

In Tribute: Jay Haley (1923–2007)

With the death of Jay Haley on February 13th of this year, the world of psychotherapy lost one of its keenest critics and one of its most influential proponents. His contributions and collaborations were critical to the evolution of modern psychotherapy, and his leadership inspired generations of therapists to break free from the constraints of older theories and experiment with modern approaches

Jay challenged our assumptions with a pragmatic and witty style that paralleled the practicality of his clinical approach, Jay was a stunningly influential theoretician, clinical innovator, supervisor, teacher, journal editor, writer, and humanitarian. Rarely in a professional revolution has one person maintained as consistent a presence and as varied a role. Jay believed that great ideas are born of great conversations, and this tribute provides the social contexts of Jay's contributions.

Rather than merely teaching us yet another way to stabilize a client's problem, Haley did something unique: He taught new generations of therapists how to promote flexibility and growth within family systems. Moreover, Haley inspired therapists to change the social institutions that inadvertently perpetuate client problems. As he often pointed out, failure to appreciate the

context of human behavior led well-meaning therapists to define clients and their problems in a way that reinforced dilemmas as opposed to solving them.

Jay was a key contributor to the formulation of the ideas that made up the revolutionary interactional approach. This approach posits that individuals and their problems are to be seen not as pathology within the individual but as a response to interactions occurring in the present. The interactional perspective further asserts that behavior makes sense within the context in which it occurs, that the family is the system most amenable to effecting change for the symptom bearer, and that relieving symptoms is the most sensible and humane approach to helping people solve their problems.

His leading role in the development of the theoretical foundations for (family and brief) therapy would itself constitute an immense contribution, but Jay then devoted his life to grounding the theories in practice and continuously testing the practice in the trenches, never from the ivory tower. He understood that no therapy was worthwhile if it could not be easily learned and taught, and he went on to educate us in every possible medium—training with live supervision, books so artfully written that readers could actually learn how to practice the therapy, workshops and films and videos that were both artful and instructive. Jay

understood that the art of teaching and supervising therapy was essential for enabling patients to benefit from theoretical advances and that these, too, needed to be taught to future generations..

Just as family therapy shows us that there is often a truth teller in the family who exposes the emperor with no clothes, Jay demonstrated the same courage and authenticity in our field

Jay taught that the therapist must be able to challenge many of the systems within which the client or family is embedded and that doing so often requires humor and courage. Jay not only taught therapy, he also modeled it in his attempts to change the entire field of therapy. He artfully and humorously challenged the orthodoxy of therapeutic systems that held people hostage in interminable therapy, blamed patients' resistance for therapeutic failure, relied on insights and intellectual interpretations as the only means to effect change, asserted that the therapist was not communicating by not communicating, and had the audacity to order patients to refrain from making any life decisions while in therapy for years on end. As Jay pointed out, people come to therapy because they want to change.

Jay's clinical optimism took center stage in his approach. He believed in the power of human systems to overcome great adversity if given the chance and that the job of the therapist is to help unblock this power.

Jay's humanity was evident in his clinical optimism and celebration of the uniqueness of each family. He always utilized the strengths of clinicians to personalize and make therapy uniquely appropriate for both patients and the therapist whom he was supervising. He had the lightest touch as a supervisor and required respectful treatment not only of clients but also of other trainees. Jay made the supervision, whether individual or group, very safe, which fostered a feeling of strong collaboration among trainees behind the mirror. In print, Jay could be highly confrontational with the psychiatric establishment and biting in his humor; as a clinical supervisor he was a sweetheart.

Social control, Jay emphasized to his students, was never to be confused with therapy, nor was it to be seen as an acceptable alternative to true change. When confronted with hopeless therapists who were discouraged by seemingly powerless clients and families, Jay nevertheless asked the therapist to believe in the innate potential of people to solve even their most extreme problems. By teaching therapists to help families behave in new and loving ways towards one another, he helped both therapists and their clients maintain the optimism that makes change possible.

Jay was conceived in a log cabin on his parents' homestead in rural Montana and was born in the town of Midwest, Wyoming. When he was four, his family moved to Berkeley, California. In the proud tradition of American self-

sufficiency—with what Jay described as a touch of “Scots feistiness” from his mother’s side of the family—Jay’s upbringing emphasized practicality and a rugged sense of egalitarianism. His father was a man of eclectic interests who fought to preserve ownership of their farmlands for Japanese-Americans sent to internment camps during WWII and once brought home a wandering Buddhist monk to join the family for dinner. Jay had two sisters and a brother with whom he maintained close relationships despite their living great distances apart as adults. Jay was proud of his rural roots and always considered himself a blue-collar intellectual.

Jay suffered a hip condition but was determined not to let his hip condition limit his life experiences. After the start of WWII, Jay hid his limp from the military recruiting office and joined the Army Air Force. After his disability was discovered, he was detailed to stateside duties that included guarding prisoners of war and repairing airplane radios.

After the war, Jay attended UCLA, graduating in 1948 with a B.A. in Theater Arts. He then moved to New York City, where he tried to establish himself as a writer and playwright. He also took up sculpture and joyously immersed himself in a community of intellectuals, artists, and jazz musicians.

Jay’s first publication was not a clinical paper but a short story entitled “The Eastern Question” which appeared in *The New Yorker* on July 5, 1947. It describes a conversation between an American soldier and a Japanese officer in a prisoner-of-war camp during WWII. The story is at once humorous and painful. Also evident in this story is that Jay was fascinated by the complexity of interaction, alert to the salience of culture and conflicting hierarchies in communication, and aware of the comedy—as well as the tragedy—arising from communication impasse. After the death of his father, Jay returned to California to help his family. Jay was married in 1950 to Elizabeth Kuehn, a violinist and journalist, with whom he had three children, Kathleen, Andrew, and Gregory.

Jay enrolled in a Bachelors of Library Science program at the University of California at Berkeley and then began a Masters Degree in Mass Communication at Stanford. At Stanford, he sought the guidance of someone experienced in film analysis and was directed to Gregory Bateson, then a visiting professor in Stanford’s anthropology department.¹ Haley and Bateson got into an argument during their discussions, and Bateson, suitably impressed, hired Jay for Bateson’s newly organized Communications Research Project.

That Bateson hired Haley after having an argument with him about a film is telling. Bateson recognized Jay as possessing that very rare combination of curiosity, intelligence, and style of inquiry that not only adds substantively to discussions but additionally helps others clarify their thinking. Equally important to collaboration was Jay’s gentle, intellectual honesty that avoided personal

offense while offering constructive challenge. Milton Erickson, Don Jackson, Salvador Minuchin, and others recognized this rare ability and sought his collaboration and friendship as well. Their interest was richly repaid: both in his writing and his teaching, Jay communicated their genius clearly and compellingly, not only making it accessible to other therapists but also showing practical ways to apply it in therapy,

Working successfully with Bateson required an ability to co-imagine concepts on his intellectual horizon while helping him give such thoughts form and name. Jay, in collaboration with John Weakland, Don Jackson, Bill Fry and others, helped bring Bateson's ideas down to earth and made essential contributions to them. Jay's roles evolved from helping to develop Bateson's ideas to articulating, testing, and publishing his own. During the years of the project, Bateson gave Jay a world-class education in how to think systemically, how to maintain courage in the face of withering criticism and miscomprehension from peers, and how to function as a guide and teacher in the development of ideas.²

The Bateson Project led Jay to Milton Erickson, which began one of the most important collaborations in Jay's clinical development. Jay attended a workshop with Erickson in 1953 when the Bateson Project turned some of its attention to studying communication issues in hypnosis. Jay and John Weakland made numerous trips to visit and study with Erickson over the next decade. By the mid-1950s, Jay had opened a private practice in hypnosis and consulted Erickson on his cases.

Jay was in many ways the ideal person to introduce Erickson's unique therapy to the world. The communications concepts of the Bateson Project proved useful in comprehending and describing the implicitly systemic nature of Erickson's approach. Erickson emphasized the positive and therapeutic aspects of paradox and other concepts that were being approached from a pathological perspective by the Bateson Project.³ Erickson's clinical optimism, focus on issues of greatest motivation to his client, use of a range of direct and indirect influence (including ordeals, paradox, and other innovations), implicit focus on moving clients from one stage of family life to another, and revolutionarily brief interventions were first introduced to the broader clinical public through Jay's books and became defining aspects of strategic and other models of therapy.

Many of the visits John Weakland and Jay made to Erickson were taped and became the basis of later books. Typical of the Batesonian approach rather than the psychiatric tradition of the time, Jay employed quotes from actual recordings rather than summary notes.

The recordings of Erickson are notable for their practical content, use of stories to convey clinical concepts, and humor; sometimes, the laughter is uproarious. A shared history of recovery from crippling boyhood illness, strong connections to Midwestern rural roots, and a similar sense of humor in facing

life's burdens strengthened the connection between Jay and Erickson. Many of their consultations appear in Jay's *Uncommon Therapy: The Psychiatric Techniques of Milton Erickson* (1973), the single book most responsible for introducing Erickson and his concepts of brief and strategic therapy to the clinical public.

Uncommon Therapy establishes a direct relationship between Erickson and the reader. Jay made the great innovation of organizing the structure of the book around stages of family life, whose importance he found implicit in many of Erickson's interventions. Jay believed that getting stuck at transition points in the family life cycle often brought people into therapy and that good therapy got people "unstuck" rather than "cured." Erickson's non-pathological focus meshed seamlessly with that of Jay's and became one of many enduring contributions to the modern practice of many models of psychotherapy.

In 1959, Don Jackson founded the Mental Research Institute in Palo Alto where Jay soon after became Director of Research. Jay had been supervised by Jackson when the Bateson Project started treating schizophrenics, and Jay had immense respect for Don as a therapist and theorist. Many family therapy concepts in strategic therapy have their roots in Jackson's idea of homeostasis and were inspired from watching his masterful ways with families.

Jay was asked by Don Jackson to become the founding editor of what is perhaps family therapy's most prestigious journal, *Family Process*. Jay was a logical choice. In addition to his personal involvement in the birth of the fledgling field of family therapy, Jay was one of the world's most experienced researchers in the 1950s and early 1960s when it came to direct observation of a variety of clinical models. The Bateson Project had given Jay unparalleled access to live observation, audio, and film recordings of some of the most significant clinicians of the day, including but not limited to Milton Erickson, Joseph Wolpe, John Rosen, Don Jackson, Frieda Fromm-Reichmann, and Charles Fulweiler. Jay's ten year tenure as editor of *Family Process* further advanced his influence and stewardship of the blossoming field of family therapy.

Haley's book *Strategies of Psychotherapy* was published in 1963. The writing was direct, simple, and well organized; some chapters were tremendously funny and irreverent. This highly influential book succeeded in drawing many clinicians to the family therapy movement.

Jay left MRI in 1967 to join Salvador Minuchin and Braulio Montalvo at The Philadelphia Child Guidance Center (PCGC) as Director of Research. In Philadelphia, Jay's collaborations and contributions would once again put him on the cutting edge of family therapy evolution. While at the PCGC, Jay, Minuchin, and Montalvo jointly created a sub-clinic that focused on training people from the surrounding impoverished urban community to be family therapists. The demands of training therapists from scratch inspired the men to experiment with

new training techniques and required them to articulate theory with greater clarity and succinctness. Jay insisted on live supervision and developed a map for a first session that still stands as the sine qua non for engaging a family and empowering the family to solve its problem. The carpool commute to the PCGC Jay shared with Minuchin and Montalvo, during their nine years together resulted in 90 minutes of additional discussion a day and in the development of two of the most important friendships in Jay's life. Jay was influenced by Minuchin's and Montalvo's ideas about organization and structure, and he brought with him to Philadelphia the practices and concepts from Milton Erickson, Don Jackson, Gregory Bateson, the philosopher Alan Watts, and others. Minuchin credits Jay with contributions to the development of structural family therapy, and Minuchin's and Montalvo's ideas run strongly through strategic therapy.

Jay Haley and his second wife, Cloe Madanes (who herself would become a major figure in the field of family therapy), both left positions at the Philadelphia Child Guidance Center to open their own training center, The Family Therapy Institute of Washington, DC, in 1976. That year also marked the publication of Jay's most influential book on his own clinical approach, *Problem-Solving Therapy*. The following decade would be the most productive of Jay's career in terms of publications, numbers of students trained, and numbers of workshops given across the United States and around the world. Other of Jay's notable publications from this period include *Leaving Home*, *Ordeal Therapy*, four additional books on Milton Erickson, *Reflections on Therapy*, and a second edition of *The Power Tactics of Jesus Christ and Other Essays*

Jay's students from his days at the Family Therapy Institute of Washington, D.C. were an inspired group. Many went on to publish or form their own training programs. On a personal note, I was one of those trainees who traveled a great distance over a long period of time to attend the Family Therapy Institute of Washington, DC. I was never disappointed. It was abundantly clear

that Jay treated teaching and supervising me and trainees like me as if it was the most important thing he could be doing.

. It was inspiring and empowering to experience this renowned man teaching us with his customary humility, thoughtful sensitivity, wit, brilliance, and love of the art of therapy. Perhaps the most profound lesson that we trainees took away from our work with Jay was that the therapist must take responsibility for therapeutic outcomes, a startling position in its day and one that constituted Jay's chief criticism of most therapy. I can still hear his voice reminding us that we were holding ourselves out as experts, that from this we ought to understand that we were responsible for the outcome of the therapy, and if we were committed to take responsibility for the outcome of the therapy, with a humane, ethical, and a benevolent stance, we could make a significant difference in the lives of people in the most difficult circumstances.

After leaving the Family Therapy Institute in the 1990s, Jay moved to Southern California, where he continued to give us the benefit of his prodigious work, superb writing, and humane wisdom. He was a research professor at Alliant International University, teaching and supervising from behind the one-way mirror, and, in collaboration with his third wife Madeleine Richeport-Haley, produced a number of films relating to both psychotherapy and anthropology, a wellspring from which strategic therapists traditionally seek inspiration. Jay wrote three more books and collaborated with Madeleine in the writing of his final book, *Directive Family Therapy*, which will be published this fall. The publications and supervision films from the last decade of his life bear the maturity and hindsight of a man whose work, writings, and relationships significantly shaped the field of psychotherapy.

Haley's academic posts included professorships at the University of Pennsylvania, the University of Maryland, Howard University, and California School of Professional Psychology at Alliant International University. He published 22 books translated into 16 languages, more than 100 papers, and helped create many films.

He was awarded an Honorary Doctorate by Alliant International University, 2002; Outstanding Family Therapist in California, AAMFT-CA, 2001; A tribute in Honor of Jay Haley Milton Erickson Foundation, 1999; Distinguished Professional Achievement to Family Therapy AAMFT, 1990; Lifetime Achievement Award Milton H. Erickson Foundation, 1983; Distinguished Achievement in Family Therapy AFTA, 1981.

One of Jay's lasting contributions relates to a very American style of pragmatism in clinical practice and writing. At a time when psychotherapy texts bore greater resemblance to philosophy tomes, Jay broke down the complexities of therapy into comprehensible steps and common-sense concepts. He melded a respect for the complexity of family and individual systems with practical maps that defined routes to change. He made the operational aspects of clinical influence manifest in a clearly defined range of practice and skills that were accessible to the new therapist yet offered continual insight and challenge even to the most experienced.

Jay has earned a permanent place among the most influential figures in psychotherapy. His conceptual contributions, seminal writings, and leadership were all crucial to the birth and evolution of brief and family therapy. Generations of therapists he inspired and trained will miss him terribly. His compassion for people's problems, careful and considerate style of supervision, and sense of humor won the hearts of countless students and colleagues and set an example that psychotherapy should aspire to maintain.

Jay is survived by his wife, Madeleine Richeport-Haley of San Diego, by his three children, Kathleen Haley of Richmond, California; Andrew Haley of Conshohocken, Pennsylvania; and Dr. Gregory of San Diego; six grandchildren; and two great granddaughters.

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