

Joseph Weldon

© November 2010

[intouch@thesomatictherapycenter.com](mailto:intouch@thesomatictherapycenter.com)

### **The Sequence**

There were three fawns running around the building that day. They seem to be moving in a natural sequence. One was following the other. They each seem to know their place. They were small and innocent. I had noticed them as I was about to enter the building where we were holding our Transformative Touch workshop. Our workshop was titled, "Coming Home to Ourselves". In seeing the fawns I had a sense of coming home to my own innocence. I wondered what coming home, would mean to the workshop participants that day. Coming home to ourselves is an important idea in Transformative Touch. It lies at the heart of our beliefs about the being and the body. For when we come home to ourselves, we take up residence once again in our body, the only home we will truly ever have.

I walked through the door into what had been someone else's home. Actually a mansion that belonged to a man named Elkins; it felt like the most appropriate place to have this workshop. Elkins had created a mansion with many rooms, each one for a specific purpose. It reminded me of the body and its many rooms, each one with a specific purpose. We were to meet in the sitting room. Here we would gather and listen to our homes, our bodies. There were 18 people in the sitting room that morning-- sixteen women and two men. Noel and I entered the space, introduced ourselves and began the process of inviting the group to come home to themselves. We started with the question " what does it mean to each one of you to come home to yourself, to come home to your body?"The responses were varied and full of wisdom. Each person shared their name and then spoke to what coming home to their body meant to them. Some spoke of returning to their hearts. Others mentioned being more fully in their legs. Two people became aware of always living from the neck up and how they wanted to trust their guts more. One man said that he hadn't listened to his body in over twenty-five years and that he was constantly overriding it and was now suffering the consequences. His chest was sunken and his back was weighted. He had recently been diagnosed with a heart condition.

As they were sharing, Noel and I were teaching the theoretical underpinnings of Transformative Touch. We taught how the body is the starting point for the exploration of self because it registers and record every second of our lives. We shared how the body knows the sequence of our living whereas the mind usually knows the consequences. We demonstrated how the body knows the difference between when it is holding onto something or someone

from when something or someone is holding onto it. All of a sudden a voice broke through from the far corner to my left. "That's it" she shouted "I know I am in the right place." The group became silent. I was drawn in by the tone of her voice (like somewhere deep in her heart she had connected with a truth that only she could know) and I realized that she was the only person left in the group who hadn't shared her name or the answer to our opening query. I opened the floor so she could speak. She said "before I tell you my name I want to tell you what I just came to know." In Transformative Touch we understand that when a person's body makes a truth connection that it is the beginning of a person stepping back into the sequence of their life and in that moment knowing becomes more important than being known. She touched her right shoulder with her left hand and shared her knowing. "It's in here" she said "I need to live back in here. There is something about this shoulder." She struggled for words and her struggle invited me in. I looked at her shoulder and her shoulder seemed to be struggling. She finally in a gasp of exasperation said "I know it's in here and I know I am in the right place. My name is Marcia." She surrendered back to her chair and for the moment she surrendered to her mind's desperate search to find the words. I gave her space and did not push her to find the words even though the group was anxious to hear her discovery. In Transformative Touch we know the words aren't always in her mind. They are also in her right shoulder. There would be time to listen to her shoulder later because I knew that at the break I would be asking her to get on the table for the demo portion of our presentation. I was very much interested in hearing from her shoulder and so was the group. We continued on with the morning.

Post-its were the next way we taught about coming home to the body. We put the group into pairs and gave a yellow post-it to each person and guided them in meditation to become aware of a place in their body where they feel the most at home and what makes you feel at home here. After opening their eyes they shared with their partner this place, wrote it down on the post-it and placed it on that body part. We then directed the group to walk around the space and get to know one another by reading and recognizing where the other felt most at home. It was fascinating to see people who were more at home in their heads making contact with those who were more at home in their hearts. The heads seemed to be looking "at" while the hearts seemed to be looking "in". In Transformative Touch we know that where you feel the most at home in your body is where you will organize contact and behavior. So it was equally fascinating to see the people who were more at home in their legs make contact with the people who were more at home in their arms. The legs were moving away the arms were moving towards. In this process the group became aware of the relational dynamics that occur when we are organized and move from different places in our bodies.

For Marcia this was an especially difficult exercise because she did not feel at home anywhere in her body. She was most aware of where she didn't feel at home and that was in her right shoulder. "It's like something is on my shoulder." she said to me and the group. I told her that in Transformative Touch we know that sometimes heavy burdens are placed on our shoulders and other times we can carry a chip on our shoulder. Her face was startled and she said trembling "That's it. My husband's name was Chip and I am still carrying him around on my right shoulder." The group gasped! I registered the tone of Marcia's voice and her shoulder as she said the word "was". Did "was" mean a divorce or did it mean death? We know in Transformative Touch that the tone of your voice is equal to the tone of your body and that what creates these tones in voice and body is the tone and tenor of the experience one has been through. Even the gasp of the group was a telltale sign to me. It looked and sounded like Chip had died. I acknowledged her tremble and startle with a reassuring tone that came from my feet as well as my heart. "Breathe into your heart and feel your feet on the ground" I said. She gave herself a deep breath, moved her feet as if she was planting them in the ground and settled. I asked her if she would like to share anything more about Chip. She said "only that he lives on and in this right shoulder." She made her way back to her seat. The rest of the group did the same. I told Marcia and the group that when someone else lives in a place in our bodies that it is difficult for us to live there and that at times we believe we are carrying someone else when it is they who are choosing to hold onto us.

The group asked me to repeat this. I did. The reason for the repeat was that many of the group participants were licensed therapists who, as they explained it, have been treating their clients on a consistent basis with the message to "let go." If something or someone is holding onto you and you attempt to "let it go" you will drive yourself crazy, I said to the group. This is what we have discovered in our thirty years of doing this work that the body knows the difference between when it is holding onto something or someone and when something or someone is holding onto it. This was the third time I had shared this with the group and as I shared I remembered a teaching from a Hindu teacher of mine. "It takes saying the same thing three times for the beginning process of a paradigm shift to occur in one's life" she would say. After the third time of hearing the same thing repeated people will slowly begin to follow through on their own investigation into the matter. I guess the third time is really the charm. We moved on to our next part of the exercise.

The group returned to their same pairs and we guided them in the next meditation. We had them identify a place in their body where they have not lived for awhile and asked what has kept you from living here. Again the group members opened their eyes and wrote their answer to the question-this time on a blue post-it. They placed the post-it on that part of their body

and walked around the room looking at and listening to their fellow group members. There was high energy and a palpable sense of discovery in the group. "Mistrust of my heart" said the man with the heart condition. "Being told I was spineless" said a woman with a blue post-it on her spine." Never feeling like anybody had my back" said another woman with a blue post-it on her lower back. "Being blinded by my father's rage" said a man with two blue post-its placed gingerly on his eyebrows. "Always having to say yes-what a pain in the neck that is" said a woman with a blue post-it placed on her neck. "Constantly believing that I do not have a leg to stand on" said a woman with blue post-it on her legs. Each group member was moving deeper into connection with this un-lived in place. The air was filled with excited sadness—excited about their discoveries, sad about what they were discovering. Marcia was especially sad. She grabbed the group's attention with the shape of her sadness. She was totally bent over fearfully displaying the blue post-it on her right shoulder. "I let go when I should have held on" she cried. It looked to me like she was carrying the weight of the world on her right shoulder—the world of life and death. The group surrounded her and guided her back to her seat.

Once she was back in her seat the group settled again into their same pairs for the final two parts of our exercise this morning. We next had the members of the group place a hand over that part of the body that hadn't been lived in and listen to it. We were now introducing the core movement of Transformative Touch that of touching with a listening hand. This is at the heart of everything we do. We touch with hands that are listening to a body's story as well as its sequences, to the literal as well as the metaphorical. As the group members placed their hands there, we instructed them to ask "what does this place need in order for you to come home to it?" We had them write that on purple post-its and put those on the body part and walk around seeing others needs and sharing their needs with them.

What an array of needs that was on display during this part of the exercise. Each one felt like a treatment plan for humanity-- Kindness, Acknowledgement, Permission, Truth, Trust, Clarity, Commitment, Love, Leisure, Expression, Ease, Expansion, To be Listened To, To Be Touched, To Touch. This reminded me of my days in rotation at the psychiatric hospital when professionals would refer to patients as being touched in the head and here we were realizing it was the lack of touch and true listening that was making people "crazy." Marcia's needs were one of permission. When I asked further about this, tears formed in her eyes as she said softly "Just to be a shoulder again."

We then led them into the ultimate part of the morning's exploration. We had each person in the pair touch each other one at a time on that body part that they haven't been living in. As they were touching they spoke the words from the need post-it into that part of the body. This

was like a mini treatment plan for that area. In Transformative Touch we are great believers in the idea that a treatment plan should be a treat for the client, treated to something that has been missing. This combination of touch and talk was very powerful. The whole energy of the group changed. Shoulders eased. Stomachs softened. Lungs breathed deeper. Chests expanded. Legs became looser. Emotions were expressed. Eyes became clearer. Necks lengthened, spines lengthened and hearts opened. What a great ending for our morning! Next was lunch.

At lunch I approached Marcia and asked if she would be willing to get on the table in front of the group for the afternoon demo. She gave a hesitant. "yes". I inquired about her hesitation. "I'm afraid my story will freak people out and send them packing." I assured her that she could share as little or as much of the story as she wanted to share." The geography is just as important as the story. I said." Your body will know the geography –where you were, where you want to be. In fact you could just lie on the table and allow your body to receive and not say a word. You're in charge. If at any moment you get uncomfortable and you want to stop the session tell me and we will stop." I was about to continue on reassuring her. She stopped me saying "I feel easier about it" and she went off to lunch. Noel and I grabbed lunch went outside and much to our amazement the three fawns were standing still within fifteen feet of our table. Once again I thought about the return to innocence.

We gathered in the afternoon with the group in a circle and the table in the middle. I spoke to the group about the demo. I told them about the importance of them maintaining the space as I did the demo. I gave specifics:" You can stand and move around. Every now and then I will address you. I will not answer any questions until after the demo. Pay attention to what touches you as you watch and listen."

I informed the group that I had asked Marcia to come onto the table and she agreed. I invited her up onto the table. She came up and sat on the table, her feet dangling like a little girl sitting on a big chair. I asked, "how are you?" She said, "I feel like Edith Anne, the character that Lilly Tomlin made famous." She even did her voice. The group laughed. I asked her to tell me more about Edith Anne but by then the sensation had shifted. She noted,"I feel like I am sitting on the dock of the bay." And she began to sing a little bit of the Otis Redding song. The group gave a curious laugh and I imagined a carefree innocent girl.

I directed her to lie down on the table, breathe and when she was ready to share her experience of being prone on the table. She shared that her lower back was tight, her neck stiff and her right shoulder shaky. I invited her to give herself a peaceful breath and send appreciation to her back, neck and shoulder for speaking the truth.( In Transformative Touch

we usually have a person give a breath rather than take one because it activates different muscles, attitude and posture. Try it now yourself. Take a breath. Now give yourself a breath. Notice the difference.) She gave appreciation to her back and neck and found it difficult to give it to her right shoulder. I acknowledged that and began the process of listening touch. First I went to her left shoulder and invited the shoulder to soften and to allow breath to find its way back into that space. When breath returns here a client can begin to live in the shoulder rather than having life live on the shoulder. Her left shoulder made its way to the table. Her breathing deepened. She sighed and said "What a relief."

I next went to her left hip and lower back and did what we call safeing and settling the pelvis. Her leg lengthened. Her back softened and her eyes opened. "Wow" she said, "I can't believe the difference between the two sides. I now realize how tense and held I am." I assured her that her body was ready to relax and to use the table for support. I went to her right hip and lower back and did the same. Her right leg lengthened and met up with her left leg. She reported feeling symmetrical in her legs and asymmetrical in her shoulders. Her feet were both pointed in the same direction. Her eyes were closed as she said "I feel support for my body in a way I haven't felt for years. I'm actually on the table except for my right shoulder which is about six inches above the table. No wonder I can't sleep at night. I'm six inches above my bed." The group gave an understanding giggle at the image. They knew that most of us when we are weighted down with stress tend to, in an ironic twist, not fully lie down. I suggested that she would sleep well tonight and I asked if it was okay if I placed my hands underneath her right shoulder. She responded that she felt better prepared for contact there.

I placed my hands under her right shoulder. She reported a shoulder that felt isolated and disconnected from her neck. "Out on an island all by itself," she said. I could feel the weight and the cold-the weight of another human being and the cold of the experience-whatever that was. She stiffened and through her tears began to tell the experience. "Chip was h-h-h-holding onto my" I stopped her and added, "Before you tell anymore, just send some warmth down into this right arm." She did and her arm eased a little. She said it felt a little more connected to her body. She went on with the story. "Chip was holding onto my right hand for dear life and I couldn't hold on any longer. My shoulder felt like it was being pulled out of my socket. I knew if I kept holding I would be pulled into the water and drown. I let go of Chip and he drowned right before my eyes. OH MY GOD!! He DROWNED right before my eyes." She was crying profusely. The group was crying and gently holding the space. I stayed supporting the shoulder speaking soft tones of reassurance. "Tell me what your neck knew," I said. She replied, "My neck knew that I wanted to live." Her crying lessened. "Tell me what your shoulder knew," I said. "My shoulder knew clearly that I wanted to live and that I would have

died if I held on. I couldn't save him but I could save myself" she said stoically. I commented on how wise her neck and shoulder were. Her shoulder lengthened and her neck softened in my hands. "Tell me what your arm and hand knew," I said. "In that moment all they knew was to let go. I wanted to live. I wanted to live," she shouted with clarity. The group gave a sigh of recognition. I brought my hands out from under her shoulder and down her arm and hand. I sent a message of care and appreciation to her arm and hand for its knowledge and wisdom even in the worst of circumstances. Her shoulder now felt to her "Like a part of my body again" she said. Her shoulder looked as if she could live there again, like she could partner with it.

"I'M BACK IN SEQUENCE" she exclaimed! I'm back in sequence. Each moment led to the next. I did the best I could in the worst of circumstances." I thought of the fawns and the natural innocence that the body recognizes. "I can take Chip off my shoulder and put him back in my heart" she said. I placed my hands under her head and neck. I watched her put Chip back into her heart. I felt her head, neck, and upper back line up with this new location. They were soft, strong, and secure. She had regained her reach and lost her grasp. I thought of the natural wisdom of Marcia's body recognizing the movement from one moment to the next—recognizing the desire to live not the desire to let go. I was moved by her body's ability to translate back into where she was, rather than who she is. I was touched by how her body knew the geography, the circumstances, and the stances that surrounded her and inhabited her. I was awed by the wisdom of her body and its ability to put things in their place and by so doing finding her own place. In Transformative Touch we know that when we are out of sequence we are usually stuck in the consequences. The body knows the way through.

Marcia's eyes opened and she reached toward the ceiling with both arms raising and lowering her shoulder on and off the table. She looked like a child who was first discovering that shoulders can help you to reach for life. She had a smile on her face and she spoke gently to the group and me. "Thank you for holding the space for me "she said. "In the past six years I have never been able to talk about this experience without going completely psychotic. The touch, the listening, and the reconnection to the sequence feels freeing." Through movement I invited her neck to feel liberated and her body once again felt the freedom of her yes's and no's. I brought the session to a close.

I assisted Marcia up off the table and onto her feet. She noted a ground that was much more forgiving and supportive. She was now breathing from her shoulder to her feet. Her face was light and bright. The group was surrounding her with smiling faces and open hearts. She made her way back to her seat. The group showered her with love and appreciation for her bravery in sharing her experience.

Several group members asked me about the importance of Marcia sharing all the details of the story. They realized that she had not spoken all of the details. I told the group the following, " Even though she never shared all of the details of the story, the body told the essential sensations. It told the geography, the sequence, as it knew it. In Transformative Touch we know that when the body tells of a traumatic experience each part of the body point a direction to the sequence of events. Our job as therapists is to listen to the body well enough to help our clients get back in sequence. Geography is just as important as history. The graph is just as important as the story. Where you were in time and place is just as important as how and when. Where were my arm, my leg, my heart, and my mind? All parts need to be heard. The mind coagulates all the information to stop the bleeding. The body coordinates all the information to start the healing. We as somatic therapists listen to both because once the bleeding stops and the healing begins the being enters once again the natural sequence of their living. In that place all the pieces fit and the body equals the sum of its parts rather than being more than the sum. The body equaling the sum of its parts is a body in sequence. When the body is considered more than the sum of its parts, it only represents that there are pieces that has not been listened to yet. "

We ended our day together with a song wishing them love and happiness in their lives. As we were driving away we saw the fawns once again. This time they were leaping through the bushes reaching new heights.