

*A Tribute to Elizabeth Moore Erickson: Colleague Extraordinaire, Wife, Mother, and Companion*

By Marilia Baker M.S.W.

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The gleam of a universe of meaning and experience emerges from the sensitive crystal of Marilia Baker's newly released book, *A Tribute to Elizabeth Moore Erickson, Colleague Extraordinaire, Wife, Mother, and Companion*. The book is an intimate slide show of significant people and events, all benefiting from the nurture of Elizabeth Erickson. With subtle and evocative prose, Baker encourages the reader to envision a personal world and to be enriched through the process, in authentic Ericksonian style. First published in Spanish (2003) and Portuguese (2004), the English version brings this beautiful tribute to English-speaking readers.

Doña Elizabeth, as the author respectfully calls her, played a vital role in the evolution of the Ericksonian method. Baker shows how Elizabeth Erickson's warmth and support in close partnership with her husband was pivotal at each phase of

Erickson's work. She complemented him and coordinated the Erickson legacy in every way. The author points out that although Doña Elizabeth chose to stay in the background, she "made sacred, transformed, made beautiful, a kaleidoscope of forms." (75) She also brought her graceful strength and optimistic spirit to the unique challenges of Dr. Erickson's illness, while sharing in an exemplary marriage and fostering the development of eight diverse and creative children. She instilled a lasting concern in her family for proper preparation, order and sequence. She brought forth home, or in Greek, *oikos*, from her intimate dance with him and their children, during their life together. And many dimensions of this are shown for us to reflect on, as we wander through the crystal facets of time in the chapters of Elizabeth Erickson's life.

The book is divided into three parts. Part One weaves the tapestry of Elizabeth Erickson's life beginning with her childhood years as a lover of the circus. The author goes on to the first moment of courtship, when Milton spotted Elizabeth as he looked out the window and saw her walking. Then and there he declared with certainty that he was going to marry her! (52) The chapters interweave Doña Elizabeth's varied roles, as psychology student, author, editor, proofreader, hypnotic subject, wife, hostess and mother. And she excelled at them all in many unexpected ways. Her son Bert, from Dr. Erickson's first marriage, expressed his delight in his

new mother: “She can even catch a ball!” She adeptly worked alongside her husband at the dining room table to help produce the *American Journal of Clinical Hypnosis* and facilitate the comfort of many patients who Dr. Erickson treated in their living room.

Each chapter is seasoned with intimate stories and disclosures that communicate the rich flavor of the development of Doña Elizabeth, the Erickson family, and the Ericksonian method. The book shows how this couple used the everyday, simple events of life as springboards to creative potentials and significant contributions. One typical example among many in the book is how the Erickson children were raised with a spirit of imagination. According to Betty Alice, “Mama connected it to our dreams.” (75) A unique method of facilitating imaginative discovery from enjoyable experiences informed Erickson’s work, such as when he challenged a patient to climb Squaw Peak: the dream opens a reality! There were other, less familiar learning experiences offered for other opportunities, as well.

Part Two is a personal interview with Doña Elizabeth about her life experiences. The interview includes a compilation of discussions with the author spanning the years 2000 and 2001 as well as an earlier, unpublished interview conducted by Shirley Bliss Ph.D. in 1988. Doña Elizabeth reveals her husband’s

generosity with his talents, for the benefit of many community organizations large and small. He helped the Seventh Step Foundation for ex-convicts, made frequent visits to Mr. Bernard Roer's Bird Farm, and offered therapeutic assistance to help Mr. and Mrs. Tex O'Leile who took in homeless teenage boys. Elizabeth Erickson helped in her own way. Whenever she donated shirts to ex-convicts she always included a necktie to help encourage them in a better direction Doña Elizabeth comments on the many fascinating people who collaborated with Erickson, along with their wives who she got to know quite well. She includes her close friendship with Margaret Mead. She also reveals interesting and little-known personal details about her husband, such as his love of magic and an insider view of how purple became his signature color!

Part III is an album of pictures that allows us all to browse through the Erickson family scrapbook. The photographs range over an entire lifespan of experiences, including the "Fabulous Erickson Skirt." The master for the pictures on this unique piece of clothing was a silk-screen portrait in blue tiles of Dr. Erickson, which hung on the wall in the kitchen for many years! A recent full-color picture of Mrs. Erickson on her 88<sup>th</sup> birthday, April 22, 2003 rounds out the collection.

The last section of the book is the Appendix. First are verbatim speeches and addresses Elizabeth Erickson presented or had read for her at Ericksonian conferences in 1993, 1994, 2000, and 2003.

The next Appendix, Laurel King M. Ed.'s account of her "pilgrimage" to visit Dr. Erickson's office and afternoon spent with Elizabeth Erickson will light up memory circuits for those who studied at the Erickson home in Phoenix and will give everyone else a felt-sense of the experience. The final Appendix includes a list of Elizabeth Erickson's professional papers. She wrote about her husband as one might expect. But she also authored and co-authored many investigative articles concerning hypnosis, hypnotic perception, hallucination, time-distortion, and post-hypnotic behavior, as a few examples.

Marilia Baker's book, *A Tribute to Elizabeth Moore Erickson* not only informs but also inspires. In encountering the best of humanity, through the exemplary life of Elizabeth Moore Erickson, we are stirred to new potentials that we might not even know are there, true to the Ericksonian way.

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