

The Sad Shoulder: Her Body Holds the Memory

As I was looking out my office window I saw her car make a quick left into my driveway. As the car climbed further up the driveway I could see through the two panes of glass {my office window and her windshield} her shoulders. They looked squeezed together like two mismatched pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. She is my ten o'clock appointment. Let's call her Betty. I moved from my window that is in the front of my home office to the back door that is the entrance to my office. I watched Betty park her car and walk to the door. Her shoulders were stiff as if they were being held together by superglue.

She shook my hand. I showed her in. She pretended to smile. I pretended it was real. I had been seeing her for six months now and I knew that the smile was her way to face the world; especially the world that had glued her shoulders together, the world that had stopped listening to her in her most urgent time of need.

She proceeded into the inner space of my office and lay down on my table. I followed her in and stood beside her at the table. I noticed and she did too that her shoulders were up off the table. They were not able to rest even in a prone position. I knew that her shoulders would be the first place I would touch and invite her to listen to. I would also be listening. I am Somatic Therapist practicing Transformative Touch. That's what I do. I listen to a person's body and I invite them to listen. That's why Betty came to see me because as she said on our first phone contact "since all of this happened no one has cared enough to listen to me --not even myself." Care was an important component for her to feel. When someone listens to you, you feel his or her care. When they don't you feel uncared for especially in the midst of great sadness.

I placed both of my hands under her left shoulder. I felt my feet firmly on the ground. As I did I remembered the first teaching I had shared with my new trainees---the ground of Transformative Touch — Gentle Graciousness, Recognition, Open-heartedness, Unconditional Regard, Nurturing, Discovery that are essential ground for touch. I told them that if we stood on that ground and touched, any person would feel cared for, listened to, even in the midst of great sadness, or any great emotion they may be experiencing.

Betty brought me back from my remembering with a deep long breath that made its way in to her belly. Tears flowed from her eyes and landed on the table next to her shoulders. The tears knew their way to the table. Maybe her shoulders could follow.

I started to ask her a question and she stopped me with a SHHH! I stopped talking. After all I was here now to listen, not to talk just yet! She needed to talk first. Three long minutes went by and I could feel her shoulder soften as she said the following "I hurt and I am sad. I want to rest in the caress of life just once rather than me always having to hold and soothe the world." I

spoke and invited her shoulder to rest in my hands. I directed her to send appreciation to this shoulder for having done so much holding and soothing. I took my hands out from under her shoulder. Her shoulder made its way to the table and met up with her tears.

She spoke with a surprised tone, "This is a sad shoulder. It has been sad since the day my father left when I was twelve. I tried to stop him. I grabbed him with my left arm and he pushed it away and left. My mother was so sad and I spent the next thirty years of my life soothing her. I'm forty-two now and I never realized what a sad shoulder I have. My heart experiences joy with my marriage and my kids but my shoulder has been sad for so long."

I placed my left hand on top of her sad shoulder and I sent her warm, soothing energy. Her shoulder sank further onto the table. As it did she had the realization that sadness needs softness, support, and soothing—three experiences that were sorely missing from her life. This led us to invite these three experiences to the rest of her body. So in the rest of my session with her, every place I went to, right shoulder, low back, hips, legs, head and neck, we invited softness, support, and soothing.

She got up off the table at the end of the session. She placed her feet on the ground and reported feeling more complete. The puzzle had been solved. The sad shoulder showed us the way. Unexpressed sadness was the missing piece. Softness, soothing, and support that provided space for the expression of sadness were the key ingredients for healing. It wasn't the fear of being not enough or doing something wrong that she and others so often accused her of. It was the sadness that showed up in her left side the day her father pushed her away. That push literally glued her shoulders together and left her with a puzzle. She was always trying to match unmatchable pieces. What did I do wrong? What did I do to make him leave? She left my office knowing that he had left her and pushed her shoulders together. With this knowledge came relief and more freedom of movement in her body especially her shoulders. I watched her drive out of my driveway. The shoulders were no longer glued together. The right shoulder initiated the turn and the left followed. She made a right turn back into her life!!