A Tribute to Jay Haley
1923-2007

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To begin to create a portrait of Jay Haley, we have to start with his mentors, Gregory Bateson and Milton H. Erickson. Bateson, a maverick anthropologist, was an imposing intellectual figure with an unparalleled understanding of the subtle intricacies of social patterns. Erickson, a maverick psychiatrist, emphasized intervention and had an unparalleled understanding of interpersonal responsiveness. Both men were larger-than-life figures, peerless in their respective abilities to comprehend the human condition. Jay Haley was an amalgam of both, and at the same time, set his own standard and direction in advancing the field of psychotherapy through the development of the strategic approach.

The prevailing climate in which Haley evolved strategic therapy was not altogether conducive to the forging of new treatment paths. Psychotherapy was locked into tradition where the emphasis was on changing psychodynamics within the confines of long-term treatment. Brief therapy was in its infancy, and treatment was confined to the consulting room. Humor was taboo.

But Haley came along and, well, he wasn’t impressed by the dos and don’ts of tradition, and it never occurred to him that humor wasn’t an essential element of effective communication. Perhaps withholding humor only occurs to those who are not funny. At any rate, working against the backdrop of what was, at the time, the field’s status quo, Haley managed to make inroads in many areas. Following are just some of his contributions (and a few of his identities):

1. **Strategic Therapy**: Haley was the chief architect of the strategic approach to psychotherapy. Strategic therapy is not so much a school as it is an orientation, whereby the therapist takes responsibility for directly influencing people.

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2. **Brief Therapy**: The term “brief therapy” was probably coined in the work of David Malan and James Mann, but their approaches were narrowly defined within psychoanalytic parameters. Haley brought into the mainstream of psychotherapy a robust and generic brief therapy.

3. **Family Therapy**: Haley was one of the founders of family therapy and systemic approaches to treatment. He demonstrated how clinicians could alter the social situation to promote enduring change.

4. **Experiential Therapy**: Milton Erickson was the quintessential experiential therapist. To Erickson, psychotherapy was a symbolic, *in vivo* drama designed to elicit change. Dynamic experiences were the vehicle of change, not psychodynamic understandings. Haley advanced Erickson’s use of strategic directives as a means of creating experiential psychotherapy, against which didactic and interpretative approaches were seen as inadequate. To Haley, therapy was a problem and not a solution. The problem was that the person was in therapy. The solution was to get the person out of therapy and into independent living.

5. **The Iconoclast**: Haley swam against the current. He had abnormal integrity, demonstrated in his fearless, blistering critiques of some of the ways in which the field had erred. At a time when therapy was preoccupied with pathology, Haley rejected psychiatric nomenclature and developmental history as central to treatment, preferring systemic procedures geared to the immediate life situation.

6. **The Theorist**: Haley championed a theory of intervention, not a theory of personality. Massively perceptive about the nuances of social patterns, he astutely pointed out how psychological problems group at transition points in the human lifecycle. This perspective had not been adequately recognized before Haley published the idea in *Uncommon Therapy*.

7. **The Teacher**: Haley was a stirring teacher of the practicalities of psychotherapy, commanding large audiences. He was one of the world’s premier teachers of psychotherapy, and he was one of the most revered.

8. **The Supervisor**: Haley was a staunch advocate of supervision. Supervision was his forte. He might not have invented the one-way mirror, but he certainly was one of those most proficient at its use.

9. **The Model for Others**: Psychotherapy has been a field where father and mother magicians have taken center stage. It has been a field in which peers are especially valued as role models and inspirations. Haley was a superstar and carried the role with dignity and compassion.

10. **The Dutiful Son**: Erickson had two careers prior to the publication of *Uncommon Therapy*. Erickson’s first career was as a researcher; the second was as a clinician. But, in both careers, Erickson was primarily renowned in hypnosis circles. With the publication of *Uncommon Therapy*, Haley tabbed Erickson the father of brief, strategic approaches to therapy, positioning Erickson as a pivotal contributor to the field.

11. **The Hypnotist**: Haley learned hypnosis from Erickson and practiced it in his early years. He wrote a brilliant “communications” analysis of the paradoxical nature of hypnosis, “How hypnotist and subject maneuver each other.” This chapter in *Strategies of Psychotherapy* should be studied carefully by every practitioner and theorist involved with hypnosis.
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12. The Humorist: Haley complained that when Erickson died, there was no longer anybody to laugh with about psychotherapy. But, Haley himself was a great humorist. As a strong writer, he never had to fall back on the use of ambiguous jargon, and humor was always a faithful companion.

My tribute would be incomplete without personal reflections. I met Jay Haley in December 1980 at the first International Congress on Ericksonian Approaches to Hypnosis and Psychotherapy. At the invitation of Erickson and me, Haley was to keynote. I introduced myself to him upon his arrival, and he immediately asked to see the auditorium in which he would speak to the convocation of 2000 professionals. As we started back to the hotel, I naively asked him if he ever got over being nervous speaking in front of large groups. “Large groups?” he replied.

Haley’s speech at the first Congress was one of the most impressive, and well-received keynotes ever recorded at an Erickson Foundation event.* Bateson and Erickson also were to keynote the conference, but both died prior to the meeting. Haley elucidated the underpinnings of Erickson’s approach, but his speech was deeply emotional as well. Haley openly wept at the passing of his mentors. He spoke of Erickson as “a man with class,” a phrase that he intoned with such rich meaning that I immediately set aside the word “class” from then on to be used only on the rarest of occasions to describe the rarest of individuals.

Haley subsequently keynoted many Erickson Foundation events. He was a scrupulous presenter. His keynotes were always written, never impromptu. I appeared on the podium with him at a number of events both in the United States and overseas. I never stopped holding him in awe. I envied his wit and wisdom, and acerbic style of piercing to the essence of a given issue. He spoke in straight lines, not in arcs, as was the habit of Erickson.

It was through Haley that I first encountered Erickson. As a graduate student in 1972, I read Advanced Techniques of Hypnosis and Therapy, a compendium of Erickson’s writings that Haley had edited, which is long out of print. At the time, it was the best book one could find on Erickson. Haley had volunteered to collect Erickson’s papers, but Erickson declined because the project had been initiated by another colleague. When that colleague was not able to complete the task, it fell to Haley. It was fortunate because I imagine that Haley’s efforts in compiling Advanced Techniques stimulated his future writings about Erickson, especially Uncommon Therapy.

Somehow I learned that Uncommon Therapy was to be published, and I had it special ordered so I could read it en route to my first visit to Erickson in 1973. I studied it avidly, making notes in the margins. It continues to be one of the most important books on psychotherapy ever published. I was transfixed by Haley’s precision and perceptiveness. Like the writing style of Erickson, Haley’s work was meticulous, with each word carefully measured and weighed.

Uncommon Therapy opened new vistas for me and many others. In the first sentence, Haley defined strategic therapy as one in which the therapist has a goal in mind and works to establish it. This was a revolutionary concept. I was steeped in the Rogerian tradition. My supervisors were analytically trained. The idea of strategy was not in my therapeutic repertoire. I knew that chess players needed to be strategic. I knew that dramatists built to a dénouement. I had not previously conceived that therapists could act strategically.

* To hear the recording, go to the Registrant’s Corner at www.brieftherapyconference.com.
Jay Haley Tribute

Haley developed many seminal concepts in *Uncommon Therapy*. He introduced the idea that problems happen at transition points in the human life cycle. He has never been adequately credited with having made that important contribution. He introduced the concept of seeding, a pattern he discovered in Erickson’s work, which has been a cornerstone principle that I have written about and taught. He clarified how changing a hierarchy to more functional stability leads to systemic change. He demonstrated how directives can be used to create experiential moments that propel constructive change. It was through *Uncommon Therapy* that I first understood the techniques that Erickson used. And it was there that Haley introduced the world to Erickson’s indomitable spirit.

Some readers may not be aware of the history of the collaboration between Haley and Erickson. The first meeting between them took place when Bateson asked Erickson to consult with him and his group on a research project called the “double bind.” In 1953, Haley, who was interested in film, had sought out Bateson to find out about the film analysis Bateson was involved in, and in 1954 Haley attended a workshop that Erickson offered in San Francisco. In 1955, Bateson wrote a letter to his friend, Erickson, outlining the double bind. Bateson thought that there were similarities between the double bind and what Erickson did with hypnotic subjects. He asked Erickson to consult with his team. Some of the history of this project can be found in *The Letters of Milton Erickson* (Zeig & Geary, 2001). Subsequently, Haley and John Weakland began a series of historic collaborations, meeting regularly with Erickson in Phoenix. From 1954 to 1960, Haley learned hypnosis and related approaches directly from Erickson.

Haley joined Mental Research Institute (MRI) when Don Jackson, M.D., founded it in 1958 along with Weakland, William Fry and Jules Riskin (Wendel Ray, personal communication, 2/19/07). The MRI team conducted a number of grant-based research projects that illuminated the nature of human interaction. Haley worked with Nathan Ackerman and Jackson to establish *Family Process* in 1962, which Haley edited for the first ten years of its existence. Curiously, this parallels Erickson who founded and edited the *American Journal of Clinical Hypnosis* (AJCH), and served as editor for the first 10 years of its existence. At the invitation of Minuchin, the director of Philadelphia Child Guidance, Haley left MRI in 1967 to serve as Director of Family Therapy Research at the Philadelphia Guidance Clinic, which he also did for 10 years.

In 1976, Haley co-founded the Family Therapy Institute of Washington, DC. This was an especially fertile period, and many of Haley’s intellectual heirs were groomed during it.

I organized the first Evolution of Psychotherapy Conference in 1985, and of course, Haley was a member of the prestigious faculty. For reasons, only known within the recesses of my unconscious, I paired Haley as the discussant for James Masterson. Actually, the first Evolution Conference did have some of the flavor of Star Wars, with the opposing perspectives of Haley and Masterson reflecting that well. Masterson advocated the diagnosis of borderline. Haley had no use for the concept, and told Masterson that he had never seen a “borderline.” The confrontation was among the most memorable moments of the conference.

Haley also was serious taskmaster. He challenged me on a number of occasions when he deemed my thinking or my actions wrong-minded. Frankly, one could only benefit from his critique.

In 1985, it was a great honor to present Haley with the first Lifetime Achievement Award of the Milton Erickson Foundation. In 1999, the Eighth Erickson Congress was focused on Haley, and it included a Festschrift in his honor. A humble man who did not seek out the limelight, it took quite a while for Haley to agree to the honor. Minuchin presented a Keynote
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Address. Haley presented on the “Loyal Opposition,” discussing the forces in the 1950s against which family therapy came into existence. The proceedings of the meeting can be found in Changing Directives: The Strategic Therapy of Jay Haley, which I edited in 2001. A film festival at the Congress allowed attendees to see the teaching videos created by Haley and his wife, Madeleine Richeport-Haley.

I continue to learn from Haley’s teaching and writings. I consider him to be one of my most important teachers. He leaves behind a rich legacy, including video recordings** that demonstrate the power of his method.

Jay Haley died in his sleep on February 13, 2007, at the age of 83. He was born in Wyoming, July 16, 1923. He graduated from UCLA in 1948 with a BA, and went on to earn his BS in Library Science in 1951 at the University of California, Berkeley. Haley worked as a reference librarian at Stanford (1952-53) and earned his MA in Communications in 1953.


Haley is survived by his loving wife and collaborator, Madeleine Richeport Haley, to whom he was married for 12 years. He also is survived by three children: Kathleen Haley of Richmond, California; Andrew Haley of Conshohocken, Pennsylvania; and Gregory Haley of San Diego; as well as four grandchildren and one great-granddaughter. There was no memorial service in Haley’s honor; instead, he asked that in his memory students and admirers could do something nice with their families (Michael Yapko, personal communication, 2/25/07). Charitable donations may be given to Shriner’s Children’s Hospital in Sacramento, or to the scholarship fund in his name at Alliant International University in San Diego where Jay was on the faculty during the “retirement” years.

Jay Haley set a standard for our field to which we all can aspire. He has already influenced several generations of psychotherapists, and his work will continue to influence the field for generations to come. I am privileged to have known Jay Haley; he was, indeed, a man with class.

** See Jay-Haley-on-Therapy.com for information on books and videos.