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Montreal
Ideas and Stories from the XXI Congress of Medical and Clinical Hypnosis
Roxanna Erickson-Klein, PhD, is a clinician and author who conducts international webinars. She is a Registered Nurse, Licensed Counselor, and Licensed Chemical Dependency Counselor in private practice in Dallas, Texas, USA. Roxanna’s impressive body of work includes co-editing with Ernest and Kathryn Rossi, the 16-volume set of The Collected Works of Milton H. Erickson. Author of numerous journal articles, book chapters and forewords, she is a member of the Erickson Foundation Board of Directors and current president of the North Texas chapter of the American Society of Clinical Hypnosis. The seventh child of Milton and Elizabeth Erickson, Roxanna and Alan, her husband of 44 years, have five adult children.

Thank you Roxanna, for the privilege of interviewing you. Your many contributions to hypnosis and behavioral health are much appreciated worldwide. Would you please tell us about your current projects?

This is a good place to start. A couple of years ago, a multilingual therapist, Alejandra Diaz, and I took on the project of translating Consuelo Casula’s outstanding Gardeners, Princesses, and Porcupines: Metaphors for Personal and Professional Evolution a worldwide classic regarding the construction and potential of therapeutic metaphors. Our commitment to translating from the original Italian into English has been to adhere as strictly as possible to the completeness of translation we seek. We are looking forward to completing and publishing our endeavor within the upcoming year. Another recent project, already launched, is an audiobook of the diary my father kept during the canoe trip he undertook to further enhance his recovery from poliomyelitis. My nephew Lance Erickson and I made it into a download: The Canoe Diary – “celebrating the legacy of Milton H. Erickson’s legendary true American adventure down the Mississippi River in 1922”.

http://catalog.erickson-foundation.org/item/canoe/

Excellent! You are also involved in other endeavors, one very close to your heart: The Collected Works of Milton H. Erickson. Tell us of the inner workings of such massive enterprise.

My biggest project is the ongoing effort to extend The Collected Works. My father was a prolific writer but not good at overall assemblage. Someday I hope his written and audiovisual works will be organized in a fashion for students to easily access. Ernest and Kathryn Rossi share my interest in preserving my father’s writing. Together, we have worked with the Foundation to publish works previously out of print.

Ernest Rossi made major contributions updating materials about neurobiology and genomics. We are now in the process of digitizing the 16-volume set for download. Volume One, including a search engine, is expected by this year’s end.

How does this effort fit with your other work?
A student of my father remarked, “All Ericksons seem to work hard at their fun.” This is true! All my siblings are productive individuals. Each enjoys making active contributions to education, to the world around us, and to the communities where we live. As a child of Milton Erickson I had unique experiences and access to information that others have not. This brings an enormous sense of responsibility.

Since 1982 I have been active in the North Texas Society of Clinical Hypnosis; I am now president. The value of professionals gathering to share interests in hypnosis is immeasurable. It is essential to have a cohort to provide forum for self-reflection and questioning. Open discussion by others with different ideological foundations offers a path and context for responsible evaluation of one’s own work.

I am especially committed to co-teaching as a way of imparting knowledge to the younger generation. Despite extra effort, co-presenting multiplies reach. I am hopeful my international webinars will continue to thrive and provide face-to-face educational opportunities for distant audiences. An online transition is broadly 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.

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

Of course, I am Ericksonian! I sometimes joke “I am Dr. Erickson, just not the famous one” or “My reputation precedes me and exceeds me.” This refers to expectations of many that I embody my father’s talents. It is essential to recognize I am different; that sometimes I disagreed with him.

With the benefit of hindsight my familiarity with his ideas offers freedom to question and incorporate information not previously available. I still learn from him every day of my life; even today I hear his voice guiding me through difficult decisions. But my style is my own. I offer cognitive explanations to a greater degree than he did, trusting both the conscious mind and the unconscious.

I maintain a private practice in which the uniqueness of individuals never ceases to amaze me. Many patients have tried and failed to consciously overcome limitations. I assess their capacity and readiness for change, based on three pivotal aspects: hope, meaning, and ability. I emphasize their individual responsibility for initiating and maintaining needed changes. I seek to supplement areas of deficit with suggestions, ideas, information, and experiential learning.

My integrative approach comes directly from my father and involves all aspects of life. I am forward-looking, strength-based, experiential, and engage of trust in unconscious resources. I strive to stimulate a natural movement towards well-being. It is generally more effective to look forward than back. My 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.
Hypnosis, used strategically, is my primary therapeutic tool but, I do not use formal hypnosis with every patient. I intentionally use metaphors and hypnotic conversation to offer impactful remarks. Patients expect results from trance so I capitalize on 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-arousal, 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 depotentiates further work continuing beyond the therapeutic encounter.

Who influenced you the most?

While higher education and science were emphasized in the Erickson household we sought to learn from everything and everyone. As seventh of eight children, guidance from parents and differing sibling perspectives provided a rich continuity. Our parents encouraged us to enjoy friendships with others who were different, including teachers, neighbors, foreign visitors, and even Dad’s patients. Some friendships formed a long time ago are still vital. There is no better source of information about one’s value as a health provider than patients themselves.

I was influenced by a diverse group. Being of similar age to many of Dad’s most dedicated students, I felt a kinship. His office door was often left open so that I or my siblings could enter 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 conversations among professionals. 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, listening to others’ questions to revisit, revise, or expand understandings. After discussions, Dad’s colleagues, who were often visitors at our home initiated conversations about my impressions. An essential lesson I learned from my father was that he never promoted himself; he only promoted his ideas.

The concepts, principles, and message he carried were most important; the fundamental premises and ongoing evolution of his ideas took place over his lifetime and were always being advanced.

He entrusted his colleagues as torchbearers to carry his powerful understandings beyond when he himself could carry them. 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! As emissaries, those advancements in ideas and principles are what each of us carries forth today.
How would you like to be remembered?

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

(A version of this Interview was published by The Milton H. Erickson Foundation Newsletter Vol.38, n.2, August 2018)