but there were other tasks like automatic writing that I never learned to be particularly good at.

Working with Dad hypnotically was always approached collegially,
as if he could learn as much from me as I could learn from him. He expressed deep interest in my experiences and encouraged me to tell him the tiniest details. He had a way of raising questions about how far I had gone and why had I stopped there—did I think it was possible or reasonable to explore a little further? Initially he taught me using a standard formal trance induction, going on to hand levitation, crystal ball gazing, counting, the elevator, and several other techniques. The fastest and easiest technique for me was the confusion technique. I remember a long interval when he worked with me exploring the process of drifting in and out of trance, up and down with the deepening, and with memory. He found a lot of opportunities to show me the power of memory work and made arrangements so I could sit in with the Los Angeles Police Department students who were learning how to interrogate witnesses. He seemed to have a very precise feel for the place where memory ends and imagination begins.

Patience with Patients

There were many times that Dad facilitated an opportunity for me to work with patients, doing hypnosis and in other capacities. Sometimes I was part of the therapeutic constellation, and other times it was circumstantial, since the patients were in our home. I remember many wonderful relationships and a multitude of lessons that came out of that contact.

One patient with whom I spent quite a bit of time looked and behaved in what I perceived as a very well-adapted way. Although we were not permitted to inquire as to the nature of the patients' concerns, I did comment to Dad that I couldn't understand why anyone as well-adjusted as she seemed to be would require his services. He was very assertive in his reply, "Don't be fooled by what you don't know." The woman was a master of disguise.

One patient with whom I have maintained a long friendship is James. He worked with my father over many years. He had come to see Dad when he was still a young man who had been diagnosed
with a severe progressive neuromuscular disorder, and faced a future of ongoing and increasing debility accompanied by pain. James talked to me about how Dad helped him with acceptance of and adaptation to his condition, and he also talked about the unusual elements of his relationship with my father—different from what he encountered with other medical resources.

James explained it this way: "I initially saw Dr. Erickson very frequently, sometimes every day for about a year. While I was at the office I would visit with the family and with other patients, and kind of make myself at home. I would say that the major groundwork was laid then. Dr. Erickson would check with me to see that I was really doing what I said I would do. I think he worked with me so intensively at that time because he didn't want to pass up the opportunity to strike while the iron was hot. Also, he knew that when I went away to college it would be a lot harder for me to get in to see him, and he needed to implant as many suggestions as he could, when he could."

After that initial interval of treatment, James described the relationship with Dad as being one "just like father and son. I would come over and just shoot the breeze or whatever was going on, unless of course I had something I needed to consult about."

Over the long course of James' treatment with Dad, the disease progressed, and James learned techniques of making ongoing adjustments to anticipated and real losses of functioning. Most importantly, he learned to maximize his life. These pivotal and central skills involved a long, incremental process of life lessons: skills of caring for oneself, taking responsibility for living independently, budgeting resources of all kinds, socializing, and participating in healthful recreational activities. James also learned to create an awareness of the physical changes his disease brought. Dad did take on James in a fatherly way, and the family members who lived at home accepted James and began to think of him as a close and valued friend—a relationship that persists today.

James erred in his self care repeatedly in the beginning, once even
badly burning his feet on the hot pavement in Phoenix because he chose to walk barefoot like all the local youth. The consequences for this and other errors in judgment were severe, but handled as an opportunity to learn more, to avoid even more serious errors. After his feet finally healed, James adapted by wearing moccasins, a local style that offered both comfort and protection.

So many people credit Dad with the ability to magically arrest disease or to change the course of disease. It is impossible to know to what extent he was able to influence a progressive condition like James' , but it is indisputable that James has adjusted philosophically to live each day for what it is and to make the most of it. He strives to be the best person he is able to be and he participates in life in such a manner as to be an inspiration to all.

James readily speaks of the concurrent struggles of increasing physical debility accompanied by inevitable pain of ongoing muscle deterioration, and is honest about his troubles as well as his successes. He describes Dad as an inspiration and role model as well as a guide for the challenges that he had not yet imagined at the time. James explains that Dad taught him at once to become more sensitive to protecting his body, and to learn to put the unpleasant sensations into a perspective of background noise.

When I asked James, years later, about the ways in which Dad had taught him to cope with his pain, James explained that he would “... drop a comment into the conversation. It may superficially sound ordinary, but something about it doesn't fit into the rest of the conversation. It may have been a socially appropriate thing to say, but it was not really logically appropriate. It would start a thinking process that I would come back to again and again. Although these comments would 'fit' conversationally, they would have a more far-reaching level for me. His comments turned out to be suggestions for me, just like a ball rolling down a chute—my obsession would define the parameters of where those comments could go.”

James gave me an example of one of those seemingly small
comments that had a long lasting effect. “Once I had a little tiff with Roxanna, where I had done something she didn’t think was funny, I don’t remember what it was. Then Erickson commented that I have a great sense of humor. I have continued to think about the essence of humor for the last 30 years!” James does make use of good humor and finds it to be a quality that helps to sustain both him and others.

James explained my father’s influence on him: “He helped me like a weaver creating a rug: A strand of warp and a strand of woof, one at a time, plotting out the journey of acceptance and adaptation over a long period of time. These included regular interactions with family members, being invited to spend special occasions with the family, and even the simple events of staying for dinner, or sharing a joke. Erickson accepted it when I felt bad, but he didn’t accept that a bad feeling should be the ‘end of the story.’ So little by little, experiences built up that I could feel good about, experiences that fit into values that I already had and wanted to keep.”

James has never been able to completely eliminate his physical pain. Instead, it is more of an acceptance and adaptation, part of the fabric of life we rest upon. The key is to not become trapped, ensnared, or lost in the negative net of pain and sorrow, but to keep moving along in the experience, and to seek a balance where the pain is tolerable and provides the least amount of distraction to living. The desirable experiences of life are also drifting by, and it is a human choice to grasp and retain those elements that best define ourselves. The focus of who we are and where we reach comes from within the self, and all people must adapt to limitations of one sort or another.

Another patient with whom I shared meaningful contact was Mr. Jones, who suffered from the loss of his right arm followed by phantom limb pain. Phantom limb is a condition in an amputated stump when the residual nerve continues to send sensations. The signals may give the person the feeling that the missing limb is twisted, cramped, or in an uncomfortable position. This condition can be agonizing and is often resistant to most forms of treatment.
I only was in the office with Mr. Jones and Dad one time, but on that occasion he recounted in extreme and excruciating detail the sensations associated with a tangled, twisted, knotted nerve of his amputated arm in an unnatural position. He told of the irresistible impulse to reposition, and the repeated horror of looking over and not seeing the absent limb. During the session, with us both in deep trance, we had a back and forth conversation reviewing the physical sensations associated with positioning of the arm and of moving the arm. It was a combination of my positioning, feeling the sensations, amplifying those sensations, and describing them. Starting off with arm levitation (a technique in which one's arm seems to lift spontaneously) and going forward with trance catalepsy (frozen body posture), it was a natural progression.

In the appointments that followed that occasion, Mr. Jones greeted me in the living room in a warm way, but never further discussed his pain—it remained in the office.

Later he brought gifts that he had made: A set of cutting boards from blocks of hardwood, or a large bag of beautiful halved walnuts that he had removed from the shells intact. The art and craftsmanship that he was able to achieve after the loss of his dominant arm was testimony to adaptation. The gifts he brought were appreciated and treasured—the walnuts were used to adorn my wedding cake!

Our obligation as family members was to be polite and responsive to patients in our living room. One particular patient, John Doe, was challenging to socialize with due to his unexpected verbal outbursts and other unpleasant behaviors, including leaving a trail of chewed paper bits torn from the pages of our magazines. Although I remember John with a great deal of sympathy, at the time I was uncomfortable and complained to Dad that every day John Doe was waiting for me as I came in from school, lurking with an expectant look on his face. I didn't have a chance to relax or even go to the bathroom before John called me over and grilled me about my day. He asked about every class, every assignment, every teacher, every
lesson, every kid in my class, all the while inserting paper or removing spit wads from his mouth and depositing them in the chairs between pages of magazines or other inappropriate locations. John was there so early that it tied me up for almost an hour every day before he was called in for his appointment. I asked to be excused from the duty of being responsive to this patient who waited for me.

Dad responded by giving me an educational lesson about the notion of “shell shock.” He talked about the tragedy of lives lost in battle, and the difficulties faced by soldiers who survived the combat and miseries of war. He talked about the irony of soldiers escaping with their lives but losing themselves. He lamented the burdens on families who remember the young, healthy, strong men leaving home and the jubilance of their return, transforming into tragedy as impairment and damage gradually revealed itself. He talked about the glory of our nation, of the tremendous cost of freedom.

I left the office with a deep sense of pride for our history and of shame for my own impatience. I regarded John Doe as an unsung hero to whom I personally owed my freedom. Over the next few weeks even the spit-wad problem evolved into a humorous competition among my siblings and me to see who could discover the most wads, as if it was some sort of an Easter egg hunt.

The lesson Dad gave me was to re-examine my own stance. He gave me enough information to show me that I had missed knowing the true strength of this tragic man, and I came away with a deep understanding that the lack of ability to present oneself well does not negate the treasures of individuality within each of us. I trusted that Dad would not ask me to participate in an activity that was not both safe and beneficial for me.

Another patient with whom I developed a close relationship was Jane Doe. She was an obviously quite disturbed teenage patient relocated to Phoenix for long-term treatment by Dad. It was obvious to all that Jane struggled with hallucinations and that her independent living in an apartment was an alternative to inpatient care. It was also
clear that the relationship she had with her mother was a loving one and that separation from her family was a sacrifice.

As a teenager myself, I supposed that Dad did not appreciate the central importance of style, and my suggestions to “get her to dress more appropriately” were dismissed, although he did encourage me to spend as much time with Jane as I wished.

Sometimes Jane would bring baked goods that she had made, and sometimes she and I would bake a batch of cookies together in our kitchen. The treats were good and we had a lot of conversations on how baking provided such an easy common ground to make new friends—a tool Jane used extensively.

Jane got around on an old bicycle, keeping a tattered purse perched in the basket as she rode. I remember her tearful arrival at an unscheduled time, crying because someone had snatched her purse. The police were summoned and handled the report with extreme seriousness. I was confused by her sorrow—she stated the purse was of no value and the contents were only old Kleenex. I was as puzzled that a thief would target such an unlikely subject as her as I was by her despondency over the loss.

Jane was inconsolable and required much time with Dad that afternoon, but by the next day she was laughing. “Imagine the thief’s surprise at finding only crumpled Kleenex,” she told me gleefully. As she reveled in this image of discovery of the paltry booty, she declared that she was going to begin carrying much more worthless items in her new purse, and that she would “be prepared” to really enjoy the next thief to come along. Her sorrow had given way to enthusiasm and future planning. The underlying element of “being ready for the next thief” provided a change of stance, reducing the probability of her responding with despondency again.

When I visited her years later, I was pleased to note how she had grown. The details of her appearance, her ways of interacting and her general presentation were the same and yet spoke of transformation; a few details of interest added to her casual clothing replaced the look
of neglect. Her haircut, while still bushy, was tied with a ribbon that kept it out of her face and prevented it from looking unruly or unkempt. She was carrying a respectable handbag. The minimal differences transformed her appearance in such a way that it would no longer be a detriment to her social acceptance.

In her work with Dad, there was a small and quiet tilt to the trajectory that her life took. The tilt dramatically influenced her ability to grow in a positive way. Each mannerism, every detail of her looks, every comment she expressed gave testimony to the positive being she became.

Mr. Frank was another phantom limb patient. He had cancer of the leg and had experienced a hemipelvectomy years before. He was a very remarkable man who was smart, courageous, and humble. He dressed in dignified suits with the pant legs rolled up, and he walked with a set of aluminum canes. He was friendly and inviting, calling me to sit and talk with him when I came through the room. His conversations were captivating and enjoyable.

On our first encounter, he was forthcoming that the reason he had come was to overcome bouts of pain that recurred in the absent leg, robbing him of his hope for a future. He actively solicited my opinion as to whether Dad would be successful in the management of such pain. I responded that Dad forbade us from talking about a patient's problems outside of the office, but that he seemed to be able to help just about all of the patients he saw. Then Mr. Frank began to treat me in a concerned grandfatherly way, focusing in on my future and my interests.

After Dad had begun to talk with Mr. Frank, I was asked to come into the office. I expected the usual brief trance demonstration, but instead the experience was much more extensive. After Dad had asked me to show Mr. Frank a simple trance, he asked me to consider the ways that I feel my body, and to consider feeling those same sensations in a new and different way. Dad's trance work was always replete with comfort, and always involved some drifting and some
transformation of the senses, always involved an appreciation for inner strengths and the pleasure of new discoveries.

For a long time that afternoon in the office, Dad guided me in trance, exploring a multitude of alterations of senses, discovering one sensation and having it blend, or move into another, taking control of the find, and transforming it into another sensory value. There seemed to be endless possibilities of modifying and changing the information as it came in—time, intensity, wave pattern, adding color or sound, covering with imaginary blankets, remembering the sensations of touch and massage or temperature, modifying the sensations into another media. For the entire session Mr. Frank just watched me. I wasn’t sure whether he was in trance or not, but he was genuinely interested in the long exploration of possibilities.

Then before I was excused, Dad gave me my reminder and “pep talk” that some day I might find these discoveries to be useful. I had, after all, talked about becoming a nurse, and in that line of work I would surely come across people who had difficult pain that needed attention. And pain, when properly treated, always required a full battery of diagnostics before any change of sensation would be appropriate or effective. I could take my new discoveries and new skills, and keep them secure until I found the right time to put those skills to use.

Mr. Frank continued to come in and always spoke freely to me about his progress, as if I was “part” of the medical team. He expressed hope that he could reduce or eliminate the use of painkillers because he knew he could better manage the pain than he had been able to before. He explained that a hemipelvectomy was a far bigger adjustment that a mere leg amputation, and that as a “future nurse” I needed to understand the magnitude of the adjustment that a patient like him has already successfully achieved. He was outspoken about the initial post-operative pain, and the complications of various tasks such as using the toilet. He also talked about the natural fading of the initial pain coupled with the insidious creeping-in of the phantom pain, and how intractable the latter had been. He said with confidence that this,
too, would fade away, and he would be free to enjoy life with his family, and he expressed hope that some day I would be able to visit him at his own home. But he also said, in a remorseful way, that if the cancer returned, he didn't know whether he could tolerate it.

A year or two later, after a visit with Dad, Mr. Frank called me and arranged that I come visit him in his home. We spent an enthralling day in a nearby national park—a special gift to me. Not long after that, I learned that the cancer had returned and Mr. Frank had chosen to end his life.

I knew without doubt that his decision was not a hasty or a reckless one, but thought out with his own well-being and that of his family considered. I felt a great sense of loss, regret, sorrow, and frustration—feelings I discussed with Dad on the phone, and which he also felt. But I learned from that event that some problems cannot be resolved and that the end of life comes. More importantly, what is done is done, and the only useful direction is forward. I left my conversations with Dad with a resolve to enjoy every minute and every moment with a friend as if it may be the last.

Plants
Active participation in nature is an important part of the teachings that Dad promoted. Noticing, nourishing, and interacting with plants was part of our daily life as well as our growth over the years. Every side of our home had a collection of interesting plants. Some beautiful plants had distasteful elements when you got to know them better with the nose. Others had irritating qualities—the roses were hard to weed, the lantana pricked when it was trimmed, the pepper tree made you sneeze if you tried to climb it, and the pyracantha concealed thorns. All of their maintenance took place under Dad's watchful eye. Several of us planted our own Palo Verde trees in the ditch on either side of the house. Dad would generate great interest in the growth, particularly as to whether it was actions we had taken that encouraged rapid growth, or whether the plant was nourished by
circumstance. His interest included not only the events of planting
a new tree, but a genuine interest in daily watering activities.

Over the years, a series of extensive yard projects were undertaken.
Though the backyard was dominated by two large and productive
pecan trees, there was ample room for improvements. Like every
other aspect of our lives and recreation, Dad was active in the plan-
ning, the creation, and the enjoyment of these projects. Bert built a
fishpond in the northwest corner of the backyard, stacking a mound
of dirt behind it to make a hill for a cactus garden. In addition to the
fishpond, a picnic table was constructed by Allan and Bert, and also
a barbecue pit that we used for family picnics or birthday gatherings.
Literally every corner of the yard was regarded as fertile territory for
cultivation of familiar or unfamiliar species. Each brought joys and
changes on a daily basis.

After the move to Hayward Street, interest in new plants and trees
continued. With Dad’s support, I brought in a new element. In
Phoenix, there are few rainstorms, but the few that come are deluges.
The skies open up like a water faucet and the ground is saturated
quickly causing flooding. The water force would often rip full-grown
cacti right out of the sand, and float them downstream far from their
origin. Ocotillo and barrel cactus would lie helplessly on their sides
with the roots exposed and drying in the warm air. Unless they came
to rest in a spot that was particularly receptive to the growth of new
roots, they would dry up and die, a casualty of a short storm that no
one had noticed. I found this particularly fascinating because the
ocotillo is the plant that most boldly announces the extra drink of
water. It gets little green leaves on its long bare spiny arms, and puts
out bright torches of red flowers at the highest points. Now those
leaves and flowers took on a new meaning to me—they were not
merely flags of celebration for a long awaited drink, but they were
wreathes of mourning for comrades that had been washed away in the
brief flood.

Upon returning home after such a flood and consulting with Dad
(who always queried me in detail about my walks, and the season, and the plants and wildlife I had encountered), I was encouraged to return, to salvage what I could and give the casualties another chance for life in our own yard.

I waited eagerly for the rains and searched for survivors with a passion. Timing was critical—the rains were rare, and there was only a short interval before the life would dry and no longer regenerate. I was unable to handle the task alone, and found myself recruiting my brother Robert, friends, school acquaintances, and even students who were attending Dad’s seminars. When we would arrive home with our finds, Dad would stop whatever he was doing to come out and examine the specimen still in the car. The work was hard, exhaustive, and inevitably resulted in cuts, bruises, and needles under the skin. But by the end of the day we had the reward of a magnificent new specimen in the yard.

Ernest Rossi, now a renowned author and psychotherapist, helped me one week with a whole stand of barrel cactus planted near the alley. Once Robert and I planted a particularly large ocotillo in the yard of the office, and within two weeks it put out leaves and bloomed the most gorgeous set of blossoms I have ever seen. Another time a friend came across a saguaro arm lying in an unlikely place for growth, blown down by violent winds. He single-handedly rescued it, bringing it proudly to our doorstep.

Each occasion, Dad rushed out and supervised the positioning of our new specimens. They were welcomed into our yard with the revelry of being reunited with long lost friends. Dad instilled in us a pride in our cacti, most of which still thrive. Some have grown magnificently, taking over large sections of the yard.

Humor

Telling jokes, listening to puzzles, reading cartoons and cartoon books, looking for funny events around us—these are parts of life that were carefully cultivated. Dad’s favorite comics were Pogo, Little
Lulu, and Peanuts, although he also read Tubby, Donald Duck and Mickey Mouse, as well as Nancy & Sluggo and Blondie. We would often read in tandem in the evenings around the fire. It was fairly common, when one began laughing, to pass the humorous selection over to one another so that we could laugh together.

Dad loved to keep people guessing what the things in his office were. One unusual item was a dried skate fish that had been marginally modified to look like a dead devil. Another item was a carving of a person in mid-transition into a werewolf. There was an old clock in the back area, which ticked loudly, positioned so that you could not see the source but only hear the tick-tock.

More than anything else, Dad loved to create elaborate and unexpected scenarios that would amuse others in a good-natured way. He would sometimes spend months in preparation for a good laugh, enjoying each of the elaborate steps along the way.

When he wanted Grandma and Grandpa to visit, but felt they were too proud to just accept the tickets, he created a puzzle that resulted in the fare being sent to them. His limericks were another way that he would call humorous attention to qualities within himself or others—often referring to himself as “the Old Codger.”

Dad was the only member of the family who noticed my fascination with becoming familiar with all of the floorboards in the home on Cypress Street. In the office there were a few centrally located loose floorboards. Dad acquired a piece of driftwood, shaped vaguely like a shark, which was positioned atop a bookcase. He called me into the office and instructed me to, “Make it talk!” With a little practice I was able to discreetly step on the loose boards and make the driftwood rub against the wall. Shifting my weight, I was able to produce an eerie, dramatic sound that seemed to come directly from the “shark.” He would call me into his office in the middle of sessions with students, doctors, or even patients and say, “Roxie, isn’t it true that the shark can talk!” And I would obediently follow through with the joke that he had initiated.
One of the more elaborate jokes that he pulled on me was when my husband and I took a prolonged journey and sent our beloved dog Earnest to live with Dad and Mom. Earnest got in a fight with Betty Alice’s dog Tom, and ended up with a temporary eye injury, which Mom reported in detail in a letter that never arrived. Some time later Mom wrote only, “Earnest is completely recovered,” along with a photograph that displayed extensive bandages. I studied that photo for hours and hours trying to discern whether this was a setup for a joke that Dad was cooking up.

Dad was cooking up a joke all right, but not that one. My husband feels particularly strongly that a dog’s first duty is to “greet his masters.” When we returned home after our long journey, Dad waited until Earnest was in the midst of his emotional welcome, and then shouted, “Dad’s dog!” Earnest instantaneously abandoned us to sit next to my father. Then as Dad slowly wheeled himself into the next room, Earnest was at his side with rapt attention, totally ignoring us. For our long visit Earnest remained single-minded in his devotion while Dad grinned, chuckled, and literally roared with laughter at our dismay. For the rest of the Earnest’s life, my husband and I would frequently call him “Dad’s dog” as we honored the great practical joke.

Ironwood Collection

Beginning in the early seventies, Dad became acquainted with anthropologist Jim Hills, who had done quite a bit of work with the Seri Indians of Mexico. Hills had taken a special interest in the native craft of carving ironwood. Hills made periodic “buying” trips down to the Seri region, followed by “selling” trips to Arizona, where Dad would be one of his first stops. Dad was fascinated with many aspects of this art. He and Mom both had a love for Indians as well as Native art. The harsh conditions of the environment where the Seris lived and their adaptation to sparse resources added to the intrigue of the beauty they created.

Whenever Hills came, he would spread his new acquisitions all
over the living room, and talk at length about each piece. Hills knew all of the artists personally and took great pride in encouraging their refinement of skills. All of the pieces would be carefully wrapped and handled gingerly. The conversations between Hills and my father would go on for hours, sometimes days. There was discussion of each artist’s individual talents, an examination of the knife marks, marveling over the smooth surfaces and the shine, admiration of the fine work, mourning over cracks in the brittle wood, and evaluation of repairs. The rendition of animals was considered, whether they showed movement, and whether the beasts were actually present locally. Signatures would be examined and Hills would express his hopes for the future development of each artist’s talent. He would compare current works with earlier ones by the same artist in Dad’s extensive collection. Each piece was regarded as an element of the persona of the carver, as a sign of the craftsman’s learning and maturity. Sometimes innovations were shown: A collection of miniatures was made from the splinters of larger works, a moon, a musical instrument, and a pair of people. Hills would speculate on how these innovations would impact other carvers, and together they would speculate on how the array of wares would change before the next buying and selling journeys.

Finally Dad would make his choices for purchase. The new acquisitions would be ceremoniously positioned for immediately catching the eye. Then family members would come in to admire the new arrangement and the array as a whole. Hills’ final comments, always the same, would be that Dad’s contribution to the economy of this tribe was important. And Dad would respond that he took pride in owning “what is surely the most extensive ironwood collection in existence.”

Every evening Dad would sit and admire the carvings. Every day he would invite new people to come in and look at the marvelous collection. He never tired of explaining the inherent qualities of the wood: It is a desert wood that is exceptionally hard, so carving it is a tremendous challenge. He let the collection communicate his admira-
tion for a people who survived in harsh conditions, who found beauty all around them, and who found the inner resources to express that beauty in a way that could be shared with others.

Planning and Writing

Dad was an early riser and would get up in the quiet morning hours even after staying up late. He didn't seem to need as much sleep as the rest of us, and would often pick himself up with a short afternoon nap.

He arranged his office and his desk in the manner that allowed him to reach for a piece of paper to record his ideas and notes whenever they came to him, keeping a box of “scratch” paper that had only one side used. A special box a patient had given him held the stubs from pencils other people had “used up.” He encouraged us to bring home all of the pencil stubs from school, and the children competed to bring the most or the smallest pencil stubs that could still fit into the brass pencil holder he always wrote with.

It was as if his mind was always full of ideas that he could scarcely find the opportunity to get down on paper, or to refine and re-write in a more effective way. During every spare moment, he would drift to his desk and begin to capture those ideas on paper. But the ideas seemed to come faster than his ability to record them, and he could never catch up to the practical matter of getting all of them into articles for publication.

He was able to keep his patient records in his head and never needed extensive note keeping. He approached each encounter with the information of previous visits right in his mind, and only scribbled sparse records of vital statistics or other pending issues.

When he drafted a professional article, he would often call Mom into the office to develop the ideas a step further. She would usually stand, or lean over his shoulder, as opposed to most everyone else, who, when called into the office, immediately sat in the patient/student chair.
Canoe Trip

Dad never talked about his canoe trip unless you asked him. And if you did, he told only little bits of the adventure that shaped him. It was a personal time for him. But Bert has a real knack for seizing meaningful moments and planting little seeds for further conversation. I remember so many occasions when Bert would point to a photograph or a feature in nature, and make a remark like, “I like this picture because there were sycamores along the river bank when Dad made his canoe trip.” Then I was left with asking for more information, or letting that piece of the story just soak into my background frame of reference.

I grew to understand that Dad’s canoe trip did much to strengthen him physically. It also gave him the opportunity to regain his independence after the assault by polio. It was almost impossibly difficult to imagine that he could have the fortitude to embark alone. But he understood his own needs, and in the journey overcame a multitude of handicaps. The journey is a quiet backdrop for our family, which has tolerated, even encouraged, adventuresome travel among the young adults.

Creative Maintenance

Although Dad did not physically participate in the household maintenance tasks, he cultivated the energy in the children who had a tendency to want to do those chores. Some of the home improvement tasks were extremely large and successful. Bert worked with Allan and Robert to extend the garage complete with a bomb-shelter-quality doghouse (bomb-shelters were popular in the fifties) and a small greenhouse. It also had a large composting area where we recycled all our organic garbage. The new garage had room for the washing machine (we never had a clothes dryer) and enough room for a workbench in front of the car. The older structure was a narrow board design, but they managed to seam the concrete slab foundation flawlessly, and to join the two structures with remarkable professionalism.
The gravel driveway was replaced with a concrete one that Allan (who was deeply involved in the labor and has a talent for math) informs me, was 10 feet by 137 feet, and each bucket of cement was mixed in a small home mixer. The labor was hard, but as with the other projects that Dad supervised, he was there praising and admiring the work as it progressed. The end result was a very well-built structure, a monument to cooperative labor.

Dad was involved in every step of the planning, and his time and physical limitations were accepted as part of the configuration. I remember feeling how lucky we were to have Bert and Allan who were so willing and enthusiastic about doing this manual labor, and I even recognized how they had special and unique talents. What I now realize is that the encouragement that Dad provided and the collaborative effort were also special and unique elements that were exceptional.

The Question of Death
When I was in the fifth grade, I witnessed a baseball accident in which a friend died. I was quite troubled. The unwitting actions of another friend, the third baseman, had contributed to the accident, and the sudden finality raised all of the typical questions regarding the nature of life and what happens to one's being once life is extinguished.

We did not belong to a church, and Dad rejected the notion that accidents and crises such as this were part of God's plan. He was comforting in response to my questions, emphasizing that we cannot know or even imagine beyond the experiences we know of life. What exists before and after is so far beyond the scope of what our minds are able to grasp, that it is really counter productive for us to waste our time imagining and attempting to define the un-definable. Rather, it is our task, even our duty and responsibility to attend to the life in front of us, to make the best of it in every moment, especially with the understanding that it is a finite, unique, and fragile gift. This is where we need to focus our energy, our attention, our
questions, and our direction.

Dad guided me towards an inner exploration that would lead to more accurate discovery than debate and discussion with others. “Search your self, your history, your own origin—the story is all told in there,” I remember him telling me. “Anything that you hear from others has already been distorted by their own need to explain what cannot be explained. The truth, the answers, the information, the secrets are all within you. What is God? You can never know from asking another man, you have to look within your own self.” Between those curtains of darkness before birth and after death, we do have a short time, but the question of eternity lingers in my thinking and in my choices.

While in high school, I visited a vast number of churches and once found myself in a position where a teacher suggested I would make a better grade in class if I would continue to attend his church. I was torn by the ethical dilemma and sought Dad’s advice.

Dad explained that what I had witnessed was an example of the fallibility of organized religion. He encouraged me to hang in there, to learn all that I could about the ways that so-called religious people bend the rules in the name of religion. He told me to explore what this experience really taught me about the nature of God and man. It was my responsibility, he stressed, to re-examine my own values and to recognize just standards.

The most important lesson that I learned was that one need not depend on any outside definitions of good and bad, or morality or justice, but that we can find these directions within—and the compass that inner guidance provides is powerfully strong.

The Long Line of Students

Dad had cultivated interest in his work from the time he was a boy. Some of my aunts told me about occasions when he would demonstrate hypnosis to his siblings, or do experiments that he would later be thrilled to explain to anyone who would listen.
The trail of students coming to our doorstep continued throughout Dad’s life, and each serious student was enthusiastically welcomed. It was a phenomenon that was enriching to the family and advanced Dad’s work in ways that reached beyond what he was able to do alone. This is the true value of teaching—that good can be spread so much further.

The great work that was extended by students was not lost on Dad or on our family. I personally have developed a sense of duty and an obligation to share knowledge that can help people in many ways. It is not always possible to foresee how small acts of courtesy or kindness can impact people later, sometimes in very profound ways. I recognize that my own influence may positively affect untold numbers of nursing students and the patients in their practice. In conclusion, I have tried to live a philosophy of life that I learned from my father: Recognize your own unique situation and do the best you can with it.