

Introduction

How I Discovered This Innovative Program

I was suffering, but I didn't know why. I was fearful I'd return to a constant state of feeling nothing at all. I was afraid I'd slip back into the numbness – a place where sadness and anger are impossible to experience; where pain is neither processed nor acknowledged; where joy is viewed as some cruel, cosmic joke. I feared I was going to free fall into the numbness and never escape. It was like being mired in quicksand. It was getting more and more difficult to breathe.

I had lived much of my life in this awful condition. It began when my father died, when I was fifteen years old, and continued until I was forty. The numbness led me to such self-destructive behavior as drug abuse and terrible feelings of self-loathing. As I entered midlife, however, I began my own psychotherapy treatment and learned how to step out and away from the numbness. I also wrote *Redemption of the Shattered: A Teenager's Healing Journey through Sandtray Therapy*. Finally, after twenty-five years of anguish, I was able to enjoy extended periods of genuine happiness through writing.

But something ominous happened when I turned fifty-one. I began drifting into the numbness again. I recognized its telltale signs – the grip of the insensate despair, the large doses of confusion – and it was wearing me down. My neck hurt and I seemed to have a sinus headache every day, the kind where the throbbing starts just beneath the eye and the pain radiates throughout the brain.

In the moments when I could actually think clearly, I attempted to understand the reasons why I was again being besieged by despair. At this point in my career, I was deeply involved in promoting *Redemption* and frequently stayed up most of the night banging away at the computer. I recognized that I felt overwhelming pressure to succeed as a writer, but I didn't understand why this need for success had become so consuming. At the same time, I was working with a number of teenage clients in my psychotherapy practice, and their angst regularly triggered my own ugly adolescent memories.

Among these memories, two were exceptionally vivid. One was of my fifth-grade teacher telling me that I was the dumbest student she'd had in forty years of teaching. The other was of my ninth grade guidance counselor telling me in front of my parents that, based on the results of a set of standardized tests, I was not smart enough to go to college and that recommending I should enroll in vocational classes. I took college prep courses despite her recommendations and proceeded to fail most of them because deep down inside I believed she was right.

Three decades later, in the midst of my despair, I focused again on these deflating events. Perhaps if I were a successful, best selling author, my fifth-grade teacher and ninth-grade guidance counselor would apologize to me on national television, maybe on Oprah. Perhaps the world would then view me as a smart person. I could understand why their dismissal of my intelligence and capabilities galled me, but I couldn't understand why I was still so desperate for redemption from their judgments. After all, these people had long been out of my life.

Many of my teenage clients had problems with drug use. At times in my sessions with them memories of my own drug abuse would kick in and I would readily relate to their struggles. Often, though, I'd go beyond empathy; I'd feel as if I myself was still living in a state of teenage angst with these issues left still unresolved for me. It seemed that somehow I could not let go of my own adolescence. On one hand, I wanted to leave it all behind me, but on the other hand, I clung to those memories embedded deep in my heart as if I'd never let them go. Why?

My father died abruptly. I was fifteen. It was the greatest loss of my life. Yet, I had been able, years later, to get in touch with my feelings about his death and grieve his loss. I documented this long journey in my first book. After I finished it, I took time to think about his life in terms of my father himself as opposed to only processing the effects of his death on me. The saddest fact of his life was that he'd never had the opportunity to realize his dream of owning a small business. For some reason the fact of my father's unfulfilled dream continued to be upsetting to me, but I couldn't figure out why.

He died at the age of fifty-six. Actually, I did not know how old he really was until I read the short obituary in the newspaper. I had thought he was in his early forties: My mother and father felt there was a stigma in the 1960's about having a parent that was too old, so my parents fabricated his birth date. They worried that the other kids and perhaps adults in my hometown would look down on me because I had a father who was older than the other dads of kids my age.

When I turned fifty, I began worrying that I would die by the time I was fifty-six. If I experienced some new physical pain, I immediately imagined it might be a disease, despite the fact that I was very athletic and ate a healthy and balanced diet, unlike my father, who died of a stroke. Why was I dwelling on my own mortality so much?

I spent an incredible amount of time reflecting on these plaguing issues. I felt like a dog chasing its tail, however, going around in circles and getting absolutely nowhere. I sensed that something deeper lay underneath these issues, something that I needed to face for my life to become more joyful. But still I remained numb, and everyday I'd think about my father, his death, the teenagers in therapy, my own adolescence, my mortality until exhaustion forced me into a fitful, unsatisfying sleep.

Then one day I found a new way to face my emotional pain.

I awoke from one of those truncated sleeps and stumbled across the bedroom to where my running clothes hung. I slowly put them on in the early morning darkness. I was sleep deprived, my body ached from sleeping at a bad angle, and my head was beating with a sinus flare-up. I really needed to work out.

I put Mary J Blige's *Dance for Me* album on my portable CD player. I really wanted to absorb its energy. As I began my five-mile run, with the music flowing into my ears, I started thinking about everything that was bothering me. I silently asked myself, "What is upsetting me right now?" But I did not press myself for an answer. I simply found my running rhythm and allowed patience to rule the hour.

The answer came suddenly, in the form of a memory.

A recollection of a happier time several years before flashed upon my mind. My wife and I had been taking care of a little girl, Laura, on weekends and on vacations. She had always seemed to be connected to me

spiritually, and I recalled the fun we had together laughing and listening to music. I enjoyed reading to her at night and teaching her how to read, cook, play sports and behave in good restaurants. At that moment of recollection I realized how much I really loved that little girl. We'd been helping her aunt raise her, but one day her aunt had a falling out with us over a disagreement on her child rearing methods and we were never allowed to take care of her again. The door was shut in our face and there was nothing we could do about it. The pain of this remembered loss took away my breath as I continued running. The tears that streamed down my face mixed with the sweat that flowed from my pores.

Once the run was over, I was pleased that I was able to connect with my feelings surrounding the loss of Laura. I was also surprised that this loss still affected me so deeply, for I thought I had worked through this problem. I had no idea it still troubled me. Then I wondered if possibly, the combination of exercise and self-examination over what was troubling me had allowed the blocked feelings to surface.

After the workout was over, I dried off without taking a shower because I wanted to write down my thoughts and feelings immediately. I want to be sure not to forget anything. I continued to make journal entries after each of my runs but I found it impossible to remember every thought and feeling that I experienced while I was working out. So I purchased a small digital voice recorder that I could utilize as I ran. What a vision from technological hell I'd become: running while talking into a recorder while listening to an MP3 player.

During the early stages of this process, as I continued to grieve the loss of Laura, I found myself getting in touch with unresolved issues from my adolescence, and I connected to my feelings about father's abruptly shortened life in a new way. On reviewing my initial series of journal entries, I realized that I had indeed discovered a new mode of self-help therapy based on merging the main principle of psychotherapy – asking questions about what is troubling you – with the mental health benefits of physical exercise. My journal entries revealed a step-by-step process by which to face and deal with emotional pain. Bolstered by my discovery, I became confident that any person might grapple successfully with emotional pain this same way. Once the pain is faced, it can then possibly be resolved.

There is no quick fix to resolving emotional pain. However this program can teach you how to deal with your emotional pain in a calm, thoughtful, non threatening manner that enables you first to face it, then to chip away at its frightening elements, and finally begin to look at ways to resolve it. You are likely, nonetheless, to experience surprising revelations during your very first exercise session.

The Body-Mind-Soul Solution will teach you how to connect with your higher self. Some call this higher self the soul, the residence of wisdom or a place of spirituality. Others find in the higher self their connection with God. Exercise in itself elevates you to a calm reflective state. Exercise combined with self questioning as regards emotional pain can bond to the healing power of the higher self. The wedding of the mind and body to the higher place will provide reassuring answers to these painful questions. You will discover, too, that you can retain and enjoy this connection to your higher self for a longer period of time while you are exercising than when you're at rest. The changes in brain chemistry that occur while exercising can explain scientifically why this state of reflective and receptive calmness is induced. But there is also the magic of the experience that transpires when you combine exercise and self-questioning. You may have been emotionally "stuck" for many years, and suddenly, in a revelatory flash, you feel hopeful that your life can change. As you begin to understand why you have been stuck, you will develop ways to move on. You will be renewed. There is something like magic in that, too.

My discovery of the Body-Mind-Soul Solution was either a happy accident or the fulfillment of my personal destiny. I believe it will be of tremendous benefit to you and it will help you discover a serenity you've never before known.