

MY BIG FOCUSING AHA

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I had been working with my therapist Amy Simpson for a few months when I experienced a great sort of release in my life and the feeling that something had been lifted off of me—almost divinely—a way that was the most substantial thing that I felt I had ever experienced.

My abuse began when I was a young child. I was the oldest girl in a family of eight...the third born. My family had been a very sad family...mom with eight children under the age of nine, and my father, with a very nasty non-supportive kind-of—cruel disposition, giving her no support...she had picked up alcohol—the same as all of those in her family...What else was she to do...?

I remember my brothers consistently beating me up almost daily. I had no understanding about any way of making friends for many years, having such a lonely life and low self esteem, as well as being sexually abused by one of my brothers. The result was a continuous and abusive relationship with men for years, until I finally decided at around age 54, that I needed to work as deeply as I could on this abuse, or never feel completely released from it. I had found the Focusing process to be the most powerful and deeply loving process, I had encountered. I had practiced it for about 20 years prior to the session I am going to write about, became a Focusing trainer and therapist about five years prior to this session.

Anyway, Amy and I were working/talking about my early experiences with my brothers' beating me, and all of a sudden I began to experience myself almost being in a different earlier time. Gradually, I began to feel something on top of me. It had me down on my face, and I felt like I couldn't get up...almost like I was being pushed to the floor.

Amy in her greatest wisdom knew exactly what was happening. She asked me where I was, and I told her that it was dark...I didn't quite know...but all I knew was that I was feeling a lot of pressure. She then, totally understanding what I was experiencing, asked me what age I felt like...I told her I wasn't sure...I was very young...and she gently asked, "Maybe about 5?" and I said yes...and that I just felt like there was a lot of pressure and nothing else. She asked if it was ok for me to stay with the feeling for awhile, and I said yes...and then after a few minutes I think she asked me what the child in there felt like it wanted to do...and I said it felt like the child wanted me to push it off, but it felt really too heavy to push off.

She asked me if I wanted some help...and I said I would like some help from God and the angels. She said, "Yes, like it feels like God and the angels will help". And I said yes...So what seemed at first to me like a lot for me to push off, gradually became easier and easier. It took some minutes, but finally the weight began to lift more easily.

Amy then asked me what it felt like I needed to do with the weight, and I said that I wanted to put it somewhere very far away where it would never bother me or hurt me again... She reflected, "It feels like if you put it somewhere very far away, it will never bother you again..." Yes, I said that I wanted to give it up to God, and have God put it in a big body of water somewhere—like in Siberia, where I would be safe from it, where it wouldn't hurt me ever again....

Then I raised my hands up, still in a motion of releasing and lifting it off of my body, and then, as if I was receiving divine help, the burden started to lift... it went... far away... and it was taken into the hands of the divine and let go... and there was a *knowing*, a *feeling*, of sureness that it definitely was gone from me... it was in a land very far away where it never would bother me again...

Amy then checked in with my child inside and asked how *she* was feeling, and what *she* might be needing to make some closure... I said that the child felt much better and more relieved, but still wanted to know that I would be with her and make her feel safe.

I told her that I loved her and would protect her, so that she would never be hurt again in this way—ever! Amy asked if the child-part wanted to hear anything more from me. The younger part told me that she wanted to hear me tell her that I love her, and she wanted to hold her big white soft teddy bear... Amy said that she was a very sweet little girl, and I told her, "Yes, you are a very sweet little girl and I love you, and I will give you your teddy..."

Amy then asked me if the child-part needed anything else from me, in order to close the session for right now... and that part said no, she just wanted me to make her feel safe and be extra loving to her... When Amy asked me if I could do this, I said yes, of course, I wanted to be more mindful about how gentle I was with her.

Then Amy asked me if my adult needed anything, and I said that I just needed to do what I love... to play myself a lullaby on the piano. That night, right then and there, I promised to be more conscious of being lovingly gentle to my self over the next couple of weeks until I saw Amy again, and then we closed the session.

I played the piano, feeling as though a two-ton weight had been lifted off of me. Afterwards, I sat for many minutes in one of the greatest and deepest feelings of peace I had ever remembered feeling in my entire life... a deep divine peace... and the start of one of the most profound changes in myself, an empowerment—a sort of a 'moving forward' and a trusting in myself that felt new and fresh... this work had started happening many months before...

There are very many paths to trauma work that have been researched and written about. As a psychotherapist I had been aware of various other methods for years previous to my meeting Amy. I met Amy one year prior to my working in therapy with her when she was an assistant in my training with Shirley Turcotte in Advanced Trauma Focusing training. I believe that Shirley's method of Trauma Focusing work is the most powerful method that I have encountered and that I believe can be offered for other individuals who carry in them the effects of trauma in their lives. The process taught by Shirley, her Advanced Trauma Focusing work, with its deep gentle presence, caring attitude, and listening—with total atten-

tion into the core of a person—creates a lasting cellular change that the body *knows*, and will remember for all time . . .

One important note that the author wants to make in respect to both her parents and her family: Trauma is multigenerational. The trauma that I experienced, both in my childhood and in my relationships as an adult, started out generations ago. My father experienced trauma in his family. My father's mother had lost five children before she came from Italy to the U.S., and the resulting personality of my father was partly a result of the trauma of Rosalia, his mother—and what he experienced as a child from being raised in a family with so many complex issues—while my mother drank for many years to medicate what most probably had started in the generations before her. Regarding my brother, he had been put into a very difficult position in the family and his abuse of me resulted, most probably, as a possible call for help or a release from the trauma that he experienced in our family, as well. This author received many good things from having been raised by her family, and this article could not have been possible had I not received the drive and other elements that both my parents gave me.

Rosie Fanale, APRN, RNC, M.Ed. is a Focusing oriented nurse psychotherapist and expressive arts music therapist. She holds degrees from Lesley College as well as Yale University and has a private practice in Shelburne Falls. Currently much of her work leans towards combining Focusing with music and other expressive arts, finding in her work with clients that the combination of improvisational music and arts together with Focusing to sometimes provide the venue for even more powerful work.

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