



COLLEAGUE'S VOICE

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Interview with Bill Flocco by Vera Krijn

My first encounter with Bill Flocco dates to the late 1990's when he was the first teacher being invited during my time as president of the New York State Reflexology Association, and over the years our path would cross briefly at conferences and some seminars he conducted.

Vera Krijn



However, this interview gives me the opportunity to thank him personally for being my inspiration to become a pioneer and listen to my own inner voice by (against everyone's advice) specializing in Perinatal Reflexology.

Though I had experienced the healing of Reflexology close and personal, I am a natural born sceptic.

It was Bill's study conducted with Terry Oleson PhD on the effect of reflexology on the ears, hands and feet (the first reflexology research study published in a scientific medical journal in December 1993) that gave me something tangible that validated the power of reflexology and kickstarted my 30-year reflexology career.





Bill Flocco

Where do you even begin when you interview someone who has done and accomplished so much? And who is the man behind the method? The first thing I noticed is that he looked more youthful than his age and the twinkle in his eyes. He is a man with strong convictions and a great raconteur who is not afraid to show his emotions when I tell him how many people, he has inspired all over the world. Those who are new to this profession may not be aware that it was Bill who commenced the World Reflexology week, starting a movement of reflexologist all over the world who perpetuate this as a yearly tradition.

Vera: Before we dive into your work and accomplishments, I must ask you two personal questions. We share and have traveled around extensively in VW Vans; do you still have yours?

Bill: Oh yes, I am still sad that I had - after many happy trips and memories- finally to let go of mine four years ago. Let me tell you the story. In 1970 I bought my first VW Van for \$2,200 and drove around with it for 10 years. When I got into Reflexology, in the early 1980's, I just had loaded my VW to go to my first reflexology booth at the National Health Foundation convention, when it caught fire. Luckily, I was able to save the car and sold it to my mechanic for \$2,200 (they don't lose their value). He then sold me a newer version, once more for the magic number of \$2,200. Even though it was in poor condition, four years ago I sold it for even more than that.

Vera: Tell me about it, my husband still can't let go his 1965 VW Van. My second personal question has to do with the emotional relationship to where we live, which can be emotional, spiritual, cultural, environmental etc. Are you a Californian at heart?

Bill: Actually, I was born in Newark, NJ.

Vera: You're kidding, I live in Northern New Jersey after 30 years in New York City, I now commute on a daily basis to NYC.

Bill: My father commuted every day to New York when we lived in Newark. Then, when I was 9, he got a job in Puerto Rico. After living in Puerto Rico for 7 years, I moved back to the US to the state of Connecticut, where I finished high school. After that, my parents, still living in Puerto Rico, gave me a one-way ticket to California where my brother was living, and I have lived here ever since, except for four years in Indiana. So, I think that I am a citizen of the world, truly.

Vera: In other words, you feel at home wherever you are?

Bill: I can't tell you how many times when visiting other countries and places, that it almost felt like a past life experience. It's something you can't put into words, and I am sure you must have that experience.

Vera: As a matter of fact, I do, there are a few places in the world that are very close to my heart.

Bill: However, there is something special about Southern California. I left once around 1972 to work in Indiana for about four years. It was quite a ride from the wild and liberal Southern California to a very conservative Indiana. However, it taught me something very important, conservatism contributes to the stability of a place.

Nevertheless, I discovered that I wanted to be in a place of great creativity and innovation. That's what brought me back to LA. The temperature is never too hot or too cold and I like the international flavor, especially of Southern California. It's a melting pot of Northern, Southern, Western and Eastern European, Black, Latino, Asian, indigenous people from all over the world. Just like New York, the international quality imparts an exciting cultural richness. It's something I probably learned by osmosis from the time when I lived in Puerto Rico and as president of our international club at my prep-school in Connecticut, we had kids from all over the world.



Vera. Let's transfer to the world of Reflexology. What and how was your journey into Reflexology? Where or with whom did you study, and did you learn first foot or ear reflexology?

Bill: In the early 1980s I was very sick for two years and couldn't work, something that is very difficult if you don't have a lazy bone in your body. When I was finally able to do some part-time work, I heard through the grapevines about foot reflexology. I had never heard of it before but there was a class offered only a few blocks from where I lived, which meant that I could walk there. It was a two-day class that included a lot about nutrition and essential oils with two teachers, one being one of the worst I ever encountered, leaving some students in tears, while the other one was one of the best teachers I ever had.

Something very unusual happened. Toward the end of the two days and knowing that I had been a high school teacher, they said: "Bill we have overbooked our class, would you be able to teach the night class for us at California State University?"

And so, I taught the four-night evening class, before having taken the written or practical certification exams.

Like many people, I have an exam phobia, so I put it off for about 3 months before I finally took the bull by the horns, called and stated that I would like to take the exam. I was told that I could take it that next weekend, and lo and behold, the night before the exam, I got a call, and was told that they were unable to find the written exam and it was canceled. I was able to convince them into letting me take the hands-on exam. During my time as a high school teacher, one of the subjects I taught was "introductory anatomy and physiology", and my exam phobia gave me 3 months to study reflex locations, principles and practices etc.", so that night I sat down and wrote up a 100- questions foot reflexology exam. Needless to say, that they were very surprised to receive this with obviously all the correct answers. Just to clarify, this was NOT the official exam, but a self-test, and the next day I had no problem to answer all the questions on their 30-question official exam. That is how I became certified.

Vera: That is a hilarious story that only could have happened in a different era; however, you showed them your competence by teaching a class and had enough guts to take the reign in your own hands. How did you get started with your practice?

Bill: My first paying client had a stiff neck, and I worked on her once a week for three weeks. Her neck issue was so severe that my high school teachers' mentality kicked in, and I asked if she would like to do some self-help foot reflexology in between visits. I gave her homework, encouraging her to work on the proximal aspect of big toes several times a day, something she did diligently. After two weeks, she had regained her mobility and full range of motion. Let me now clarify that her condition was so severe that she had to turn her entire upper body to look sideways. Moreover, she this was not a condition she had for twelve days, twelve weeks, or twelve months, she had suffered for twelve years. Getting relief from such a debilitating issue so quickly grabbed my attention. I had had some rewarding careers in my life, but I never had such profound satisfaction,

and there are no words that can express the emotions I felt when I saw her walking away with so much improvement.

Vera: Was that your AHA moment?

Bill: He laughs and says, yes, I became a "feel-good" junkie. Not long after, I discovered a book by Mildred Carter on hand reflexology. I could not find any classes on this specialty, until I heard about someone in the desert who taught hand reflexology. Not to be presumptuous, but in less than ten minutes I realized that I already knew more than she did. Not long after, I added hand reflexology to the work that I was doing with my foot reflexology clients. Shortly thereafter I added a hand reflexology class in addition to the foot class I was already teaching.

That same year during a party in the Hollywood Hills, I met a lady who was an acupuncture student and while we discussed foot and hand reflexology, she asked, "how about the ears"? So, she taught me auriculotherapy, the medical/acupuncture approach medical practitioners are licensed to use working with the outer ears. This got me thinking, why should working with the map of the body on the external ears only be in the scope of medical doctors and acupuncturists. I contemplated that when we use touch on the map of the body on the hands, we call "hand reflexology", and when we use touch on the map of the feet, we call it "foot reflexology".

For me. It was just a natural extension that when we use touch on the map of the body on the ears, it's "ear reflexology". In 1982 I coined the term "ear reflexology", which was met with lots of resistance and criticism by leading foot reflexology teachers at the time/ It was not a pleasant period in my life, but I was compelled to persevere because of the dramatic results from ear reflexology.

Subsequently, I invited that same acupuncture student to teach an ear reflexology class to my students, which she continued to do to do several times, until university and family commitments interfered, precluding her to carry on. Within a year of me becoming certified in foot reflexology,

I used foot, hand, and ear reflexology on my clients while teaching foot, hand and ear reflexology.

Vera. Well, you were certainly consistent, persistent and unyielding in your quest

Bill: Let me tell you something that is relevant to what's emerging right now. I visited an old friend in the Beverly Hills hotel and noticed that she was favoring one shoulder. So, I said, "would you like to try something that might help to remedy your shoulder issue? I demonstrated how she could work on her hands, and after a while she said, "my shoulder is feeling better".

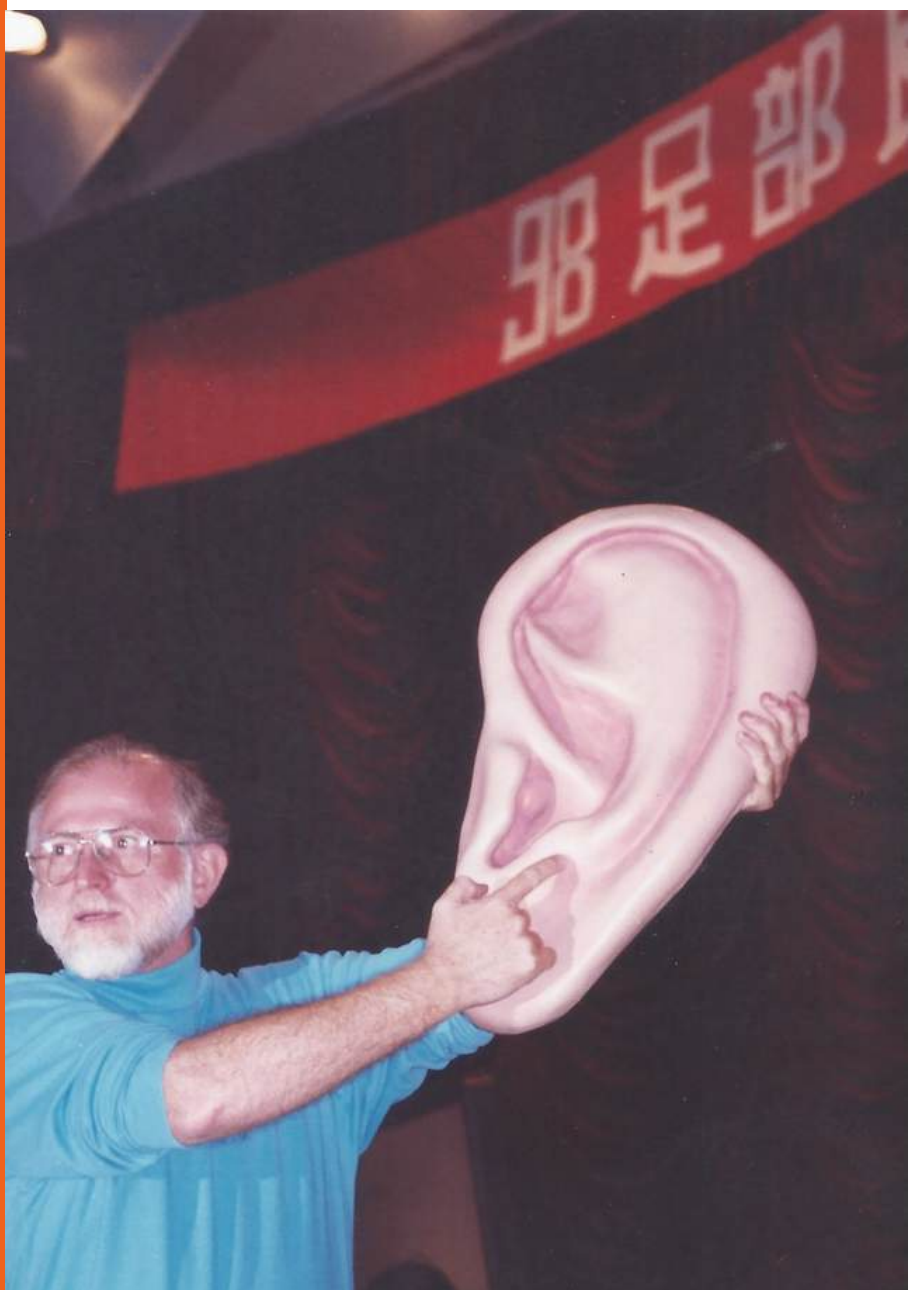
So, I thought, is it possible that hands are as good or even better than the feet for some health issues, and likewise that the ears are better for other specific issues. Thus, I started to pay close attention when I started to work with the ears, noticing that for some conditions the ears were light years better, while for other issues the hands were better, and for other problems it was better to work on the feet. So, I called this "Priority Reflexology". In other words, for discomfort in each part of the body as well as for each health challenge, what is the "top priority", the hands, the feet or the ears?

It was a slow discovery process , observing client after client while this new body of knowledge emerged. I discovered, when there is neck pain, go to the ears first, the big toe second, and the thumb third. Let me emphasize that this is based on years of experience, NOT because Bill feels like it. If someone has sciatica, go for the ears first, feet second, and hands third. For someone with eye and ear issues, go to the hands first, feet second, and ears third. Let's take bladder or stomach issues, feet first, hands second, ears third. Again, this is based on experience on hundreds and hundreds of clients. In other words, it has nothing to do with my preference, it supported by experience. It's called Priority & Progression Reflexing.

That's the **Flocco Method – Integrating Foot Hand Ear Reflexology** into each session.

Vera: Whenever I talk with Reflexologists who made a difference, the thing I observe foremost is their self-reliance and ability to think differently. In your opinion, what's more important when you work with a client, the reflex point of the chart or "touch" and feeling the afflicted reflex?

Bill: It's a combination.



If I do a client intake, it starts by gathering information about the person's past and current health issues, followed by a detailed visual assessment of the ears, hands, and feet, then during the reflexology session paying attention to texture variations on and under the skin of the feet, hands and ears. It's only after these three steps in addition to debriefing with the client, that a preliminary optimal strategy can be put together for helping this person.

Reflexology maps are the basis of reflexology, but from there on "whose map?" This is the thing, most reflexology maps tend to agree, with some variations.

I have been contemplating to write an article about this. For example, let's take the ileocecal valve. Most people believe the ileocecal valve reflex is in the lower aspect of vertical zone four of the right foot. Since some organs and glands, especially the ileocecal valve, can be in a slightly different location in the body from one person to another, might not the ileocecal valve reflex location be slightly different from one person to another. An additional concept, smaller nerve structures in one person's right foot, might be different from that in another person, consequently, the ileocecal valve reflex might best be activated from a slightly different location than conventional reflexology charts might indicate?



It is fascinating to look at maps that are different from traditional western reflexology charts. Let's take the Korean map that I have been working with for about 35 years. The entire map of the body is on one hand. I worked with that long enough to say that it is a valid map. In Taiwan, they have a map on the second metacarpal of the hand. I worked with this for over 30 years, and again I find it quite valid. I think we need to honor that what we already know that works yet continue to learn so that we not only can improve ourselves to better our client's health, but also facilitate the future of reflexology by keeping open minds and continuing to be eternal students.

Vera: I believe that we are such a young profession, just on the cusp of discovery of finding out how and why reflexology works. Just look at the medical profession that changed over thousands of years and at times was stagnant until someone poked a hole in existing theories and practices. That's why I believe we can't talk in definite terms.

Bill: Amen, Hallelujah, it's one of the reasons that I like going to reflexology conferences to learn from leading traditional teachers, who are experimenting with different concepts and approaches to reflexology. Just to be able to exchange ideas and ask questions like "How do you do this?" or "Have you faced this or that specific issue?" It's so important to exchange ideas with people who can set their ego aside.

Vera: We have some amazing leaders and teachers that are male, yet more that 93% of this profession is practiced by women. What do you think is the reason for this?

Bill: Twofold; first, reflexology tends to be a very nurturing profession. Giving care and nurturing are qualities that are synonymous with feminine qualities. Historically men have been the traditional breadwinners until recently. As reflexology is increasingly being acknowledged as the profoundly powerful and important profession that it is, it's likely that more and more men will be attracted to this profession as well.

Vera: This brings me to another point of interest. The medical profession is in the midst of a paradigm shift all over the world, due to a convergence of circumstances, such as Covid 19, the graying of the medical profession and not enough young people ready to enter this field among other things. Urgent Care centers are a new phenomenon and apparently some medical schools just added nutrition to their course materials. In other words, the medical profession seems to shift more towards preventive care. In your opinion, shouldn't we use some basic nutritional education to the curriculum of reflexologist and other holistic practices?

Bill: The future is in the hands of the "nurturing professions". Look, medicine is profoundly important. However, we are seeing that health conditions around the world are deteriorating, and more and more people are getting interested in Naturopathy, Nutrition, Herbology, Essential oils and Touch therapies. Without doubt, reflexology will grow, prosper and thrive.

The other thing is "self-care". I have been teaching self-care reflexology for 45 years, ever since my first client with the severe stiff neck. Fifteen years ago, after teaching a foot hand ear reflexology class in Switzerland, I enjoyed a boat trip around Lake Geneva savoring the glorious surrounding, when the thought came. "Wouldn't it be nice to have a retreat here to teach people for free for 3-4 weeks, after which they could return home and teach reflexology, for free, to those in need in their communities. Upon returning home, on March 3, 2007, I gathered eight reflexologists and said, "How can we get reflexology into the hands of everyone on earth? Let me be more precise and rephrase this, "How can we improve health worldwide through self-help and family-help reflexology?"

Vera: I'd like to know as well; how can we do this?

Bill: Let me dance a little with words. What do you answer when someone ask you "what do you do?" Usually we answer, I do reflexology.

Actually, that is NOT what you do, it's the title of your profession. What you really do is help people to achieve better health, reduce their pain, relief stress, facilitate work performance, etc. etc. So, how can we improve health worldwide, through something that I have been doing for 45 years, teaching Self-help Reflexology".

That's why we launched the 501(c)(3) not for profit

The World Reflexology Foundation
<https://worldreflexologyfoundation.org>.

We are a growing group of experienced reflexology volunteers. This foundation provides free self-help self-care reflexology webinars, free self-help self-care reflexology videos, and free self-help self-care reflexology articles. These are available 24/7 to anybody around the world with Internet access. They can return to see the videos or read the articles, as many times as they would like. Anyone can sit down with a family member or a group of friends or clients having a health issue, go to the related self-help reflexology video or articles, and do self-help reflexology together. Currently we are devising several programs to eventually be able to reach the 4-5 billion people worldwide with internet access, for them to help themselves and empower their family with self-help reflexology.



Vera: What an amazing and ambitious undertaking. You are not just a dreamer, you are someone makes his dreams a reality, while connecting and touching a great number of people around the world

Bill: I have been dreaming about this since March 3, 2007. In retrospect, throughout my life, I have been a "change agent". It's not that I think "outside the box", it's rather that mother nature or God guides me outside the box. I am currently writing three books. One on Ear Reflexology with Terry Oleson where we translate scientific terminology into laymen's terms is almost finished. Then there were requests for an autobiography, I finally agreed, worked on it during the pandemic, it's mostly completed, no rush, all in God's time it will be published. The third book is on integrated hand ear foot reflexology with hundreds of illustrations, that one is still about two years away.

Vera: I can't thank you enough for you giving your time to talk with me on behalf of RIEN, and I am sure that some of this information will not go on deaf ears and is a beginning of spreading the essence of you and your colleagues work through The World Reflexology Foundation. Let me add to this that 1942 must be a special year that produced some exceptional people who are still active and productive in the reflexology world. However, to be still ambitious and bringing big dreams to fruition despite some health challenges, that's an achievement that few measure up to.

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