

Interview With Rubin Battino, MS, Mental Health Counseling
2 May 2018

(Responding to the questions listed below.)

1. How I got Involved with Hypnosis: I became interested in hypnosis after reading Bandler and Grinder's first two books on "The Structure of Magic" followed by their two books on analyzing how Milton Erickson worked ("Patterns I and II"). The latter two books led me to getting in touch with the Erickson Foundation. They told me that there was an Erickson Society affiliated with them in Dayton, OH, a short distance from where I live. I got in touch with Tom South who was the leader of this group. They kindly let me join them. For many years there were monthly meetings with demonstration of the uses of hypnosis by members, and also watching Erickson movies and listening to Erickson tapes. I soon became the co-leader of this group.

2. "Ericksonian Approaches" with Tom South: On one of those early days I suggested to Tom (a clinical psychologist working in the forensic unit of the Dayton mental hospital) that we write a text on how to do Ericksonian hypnosis and psychotherapy. We each wrote separate chapters, and also got several knowledgeable therapists to contribute specialty chapters. Since I came from an academic background (professor chemistry for many years) I was more interested in writing a training text book (than a traditional book with lots of case studies). We eventually published a second edition.

3. Important qualities of a Good Therapist: The first is to be a good listener. The second is to be flexible and adapt to the individual needs of your clients. Rapport building is essential as the literature on *the therapeutic alliance* indicates. If your clients do not feel comfortable being with you and trusting you, then you are in trouble. Another quality is being unpredictable. That is, if you work in only one style or approach, then what do you do when that does not work with a particular client? It has been said of Milton Erickson that he developed a new approach with each client to be in phase with their particular lifestyle and way of thinking and behaving. I also believe that as therapists we often are too careful and not confrontive enough, especially when a direct confrontation or declaration or direction is what is needed. Again, if you study Erickson's case histories you will find many examples of his almost ordering client's to do things in different ways.

4. Personal and Professional Background: I grew up in the Great Depression and was very aware of the need to be able to have a career where I was certain that I would be able to earn a living. In high school and college I was fascinated by psychology, chemistry (I took two years of chemistry in high school), and writing. I could not figure out how I would earn a living as a psychologist or in the field of English. So, I majored in chemistry while taking many courses outside that area. After earning graduate degrees in chemistry (Duke University), I worked in industry for one year and then pursued an academic career. You might be interested that when I was in graduate school I got involved in theater and acted in two plays: I had a supporting role in the first one and the

lead in the second one.

My interest in psychotherapy was sparked by being in therapy with a Gestalt therapist, and then being invited as the only lay person in the group to join the first Gestalt Therapy training group in southwest Ohio. I got my master's degree in counseling in 1978 and have since pursued activities both as a professor chemistry (until I retired in 1995) and then more actively in private practice and in teaching psychotherapy at my university. Subsequently, I gave presentations and was on the faculty of many professional meetings, and also did training and workshops in the U.S. and abroad. (In September of 2017 I did an all-day workshop for the Quest Institute in London.) As to being active in what seems to be two very different fields, all I can say is that it helps to be a bit schizophrenic!

5. Future of Hypnosis: The number of institutes affiliated with the Erickson Foundation is an indication of the future of hypnosis. There are an increasing number of these institutes outside of the U.S., while the number in the U.S. is stagnant or declining. Perhaps an indication of the latter is that I recently spent three days at the Ohio Psychology Association's annual meeting. There was not one session on hypnosis, and I never heard any speaker mention it! I believe these trends will continue despite the many advances being made via brain scans and neurological work, and efforts like Ernest Rossi's connections with genes.

6. Recommending Hypnosis as a Career: I am passionate about using hypnosis with my clients, and I have many colleagues world-wide who feel the same way. Its usefulness stretches to the many concerns that clients present to us. On the other hand, I do follow Erickson's opening comments to many of his patients, "If it is appropriate to use hypnosis, I will certainly do that." That is, we also need to be able to use many different approaches in working with clients, as well as being aware that some clients will not be open to hypnosis. Of course, I do get referrals because colleagues know that I use hypnosis when appropriate. Although there are well over 600 "named" therapeutic approaches, there is always more to learn by studying Erickson's works. I know that when I started using hypnosis that I had memorized much of what he wrote, and even talked like him for a while! If you find that people are endlessly interesting as I do, and that hypnosis opens many paths, then this is the field for you.

7. People Who Have Influenced Me: Although I never met Erickson, I felt that I knew him through his writings and recordings. I do recall being reluctant to finish reading the four volumes about Erickson's works that Rossi edited. It felt like saying goodbye to him. I soon discovered that there were many more books and papers about him and written by him (in collaboration or alone). I really got to know Erickson when I spent more than one year intensively studying his work to write the biography I wrote about him in play form. (I do acknowledge the assistance and encouragement of Betty Alice Erickson and Roxanna Erickson Klein in writing that book.) At the Erickson congresses I attended I soon found that I attended all of the sessions led by: Ernest Rossi, Robert Pearson, Kay Thompson, Jeffrey Zeig, Terry Tafoya, Betty Alice Erickson, and Joseph Barber to name a few. Of this group I got to know Rossi and Betty Alice well.

8. Life as a Trainer: I probably began to be a trainer as a graduate student in chemistry. That is, in

training students in laboratories how to use the equipment and do the experiments. This continued with 38 years of teaching chemistry. Teaching is a variant of training, is it not? So, after I earned my degree in counseling I continued in many ways at the university and elsewhere to train and teach. Perhaps, the inspiration to do this is invariably the look in students' eyes that show that they got the message, that they now know something new and how to do it. There may be people who are "natural" trainers, yet most of us have learned by example followed by trial and error until we have found our own path. I have also had that most wonderful of all experiences as a teacher/trainer to have many of them not only move on to successful careers, but also know that some have exceeded me in their chosen fields.

9. Most Valuable Erickson Teachings: If you have ever watched any of the movies of Erickson working with people, then you know how intensely he focused on whoever was the center of his concentration at that time. So, when I work with a client, I am totally focused on that person. It is not unusual for me to be in a trance state at that time, yet it is a *conscious* state where I am thinking and evaluating all of the time while listening and observing. Although it is not possible to create a new approach with every client (as Erickson seemed to do), every client is unique, as is every session. Indirect work like using metaphors and stories is a gentler and more polite way of working with clients (rather than imposing on them some fixed numbered approach). I like telling stories, and I like Erickson's way of incorporating personal relevant information. Perhaps, the most important things I learned from studying Erickson are the use of surprise and confusion and unpredictability, and the implied *permission* to do that. I have written about the importance of expectation in working with clients, and I believe that (somehow) all of Erickson's clients understood *his* expectation that they would be helped and changed during a session. He also had a wonderful sense of humor and exuded great joy in his work.

10. Working with People Who Have Life-Challenging Diseases: About twenty five years ago I read Bernie Siegel's first book ("Love, Medicine, and Miracles") about his work with cancer patients. He had founded a support group named Exceptional Cancer patients (ECaP). I decided then that I needed to use my skills in working with such a group. I joined the Dayton chapter. After a while I became the leader and moved the group to Yellow Springs where I live. Over the years most of the people in this group have died. Yet, it was such a privilege to know them and spend time with them that it changed my life. They taught me much like how important relationships and Nature are. They taught me that "Life is With People." The most important part of our meetings is the opportunity to say anything you want to, know that *you are being heard*, and that all of this is confidential within the group. So, in many ways, listening and being totally there for your client changed my style of using hypnosis. Also, all of our meetings end with a closing healing meditation of 5-10 minutes. What I say in the meditation always derives from what I heard our members say. This taught me to tailor each session to what went on in that session. I do not function as a therapist in these meetings, the therapy is in being heard and listening.

11. Last Book: My Last Book is Entitled, "When All else Fails. Some New and Some Old Tools for Doing Brief Therapy." As the title indicates I cover a variety of topics. The first part has a

number of chapters of interest to hypnosis like the use of pauses, poetry, and healing language. There is a chapter on expectation which is for me the essence of doing brief therapy. There are some personal comments. Steve Andreas's two books on transforming negative self-talk are highlighted and recommended. The second part discusses a number of approaches to therapy that are quite useful, but have somehow fallen by the wayside. I briefly discuss older methods like Gestalt Therapy, encounter groups and group therapy, psychodrama, and provocative therapy (to name a few). David Cheek's work on ideomotor signaling is quite useful in hypnotic work as any time a person goes "inside" they are in some level of trance. I point out here that my working definition of hypnosis is "focused attention." That is, any time your attention is so focused that the world around you recedes or disappears you are in a trance state.

12. Some Closing Comments: It has been said of Milton Erickson that he was a master of the *precise use of vague language*. Vagueness allows the listener to adapt your carefully chosen words to their own experiences. Perhaps the most important thing I learned in studying hypnosis is how powerful suggestion is when the listener has time to consider and convert new ideas to match their own circumstances and lives. In that sense, I consider that I am a guide leading someone into the possibilities that make sense to them so they can make realistic choices. Thank you for this opportunity to share my thoughts and experiences with you. Remember that the world is full of "elses" and that it has nothing else than elses!