

Biography of Eric Berne

The following biography of Eric Berne is adapted from multiple sources. Family recollections, stories, photographs, and letters were used to compile this information. In addition, biographical data from the [International Transactional Analysis Association](#) was also consulted. A comprehensive [biography](#) of Eric Berne written in 1984 was also used as a source, although the authors used the same family members as sources who wrote this biography! Occasionally, internet searches include the search terms Eric Bern, Erik Berne, Erik Bern, Eric Burn, Erick Berne, Eric Berner, and others. All of those refer to the one and only Dr. Eric Berne.

Eric Berne's Early Years



Dr. David Hillel
Bernstein, father of Eric
Berne

Eric Berne was born on May 10, 1910 in Montreal, Quebec, Canada, as Leonard Bernstein. He was the son of David Hillel Bernstein, MD, a general practitioner, and Sarah Gordon Bernstein, a professional writer and editor. His only sibling, his sister Grace, was born five years later. The family immigrated to Canada from Poland and Russia. Both parents graduated from McGill University in Montreal. Eric was close to his father and spoke fondly of how he accompanied his father, a physician, on medical rounds. Eric later recounted stories of travelling on a horse-pulled sleigh on ice in the cold Montreal winters with his father to visit patients.

Unfortunately, Dr. Bernstein died of tuberculosis at age 38. Mrs. Bernstein then supported herself and her two children working as an editor and writer. She encouraged Eric to follow in his father's footsteps and to study medicine in Montreal. He received an M.D. and C.M. (Master of Surgery) from McGill University Medical School in 1935, receiving high marks and accolades from the medical faculty.

Pre World War II Years

Eric came to the United States in 1935 when he began his internship at Englewood Hospital in New Jersey. After completing his one year internship in 1936, he began his psychiatric residency at the Psychiatric Clinic of Yale University School of Medicine, where he worked for two years.

Around 1938-39, Berne became an American citizen and shortened his name from Eric Lennard Bernstein to Eric Berne. His first appointment post-residency was as a Clinical Assistant in Psychiatry at Mt. Zion Hospital in New York City. He held this position until 1943 when he went into the Army Medical Corps. In addition to his post in New York City, Berne had established a private practice in Norwalk, Connecticut. Norwalk is approximately 30 minutes from Yale University. It was in Norwalk where he met and married his first wife, Ruth, with whom he had two children. Ellen Berne was born in 1942 and Peter Berne born in 1945. A very unique [research paper](#) written by Eric Berne and his dentist Dr. Norman Feitelson DDS of Westport, CT was published in 1941 and is evidence of Eric's time in this area of Connecticut.

In the [Jorgensen biography](#) of Eric Berne, Ruth is referred to as "Elinor." This was done by the Jorgensens to protect the identity of Ruth. In fact, it was written in the NOTES of that book: "We have used the pseudonyms of "Elinor" and "McRae" to protect the privacy of Berne's first wife." Berne's first wife was born Ruth Harvey near Chicago, IL. After divorcing Eric, she remarried and changed her name to Ruth Manning. She divorced Mr. Manning and lived the rest of her life as Ruth Manning. She remained a resident of Westport, CT where she had lived with Eric in the early 1940s up until her death in 2006.

Eric and Ruth were married on October 24, 1942, nearly 4 months after the birth of daughter Ellen. From 1940-1943 he also commuted from his Westport home to practice concurrently in New York City. In 1941 he began training as a psychoanalyst at the New York Psychoanalytic Institute and became an analyst with [Paul Federn](#).

Eric's Army Career

Due to World War II, there was significant demand for army psychiatrists. Eric Berne served as a psychiatrist from 1943-46 in the Army Medical Corps, starting as a First Lieutenant and rising to Major. His assignments included Spokane, Washington, Ft. Ord, California and Brigham City, Utah. During the later two years he practiced group therapy in the Psychiatric wards of Bushnell General Hospital in Brigham City. Eric was discharged from the army in 1946 and at approximately the same time he became divorced from Ruth. After the divorce, Eric decided to relocate in [Carmel, California](#), an area he had fallen in love with when stationed at nearby Fort Ord. His ex-wife Ruth and his two children Ellen and Peter stayed behind in Westport, CT. In the 1946-7 time, he completed writing *The Mind in Action* and signed a contract for its publication with Simon and Schuster of New York. That same year he resumed his psychoanalytic training that he had begun in New York City prior to the War at the San Francisco Psychoanalytic Institute. In 1947 he began to work with [Erik Erikson](#); their working relationship lasted for two years.

Berne's Family Life in Carmel, California

Soon after beginning analysis with Erik Erikson, Eric Berne met a young woman Dorothy de Mass Way. Berne instantly fell in love with her, but Erikson said Eric could not marry until after finishing his didactic analysis. Berne completed that portion of his training by 1949 and then the two were married and set up home in Carmel. Dorothy brought three children to the marriage, and she and Eric eventually had two sons of their own, Ricky and Terry. Eric Berne loved the father role, relishing in his large group of offspring and tending to be overly permissive and a nurturing parent more often than an authoritarian one. However, his writing was always important. He had an isolated study built at the far end of his large garden, well out of earshot of his youngsters. In that study he did most of his writing between 1949 and 1964, when he and Dorothy divorced on the friendliest of terms. Eric remained only on light speaking terms with his first wife Ruth Manning but made sure he saw his two children Ellen and Peter who would spend 2 weeks with him every summer in Carmel.

During these important years in Carmel, CA, Eric kept up a demanding pace of research, teaching, and of clinical responsibilities. In 1949, he was admitted as a Fellow in the American Psychiatric Association. He took an appointment in 1950 as Assistant Psychiatrist at Mt. Zion Hospital, San Francisco, and simultaneously began serving as a Consultant to the Surgeon General of the US Army. Then, in 1951, he accepted a position of Adjunct and Attending Psychiatrist at the Veterans Administration and Mental Hygiene Clinic, San Francisco. These three appointments were in addition to his private practices in both Carmel and San Francisco.

Break with Psychoanalysis; the Creation of Transactional Analysis

Probably the most significant traces of the origins of transactional analysis are contained in the first five of six articles on intuition Berne wrote beginning in 1949. Already, at that early date, when he was still working to gain the status of psychoanalyst, he dared to defy Freudian concepts of the unconscious in his writings. When he began training in 1941 at the New York Psychoanalytic Institute with Paul Federn, and later when he resumed his training at the San Francisco Psychoanalytic Institute, Eric Berne obviously believed that becoming a psychoanalyst was important. However, in the end that coveted title was withheld; his 1956 application for membership was turned down with the verdict that he wasn't ready, but, perhaps after three or four more years of personal analysis and training he might reapply. For Eric the rejection was galvanizing, spurring him to intensify his long-standing ambition to add something new to psychoanalysis.

With that "rejection" in hand, Berne set to work, determined to develop a new approach to psychotherapy by himself. Before 1956 was out, he had written two seminal papers based on material read earlier that year at the Psychiatric Clinic, Mt. Zion Hospital, San Francisco, and at the Langley Porter Neuropsychiatric Clinic, U.C. Medical School: "*Intuition V: The Ego Image*": and "*Ego States in Psychotherapy*." Using references to P. Federn, E. Kann, and H. Silberer, in the first article Berne indicated how he arrived at the concept of ego states and where he got the idea of separating "adult" from "child." In the next article he developed the tripartite scheme used today (Parent, Adult, and Child), introduced the three-circle method of diagramming it, showed how to sketch contaminations, labeled the theory, "structural analysis" and termed it "a new psychotherapeutic approach." The third article, titled "*Transactional Analysis: A New and Effective Method of Group Therapy*," was written a few months later and presented by invitation at the 1957 Western Regional Meeting of the American Group Psychotherapy Association of Los Angeles. With the publication of this paper in the 1958 issue of the American Journal of Psychotherapy, [Transactional Analysis](#), the name of Berne's new method of diagnosis and treatment, became a permanent part of the psychotherapeutic literature. In addition to restating his concepts of P-A-C, structural analysis, and ego states, the 1957 paper added the important new features of games and scripts. Berne went on to publish [Games People Play](#) in 1964 where he introduced games and [Transactional Analysis](#).

Berne's San Francisco Seminars

From the beginning, Eric Berne used his regular Thursday evening clinical seminars in Monterey as a testing ground for his new theory and methods. In 1950-51 he began a Tuesday evening seminar in San Francisco; this became incorporated in February 1958 as the San Francisco Social Psychiatry Seminars in order to handle funds required for the publication of the *Transactional Analysis Bulletin*, which first appeared in January 1962 with Berne as editor. In 1964 Berne and his San Francisco and Monterey seminar colleagues decided to create a Transactional Analysis Association, naming it the International Transactional Analysis Association in recognition of the growing number of Transactional Analysis professionals outside the USA. The new organization was designated successor to the San Francisco Social Psychiatry Seminars, and the San Francisco seminar changed its name to the San Francisco Transactional Analysis Seminar in recognition of the fact that it was only one of the many branches of the [ITAA](#).

Berne's Final Years

The years from 1964 to 1970 were restless ones for Berne. After his second divorce his personal life became chaotic as he longed to find another mate. His frustration in this area led him to work longer hours at his writing, but when he did remarry Torre Peterson in 1967, he did not give up any of his increasingly complex writing commitments. By early 1970 he was once again divorced. In June, 1970, Berne suffered the first of two heart attacks. A few weeks before the first heart attack, on May 10, his 60th birthday, Berne had told his friends how well he felt. He had just sent his manuscript of [What Do You Say After You Say Hello](#) to Grove Press, and was pleased about how it had turned out. He actually allowed himself some weekends of pure play, with no writing. However, on June 26, he suffered sharp pains that went through his chest and back which turned out to be caused by a heart attack. He was hospitalized and was making a slow recovery but three weeks later, while working on the galleys of *What Do You Say After You Say Hello* in his hospital bed, he suffered another heart attack this time a massive one, which caused his death. Eric died on July 15, 1970. Eric Berne is buried at the El Carmelo Cemetery in Pacific Grove, California. Pictures and information on his gravesite can [be found here](#).

Montreal 2010 Conference

In 2010, the ITAA held it's annual conference in Montreal to celebrate 100 years of Eric Berne. Information on the conference can be [found here](#).

Berne's Home in Carmel, CA

This [page](#) shows recent photos of Eric Berne's home in Carmel, California. Included are pictures of his writing study and his typewriter where he wrote [Games People Play](#).

Berne's Appreciation of the work of Jean Varda

Eric was apparently a fan of the works of the Greek Born artist [Jean Varda](#) who spent much of his time in Sausalito and Monterey. See an [original collage](#) that Berne picked out himself.

Eric's Offspring

Eric had two children with his first wife, Ruth Manning. They are Ellen and Peter. Eric had two children with his second wife Dorothy (Terry and Ricky) and two stepchildren (Robin and Janice). Eric had a third stepchild with Dorothy who passed away as a teenager. Of Eric's four children with whom he had a blood relationship, Ellen Berne is now deceased and had been a library director in Boston, Massachusetts. Peter Berne lives in Berlin and is an accomplished musician and opera coach. Ricky Berne lives in Alaska and is a retired pilot from America West Airlines. Terry Berne lives in Madrid and is a writer.

Eric ended up with only 2 blood grandchildren. Both are children of his daughter Ellen. Anna Calcaterra lives in Atlanta. Nicholas Berne Calcaterra is a dentist and practices [dentistry in Orange, CT](#). He maintains a blog on dentistry called [Directions in Dentistry](#).

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