

The following is an original article written in 2007 after the death of Albert Ellis.

After a year-long battle with poor health, Albert Ellis Ph.D., the tough-minded therapist in a tender-minded profession, died on the 24th of July 2007. Dr. Ellis is cited with changing the landscape of modern psychotherapy. In a survey conducted of his peers, he was voted the second most influential psychotherapist in history. Sigmund Freud, the so-called father of psychotherapy, was third.

Initially, Ellis wanted to become a fiction writer. After having little success as a writer/journalist, he began searching for a new direction. Noticing his knack for helping friends with their personal problems, he rather haphazardly decided to study clinical psychology. Ellis received his Ph.D. from Columbia University in New York in 1947. Having completed his tertiary education, he established a private psychoanalytical practice in New York city. Rather quickly, Ellis became disillusioned with the slowness and ineffectiveness of psychoanalysis and in 1953 he started a revolution in psychotherapy.

Albert Ellis created the first cognitive behavioral therapy: Rational Emotive Behavioral Therapy (REBT). For the first time in psychotherapy Ellis focused on the beliefs one has and not on the past or the pure behavior. He declared, as did the Stoic philosophers, "It is not the 'thing' that disturbs one; rather, the dogmatic view that one takes of the 'thing'." In 1955, Ellis presented REBT to his peers. He was considered a heretic. Not only was REBT criticized because of its revolutionary paradigm, but also because of Ellis personally. Ellis was, simply put, a character. He often used obscenities in therapy and at the podium. He was known for attacking the "nutty" beliefs of his clients. He also took to singing Rational-Emotive songs at the American Psychologist Association's conventions. And, in order to conquer his own pathological shyness, he forced himself to proposition hundreds of women in the Bronx Park, an exercise he called "shame attacking".

Despite his eccentricities, Dr. Ellis was devoted to helping others. In 1967, he purchased a mansion in Manhattan in order to provide affordable psychotherapy to the public while promoting REBT. Since that time, Ellis contributed all profits from his professional endeavors to the Albert Ellis Institute. He wrote and co-wrote more than 60 books, authored around 1000 empirical-journal articles and has taped hundreds of hours of self-help audio and video tapes. For more than 40 years he hosted the popular "Friday Night Workshops" where he offered free REBT demonstrations to the public. And, as Ellis always wanted "to die in the saddle", he gave his last public-course to a group of Belgium students from his hospital bed.

Almost 60 years after the initial shock, the advances in psychotherapy made by Dr. Ellis have earned him many honors and awards. Indeed, at the American Psychological Association's 115th annual convention, on the 17th of August 2007, a tribute was held for Dr. Ellis. Today, REBT is the foundation of all modern psychotherapies. "Al" was 93 and is survived by his wife, Debbie Joffe Ellis. The Official Memorial Service for Dr. Albert Ellis was held on Friday, September 28, 2007, 7:30 pm, at St. Paul's Chapel at Columbia University.