

ED SVASTA

Memories



IIBA INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR
BIOENERGETIC ANALYSIS

<https://bioenergetic-therapy.com>

IN MEMORY OF ED SVASTA



Photo: 1 © Heiner Steckel

As we come together to honor the life and legacy of Ed Svasta, we invited you to join us in sharing your memories, reflections, and heartfelt anecdotes that capture the essence of his profound influence on our global community.

Ed's role extended far beyond that of Assistant Director during Alexander Lowen's tenure. He assumed the mantle of Chief Editor of the Clinical Journal in 1991, served as Executive Director in the mid-90s, and held positions on the Executive Committee. Moreover, he was a valued international faculty member and eventually became an emeritus faculty member, leaving an enduring imprint on our community. Ed's dedication to Bioenergetic Analysis enriched countless lives across diverse nations, reflecting his profound passion and commitment.

Through this collection of an interview by Paul Amberg and prompt memories, we aim to celebrate Ed's life by preserving the moments and stories.

Thank you for your contributions and taking a moment to reflect on your interactions with Ed and to share your memories with us. Your words serve as a testament to his lasting legacy and the profound impact he had on our institute and the lives of those around him.

Thank you for joining us in honoring the memory of Ed and celebrating his extraordinary life.



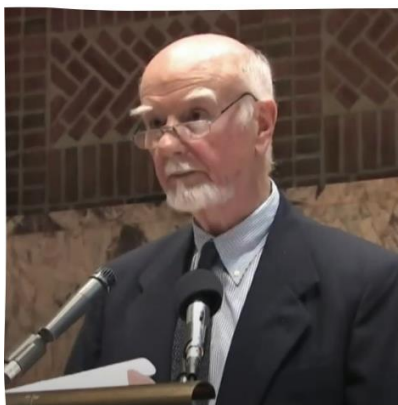
IIBA President | Léia Cardenuto

ED'S ARTICLES FOR THE IIBA CLINICAL JOURNAL

His commitment to advancing our field was evident not only through his teaching but also through his contributions to The Clinical Journal of the International Institute for Bioenergetic Analysis in 1984, 1993, and 1996.

- A Psychosomatic Case Vignette [[Read here ...](#)]
- Orgasm Reflex: That Elusive Experience [[Read here ...](#)]
- From Psychoanalysis, to Gestalt Therapy, to Bioenergetic Analysis: A Personal / Professional Integration [[Read here ...](#)]

MEMORIAL NOTE



Dear People of the International Institute for Bioenergetic Analysis,

It is with a heavy heart that I inform you of the death of Edward J. Svasta, Jr. He died on his 94th birthday, February 27, 2024 after three months of failing health.

Our family is very proud of the work he did in Bioenergetics and are sad to see it end.

I am his niece, Amy Loar, and am currently in Florida, USA, starting to settle his estate.

This is the reason I am sending this email from his computer.

It was his wish that I contact you to let you know of his death.

| Amy Loar (Gainesville, FL, USA)

TRIBUTE TO ED SVASTA

"We rode that popularity wave."

A tribute to Ed Svasta

| Paul Amberg (Germany)

Not that I am oblivious, but I still have a piece of paper in my note book. Under the headline "Five ways to relax a muscle" you can read: "stretch, massage, expressive exercises, breathing and vibration, over contraction". For every Bioenergetic practitioner that doesn't sound like news rather like a matter of course. But Ed Svasta from whom I got it brought it down to that simple formula. When he told me that he added with a smile "That's how I taught it, and it is from me". I couldn't check whether this was true or not but I had no doubts that it was his. It came along with other insights and wisdom from Ed Svasta when I met him several times for talks.

Ed Svasta lived in a compound between Gainesville and Alachua/Florida (USA) after he retired beginning of the 2000 years. Between 2009 and 2013 I attended the training program of the Florida Society for Bioenergetic Analysis (FSBA). One day at a training in 2010 Bob Glazer, the FSBA director, suggested "Why don't you drive over to Ed Svasta and ask him about how it all began back then with Bioenergetics." Bob Glazer was one of the reasons why Ed Svasta moved down to Florida. They have planned to develop a training program. But it didn't work as they wanted it. For any reason they didn't get along well. Anyhow since I am a professional journalist and a sort of always curious I didn't think long. I took my audio recorder and went over. His house was located close to a golf course. On the day we met first in March 2010 it was hot. Nobody was out golfing. The whole area looked thereby a little sleepy. Sleepy but nice. A good place to calm down and rest after a busy exciting life in New York City and all over the world. Ed Svasta was about 80 years old at

that time. Still a tall man with a remarkable straight back. Grey hair and this may sound funny, he appeared to me like one of the actors that use to play Sigmund Freud in movies. He was in good shape with a strong low voice. Very concentrated and clear in his memories and about the topics we were talking about. Only the big magnifiers near the book on the table let me know that he couldn't see that well anymore. Maybe also because of the seclusion of the premises I could sense a sort of loneliness around him.

Anyway, after a short -literally- getting in touch phase we were in good contact. Ed was open and excited that someone was interested in his stories and experiences and I was eager to hear how it was back then. And slowly I got aware of whom I was sitting in front of. Ed Svasta was one of the pioneers in the 70s, 80s and 90s who was among others responsible for the development of the Bioenergetic Institution, training and setting. He was close to Alexander Lowen professionally and sometimes privately. I interviewed him several times for many hours. And often the talks didn't stop when the mic was turned off. As an appreciation of his life achievement and as a sign of the deep respect I feel for him I have edited a short excerpt of the recordings that took place in March and September 2010.

Paul Amberg (P.A.): How did you get in contact with Bioenergetics?

Ed Svasta (E.S.): Well, before I came to Bioenergetics I had therapy, training and teaching in Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy and in Gestalt Therapy. I was with Laura Perls who was the founder of Gestalt Therapy. She was my teacher and therapist in Gestalt Therapy. We used to have individual and group therapy and in the group which was for professional training I was there three years. When I was going to have my last session of Gestalt Therapy and group therapy, a woman named Anneliese Widman was introduced to us by Laura as an old friend. She was a "Bioenergetics

Therapist”. I had never heard that term before. But she explained to the training group there essentially what Bioenergetics was and that it involves a lot of exercises to release tensions and so on. She also gave individual sessions and so I went. She had me kicking to build up energy and all of a sudden, I chocked. She put her hands here and “Wah” a big expression came out and I felt better. I thought, “well this is good”. So, I went to her then as a client and after a few sessions I said “I got to learn this stuff. This is a good addition to what I know in Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy and Gestalt Therapy.” She said “Well, you have to go see a man named Al Lowen.”

P.A.: Which year was that?

E.S.: 1969. So, she said, “Write him a letter and tell him what.” I said, “I’m not going to write a doctor, I just call him” and she said, “No, you have to write him a letter. He won’t see you otherwise.” And I said, “No, I don’t.” Anyway, maybe six months later she said, “Would you like to meet Al Lowen?” I said “Yeah”. She said, “He supervises me, so you could be my client and we will go and you’ll meet him.” So, the day that came we had an appointment at 9 o’clock in the morning in New York. I lived in New Jersey at that point and the phone rang about 7 o’clock. It was Anneliese. She said “I want to make sure you are up.” Of course, I was up because I was always on time right. I said, “Sure, I am up and I’ll be there on time”. We got inside and Al Lowen and Anneliese sat down. I stood up because I was the last one in the room. I just looked at Anneliese and then I just started pouring out this,” Anneliese god damn you treat me like a child.” I was going on and on. Then all of a sudden, I chocked and the first words Lowen ever said to me other than when he shook my hand was, “Bend over, bend over.” Then he put his hands here and “Wah”. I came out for more. Then I stood up. I was like, “God, he is gonna say I am crazy”. So, he just looked at me and he said “You know, sometimes Anneliese likes to mother her patients.” And I was like “Wow this guy knows what’s going on. I got to get with this guy.”

P.A.: What was your impression of Lowen?

E.S.: Well, I will tell you. I don’t know if I’m answering your question. But I tell you that he then said he would see me on a monthly basis. I would see him and my first impression after the first two sessions was: I want back to Anneliese. I don’t want to go see this guy anymore.

P.A.: Why?

E.S.: Because he was too cocky. He knew it all and I didn’t particularly like the cocky attitude. I thought it was a bit overdone you know, of course I realized later it was a part of his personality. So, I thought he was trying to impress me somehow. Maybe he was, I don’t really know. But Anneliese kept telling “Hang in there, hang in there, you are going to see that this man has got something special”. And indeed, I hung in there and after a couple of sessions I changed my mind. Not the well way that I can put up with that part of it because of the therapy I was having with him.

P.A.: How did it change from “I don’t want to see him again and I would like to get involve with this kind of therapy?”

E.S.: Well, it changed because I began to value how he understood me and the body work he was doing with me to resolve my problems. I pretty much knew my problems because I had so much other therapy, but I hadn’t known about the deep body foundations. In Gestalt Therapy we did do body work but it was only body work that the therapist did intuitively. He might say “Get up move around or your shoulders are tight.” And what can you do to lose them up. There was no systematic knowledge of the body. And that’s what I began to learn from Al Lowen: The systematic appraisal and systematic understanding of the body in therapy.

Ed Svasta stayed on. He was in the first official Bioenergetic training class that lasted four years and was run by Alexander Lowen. It ended in 1975. So, he was an insider almost from the beginning and he was

part of it when Bioenergetic started to spread out not only in the US. In the middle of the seventies, it wasn't clear which way Bioenergetic would and could take.

P.A.: Alexander Lowen haven't had in mind to found his own school. So, it happened by accident so to speak?

E.S.: Yeah, by accident. It wasn't by accident in a sense that he likes spreading the word but he wasn't out to form a school. Other people came in and convinced him that this was a good idea. He liked it up until the point when he was running a group. He had that training kind of group. I was the director of training then. He wrote me a letter, saying I am going to resign because they want group work and that's not my interest. So, he resigned. He never trained anymore. He continued to go out when people would ask him independent of the training program. He would go there and then he came to trainers here and say, "Go out there and develop." He, in a sense, was the advanced man but he wasn't doing training. He then limited himself to trying to train trainers. But then he even turned that over to Myron Koltuv and we began to train the trainers. So, we trained most of the trainers between 1980 to 1996.

P.A.: I thought it was his purpose to spread out this idea of Bioenergetics to the world but it was not?

E.D.: No. I mean he spread it and he liked to spread it, but it wasn't his idea to do it formally. In fact, many times he would talk to us, the trainers, about and he writes about it more clearly that he didn't believe in power and by virtue of having a school. You were in power and you had control over the students. And in that way, it was sometimes misused and also didn't allow the students to become free people because they had some authority over them. That was his point of view, again that extreme point of view. Not like you have professionalism and you have liberation of people and they have to be reconciled somehow. In his final years he told me personally many times that he wished that he had started an official school, that

he wished he would have followed the guru model, as he said, that you could learn something from me and then if you could go out and teach it to somebody else or help somebody else with it then you were the guru and they became your - whatever they were called - students or patients. That's what he would have preferred because it cut out the power angle. I just think that his idea of the power angle was not realistic.

P.A.: Anyway, you then started to go international in the middle of the 70s. How did this work?

E.S.: The first person to go Europe was Al Lowen doing workshops. Out of that the first group that started was in Belgium. The second group which was started very shortly thereafter was in Holland. I started that one. I was then a trainer so it had to be 76. I went as a first coordinating trainer to Holland. The way that happened is that a man, named Jan Velzeboer, who was a big Gestalt Therapist in Holland went to a workshop with Al Lowen in Europe. Then he asked Al to go to Holland to start a program and Al was so busy, I mean he could have gone any place anytime. He asked me so, "Would you like to go" and I said, "Sure". So, it worked out perfect. And then when we finished there, Velzeboer was an excellent teacher in Gestalt Therapy, now he was a Bioenergetics therapist. So, he went to Germany and said let's start something in Germany and we started then with Heiner Steckel there.

P.A.: How was your relationship with Lowen at that time? Did you get along with him well?

E.S.: Oh, very well, yeah. He asked me to become the assistant director because he said, "You get along better with all the trainers." I also of course believed in what he was teaching, so I could bridge the gap between Al's personality and what he was teaching and those people on the other side who either had difficulty with Al or wanting to bring their ideas in. That wasn't an easy process because Al liked to be the

authority because Bioenergetics was his child. In that respect it was fused in his personality.

P.A.: What is your feeling when you think about Alexander Lowen now?

E.S.: Well, many things. I saw he is genius and benefited from it. I am sorry that he didn't have more therapy training and could help me in some ways that he obviously couldn't. I was looking for a good father and in reality, he was a good provider for me. Because he taught me things and he gave me patience and helped me, gave me jobs and so on. But as a therapy father he was not someone you could get close to have that kind of relationship with. That was his own personality. But I am grateful to have met him and it made change my entire life. So, I am just a little sad about him, we didn't get along closer and he even said to me at one time, "Well you know, we are too much alike to be close" or something like that. If you are phallic narcissist that means you have trouble with your softer feelings, right, that's what it means. You can't give in to your love feeling so easily.

P.A.: Why is Bioenergetics not that popular anymore?

E.S.: Well, let me say this: you know, we rode the wave of the new age from late 60s to the 90s, I guess. And even Al acknowledged that to me when I had told him, "We rode that popularity wave", he said "Yes". And when I look back on all the therapies that were prominent then they are all sort of passé now. I am not sure about Gestalt Therapy but Psychoanalysis is certainly not that popular anymore. All of those therapies that came up to take the place of Psychoanalysis have expanded, now have declined in general popularity. So, it's a cultural thing. Now in terms of Bioenergetics I think it is only a certain percentage of people really want to work this deeply.

P.A.: So how successful is Bioenergetic Analysis as therapy?

E.S.: It is very successful as long as it maintains the rest of your life. As long you can keep improving in whatever stage of life you are in. If you maintain your exercises and your opening of your life and you're seeking to reduce pain and to embrace pleasure in a wholesome way. And so, it needs to become a way of life to be called "really successful". Along the way you can reduce a lot of symptoms and a lot of maladaptive personality traits but they will be with you most of your life. But you will learn to live with them and live around them. As Al would say, "When you can loosen up a character so that it's not fixed, but you will return to it in time of stress but you will know about it and then you can get around it again or exercise it out".

P.A.: Can one change through therapy?

E.S.: If you spend a lifetime at it. I learned that from Al and I thought that for long time but I had one another idea and I used to talk about this. My goal in life is to change "not have any of the past jumping up" and that means I can work out all my physical tensions and my attitudes. And if I am "you can't do, you can't do". Then you can't do it. I went to other therapists who say we will try. But my view is

"yes you can do it, if you keep it up".

I am still having it.

So that's my life experiences that you can do it. If you take that trajectory you will change, and change and change.

Many people stop along the way. Luckily Al believed and inspired lots of people, myself included, to continue to do your own body work at home. Now at home I do the body work but I also do the expressive vocal work. I can do - living alone here - I can scream and whenever I get into trouble, I do that.



Photo: 1 © Paul Amberg

MEMORY PROMPTS

“In the last e-mail we exchanged at the beginning of the summer of 2023, Ed wrote me, June 20: “Hello Guy, I am very pleased to hear from you and get your picture. You certainly are very busy, and live in a most beautiful home. For 5 years I have lived in an upscale senior citizens village of 700 people here in north central Florida in the medium sized city Gainesville the home of the University of Florida. It's lively and interesting.

At 93 years old I mostly eat, sleep, read and watch TV daily and visit friends and doctors occasionally. A disadvantage of being so old is that one outlives family and old friends. New good friends are rare and not easy to find and they die off here also.

I stay as young as possible by doing bioenergetic exercises and releases regularly. I'm one of the young old people here! But just last week I was in the hospital for a mini eye stroke (transient ischemic attack). Brain is clear but I must be careful for 6 weeks and take a lot of meds to avoid a future stroke. (statistics).

Stay active, live what you like to do, love and you will have many more years as a 74-year youngster! Ed”

He always had **this humanity, this kindness**, something of the stoicism dear to the Slavs I had

discovered when I entered in therapy with him in New York in 1979, at the same time as Lowen (2 sessions a week with Al + 1 session with Ed). I was discovering his way of working in bioenergetic analysis, which was different from Lowen's: I had the impression of finding a little Gestalt touch in it and an attentive eye for the relational dimension and its transference implication.

I salute his dedication to Bioenergetic Analysis, to the IIBA and to the training of trainers. I salute his respect for the evolution of the IIBA, its organization, its new leaders and the evolution of bioenergetic analysis itself. He has been for me a therapist, a master and somewhere a companion.”

| Guy Tonella (Gibel, France)



“When I think about Ed, I remember how important he was for me personally and in my home society the North German Institute. We started in 1978 with our first IIBA training group. He - together with Virginia Wink and Frank Hladky - accompanied this first group, of which I was a member. He was the coordinating and certifying trainer in our local institute for many years and several groups.

With his commitment to spreading bioenergetics, he is definitely one of the founding fathers of our local institute and I believe one of the cornerstones of bioenergetics in Europe. During early turmoil and conflict in our newly formed local society, he remained firm and clear, representing the IIBA, both as trainer and also institutionally as part of the executive committee, helping us to stay with the main purpose of securing a solid training for us as students and further students.

1980 at the IIBA Conference in Taormina (Sicily, Italy) I volunteered being his demo patient, demonstrating his work with the birth reflex. This became a decisive moment in my own therapeutic journey - finding out about my forceps delivery - later confirmed by my mother - and the impact of this early experience.

Years later he was part of the midwifery team that encouraged and later evaluated me to become part of the faculty in 1990.

I saw Ed for some personal therapy sessions in New York and later on met him whenever I was in town, as long as he lived in NYC, having lunch and always enjoyed his personal and collegial company. Last time we met personally was at the Lowen Memorial. After the event he proposed to have a little walk together to the former location of Al's and the IIBA office, where we took a picture.

I was very touched, when Ed wrote me a personal letter years later, when Frank Hladky died, as he knew

how important Frank had been for me personally and professionally. Ed stays in my memory as a **firm and wholeheartedly committed man to bioenergetics** and the Institute and I am thankful to having met him as a very warm-hearted person.

I am glad to share some pictures from my personal album.”



Photo: 2 © Heiner Steckel

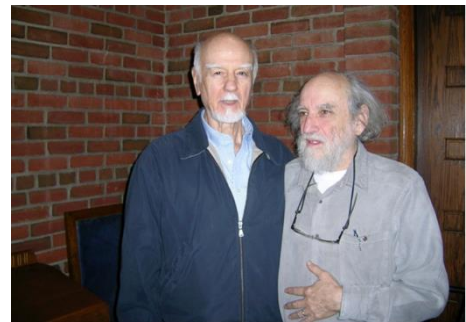


Photo: 3 © Heiner Steckel

| Heiner Steckel (Thedinghausen, Germany)



Sincerity, sensitivity, competence and loneliness

It was with both sadness and happiness that I heard of the passing of Ed Svasta. Sad that he is no longer with us and happy to have gotten to know this special person. Our first encounter goes back to 1976, when Ed, together with Jan (Velzeboer), developed the curriculum for the first training group in bioenergetic analysis in Europe. At that time, I was allowed to participate in the translation work into Dutch and German. At that time, I had already gotten to know Ed as a sincere, very professional, clear-thinking, well-structured and sensitive colleague. Since then, there

have been the "usual" encounters, meetings and experiences within the IIBA.

On the other hand, I also experienced him in a very personal way. The "birth work" with him remains in my memory like a gift. Back then, I experienced him as someone who embodied "magical knowledge". At the time, I experienced him as a rather reserved, "unspectacular" colleague who was rather economical in his expression, which, coupled with his "secret knowledge", gave him a special significance for me.

He could also hold very rigid opinions and positions that I didn't share, but which gave me the opportunity to rub shoulders with him. This helped me to gain more clarity about myself. But it also helped me, and this was special, to have a very personal experience with him.

This is how I remember the international congress in Mexico. After the congress, we spent a whole day at the conference venue chatting, walking around the place, talking about love, about the pain of losing a loved one, about loneliness and the depth of human encounters. It was a very impressive, deeply moving encounter in that I was able to experience him as an extremely sensitive person.

I remember Ed as being very strong in his therapeutic skills and competence. I remember Ed as a very **sensitive and vulnerable person**. I also remember Ed's role and important function within the IIBA, which he performed for a long time, as from time to time not being sufficiently appreciated by his colleagues and the organization. I therefore see my obituary as an appeal to the IIBA not to lose sight of mutual respect in the future.

As Lowen said: "When I die, don't kill me".

| *Ulrich Sollmann (Bochum, Germany)*



"Warm and compassion are the words that immediately come to mind when I remember Ed."

| *Joy Ramsay (Steyping, United Kingdom)*



"When I think about Ed, what comes to mind is a **feeling of gratitude** imagining their contribution, even though I didn't know them. Peace & light for him."

| *Laurence Heitzmann (Lyon, France)*



"Ed was part of the original team of Bioenergetic trainers and had a significant contribution in the expansion of Bioenergetic Analysis in the early years and beyond.

He was a builder and a strong believer in Bioenergetics! He will be remembered as a force of nature by all of us who had the chance to know him. My condolences to his niece and all his family."

| *Louise Fréchette (Montréal, QC, Canada)*



"I have **fond memories of Ed. Both as a person and as a therapist**. I, along with all of Siab, send our heartfelt condolences to Ed's family."

| *Patrizia Moselli (Rome, Italy)*



"I'm sad to hear about the passing of Ed. I did not know him well but had a lot of contact with him around the time that Virginia Hilton became the Director of the IIBA.

Two memories of contact with him stay with me. He was the faculty member at the professional development workshop that I took in Colorado to

become a faculty member. At that workshop, he explored working somatically with birth trauma and that helped me become aware of my own birth trauma. I'll be forever grateful for his work with several of us in that workshop. The second memory was of me walking in on him at an international conference early in the morning looking to gather some equipment for my workshop. There he was over a bioenergetic roll opening up his chest. And he was crying. I said, "excuse me for interrupting you", and he said "I do this every morning to keep my heart open". It was a tender moment. And I realized **how deeply committed he was to staying in contact with the places in himself** where he felt blocked."

| *Robert Coffman (Redondo Beach, CA, USA)*



"I knew Ed since the early 70's when I first entered the training program of the then Institute for Bioenergetic Analysis, in New York.

Neither man's passing should go unmarked, since each left their mark on the people who make an institute, and on its organismic life.

Expounding on my relationship with Ed would take me into territory not relevant on marking his passing. Suffice it to say we were both present at the formative events of the IIBA, and we **had our own ways of participating in that process.**"

| *Scott Baum (New York, YK, USA)*



Photo: 4 © Heiner Steckel

