

INTRODUCTION (Full text)

In: A Tribute to Elizabeth Moore Erickson: Colleague Extraordinaire, Wife, Mother and Companion. (2004) Alom Editores: Mexico; pp. 21-23.

“Only connect! That was the whole of her sermon. Only connect the prose and the passion... and both will be exalted; and human love will be seen at its height. Live in fragments no longer... Only connect!

E.M. Forster

Interviewing Elizabeth Euphemia Moore Erickson has been an extraordinary honor and privilege. In addition to being Milton Hyland Erickson's wife, companion, caregiver, mother to his eight children, partner and fellow researcher, hypnotic subject, editor, assistant writer, and proofreader, Elizabeth Erickson witnessed, participated in, and helped shape the integration of hypnosis and psychotherapy in the second half of the 20th Century.

In addition to the professional role she performed, Elizabeth Erickson collaborated with her husband and esteemed colleagues over the decades. She was also the “chief executive officer” of a busy household, raising her lively family of eight children, including the three he brought into the marriage and the five they had together. Their 1936 marriage was synergistic and happily successful. Together they found creative solutions to the everyday family issues that emerged along the way, and together they faced the difficult challenges of a professional life compounded by times of severe physical illnesses suffered by Dr. Erickson.¹

¹ See: The MHE Foundation Website: www.erickson-foundation.org/health.htm for a detailed account of Erickson's physical challenges, authored by Elizabeth Erickson: “About Erickson: His Physical Struggles.” Originally published in: Zeig, J. K. (1985). *Experiencing Erickson: An Introduction to the Man and His Work*, pp. 7-12.

The Erickson children: Bert, Lance, Carol, Betty Alice, Allan, Robert, Roxanna, and Kristina are engaged in a variety of professions – academics, farming, medical arts, and mathematics. The progeny is immense: the Ericksons have had 34 grandchildren (one is deceased), 49 great-grandchildren, and, to date, 3 great-great-grandchildren. Mrs. Erickson *does her best to keep track of them all!*

For many years now, I have had a strong professional curiosity about Dr. Erickson's work, particularly about the one developed in the second half of his life. Recently, I had the opportunity to learn about his early years in Arizona through the direct testimony of lifetime companion, his wife Elizabeth Moore Erickson. This opportunity has been immensely enriching to me as a person and as a clinician.

One of the reasons that led me to this project was the firm belief that I could be a better Ericksonian psychotherapist by closely understanding the role carried out by Elizabeth Erickson, side by side with her famous husband. My wish has been to be a better professional – capable of creating, inventing, putting together, and applying my own *naturalistic* interventions. And, in the process, to learn about my own self, while reflecting more deeply about my own life and about all that surrounds me by always *observing, observing, observing*. This is also what I always teach my students: to observe and to appraise, to assess, to see, to become aware and very carefully pay attention to all the smallest details, the 'minimal' cues surrounding their client's field, as a condition *sine qua non* to creating and developing good interventions.

As a multicultural, multi-lingual hypnotherapist living and working with multicultural communities in these United States, I attempt to be always aware and vigilant to the cultural nuances of each community. Accurate observation is a

helpful skill. Therefore, the hypnotic language I utilize will be appropriate, and adequate to each of these cultures. In other words, in addition to tailoring the therapy to the uniqueness of each client, always alert to his or hers emotional language, I also tailor the therapy according to the uniqueness of the client's culture of origin (e.g. Anglo-Saxon, Mexican-American, Latin-American, Brazilian or Portuguese).

In describing the physical challenges Milton H. Erickson faced throughout his life, Ernest Rossi emphasizes how he turned them around for his benefit: " The misunderstandings, inconsistencies, and confusions that arose because of those deviations from the common everyday world view (as dyslexia, musical tone-deafness, color blindness) might have inhibited another person's mental functioning. In the young Milton, however, these differences apparently had the opposite effect: they stimulated wonderment and curiosity." ²

Milton H. Erickson had a fundamentally naturalistic orientation. He believed therapeutic work begun in the consulting office *must* continue "out there" in everyday life. His techniques included the utilization of common, everyday trance phenomena, and the use of directives to elicit people's unique resources. Elizabeth Erickson shared these views. Her intellectual curiosity, professional acumen, indefatigable dedication, and devotion to a modern genius, in an everyday married life of almost 44 years – about 16,000 days – gives her an inextricable genius of her own.

My introduction here of the *concept*: "approximate number of days" the Ericksons spent together has to do with the enlightenment *principle* expressed in Eastern philosophical teaching that one "sees truth through our everyday eyes".³ Or, by extension: *experiencing truth with our everyday self*. I have been long interested

² Rossi, E.L. et al (Eds.) *Healing in Hypnosis. The Seminars, Workshops, and Lectures of Milton H. Erickson*. Vol. I, p. 5.

³ Mills, J. C. and Crowley, R. J. *Therapeutic Metaphors for Children and the Child Within*, p. 8.

in the phenomenology and the psychology of everyday life – that is, how do people go about their myriad everyday tasks and interactions without any attempt at explanation and how they, on the other hand, give meaning and purpose to those same everyday tasks and interactions.

A couple's quintessential opportunity to experience this enlightenment is through giving *meaning* and *purpose* to each of those days spent together *and* separate, each one in their respective tasks of co-creating with nature and society. Erickson's developmental view of the individual and of the couple's life cycle – as well as of their psychological journey – indicates this profound and naturalistic "knowing".