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## RAPPORT

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# Frank Farrelly

and provocative  
change

[ A tribute to Frank Farrelly ]



# Frank Farrelly

## and Provocative Change

By  
Nick Kemp



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**M**any people who have studied NLP may not be aware of Frank Farrelly, the creator of Provocative Therapy, and his influence on the co-creators of NLP. I was fortunate to interview Richard Bandler on Frank, and also Frank Farrelly on his experience with Richard Bandler and John Grinder. I suspect I may be one of the few people to have had access to both these individuals and was struck by how Richard had a great respect for Frank and his work, commenting: 'You know, Farrelly had to be one of the most courageous people on the face of the earth. What I respect about Frank is that he stuck to his guns. No matter how much they told him therapy should be boring or how much they told him he was over the edge, what he noticed is he made people better.'

I first met Frank at a workshop in 2004 on the south coast in the UK. Amazingly there were only 17 attendees including myself, my wife and Andrew T. Austin who I also met for the first time. Little did I know that this was to be a truly life changing event. I found out later that Frank regularly ran events in Europe, but this was the first time I had heard of him running a training in the UK.

Frank began the first day by introducing himself and commenting that as this was a smaller seminar than usual, each delegate could introduce themselves and their reason for attending the seminar. We came from a variety of backgrounds, including hypnotherapists, sales and marketing directors, and other professions, with individuals travelling from as far afield as Mexico.

Frank talked about the development of Provocative Therapy and explained that he was the ninth of a family of 12 children, and that he

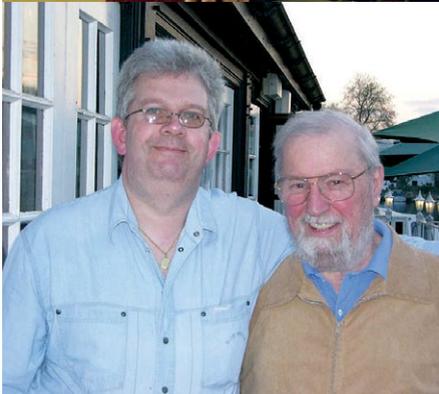
had learnt much from his family upbringing. Provocative Therapy was developed in an inpatient ward as Farrelly, dissatisfied with his effectiveness as a therapist, and influenced by Carl Rogers and Spurgeon English, began to explore new procedures for promoting significant, resilient change in chronic and recalcitrant patients. He worked in this institutional setting for 17 years, continuing to develop and refine his techniques. Frank was certainly on the radar of many therapists when he first created Provocative Therapy in the 1960s and although he never spoke directly to Milton Erickson, he had a phone call with Betty Erickson who commented that Milton was interested in his work.

In the first hour of the 2004 seminar, Frank commented: 'Anyone can be hypnotised, anyone can be gotten to.'

He explained that Provocative Therapy seeks to elicit five types of behaviour.

- 1 Assertive behaviour.
- 2 Self affirmatory behaviour.
- 3 Realistic and appropriate self-defensive behaviours.
- 4 Psycho social reality testing behaviour.
- 5 Behaviour that denotes communicating positive messages including warmth, affection, friendship, sexual attraction and love.

After this initial introduction, he commented: 'Well we could now start with a Provocative Therapy interview, or we could...[long pause]...just wait.' We all looked at each other watching who would dare to be the first client in a one to one session with Frank! Frank in the meantime sat back in his chair in a very relaxed manner, just waiting. In later years I began →



→ to fully appreciate the power of pausing during client interactions to provoke responses. Throughout these four days I was totally fascinated by this approach, which seemed to defy any sort of analysis. My previous five intensive years of training with Richard Bandler seemed totally useless in figuring out just what Frank was doing!

By day two I decided to 'park my NLP head' and simply watch and listen without trying to compare what I was noticing with previous experience. Frank didn't overtly explain a great deal during this event and many of us were so mystified by what we saw we really didn't know what to ask him!

After this event I headed back to Leeds feeling that I had been plugged into the national grid, fascinated by what I had just experienced. I contacted him a few months later and discovered that as well as his original book, *Provocative Therapy*, he had also written a second book, *Me and God*. There was only one problem; it was only available in German! Frank's longstanding promoter and dear friend Dr E. Noni Höefner had ensured that it was published.

Seeing as I had a home recording studio, I asked Frank if he would be interested in audio recording the book in the UK, and we agreed some studio time. I allowed a total of 10 days for the recording, which would produce a four and a half hour audio product. Most people would need at least three times for this as well as multiple takes. We finally completed the entire recording in less than three days, and in a book of 37,000 words we only did three second takes during this period! In recent years, Jane James did a wonderful job of finally getting the book published in English for the very first time.

I started hosting Frank in 2005 and each year after that, he came to stay at our house for a week prior to each training to, in his words, 'get his days and nights straightened out'. We discovered that we had a mutual love of movies and would happily spend many hours prior to events watching films in our home in Leeds. On one occasion we managed to watch the entire three seasons of *Deadwood* back to back! My wife brought food every few hours, and amazingly, on one particular day we managed an entire 15 hours of Ian McShane 'cleaning house' in the Wild West! Frank loved westerns, Film Noire and classic movies. Aside from any professional relationship, we became firm friends and we would meet in person for three to four weeks most years, as well as speaking on the phone.

With the help of my good friend Mark Zaretti and Spartmedia we recorded every single workshop in forthcoming years, as well as many private discussions, some of which can be found on YouTube. I was mindful that to date there was very little available material on Frank's work, so we set out to correct this. We set up The Association for Provocative Therapy (AFPT) to provide a Farrelly approved quality standard in Provocative Therapy. In recent years I am delighted

## “ Frank Farrelly RIP, 26 August 1931 – 10 February 2013 ”

that Dr E. Noni Höefner from the German Institute of Provocative Therapy (DIP) also supports this initiative which ensures that Provocative Therapy trainings remain true to Frank's original vision and continues Frank's legacy.

A few years ago, under the instruction of his PA, Mrs Kim Stokes, Frank started shipping me boxes of Provocative Therapy material dating back three decades. I have begun creating the Farrelly archive in the UK and as Kim commented 'Frank never threw away anything!' My own Provocative Change Works approach would never have been possible without my years of training with Frank and our countless discussions.

Over the last three decades I have been fortunate enough to have met and spent time with a host of excellent trainers from the world of NLP and other fields. The creators of NLP modelled a number of excellent therapists including Frank. Frank, however, created the entire Provocative Therapy approach by himself, a totally different way of working with clients. He had a great love of music, beauty, reading, movies, motorbikes, and of course, singing hymns in old churches, as well as Apple Macs, digital photography, and, of course, above all he loved people. Frank would like nothing more than a fine meal and great company.

We joked about 'Frank's girls' who consisted of his translators, hosts, professional colleagues and dear friends spread around the world. These included Noni, Jane James, Sue Knight, Elke Borchart, Heidi Huber, Anke Konemann and my wife who he referred to as 'Dr sweet Sue'. Frank loved giving people nicknames. In the early days of our meeting I was known as 'The Can do kid' and in later years was referred to as 'Fearless Leader!'

He was without doubt the most congruent person I have ever met, always spoke his mind yet always had time to listen, and generously supported those genuinely interested in helping others. He maintained that client sessions should always be conducted 'as if talking to an old friend with a twinkle in the eye and warmth in the heart'.

As Frank passed away on 10 February 2013 in the early hours that twinkle, which had helped so many people, departed from this world. He will be greatly missed by dear friends, professional colleagues and clients alike. His insights into human behaviour were quite extraordinary and he was, as far as I am concerned, without doubt the smartest and kindest guy I have ever had the privilege to meet. ■