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The Importance of Play in Adulthood: A Dialogue with Joan M. Erikson

Daniel Benveniste

Joan M. Erikson (1902 – 1997) was an artist, a writer, a mother, and the wife and collaborator of Erik H. Erikson (1902-1994), one of the most important and influential psychoanalysts in the world. The following is an edited dialogue on one of her favorite topics – The Importance of Play in Adulthood. It features her thoughts on the subject and reminiscences of the ways she played throughout her life. She muses on play in relation to humor, fun, the role of the fool, and more. The article was a project undertaken in the spirit of play and it will hopefully evoke further playful musings in the minds of the readers.

The late Joan M. Erikson (1902 – 1997) was a dancer, choreographer, jeweler, poet, teacher, writer, and researcher. Her husband for sixty-four years was Erik H. Erikson (1902-1994) one of the most important and influential psychoanalysts in the world. She was his English teacher, his collaborator and editor, the mother of his children and his lifelong muse.

In the late 1920s and early '30s Joan and Erik Erikson, along with Peter Blos, were teachers at the Hietzing School in Vienna, under the direction of Anna Freud, Dorothy Burlingham and Eva Rosenfeld. At the Hietzing School art and play and academics were melded together in a dynamic and creative learning environment for troubled children in need of a child analysis and/or an out of home placement. In the 1940s Joan collaborated with her husband in schematizing the Eight Ages of Psychosocial Development. In the 1950s Joan founded the creative arts program at the Austen Riggs Center, in Stockbridge Massachusetts, a residential psychiatric facility where severely disturbed adults were invited to express themselves creatively without any suggestion that this activity was an "art therapy." Instead it was seen an opportunity to use the media to connect with oneself, the group and the world. A special feature of this program was the way in which Joan protected the patients' creative work from psychological scrutiny or interpretation. This was a feature that noted psychologist, David Rapaport, strongly supported. In the 1970s Joan continued this work as a Senior Consultant on the Adolescent In-patient Unit at Mt. Zion Hospital in San Francisco.

In 1976 *Activity, Recovery, Growth: The Communal Role of Planned Activities* was published in which Joan and her co-authors, David and Joan Loveless, described her work at the Austen Riggs Center. Joan Erikson had previously published three other books, *Mata Ni Pachedi: A Book on the Temple Cloth of the Mother Goddess* (1968), *The Universal Bead* (1969, 1993) and *St. Francis and His Four Ladies* (1970). She subsequently co-authored *Vital Involvement in Old Age* (1986) with Erik H. Erikson and Helen Q. Kivnick and more recently authored *Wisdom and the Senses* (1988), *Legacies: Prometheus, Orpheus and Socrates* (1993), and *Poems* (1996). She also translated *20 Poems from the Book of Hours: Rainer Maria Rilke* (1988). In 1997 her three chapters on "The Ninth Stage" of psychosocial development were published in a re-edition of Erik Erikson's *The life Cycle Completed*.

In May of 1996 I spent five days with Joan M. Erikson at her home in Harwich on Cape Cod. We drank tea in the mornings and port in the evenings. We collected sea shells at the beach, took walks, sang songs, recited poetry, watched the birds feeding, listened to the song birds and talked about the importance of play in adulthood. The following is an edited dialogue based on our tape-recorded conversations.

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Daniel Benveniste: Joan, when you first proposed this topic, *The Importance of Play in Adulthood*, I thought about all the ways that you have been creative in your life. But then it occurred to me that before getting in to all that, we would probably do well to begin this discussion with a working definition of play. So, how would you define play?

Joan M. Erikson: Play is what you do, in a lighthearted way, for your own pleasure because you find it amusing and enhancing somehow. Many will say that the opposite of "play" is "work" but I say that the opposite of "play" is "obey." A child may be playing and having a good time but the play comes to a stop when there is a demand to obey. An adult will play or work, but for a child, there is no work. So the opposite of play is the order to stop, because you're told to, or you're told to do something else, or, in some way, you're interrupted by an adult or someone in charge of you who has the authority to say "Now you stop playing and do this, that or the other."

DB: It seems to me that one can be constricted by obeying limits and that one can be guided by obeying limits. If the walls of a sandbox constrain more than they contain the play will be limited. If the constraints force us to obey too much, we're probably performing more than playing.

JE: Yes and I think you're not as free to play in the same way if you know you've been told to do something. You might override the limit but I think it often drives the playfulness out of the play.

Adults often place too much emphasis on their duty to finish up what they are doing. It's almost like a promise to themselves to do something. But then they feel they let themselves down by being sidetracked. And that's the way they look at play - as a kind of sidetrack - even though play can be very refreshing.

We really shouldn't take ourselves so seriously. We're a joke, you know, whichever way you look at it, we're a joke. And taking yourself seriously is certainly a joke because you lose all the freedom of motion that you had before you started out on whatever course you're following. And if that goal is more important than anything else, then heaven help you. There's always more than one way to go. You have choices all along the way. Play helps us to be aware of the fact that we do have choices. If you think you don't have choices, then you're in a tight hole and you aren't going to do anything very well.

It's "play" when you're doing things that you really haven't got time for. There's a kind of a release in doing something you know perfectly well you shouldn't be doing at that moment because there are other things that are important that you're leaving out - but you play just the same, because you need that moment of relaxation. And if you don't allow yourself that time and that freedom, there's something wrong.

DB: How do you play? What forms has your play taken throughout your adulthood?

JE: Well, I sew and I weave and I make things and I love making things. It gives me pleasure and it looks like work but it isn't because it's a pleasure to do it. I don't have as many skills as I used to have and that sobers me. I don't undertake to make myself a dress, which I used to, or make something complicated for myself or anybody else. Partly that's because my eyesight isn't so good anymore and partly because I don't have the skills in my fingers that I once had.

Bead making was a borderline thing for me, on the border between work and play. I loved doing it and it was great fun to make beautiful things. I enjoyed the process and was very pleased with the product but sometimes it could be work when it was a challenge. Sometimes I sit and talk with people that I am interested in. That can be play. A conversation can be play.

DB: What makes a conversation playful?

JE: A conversation becomes playful when you don't know what the response is going to be to anything that you say and you say what you want with the idea that there will be a response to it. That can be fun but also very unpredictable. It can be fun or it can be a let down but there is always a potential.

DB: You say that you have played as an adult by sewing, weaving, bead making, and in conversation. How else have you played as an adult? How else have you gone to the edge of your not knowing?

JE: I write. Writing can be play too - a playing with words. If you write something and it pleases you, that's play. If there's a push behind it, it's not play. If there's a push behind it, the lightness of it goes.

DB: That "push," as you say, betrays a plan, an agenda and an effort to achieve a prescribed goal. Striving for a goal and efforts to perform can be worthwhile endeavors in their own right but they lack that playful spirit that you were referring to. They might be satisfying but they aren't always fun and certainly aren't funny!

JE: That's right and humor has quite a lot to do with play. "Humidity" is etymologically related to a sense of "humor." Humor pertains to the movement of the essences or humors within you. The Latin root of "humor" is "umor" meaning liquid or fluid. Humor is something that flows, resembles water itself, and symbolizes the movement of unconscious forces, which gradually evolve into the basic characteristics of an individual and express themselves in the body in moods, in emotional reactions, in qualities and in feelings of the mind and spirit. A capacity to appreciate or understand a situation is also a part of a sense of humor. Those with a sense of humor do not laugh at others, just at the ridiculous. It's a healing kind of laugh.

There is a joy when any disproportion is restored to the proper proportion. And sometimes, if you overdo things, it becomes a laughing matter. But our natural ability to play is lost when humor is missing. Performances, games, sports, and the rest all become big business. Many yearn for the spirit of play unattached to gain. Schiller says "Man is only fully human when he is at play for itself." Another important part of play is a sense of wonder, which sets the stage for the freedom and simplicity that are so integral to play. I think it's a loss to Christianity that the Gospels don't convey the humor and playfulness that Jesus must certainly have had. It seems obvious to me that he loved little children and their straight forward ways. You know, he said, "Suffer the little children to come unto me and forbid them not, for of such is the Kingdom of Heaven." In other words, Allow the little children to come unto me and forbid them not, because its meant for them. They're part of it!

I make a distinction between "Games" and "Play." "Games" demand a beginning and an ending, with winning or losing; they have rules and boundaries, and are time bound. Surprises are a hazard and spoil the games. But "play" has no ending. It strives for continuation and change. Surprises enhance the play. They are invited and hoped for. Vulnerability is accepted and can be incorporated. With some leeway, there's some ground to stand on, to play on. Shakespeare was the most perceptive poet who ever lived. He recognized quite wisely that sleep is perhaps the world's freest play area, for when we sleep, we engage in that great free play of the senses and the mind -- we dream. Erik spoke of: "Play that juggles sense - mind - fantasy with a creative chuckle." Put another way, "Play that juggles perception - intellection- imagination with creative skill and fun." Imagination is the free play of perception and intellection with no holds barred - unending play with thoughts, ideas, memories - all the "toys and reasons" of the mind.

When Einstein looked back on his method of thinking and working, he was convinced that fantasy had been his greatest asset. Play offers the leeway to let images, thoughts, ideas, turn things upside down, inside out, in a sensible, non-sensible way. Play is, I hold, an attitude, not only an activity. It can pervade your life and make you creative - and alive. Blake wrote: "The child's toys and the old man's reasons are the fruits of the two seasons." Without the play of the child in us, few creations, ideas or inventions, and few valuable reasons would be forthcoming, and little wisdom would ripen as we grow old.

A sense of humor is communicable and I would say that a sense of humor is, in fact, the royal road to freedom - freedom from the pretension of ego in himself, herself or another. To laugh at oneself, one must override all sense of pride. That's the best way to laugh. A sense of humor is only a sense of humor if you've got it about yourself.

DB: When you say, "Humor is the royal road to freedom." it seems that you are playing with Freud's statement that "The dream is the royal road to the unconscious."

JE: Yes, and I think its a safe road to take. The gift of child's play is a natural joy. We lose a lot when we use the word "play" to describe so many things that aren't play. Play is for the joy of it - for the fun of it. Games and sports and theater and musicians playing jazz or rock 'n' roll are all described in terms of "play" but often they are not.

So often it is said that the fool and the child are hidden in each of us. When we lose play we lose the child and the fool as well. Laughter is at the heart of things. The divine comedy of being, is the fool in the palace. Those who have a sense of humor do not laugh at a person but rather in a simple feeling of delight in the ridiculous, wherever it is manifested. In such laughter there is no condemnation of the other or the self, just the

recognition of the loss of proportion. That's a healing thing, not a destructive thing. Humor enables us to endure and find meaning in life's comedies and tragedies, its seriousness and its absurdities.

Play is conspicuously missing from our society. Gaiety and laughter and the child within each of us are all lost in exact proportion to the loss of our ability to play. Schopenhauer says, "A sense of humor is the only divine quality of man." And T.S. Elliot says that, "Laughter is at the heart of things."

I think its wonderful, if, as you grow old, you can be more and more capable of accepting and laughing and seeing things as funny instead of being distressed by them, since there is so very little you can do anyway. Aging is a process of becoming free. I think it's a very good idea to not take oneself too seriously.

DB: I'm intrigued by your reference to "the fool in the palace." I think of both the political structure of having a "fool in the palace" but also the metaphor of psychic structure as a kingdom and the need to have a fool, or a lighthearted spirit, around to keep the psychic equilibrium of the kingdom from getting too rigid, brittle, controlled, and closed. It's a good metaphor but you were speaking of "the fool in the palace" specifically as a role in a political structure. Could you say more about that?

JE: Well to tell you the truth, I think the fool in the palace was one of the most intelligent things a community ever planned. The king would weigh all the pros and cons of a situation but there was always a fool there who would have the privilege and responsibility of saying to the king "Now listen here, King, don't you think you're going a little too far? Lets not get into this too deeply or we'll never get out of it." The fool was allowed that kind of freedom. The king loved the fool and he always brought the king back to something less severe, less cut and dried. The fool would always put something in that would make the people giggle and even make the king laugh. In this way, it lightened his load tremendously.

But what a brave character the fool had to be, because he could never really tell when he might be over-doing it. When the king would decide something that was too obviously harsh, the fool might come in and say, "Oh my god, that poor creature, he won't have another drink of water for six weeks!" or "Are you going to cut their heads off and line them up in a row?" Overblown statements would make the group laugh and help the king to see his decision in a new light. They would put him back into a normal position, as if he were a human being, instead of a king. I think it's stunning that that was possible then. The king and the court loved the fool and there was great affection for him.

DB: What do you think would happen in a kingdom without a fool?

JE: What would happen? It happens all the time. Read the newspaper.

DB: Oh, yeah! I forgot! But you know it seems to me that your husband, Erik Erikson, was involved in a lot of very serious work throughout his life - personal psychoanalyses, the evaluation of Hitler's personality during the war for the United States government, work with returning war veterans, historical analyses, psychobiographical research, investigation of religious issues, and so on. How would he play? How would he integrate the playful spirit of the fool?

JE: Well, one thing you could say about Erik is that he knew how to laugh. He really did. His laugh was contagious and he said amusing things. He had a good sense of humor. He didn't take everything he did seriously. He had a wonderful sense of humor.

DB: I recall now that he was also an artist. I seem to recall that his interest in the arts dated back to his childhood or at least into adolescence. What about you, how did you play as a child?

JE: Well, it was very clear in the parsonage, where I grew up, that there were lines that you didn't cross and it was made explicit to you right from the first. So you knew whenever you were overstepping the line. When my father came into the dining room at breakfast time or lunchtime or whenever, you had to be focused on the fact that you were going into the dining room. You were going to be sitting down and being with the rest of the family. You had to be focused on that because if you went in there and went on laughing and giggling over the thing you had been talking about or playing with, with the rest of the kids, he would say in a deep voice "No nonsense in this house." and he meant it. He wanted quiet because he wanted to say grace before we had the meal. When he said "No funny business and no giggling." we knew that the play had to stop momentarily. Then as soon as he'd said grace, everyone was free to say what they wanted to and to giggle and be what they liked. And while there were lines that were very carefully held, we were allowed to do our laughing and giggling and all that kind of thing in the playroom, which was there for that purpose, and we made free use of it. We would make fun of everything we had seen. We repeated what we had heard, out there in the dining room or in church.

For example, my brother played the role of the parson. He would hold his hands the way father did when he was preaching. I don't know why father did this but we were on to it. We thought that was just what you did. He'd put all the fingers together in an open way

like this. This is the way he preached. So my brother would do the same thing. Then we would have these two sermons that we would say. One of them was:

"Dearly beloved brethren, is it not a sin
for when you peel potatoes, to throw away the skin?
For the skin feeds the pigs, and the pigs feed you.
Dearly beloved brethren, is this not true?"

And then we would all giggle to ourselves! Then the other one was:

"What is love? Oh, let me tell you. 'tis a passion so intense,
that it oft destroys the reason, rends to tatters common sense.
When our lives are not without it, 'tis a blessing from above.
And it either makes or mars us, 'tis this blessing we call love."

Oh, and then we used to also say:

"Algie met a bear.
The bear was bulgy.
The bulge was Algie."

DB: Its funny, the things we remember. Now, let's see you were born in 1902, so your early childhood, and these memories of play, must have been taking place around 1907 or 1910, somewhere around there. What else do you recall playing in those early childhood years?

JE: Well, I remember I broke my dolls head. My doll had a porcelain head and I was pushing the doll down the hill in a little stroller when the doll fell over. It fell out and its head was broken. So we had to have a proper burial for this doll and all of that was done with great ceremony. You see hearing all the things that we heard as children around the parsonage we just picked it up wherever we were. I'm sure we had been to funerals by then. In fact, I remember I went to my grandmother's funeral. It was very weepy and sad. So we had a funeral for the doll but then when we got the child all buried, I had a fit because we had buried the child and I had to have it back so we had to dig it up again!

DB: As a child I loved imaginative play. As a teenager I started to really enjoy dancing. And I still enjoy dancing to this day.

JE: Well, we have that in common. It meant so much to me that dance could become such an important part of me for a number of years. It's just amazing what dance did for me. It freed me to leave home and go off to Austria as a young woman in the 1920s. Imagine! I didn't speak any German and I just went off with nothing.

DB: How did you get interested in dance?

JE: In high school we did some movement to rhythm. It wasn't dance but it was rhythmic movement. I had always thought that dance was when little girls came out and did goodness-knows-what, and that didn't appeal to me at all. But then when I went to Columbia we had a teacher who came to teach us one day and she was a big woman and I thought. "God, here is a woman - that size - dancing. Well, if she was dancing, it certainly must be alright for me to dance." And I just remember leaping from one thing to the other because I was just so excited to do it. And in no time at all I found other places and people who were teaching dance too. So, I would go off and get further training here and there from the other teachers in town. It was very exciting for me.

I could play the games but they didn't satisfy me the way the dance did. After completing my undergraduate degree at Columbia, I took a master's degree at Teachers College at Columbia and then taught at Teacher's College and Barnard College. This was in the 1920s when modern dance was just coming out and I just loved it. Ballet is what I thought was so awful. To become a ballerina you do things that distort yourself. It's all posed. It isn't flowing. You do this thing and then the next thing. And they use their feet badly and put very tight things around their feet. I thought that was awful. I was interested in modern dance.

So, I went to the head of the department and said, "Look I want to go to Europe to study modern dance over there and I want to write it up so I can tell you what's going on over there." And he listened very severely to all of this and I said, "If you could help me out, financially, so I could afford to get there, I could do this and then I could report back." And he said, "Well, if I thought you'd ever come back free, I'd do it. But you never will. You're gonna get married over there." Which I did!

So I just went over with nothing. I just took a big jump and there I was in that big country and I didn't even speak the language. It was very funny when I first got there. I would unknowingly say the most awful things as I struggled to learn these new languages. I remember going into a shop and I wanted to weigh a package so I could send it and instead of saying, "I want to weigh something so I can put postage on it." I said, "I must have a bassinet. I'm going to take a chance." and the two men there laughed, looked at each other and said, "Well, why not?"

Anyway I went to the dance schools and I would say politely in whatever language they could understand that I wanted to come and stay there and be there for a while and observe what they were doing. And they would say, "Well what harm could it do?" and they'd let me come and let me participate, partly because it was very unusual for an

American to do that and they probably also thought, "Well for the love of Pete, she's sure got her nerve!" So I went and I could tell from the music what it was they were trying to do and I could do things they couldn't do because they didn't know anything about syncopation. So if there was some syncopated music I could do it. I was on the right note and they just thought that was magnificent. But I was making all sorts of other mistakes and saying funny things and it's just a miracle that I got by.

Then I had heard that there was a class up on the north shore, in Germany. I went to this class and just did what everyone else was doing and it kept me in good shape but I couldn't talk to anybody at all. It was more like gymnastics. Then I went to look for Isadora Duncan's school in Austria. She wasn't there when I arrived but we did the best we could without her. She wasn't there but her three best teachers were all there. She left them in charge of the thing over the summer and I was with them but I never did work with her, unfortunately.

Then I got a job working at a school where the teacher was English speaking. I helped her and that was how I earned my way. That was in Austria. I was teaching children at that school because I thought it was wonderful teaching children who were that little. I would start them off with dance of various kinds and they just took to it - and so did the woman I worked for. Then they had a big ball, the last week before Lent, and that's where I met Erik. I had said, "Hello." to him once before, after a performance, so I knew who he was. And when I saw him again at the ball, we were all in costume. We wore masks at first and then later on you could take them off. It was held at a beautiful summer palace. I wore a long blue dance costume - scant but comfortable. And Erik was all dressed in red, like a sheik. So we danced and "we could have danced all night" and we did! And then, when we got worn out, we would sit out on the sidelines where we could watch everybody go by. Everybody dressed up like somebody from somewhere else, and we would look at them and say, "Hmm, why don't we go there." We danced all night and had breakfast in the morning just before we took the train back to town

DB: Did Erik like to dance throughout his adulthood?

JE: Oh yes, he never liked to dance by himself. He never took it up as I did but he would dance with people.

DB: In my family, everyone loves to dance and needs to dance too.

JE: Ah, well so do I. The rhythm is there whether you like it or not. And there is nothing to replace it at all. There is nothing to replace dance. You can dance by yourself or with a partner or partners but without it, life wouldn't be worth a nickel. That's the truth. Crazy,

but true. But how I love it. It's as if the music takes hold of you and there is just nothing you can do about it. You have to be part of it and keep moving your body. Now, I dance sitting down a lot.

DB: What is the relation between modern dance and play?

JE: Modern dance is free and freeing. I went to a show the other day in Cambridge where there were men and women in two groups and you couldn't tell a man from a woman. They all wore exactly the same thing and the men had let their hair grow and the women, some of them, had their haircut. There was no differentiation. You couldn't say for sure if it was a man or a woman that was dancing. It was so unbelievable to see this. It was fantastic! I've never seen men do things like this. And they delighted in it. You didn't know who was which and it didn't matter. It was very interesting. I think the difference that we make between men and women and what they should do and how they should be is so ridiculous. We demand these things in a stupid kind of way. I think it's just as appropriate for a woman to hold a door for a man as it is for a man to hold it for a woman. We've stressed this thing about being gentlemanly toward women and women holding back and waiting for men to encourage them, but it's phony. And it interests me tremendously to see this oneness on the stage. It's interesting when you think back far enough - who drove the carriage? It was always the men and now we have women who have cars just as often as men. At least we've broken that down. So little by little these things are not being taken so much for granted and things are changing.

I don't know what will happen. I can't envision the future but I think there will be more reciprocity when we don't make such distinctions between men and women in the kinds of things we talk about and the kinds of things we do and everything else. And for all of that, a sense of humor is very necessary to assist in bringing down all of these strange hurdles or obstacles.

DB: Do you feel that there were options or opportunities that you missed because you are a woman?

JE: Well, it's hard to say. As you see I took terrific jumps. I studied modern dance, I went to Europe, we came back to the United States and so on.

DB: These terrific jumps and playful leaps seem to suggest a kind of "transcendence within limits" so to speak. Of course, one can be playful with colors, shapes, and materials in artistic expression but it seems to me that one can also be creative in social relations as well.

JE: Yes, and that reminds me of a poem we used to recite a long time ago. We would say:

"Once there was a way, I had to do my best to please
And change with every passing lad, to suit his the-o-ries
But now I know the things I know, and do the things I do
And if you do not like me so, to hell, my love, with you."

As I recall there was quite a lot of that kind of rebellious feeling at that time in women. There was some writing, I vaguely remember, in that spirit where women were saying, "No. I'm gonna do the things I want to do and so be it."

DB: Joan, it seems to me that you and Erik and Peter Blos were taking some leaps and being pretty innovative at the Hietzing School as well. I read that at that school, organized and run by Anna Freud, Dorothy Burlingham and Eva Rosenfeld, in the 1920s and '30s, you structured the academic work in accordance with the Project Method, in which the children's interests were engaged in a particular subject matter such as "The Eskimos" and that the children were then drawn into mathematical, historical, scientific, geographical, and literary investigations of the subject.

JE: Yes, and when Kai, my oldest child, was born I used to take him to school and he'd be outside in the yard when I was teaching inside. And the children would come and say "Kai weint." - Kai is crying. - And then we'd have to go out and take care of Kai and it was all very fun and very sweet, in a way. The Burlinghams were all English speaking so they couldn't just throw their children into a German school so they created this school and Peter and Erik and I taught there and between us we got a lot of stuff done. Erik was a very good teacher. We had fun there. I was teaching a certain amount of dance But I had to teach it on their terms - on the children's terms - so that it didn't seem feminine, you know. I'd give them ropes to swing like this and they would love doing it and the boys wouldn't feel that we were trying to make women of them.

DB: When were you and Erik married?

JE: Well, actually we weren't married until after our first two boys were born but when we did get married we were married three times over on or around April Fools Day because we decided that was the way to do this. It amused us to get married on April Fools Day. We had to go to the government man first, so we did it legally. Then we did one in the Anglican Church there and then we did another one in the Jewish temple because Erik's family was Jewish. So we did all three.

DB: When was it that you left Vienna?

JE: In 1933. We knew the war was coming on because everything told us it was. Much of Austria was kind of laughing it off. They didn't think anything was going to happen but the Germans were so obviously all in stride and ready and I knew that if we had to go through Germany to get home we'd never make it. I had two little boys and we had to get out of that country and I just said, "Look we have to get out of here."

I had a British passport because I was born in Canada so I was English. Well if we would have stayed, I would have lost that because I had married Erik and it didn't matter what the wife was because you become what he is. So I would have become a German, as he was at that point, and I didn't go for that. So, all I could think of was, we have to get out of here and I started to say, "We're leaving."

The analysts thought we were pretty silly for leaving and thought we were over-reacting and so on. "You're crazy to be so upset. Hitler's not going to do anything." But we knew Austria couldn't do a damn thing against Hitler. So we got out and I never did anything smarter. And then the other analysts had a terrible time getting out. I had taught a lot of them English. That was one way I was making some money at that point. I would go to their houses and teach them this and that, hoping it would help them when they wanted to get out, and it did. "You're being ridiculous." they said. And I thought "Oh no, I'm not. I'm here with two little sons and I'm not gonna have them dangle around here with people trying to decide who are they and what are they. We're goin'!"

So we got on the Polish corridor because it was just one line of traffic that could take you from wherever you were in Austria right to the North Sea and from there you could get a boat to take you the next step. So we went to the North Sea and got on a cattle boat going to Copenhagen. We decided to go to Copenhagen to see if we could get back Erik's original citizenship there. Well we got on the cattle boat and went but Denmark didn't take us in lovingly. They let us stay until I could get my family in action and they were the ones who made it possible for us to go from there to New York. And on the boat we met a representative of the United States from one of the European countries or Russia or something like that. And while I took care of the kids, he taught Erik quite a lot of English on the boat, on our way to the United States. That was very nice of him and a very big help because when we arrived, we had to tell who we were and all that. It was really something.

DB: Well, that was a huge leap, all the way across the Atlantic. But wait a minute! It seems to me that you must have been in Vienna when Sigmund Freud was still around. Did you ever meet him?

JE: Oh, yes. We shared a house for one summer with the Freuds. In the summer a lot of the people, where we were living, moved to the outskirts of town so that they would be near the world at large but not in the city itself. It was on the border of the town and out a little bit (Probably in Poetzleinsdorf in the 18th District). The Freuds had taken this place for the summer. And they wanted Erik there for various reasons. Partly they liked having Erik there because he was, at that point, in training to be a child analyst and it was practical to have him around in those circumstances but he could also do that which he did very well, which was to be with the kids. There were a lot of children that were around from the various families. So one day I was strolling in the garden with Kai, who was just a year or so old and I was carrying him and Freud came up behind me. He was looking at the little one from behind me and as he passed by he said, "Sehr intelligent. Sehr intelligent." Which means "Very intelligent." It was a funny thing to say about a little baby - that he looks "Sehr intelligent." and I thought, "Oh heavens, I don't want one like that. Not that young. No. He has a right to look and be just that young." But that really was the highest praise that I think Freud ever bestowed on anyone. I thought Kai had really been chosen. And I knew Kai would be pleased to know that in the future.

I was also in Freud's home in Vienna. He had a lot of little playthings you know. His office wasn't an empty room. He had all kinds of stuff on the desk and table. He had a big playroom. He would show me things from there. He was very friendly. We didn't discuss it very much. It was just like he was saying, "Come into my playroom."

DB: You know, Joan, in Erik's preface to his book *Toys and Reasons* he wrote, "As always, I thank Joan Erikson for her collaboration in my writings in many tangible and intangible ways. This book is dedicated to her because of her lifelong devotion to the grace that is play." And after this discussion with you, I think I know just what he meant. You're an extraordinary individual, Joan, and it's been an honor, a privilege, and a pleasure to talk with you. Do you have any closing thoughts or reflections on play or on your life with Erik?

JE: "I'll never know what made it so exciting,
Why all at once my heart took flight.
I only know when he
Began to dance with me
I could have danced, danced, danced, all night!"

Joan Erikson died August 3, 1997.

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