

My 47th Anniversary as a Psychotherapist

September, 1973 – September 2020

Dedication: To my supervisees and colleagues, may your careers be as long, interesting, and fulfilling as mine has been thus far.

*May your learning from me and your colleagues permit you to exceed the achievements of your own mentors
and to mentor the next generation.*

This week in September, 1973, I became a Psychotherapist. I dedicate this short account of the start of my career to wonder, serendipity, openness-to-experience, and excellent mentors. Perhaps you will reflect upon your motivation to join this profession and what excites you about it.

My First Psychotherapy Work

My career itself began in Chicago this week in September, 1973.

- On Mondays, I began to volunteer at a clinic of Grant Hospital. Grant was on Lincoln and Webster. But the clinic was a few blocks to the east on the second floor of the Webster Hotel, across the street from Lincoln Park Zoo. Up until then, I focused intensively on learning psychoanalytic theory. My supervisors, Shirley Pilster, RN and Conrad Meuhling, PhD, introduced me to something nearly new at the time, Family Therapy. I remember well my first individual client, a tall depressed man, also a family for which I was Shirley's co-therapist. I also saw a couple. That experience led me to become a student of marriage and family therapy the next few years. During the next eleven months, I read new family therapy theories by Minuchin, the MRI group in Palo Alto, and Bowen as they were coming out in real time!
- On Wednesdays, I went to a program of the Chicago Medical School held at Mt. Sinai Hospital on Ogden and California. The classes were a certification program in psychotherapy. Most of the other students were clergy. Rabbi Eichenstein of the synagogue right on our corner was in the class. Occasionally, we drove to and from class together and we talked psychology and psychotherapy. The head of the program was the psychiatrist, William Lee, MD. Educated in Germany, he taught psychopathology. One day he demonstrated Autogenic Training, a practice well-known in Europe, but not here. I practiced it intensively then and still use it to this day.
- On Fridays through Sundays, I worked at Illinois Masonic Hospital on Wellington Ave. As an aide, my job was 10% changing linens, keeping the coffee urn filled, and escorting patients for medical tests. Fully 90% was talking with patients. On Friday mornings, I was permitted to sit in with medical students at their psychiatry lectures. One day, the famous psychoanalytic psychiatrist, Karl Menninger, came to speak. In that couple of hours, I learned the lesson he exemplified -- to value and delve into every detail, every fact, every sentence from the patient, to mine the gold in each bit of communication. Working there was an experience of intensive immersion in working with patients.

A psychodrama practitioner also came on Fridays to conduct a group for the patients on the unit. I learned to let the moment unfold so that, even with minimal direction, the patient will recreate and dramatize his or her problems. Then we can observe and understand. Also, on Fridays, the psychiatrists did electro-shock (ECT). I helped with that. ECT is still practiced and is far less disorienting to the patient than it was in those days. But I wanted to know everything about mental health work. Patients did improve. Also, in those days, patients stayed in the hospital up to three weeks. I got to know them and study their patterns and thinking. I also got to know about almost every kind of emotional problem. Early in my year there, I was entrusted to do initial interviews and write charting entries with ideas and recommendations for the psychiatrists.

Getting into Graduate School

In college, I had taken only one psychology course. As 1973 began, I was in the last 6 months of an MBA program at the University of Chicago. In those days, classes were held at night in a squat, four-story classroom build on Delaware St. east of Michigan Ave. The business school's current gleaming Gleacher Center on the Chicago River was long into the future. If I had any hope of getting a degree in psychology, I needed to create the equivalent of the major I did not take in college and then to take the Graduate Record Exam.

First, I enrolled in an extension program at Northwestern University downtown to take two psych courses. At U of C, I enrolled at the main campus in Hyde Park and finished my MBA by taking all the four electives in psychology. Those physiological psychology textbooks were enormous. I was introduced to Piaget, Erikson, and neuropsychology. This was all exciting. My MBA was conferred at Rockefeller Chapel that June. Trumpeters played a fanfare to the graduates from the tower of the great chapel on the Midway, a grassy park where the world's first and largest Ferris wheel was erected for the world's fair of 1893.

Throughout the summer, I read abnormal psychology, basic psychology, and Carl Rogers. In September, I enrolled in graduate courses at Roosevelt University. I found personality testing and personality theory intriguing. Barbara Lerner, PhD, taught the first psychotherapy course I had yet taken and I was fascinated. Sheila Courington, PhD, was then a student in the program and we drove together, debating and learning as we went. By October, 1973, I was ready to take the GRE and the advanced test in psychology. My scores were adequate to get me into the psychology program at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee with a teaching assistantship. Unbelievable serendipity took over from there, landing me in the care of more great mentors and teachers. That was September, 1974, the culmination of that first year of immersion in mental health work to begin a long career.

In Summary

So that is how it began. Today, after some 2,500 first interviews and around 65,000 sessions, innumerable seminars and workshops taught and attended, and about 300 professionals in whose training and supervision I had some role, I am going strong, with never-ending enthusiasm for this work. It's old fashioned, I suppose, but I have had only two full time jobs since 1974, 17 years at Family Service of Milwaukee (now part of Advocate-Aurora) and 28 years in my own

practice, first in downtown Milwaukee working with Melvyn Wagner, PhD, and, since October, 1996, as President of Shorehaven Behavioral Health (then known as Shorehaven Counseling Associates). Mel, soon to retire to Arizona, and I folded our practices and Shorehaven into one entity. Four years later, we turned over operations to Lynn Godec, MSW, who still runs it today as Executive Director.

If I did not make it clear enough, chance, opportunity, luck, commitment, open-mindedness, mentoring, and great associates have driven this enterprise. Enjoyment, fascination, knowledge, and connection have been its continual motivation and its outcome. Every day is personally enhancing to me as a professional. I hope it may be to my trainees and colleagues.

As to good fortune and opportunity, at any one point, the entire direction of all I have learned and all the people I have helped could have been so different. If I had not been accepted as a volunteer at Grant, I might not have learned to work with families, a major focus for Shorehaven today and its service to the community. If I had chosen a different graduate school from UWM, I would not have studied psychoanalytic psychotherapy under Michael Tomaro, PhD, Mary Remmel, MSW, and the child analyst, Betty Ruzicka, MA. If not for the recommendation for a practicum and internship at Family Service, I may not have studied family therapy which I learned from Insoo Berg, MSW, and Roman Heitpas, MSW, who also taught me clinical supervision. Had any other small decision been made along the way, I would have been introduced to other mentors, to other supervisors, to other methods, to other orientations to treatment, to different populations, to different clients from the ones who mean so much to me now, and to different professional values from those that have driven Shorehaven for two decades.

Being three years from an even fifty, I think I may want to expand on these reflections every September. Opening this gate into the past, uncountable other influences and learnings come to mind, such as mastering crisis psychotherapy, a day listening to Masters and Johnson, discovering recordings on technique by Robert Langs, MD, learning hypnosis in 1975, my first workshop on EMDR, presenting at a few national conferences, so many hours of conversations on therapy with my friends in the profession, all I've learned from teaching so many new therapists, and so much more. But those will be reflections for some other year. Today is for contemplation of how well it all unfolded and the delight of these many years.

Don D. Rosenberg, Licensed Psychologist, LMFT, and CSAC, is the President of Shorehaven Behavioral Health, Inc., in southeastern Wisconsin. Shorehaven is a mental health and substance abuse treatment clinic with offices in the Milwaukee and Racine areas.

Shorehaven has a large staff, so callers can quickly receive telehealth throughout Wisconsin and in-person therapy in Milwaukee.

The clinic provides in-home therapy throughout eastern Wisconsin. Shorehaven is also a training clinic for graduate students and post-graduate trainees. Shorehaven accepts most Badgercare/Medicaid insurance as well as commercially insured clients. Referrals and inquiries: 414-540-2170.

drosenberg@shorehavenbhi.com

www.shorehavenbhi.com

www.facebook.com/shorehavenbhi

Like us on Facebook to follow our posts on the craft of psychotherapy and our Therapy Gems© series: <https://www.facebook.com/shorehavenbhi>