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SomatoEmotional Release Helps an Aching Hip Receive Needed Attention

"Sparkle Hip" by Jeannine Wiest, LMT, CST

An ache is getting my attention. I need fresh eyes for the nagging feeling that's been surfacing as a catch-click pain in my right hip. I decide to see Abigail, a CranioSacral therapist I've heard good things about. She works out of her townhouse by the beach.

I find her place easily. I'm early so I drive around and see a Big Lots store. I wonder what leftover retail items I need. I find mugs that say "Official Society of Sarcasm: Like We Care What You Drink." In an existential mood, I buy two.

My stomach flutters as I drive back to Abigail's house and park. With 10 minutes to kill, I turn on the radio. "**You know that I could use somebody...**" Kings of Leon. Love them.

That's three minutes gone. Maybe I can just sit here for a little while longer. A gardener starts his blower two houses up. A man shuffles by with a poodle that reminds me of my childhood pet. Okay, let's ring the bell.

I enter a small brick courtyard with one cactus, wind chimes and three sets of shoes. Abigail appears wearing an Esalen T-shirt and drawstring trousers. We walk downstairs to her treatment room.

She leaves me to settle in, face up on her table. The blue room has shelves of crystals and books. The lights are low. I clear my mind of Big Lots, childhood pets and expectations.

Abigail comes in. I feel the heat of her hands as she connects with the dorsa of my feet and my cranial rhythm. It feels like sonic electricity humming. She palpates her way up my body, asking me about surgeries as her hands move to my ASIS hip bones. I tell her I've had two laparotomies.

"How long ago," she asks.

"Long ago," I answer. Her hands sandwich my abdomen.

All of a sudden I'm in 6th grade. A memory floods my awareness as I shift into a SomatoEmotional state. I see my 10-year-old self in a New York City school bathroom with Pam Maher. We're both looking in the mirror.

Pam has strawberry blond hair she wears long and straight with a center part, like Joni Mitchell. Her features are angular. She's painting her small mouth with Yardley Pot O' Gloss. A child model, she wears things I've never seen at the Long Island Green Acres Mall.

Today she's wearing a suede two-piece outfit, the exact russet shade as her hair. The front and back are attached with tortoise-shell rings, so there's a 2-inch separation on both sides. It's not X-rated because of the brown-ribbed unitard underneath. This picture has been hiding in my right hip.

"Where are you, Jeannine?" Abigail asks.

I tell her I'm in the bathroom with Pam. Tears form. My spine shudders from neck to hips.

"What are you aware of?" she asks quietly.

"She's putting makeup on," I say. "I'm pretending I left my makeup at home, but I don't really have any."

A wave of nausea comes over me as I watch little Jeannine feeling less than Pam. A tear slides down the side of my eye and pools in my ear.

"Tell me more," Abigail says neutrally.

"She's a model. She was just in the *New York Times* magazine section. I ask her how it feels to be in a full-page ad by herself."

My hip screams a raw arthritic pain, but I don't have arthritis. Now Abigail is sandwiching my hip.

"You're asking her a question," she says.

"I ask questions. I want to imagine what it's like to be in the center of a magazine. I feel so stupid, like she knows things I'll never know."

I fall silent. My fascia shifts to accommodate this focused attention. Abigail stays where she is. Tears fill my face.

The observer part of me is pleased and curious about what's transpiring. Being neutral on the table allows me to be present to witness trauma unraveling. It's the coolest way to explore.

I'm still in the bathroom with Pam. She tousles her hair, which is weird because it just falls straight again. It would never occur to me to tousle my hair.

"How does it feel to have them choose you?" I venture.

"I don't know," Pam replies.

Answering me is obviously a pain. I ignore it. After all, she's my friend, and I want to know.

"How come you don't know, Pam?"

"Because I don't ask stupid questions," she says.

All at once I think, "Did I hear that correctly? What does that mean?"

Then it dawns on me. Oh. Oh no. Grown-up Jeannine, watching from a therapy table 40 years away, sees what 6th-grade Jeannine does in that instant: She leaves her body to protect herself. She makes decisions about herself that day that are stuck in my 50-year-old hip.

Abigail notices. "Huge heat release just now," she says. "Feel that?"

"I'm invisible," my 6th-grader cries.

At that moment I confirmed something for myself. I am stupid. Pam wouldn't say it if it wasn't true. I walk into one of the bathroom stalls and close the door.

Abigail murmurs, but I can't hear her. Louder she says, "Tell me more about invisible." Her voice pierces the stall where I'm frozen in 6th-grade discovery.

"My heart," I say.

"Your heart," Abigail repeats gently. "What about your heart?"

"She stabbed me with words in my heart."

"Stabbed you."

"Yeah. Pam, my perfect friend." I sniff.

"What about your heart?"

"My heart is huge and sloppy and not cool."

"Huge, sloppy and not cool," Abigail mirrors. "Is that right?"

"Mmmhmm," I whisper. "I have to hide it."

"Hide it. Why is that?" Abigail says.

"I have to hide it to make it fit into this body."

I fall silent as a lighter feeling begins to flow into my hip. Minutes pass. My body shifts to take in the awareness.

I've told that story over the years to shrinks and to lovers, pointing in an analytical way to the moment I decided I must be stupid. None of them gave my body relief from Pam's words, which had been stuck in my hip for 40 years. Now that trapped energy has moved.

Abigail asks me if I want to reframe the scene. She has one hand on my hip, the other near my heart.

"I'd like to play hooky, take my 6th-grader to the park and get her out of that bathroom before she has to hide in a stall and pretend it's okay," I say.

"Do you need help with that?" Abigail asks.

"No. I'm going to dance out of the building and up to Central Park and 59th."

And I do that in my head. I feel viscerally how freeing it is to change that story and run to the green trees with my big sloppy heart.

"What are you aware of in your hip now?" Abigail asks.

"It feels empty," I say, "like a vast art gallery in the Village waiting to be filled with art."

It's not any analogy I ever imagined, but that's what bubbles up.

"What would you like to fill it with?" she asks.

"Sparkles," I say. "Lots of sparkly art."

My left brain kicks in. Jeez, what kind of Village gallery has sparkles? Then I laugh, because it's my sparkle art. My hip needs sparkles. The hip has spoken. I don't know what my inner wisdom will show me next, but I'll meet it with a sparkly hip. —XX—

For more information on SomatoEmotional Release and CranioSacral Therapy, contact Karen Axelrod at 310-376-0113. www.karenaxelrod.com