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ROXANNA ERICKSON KLEIN

Foreword

Jay Haley is recognized worldwide as one of the most influential leaders in brief therapy and family therapy. He is lauded for his essential contributions to therapeutic approaches that focus on short-term, strategic interventions and symptom management. His numerous publications have informed generations of therapists, and his ideas have served as a catalyst for generative thinking.

Haley’s acclaim is balanced by his graceful and quiet demeanor, which reflects his cultivated skill of receding into the background. Haley has a powerful presence yet he emanates a Zen quality of just “being” present. What a paradox! This man who commands center stage seeks not to be noticed.

Haley’s students and colleagues have learned that each word he speaks is likely to be chosen carefully. Interactions with him involve a fundamental quality of being attentive and capturing the moment. Both his comments and words are worthy of careful consideration and review.

Yet, who really is Jay Haley? Where did he come from? How did he develop the expertise that has elevated him to the heights of his profession? While his own materials speak to the uniqueness of that contribution, this volume illuminates the impact he has made on the profession. But his achievements also can be understood by reflecting on the personal side of Jay Haley.

Jay Haley is a quiet man. He is supremely comfortable in a pensive, observational role. Unobtrusive grace and dignity define his posture; his style is decisive; his words are succinct. His humility is inviting. He relishes listening, watching, processing information, and then engaging others in deep and insightful yet lively discussions. In these conversations, Haley is animated, humorous, and reveals rare depths of understanding about society and the nature of life itself. It is these conversations that have given
rise to numerous projects, and cultivated a following of dedicated pupils and the respect of colleagues.

Haley is a generous professional. His enthusiasm and willingness to share ideas mark him as a man dedicated to advancing the field of therapy. He is artful in keeping the conversation on track. In his roles as researcher and clinician, he can be depended upon to avoid distraction and to address elements central to the topic at hand. In personal interactions, however, when questions are directed toward him, he often skillfully redirects conversation to professional matters, thereby diverting attention from himself. I consider Jay Haley to have been a cherished friend of the Erickson family and a personal friend for more than three decades, yet the Ericksons know little about those features that identify him as a part of a larger family system. We have always respected Haley’s choice of receding into the background, of redirecting conversation to topics of a less personal nature, and of living the moment. It is fitting, however, that we learn more of who he is, not only as a professional, but as a person. In so doing, perhaps we will gain an even better sense of how he came to be so unique and accomplished in the field that looks at family as an integral part of self.

Haley was conceived in a log cabin in Montana where the family was homesteading. The remnants of the cabin can still be found. From there the family moved on so his father could seek work in oil fields. Born in a small oil town in Wyoming, which has since disappeared, Haley quips, “At my birth the doctor was late, so my father delivered me while my mother said that he wasn’t doing it right. This probably led to the birth of family therapy.”

By 1927, the family moved again, this time to California. One of four children (two boys and two girls), Haley spent his childhood in Berkeley. After an interval of sheep ranching, his father went to work for the State in Sacramento. There, Haley attended high school. Both parents valued education and made it a high priority in their child rearing; his father was an accountant and his mother a teacher.

When he was nine, Haley developed painful arthritis in the hip socket of his left leg. A specialist advised his parents that he should wear a body cast for a year. The physician was an expert in working with children but as Haley explained, “My parents disagreed with the doctor’s advice.” The parents believed the hip was becoming frozen in the wrong position. They wanted the cast removed. When the doctor did not follow their advice, his parents cut the cast off themselves. This took considerable courage. They then took their young son to Shriners Hospital where they were told the hip was frozen and the condition had become unchangeable.

Haley, himself, never considered his stiff hip to be much of a handicap. A favorite family story tells of a policeman coming to the Haley door to tell his mother that young Jay was among a group of boys who were throw-
ing rocks at cars. His mother replied, "It cannot be my child. He's in a body cast." The policeman retorted, "He's the one up in the tree." Haley notes that his hip has not prevented him from doing much of anything. "I got through the army with it during the Second World War," he explained.

Haley's educational path was not linear, but one reflecting his innate ability to capture opportunities. By his own account, he was a young man without the drive to pursue a specific degree, but with the insight to understand his own captivating interests. He offered, "I attended UCLA with the intention of studying pre-law. While there I developed an interest in theater and got my degree in theater arts." He added, "I went off to New York and spent a year there aspiring to be a great playwright."

When his father died, Haley returned to California to help his mother. "I was told I could get a degree in Library Science from UC Berkeley in less than a year and then be guaranteed a job. I landed a job as a reference librarian and went on to get my Masters in Mass Communication at Stanford. I struggled for a while towards a doctorate degree, but then I got involved in full-time research with Gregory Bateson. I never went back from there."

Haley remembered a class at UCLA in which a professor raised the question "Why do people go to the movies?" The question piqued his interest in mass communication. In the course of those studies, he began the research that led to his first paper, "The Appeal of the Motion Picture" (1952). Haley's interest in films and movies was shared with Bateson, and then later with John Weakland who had been studying Chinese films. Haley retains his interest in films and shares that passions with his wife and colleague, Madeleine Richeport-Haley, who utilized film-making as a central element of her doctoral studies in anthropology.

Interest in films was only one component of his decade-long professional and personal relationship with the renown anthropologist and researcher, Gregory Bateson. Haley credits Bateson's unorthodox ideas as pivotal in the formation of his own thinking.

Haley readily identifies other mentors and colleagues in shaping his professional ideology. Among these is Milton Erickson who Haley described as "a psychiatrist different from all others." Their 17-year relationship began as part of the Bateson Project, then continued as clinical consulting, and blossomed into a deep mutual respect and friendship.

Haley also identifies as significant to his development lengthy intervals of study with Don Jackson, John Weakland, and William Fry. These contacts helped form the character, sense of humor, and the professional expertise that comprise Jay Haley.

From 1965 to 1975, Haley worked with Salvador Minuchin at the Philadelphia Child Guidance Clinic. He notes with respect that Minuchin was one of the first to focus on serving low-income people. Haley later
became director of Family Therapy Research at PCGC and subsequently co-founded the Family Therapy Institute of Washington, DC. During those years the approaches pioneered by Haley first generated the wide acclaim that they continue to receive.

Today, Haley resides in San Diego with his wife of ten years, Madeleine Richeport-Haley. She is an accomplished anthropologist who has worked and lived in a wide variety of cultures. They share common interests in the study of film, communication, and human interaction. Haley and Richeport are collaborating on the preservation of historic works as well as on the creation of a professional training film series on trance and therapy. They clearly enjoy the experiential aspects of their efforts. If one looks closely, one can catch a glimpse of a sarong-clad Haley, along with Balinese dancers, in a teaching film “Whither Family Therapy?”

When asked whether or not he has achieved his own professional goals, Haley replied, “If I knew what my professional goals were, I would have achieved them.” Then he added, thoughtfully, “I would still like to write a good play.” When queried about his professional career and its somewhat circuitous path, he reflected, “Given the opportunity, I would not have done anything different with my professional undertakings.”

I asked Haley of which accomplishment he is most proud. At first, he spoke of his publications and films. Then he paused. “I think my most significant contribution is breaking therapy down to a practice of specific skills — of simple ideas, skills, and techniques. This is quite different from the nondirective ideology the field had when I first got into it.”

And asked what he would most like to be remembered for, Haley smiled and quipped, “As being the oldest living teacher of therapy.”