

CASE REPORT

IN MEMORIAM

Robert E. Pearson, MD

By Roxanna Erickson-Klein

Robert Pearson passed away on August 11, 2013. A physician and educator, he made significant contributions to the advancement of clinical hypnosis. Pearson was a physician in a small town in Michigan where he once commented that the most pressing community health care need was attending to fractured bones resulting from ski accidents. In the early '60s, he became deeply interested in Milton Erickson's teachings of hypnosis, so much so that it altered his career path.

After approximately 10 years in general practice, Pearson took a psychiatric residency and developed expertise in pain management and self-hypnosis. Over the years his relationship with Erickson grew from that of mentee to one of friend and colleague. Hand-chosen by Erickson to carry on the legacy of introducing clinical hypnosis to professionals, Pearson began a long and influential career teaching many other health care providers the power of clinical hypnosis.

To illustrate the power of the unconscious to preserve life and health, Pearson often began his teaching with the story of his own injury. He was once hit by a falling brick from a construction site and suffered a depressed skull. Quickly assessing that he was the only physician in town, and by far

the most qualified to treat his injury, Pearson became his own healer. He recalled the historical account of Phineas Gage who had survived a traumatic head injury. Inspired, Pearson treated himself by calling forth unconscious resources. His story of personal injury and healing, annotated with the dent on his head, became his trademark opening in teaching.

Pearson and a dentist colleague, Kay Thompson, were the "younger" group that rose up to steer the helm of the fledgling American Society of Clinical Hypnosis during an interval of organizational transition. As the original founders of this professional group began to retire or step down, the goal was to facilitate a structure of self-renewing energy in which professionals could grow and develop. The times were tumultuous, as they often can be in that stage of organizational development, and Pearson was instrumental in ensuring ongoing stability and growth. For decades, the American Society of Clinical Hypnosis has thrived, and today remains at the forefront of hypnosis education.

Pre-deceased by a daughter, Barbara, Pearson was survived by his beloved wife, Karen, four sons, and a daughter. He died in Grand Rapids, Michigan at age 90. Those of us who had the privilege and pleasure to know him and be inspired by him mourn his passing. We all have been enriched with his contributions, both personally and professionally.

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