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I N T E R V I E W

Roxanna Erickson-Klein, PhD

By Marilia Baker

Roxanna Erickson-Klein, PhD, a multi-talented, multi-credentialed professional, is a clinician, author, and trainer/teacher who lectures, conducts workshops and webinars in the U.S. and internationally. She is a Registered Nurse, Licensed Counselor, and Licensed Chemical Dependency Counselor in private practice in Dallas, Texas. Roxanna has an impressive body of work, which includes co-editing with Ernest and Kathryn Rossi, the 16-volume set of The Collected Works of Milton H. Erickson. Having authored numerous journal articles, book chapters and forewords, Roxanna continues to be an active contributor to the Erickson newsletter, with more than



Roxanna Erickson-Klein, Ph.D.

100 articles to date. She is a member of the Erickson Foundation Board of Directors, and current president of a local chapter of the American Society of Clinical Hypnosis. She is Milton and Elizabeth Erickson's seventh child, and along with Alan, her husband of 44 years, she has five adult children.

Marilia Baker (MB): Thank you Roxanna, for the privilege of interviewing you. Your many contributions to the Erickson Foundation, the behavioral health field, and this newsletter are much appreciated. You are currently involved in several relevant endeavors, but there is one undertaking that is very close to your heart: The Collected Works of Milton H. Erickson. Could you please introduce us to the inner workings of such a massive enterprise?

Roxanna Erickson-Klein (REK): Currently, my biggest project is the ongoing effort to extend The Collected Works. My father was a prolific writer, but not so good at the overall assem-

blage of his works. I hope to someday have the written and audiovisual resources organized in such a fashion that a serious student can easily access all the materials, or at least most of them. Fortunately, Ernest and Kathryn Rossi share my interest in preserving my father's writing. They have worked tirelessly with me and with the Foundation to publish works that were previously out of print. Ernest Rossi made a major contribution by updating materials with discussions about neurobiology and genomics. We are now in the process of digitizing the 16-volume set for download, which will hopefully be available by the year's end. A search engine is envisioned to be part of the project.

MB: How does this archival endeavor and other volunteer services you offer to the Foundation fit with your professional work in Dallas?

REK: One of my father's students once remarked: "All [the] Ericksons seem to work hard at their fun." This is true. All of my siblings are productive individuals. All of us like to make active contributions to education, to the world around us, and to the communities in which we live. While it is challenging to integrate my volunteer services in Phoenix with a professional career at my home base in Dallas, this volunteer work is something I have wanted to do. I recognize that as a child of Milton Erickson I've had unique experiences and access to information that others have not. This brings with it a sense of responsibility to contribute to archival efforts. I am fascinated with organizational development; my doctorate degree is in public administration. I have a special interest in how an organization is run, as well as the clinical aspects of medicine. My clinical career has gone further than my administrative career, but that has been

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INTERVIEW*continued from page 1*

simply a matter of time and opportunity.

I have a part-time private counseling practice in Dallas, Texas. The uniqueness of individuals never ceases to amaze me. Since 1982, I have also been active in the North Texas Society of Clinical Hypnosis. Currently, I am serving as president, and I have established a great local teaching program. The value of having a cohort of professionals with similar interests in hypnosis is immeasurable. I am especially committed to co-teaching; it is a way of imparting knowledge that takes extra effort. However, co-presenting can significantly extend the reach of information. I am hopeful that my online work established through international webinars will continue to grow and thrive. My aspiration is to provide face-to-face educational opportunities for distant audiences. I have been successful in setting up a few internet teaching series through the North Texas Society, as well as setting them up on my own. I consider this transition to online availability to be especially important since the original Ericksonian faculty has aged. While I still enjoy traveling, I am now 68 years old, and it is time to work with others in ways that will meet interests a decade from now.

MB: How would you describe your therapeutic approaches to hypnosis and psychotherapy?

REK: Of course, I consider myself to be Ericksonian! Sometimes I joke that “I am Dr. Erickson, just not the famous one.” I also joke that “My reputation precedes me and exceeds me.” This double entendre refers to the expectation of many patients and colleagues that I embody the talents of my father. I learn from him every day of my life. Even today, I can hear his voice and words guiding me with difficult decisions. Most aspects of my therapeutic work are 100 percent based on what I learned directly from my father. However, it is also important to recognize that I am different from him; I sometimes disagreed with him. Now with the benefit of hindsight, the close familiarity I have with his ideas has offered me a freedom to question, and fortunately today there is far more information than was previously avail-

able. One of the big differences between my father and me is that I spend more time and effort on cognitive explanations. I trust the conscious mind, as well as the unconscious. We all know that there are limits to conscious capacity to instigate change; a good part of my practice includes those who have tried and failed to consciously overcome a limitation.

People seek psychotherapy generally because they don’t know how to resolve certain issues that exist in their lives. I assess their capacity and readiness for change, based on three pivotal aspects: hope, meaning, and ability. My task as a therapist is to assure that the individual takes responsibility for initiating and maintaining needed changes. I undertake this by supplementing areas of deficit with suggestions, ideas, information, and experiential learning. My forward looking, strength-based, experiential approach that engages trust in one’s unconscious resources, along with a natural tendency to strive for well-being and my integrative look at a patient’s whole life, all come directly from my father. Acceptance of the fallibility of memory, coupled with a strong idea that we can never fully understand the origin of pathology, is also based on his ideas. It is generally more effective to look forward than to look back. Having a professional cohort that includes others who come from different ideological foundations, offers a forum for honest self-reflection and questioning – both of which are essential. Open discussion offers a path for ongoing growth, as well as a context for a realistic evaluation of one’s own work.

MB: How do you integrate your nursing background and interests in medical matters into your therapeutic methodology?

REK: My nursing background, interests in medical matters, and helping individuals overcome addictions, have all shaped my clinical practice. Like many of my colleagues, I work almost miraculously well with some patients, but make little progress with others. I am oriented toward short-term therapy and symptom resolution. And while I recognize that symptom management does not necessarily resolve underly-

Having a professional cohort that includes others who come from different ideological foundations, offers a forum for honest self-reflection and questioning – both of which are essential.

ing problems, it repositions individuals to more effectively self-direct. I consider key aspects of my work to be a combination of direct and indirect permissive suggestions, coupled with encouragement and support for patients to assume full self-responsibility for needed change. I constantly review with my patients whether expected progress is made in a timely way, and credit them with the change that has occurred, thus promoting active involvement to further advance in the desired direction.

Hypnosis is my primary therapeutic tool, but I do not use formal hypnosis with every patient. I intentionally use informal aspects of hypnotic conversation to offer impactful remarks; I use more formal hypnosis strategically. Patients expect results from trance, so I capitalize on that expectation. My suggestive style is to invite the patient to listen or not to listen, and to enter a healing state in which they trust their own internal resources. The hypnotic state facilitates exploration of resources within and the building of healthy new associations. On re-awakening, I rarely have subjects recount “what happened” in the trance state. Instead, I invite them to say only what they feel they need to say. I find that the verbal review of the trance experience brings it up to conscious awareness and de-potentiates further work that continues beyond the therapeutic encounter.

MB: Regarding approaches, who has influenced you the most?

REK: Like my father, I seek to learn from everything and everyone. Higher education and science were emphasized in the Erickson family household. There was also much emphasis placed on learning from those who have a different way of doing things. There is no better source of information than role models to demonstrate what one does or does not want

to become. As the seventh of eight children, the benefits of siblings with their differing perspectives, combined with guidance from our parents, provided me a rich continuity during my formative years. We were encouraged to enjoy friendships with others who were different from us, including teachers, neighbors, visitors from foreign countries, and even Dad’s patients. There is no better source of information about one’s value as a health provider than the patients themselves. And some of those friendships that we formed a long time ago are still vital today. I was also quite close to three of my aunts, and deeply appreciated my grandparents.

Professionally, I was influenced by a diverse group. In the 1970s, being of similar age to many of Dad’s most dedicated students, I felt a kinship with many of them. When colleagues or students came to learn, it was a two-way street. He used the opportunity for investigation of the margins of what was clear in his ideas, listening to others’ questions to help revisit, revise, or expand understandings. One of the most important lessons I learned from my father regarded his own professional career. He never promoted himself; he only promoted his ideas. The fundamental premises and ongoing evolution of his ideas took place over his lifetime, and were always being advanced. Now that he has been dead for nearly 40 years, it is his younger colleagues who have continued with the ongoing refinement. The passing of wisdom on to the younger generations must continue!

My father worked closely with many colleagues in the ’60s and his office door was often left open so that I or my siblings could sit in if we chose. Many times, he called on me to demonstrate hypnotic phenomena, but mostly I sat quietly on the periphery of discussions, soaking in the conversa-

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INTERVIEW*continued from page 22*

tions among the professionals. After the office discussions, Dad's colleagues, who were often visitors at our home, sometimes initiated conversations with me about my impressions and reactions.

Drs. Bernie Gorton, Margaret Mead, Marion Moore, Frank Pattie, Leonard Ravitz, Kay Thompson, and T.E.A. von Dedenroth, were among colleagues that serendipitously I had the opportunity to learn from, prior to my awareness that my father's ideas were of historical significance. Over the decades, I have seen many of the individuals with whom he shared his ideas, rise to a prominence of their own. In the '60s, I took note of his efforts to promote Bob Pearson and Kay Thompson as emissaries for teaching hypnosis through the American Society of Clinical Hypnosis. In the '70s, while I was in nursing school and living at home, my father's work with Jay Haley, Herb Lustig, Jane Parsons, Sid-

ney Rosen, Ernest Rossi, and Jeffrey Zeig occupied much of his time. Around this time, I actively participated in many of his teaching sessions.

For my father, it was the ideas, concepts, principles, and message he carried that were most important. He became committed to entrusting his colleagues as torchbearers who could carry on his uniquely powerful ideas beyond the time in which he himself could carry them. As emissaries of his, those advancements in ideas and principles are what each of us carries forth today.

MB: In addition to your work with the Erickson Historic Residence in Phoenix, described elsewhere in this issue (page 4), you also have a valuable history of significant contributions to this newsletter, which is an influential arm of the Erickson Foundation and reaches thousands of professionals worldwide. Would you describe some of

The newsletter has a rich history of skilled volunteerism, which began with Bill O'Hanlon, and has been carried forward by Michael Yapko, Dan Short, and Richard Landis. During the early 1990s, my sister, Betty Alice, and I co-edited the newsletter for more than five years.

your most meaningful experiences as a volunteer editor and contributor?

REK: The newsletter is indeed influential, with extensive circulation in print and on line. The newsletter has a rich history of skilled volunteerism, which began with Bill O'Hanlon, and has been carried forward by Michael Yapko, Dan Short, and Richard Landis. During the early 1990s, my sister, Betty Alice, and I co-edited the newsletter for more than five years. Since its inception, I have contributed, writing articles, interviews, book re-

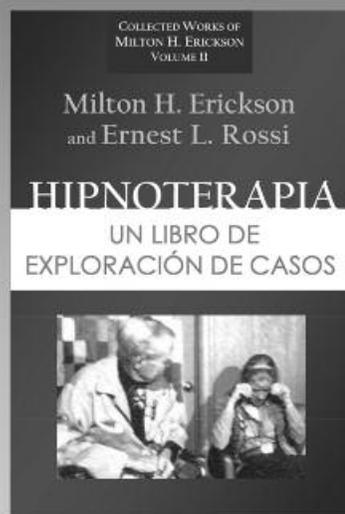
views, archive news, eulogies, and columns.

The Foundation owes much gratitude to the newsletter's current executive editor, Richard Landis, and to editors Charles Simpkins for the book reviews, Eric Greenleaf for Case Report, John Lentz for In the Spirit of Therapy, and you Marilia Baker, for The Power of Two and Introducing the Institutes. The Foundation is also appreciative of all other contributors whose ongoing skilled volunteer work

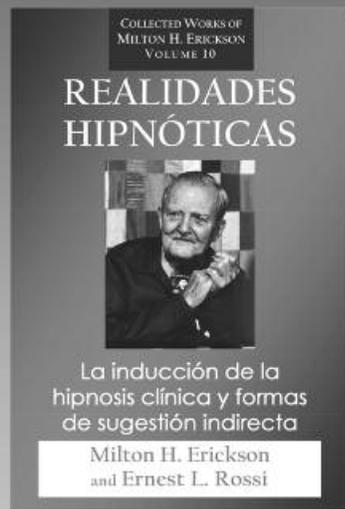
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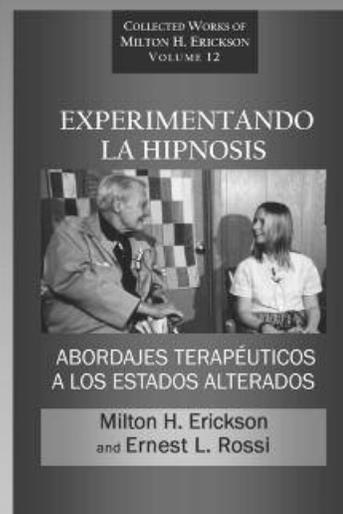
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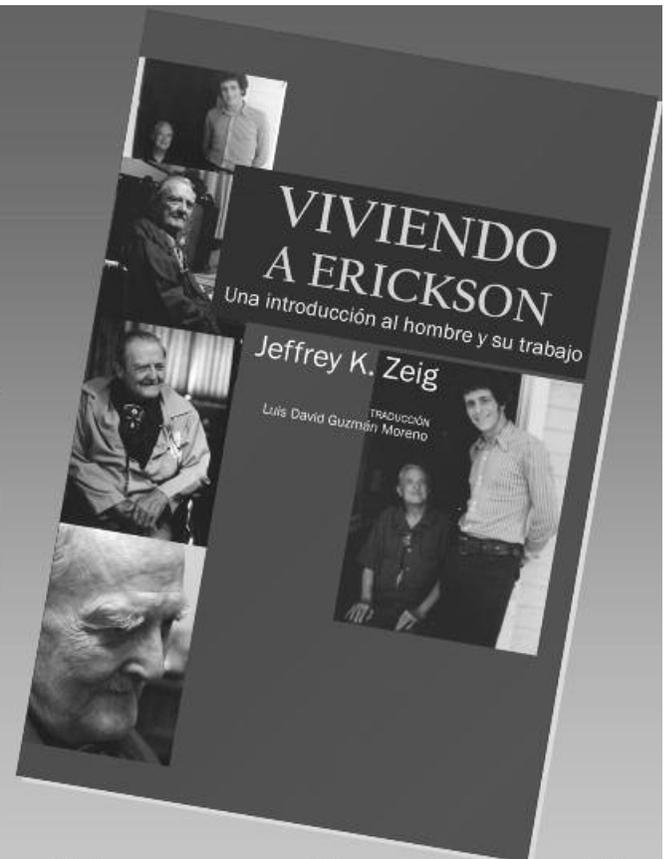
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continues to enrich this publication. Being an editor provided me with opportunities to recognize many individuals whom I value for their contributions to the study of hypnosis. I very much enjoy being part of this dedicated team that offers information to professionals worldwide.

MB: How would you like to be remembered?

REK: Erickson's interchange of ideas was profoundly impactful, but now it has come to my attention that some of his colleague's and contributor's names remain prominent, while others are lost to history. We are lucky that some audio and video materials of my father are preserved. In his day, remembrance of one's specific role in dissemination of ideas was kept through the written word. Those professionals most remembered are those

who left written works. While I long to do more writing of my own, right now I am in a career phase where I am focusing on my clinical work and teaching and training.

I enjoy being an active, productive member of society, surrounded by friends and family. I rest at night knowing that I am true to my values and that I give all that I have to give. I appreciate the joy of watching the flowers open in the spring. I love feeling the sun's heat on my skin in the summer. I feel a spiritual connection within, around me, and through me. Life is not about me. It extends through the generations, past and future. We all have gifts and we all have vulnerabilities; we are here to learn together from the experiences we share.

MB: Thank you Roxanna for this enlightening conversation!

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*In the desert of Sonora, on the branch of a tree,
Sat a noble eagle gazing to sea.
Wings forged from iron, a shadow was sown
Within was the hope of dreams not yet known.*

*Eagle readied for flight looking far and away.
Tree branch grew light, the shadow did stay
A journey of discovery into the sun;
The shadow, the eagle, and the tree are one.*

*With son on our shoulders
Feet fresh with do,
We embrace true friendship
and reach out for new.*

Roxanna Erickson-Klein

Interested students and professionals can learn more about Roxanna Erickson-Klein and her projects by visiting: www.erickson-klein.org

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