



## Genius and Joy

Ernest Lawrence Rossi

26 March 1933 – 19 September 2020

A Tribute by Kathryn Lane Rossi

At 87 ½ years of age, at 11:19 PM, September 19<sup>th</sup>, 2020, Ernest Rossi passed on of natural causes in his home library - with a smile on his face. For the 30 years that I knew him Ernest lived almost all his time in the present. He held his brilliant and positive consciousness in the present moment until he died. This was no small feat as everyone in his family died of Alzheimer's disease or dementia. He studied every day, often for 6 hours, in order to keep his mind active and growing. We are all the better as recipients of the vast knowledge he developed and shared with us. As you all know, the present moment is where happiness lives. So, for a moment, open your heart and feel the joyful essence that is Ernie and put that in a place that will nourish you for a lifetime.

Ernest Rossi's brilliance as a psychotherapist was this ability to be in the present moment. He was often silent, but you knew he was right with you every moment, honest and true. He believed in the power of *Numinosum* as described by Rudolf Otto (1917) in *The Idea of the Holy* as that which is *tremendous*, *mysterious* and *fascinating*. For Ernest this was the basis of all life and creativity. He was also comfortable with "I don't know" moments as gateways for something new—an opportunity for creativity.

Ernest thrived in his lifelong quest to understand, in his own way, the theory of everything. Immanuel Kant was his first literary mentor through *The Critique of Pure Reason* (1781). In high school he contemplated sentence by sentence hoping he could learn to "think" from this book. He did. What a surprise it was to take college entrance exams with Kant's paragraphs included in his thinking process. His score was so high that every opportunity was made available to him.

What made Ernest the sincere, careful, compassionate and deep thinker he was? He was born in 1933, son of an Italian immigrant father, Angelo and Mary Rossi in Shelton, Connecticut. Italian was the language of his home. When it came time to go to school, Ernest knew little English. The school categorized him retarded (developmentally delayed) and put him in special classes until the third grade. Two events happened to change their minds. First, in woodworking class he made a stool with 3 legs. The legs were not exactly even, but quite a feat for one who was supposed to be slow-minded. Next, standard testing showed that Ernest read at the 8<sup>th</sup> grade level. He was then placed in regular classes and remembers the "nice smelling" and "pretty teachers" that gathered to talk about him. That was the first time he was recognized as being valuable by scholars.

As a goofy and immature boy, Ernest was sent regularly to the hallway outside the classroom. There he gathered encyclopedias and began cross-referencing whatever interested him. At recess he would continue studying in the hallway. This same work ethic would come in handy 30 years later while putting

together the *Collected Works of Milton H. Erickson, MD*, which he did over one weekend in his Malibu living room.

Angelo and Mary Rossi envisioned their son working at a trade. After grammar school Ernest was sent to work as an assistant to Paddy, the local shoe repair man. Halfway to Paddy's shop was a library. *Electricity for Boys* (1914/2007) caught his attention along with great novels. Each day Ernest would spend more time in the library and come later to work with Paddy. Clearly, he was not going to be a shoe cobbler.

High school was a turning point. Ernest was enrolled in the trade school rather than the academic school. All the kids rode in the same bus. On that first day, the prettiest and most popular girl headed up the hill to the academic high school and Ernest followed her. No one could find Ernest's name but added him to the registration list. Several months passed before report cards had to be signed by his shocked parents who said, "Ernest, you were supposed to go to the trade school! What happened?" Ernest feigned ignorance and just shrugged his shoulders.

His high school job was a bicycle delivery boy for local pharmacies. The pharmacists recognized his innate capacity, interest and understanding of biology and pharmacology. They banded together to find full scholarships for Ernest to attend pharmacy school. Secretly, Ernest applied for college when his parents were in Italy on holiday. He borrowed application money from his Uncle Frank and, once again, his parents were very shocked at the life course Ernest was pursuing.

He was awarded a Bachelor of Science in Pharmacy from the University of Connecticut in 1954. By then his passion for learning and appreciation for the power of education had captured his hopes. He went on to receive full scholarships for his Master's degree in psychology at Washington State University in Walla Walla in 1958, and Doctorate in psychology from Temple University in Philadelphia in 1962. His Aunt Josephine described him as, "*Ernest, colui che non finisce mai*" - "Ernest, who never finishes." His family was proud of him but never understood his dreams of education. He had both pre-and post-doctoral fellowships with the United States Public Health Services in Clinical Psychology. He was also proud of his work with Franz Alexander, one of the founders of psychosomatic medicine and short-term psychotherapy.

Ernest's contributions are legendary. He achieved status as a Diplomat in Clinical Psychology through the American Board of Examiners and began to establish his own unique perspectives. His first published paper with the American Journal of Clinical Hypnosis was *Psychological Shocks and Creative Moments in Psychotherapy* (1973). He used this pivotal and life-reframing principle in our last session as co-therapists just two weeks ago. He believed dreams are windows to growing consciousness. He studied Carl Jung's work extensively, becoming a training analyst before writing his first book: *Dreams, Consciousness, Spirit* (1972/2000). He joined the International Association for Analytical Psychology taking active roles in the CG Jung Institute of Los Angeles. We have shared our dreams each morning, along with new spiritual insights. Ernest was deeply curious to know about the growing edges of consciousness.

Meeting Milton H. Erickson was pure serendipity. A client in 1973 pointed his fingers at Ernest and said, "I know what you are doing. You are doing Erickson!" Ernest's curiosity piqued, and over one weekend he read Jay Haley's book, *Uncommon Therapy: The Psychiatric Techniques of Milton H. Erickson, MD* (1973/1993). Ernest was so engrossed he did not eat or sleep. He simply read. That Monday he was ill enough to seek medical attention. The doctor said, "Whatever you are doing, just stop it now. You are

getting an ulcer!” Ernest reasoned he should see Erickson for therapy since he now had a psychosomatic illness.

After a few sessions Erickson recognized that Ernest was not a patient but someone there to learn. Erickson said with his laser-like stare wagging his head at Ernest, “You really not a patient, are you? You are here to learn hypnosis, aren’t you?! Don’t give Betty any more checks.” Over the next 8 years Ernest drove from Los Angeles to Phoenix for one week every month. Ernest recognized that Erickson had developed unique talents and skills that extended understandings of human potential for healing. The two of them established a bond of friendship and collaboration that became a meaningful professional contribution. Ernest brought a youthful energy, a passion for unlocking the secrets and understandings that others had attempted to reveal in Erickson’s work. The collaborators who had previously worked with Erickson had done some important groundwork in bringing Erickson’s genius to light, but for a number of reasons all had limited success. Erickson, now in the last decade of his life, was physically unable to organize, compile, or clarify his body of work. It was not long before their collaboration gained its own momentum. The two, each with a genius of their own, co-authored *The Collected Papers of Milton H. Erickson* (8); *The Seminars and Workshops* (4); *Hypnotic Realities*; *Hypnotherapy: An Exploratory Casebook*; and *The February Man*. *The Collected Works of Milton H. Erickson MD* (2008-2014), co-edited by Ernest, Roxanna Erickson-Klein and myself is now in 16 updated volumes that includes these books. The volumes will soon be released in digital format. The volumes, while not all of Erickson’s primary works, remain the definitive *corpus* that document the legacy of Milton H. Erickson, MD.

Ernest continued to explore areas and aspects of psychotherapy beyond Erickson into the nature of the unconscious - all the way to the speculations regarding possible quantum levels. By the time he had received the Lifetime Achievement award from the Milton H. Erickson Foundation in 1986, he had also become Editor of the periodical, *Psychological Perspectives: A Journal of Global Consciousness Integrating Psyche, Soul and Nature*. He began an in-depth study of mathematics and chronobiology and continued to invest himself in the physiology, or you could say, “internal pharmacology” of consciousness. By 1999, he was participating with the US Department of Energy on the human Genome Project and positing explanations for DNA microarrays. Together we pioneered PsychoSocial Genomic work to encourage an understanding of how thoughts and behaviors interface with gene expression as a top-down approach, creating brain plasticity. Our team, including Salvatore Iannotti, MD, Mauro Cozzolino, PhD, Giovanna Cilia, PhD, Richard Hill, MBMSc, and Jan Dyba, PhD, have been invaluable.

Ernest’s work continued with momentum and force. While numerous recognitions and awards were granted over the decades, he described the most important life experience was our relationship. We wed in 1995, after 5 years together, in the Cumbrian Northern Lake District of England at the county seat, Cockermouth. We became partners in Ernest’s lifelong explorations of emotions, behavior, physiology and the workings of the body and mind. Together, we explored the concepts of ultradian rhythms, the Four-Stage Creative Cycle, PsychoSocial Genomics and other mind/body connections that are so fundamental to consciousness, creativity, and healing.

Our publications ranged from the nature of consciousness, to enlightenment and the psychobiology of gene expression along with new developments in genomics and quantum understandings and cosmology. We were thrilled to be invited by mathematician and Nobel laureate, Roger Penrose, to contribute a chapter, “Decoding the Chalmers Hard Problem of Consciousness: Qualia of the Molecular Biology of Creativity and Thought” for *Consciousness and the Universe: Quantum Physics, Evolution, Brain, and Mind*

(2011). Sometimes our propositions preceded discoveries, and sometimes served to explain new discoveries. We always worked together, in partnership, with a harmonious passion for learning and sharing. The Mirroring Hands practice of therapeutic hypnosis evolved into a signature approach.

During the 30-years that we shared we refined the deep numinous understandings of the theory of everything he sought. Ernest always questioned what underlies the best of psychotherapy, rehabilitation, health and relationships. This was one of his unique contributions. It seems as if he was usually 10-20 years ahead of his time, forecasting what psychology could and eventually did become. He advanced his, and our, conceptualization of the influence of psychobiological circadian rhythms on the human psyche. His depth of appreciation for the natural waxing and waning of energy emerged as a foundation that helps us to utilize nature to become our best self.

Over his lifetime, Ernest received a multitude of recognitions including a Lifetime Achievement awards from The Milton Erickson Foundation (1986), American Association for Psychotherapy (2003) Lifetime American Society of Clinical Hypnosis (2008) and an Achievement in Science for the RNA/DNA Psychosocial Genomic Theory of Cognition and Consciousness from the Austrian Society of Medical Hypnosis (2019). He has served on eight different professional editorial boards, he has authored or edited 46 books, and published over 400 research articles, all in professional journals. This was his contribution to our ongoing focus into deeper understandings of consciousness and the nature of life itself.

Ernest remained sharp, interested and cognitively intact until the final day, even though there was a natural aging loss of muscular mobility and some hearing loss. While it is hard not to feel a sense of loss for this humble, gentle friend whose life was filled with loving kindness, I invite you to let the joy that is *him* shine most radiantly in your minds in an ongoing and daily way. Let us all celebrate, individually and together, the positive presence and joyful essence of Ernest Lawrence Rossi.

Appreciation and condolences in celebration of the life of Ernest Rossi are best directed to support the legacy of his work. In lieu of flowers, it would be wonderful for those who wish to contribute, to continue the cooperative exchange of knowledge that Ernest felt so passionate about. Please write your stories of Ernest and what he meant to you, or how he contributed to your knowledge and send them to me, Kathryn Rossi. Should you wish to make a cash donation to ongoing Psychosocial Genomic research, or to learn more about Ernest, please visit [www.ErnestRossi.com](http://www.ErnestRossi.com).

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