

# The **SOLUTION** source

Thunder Bay Counselling Centre Newsletter  
By Colleen Ginter, Clinical Counsellor at Thunder Bay Counselling Centre

For You & Your Family

Fall 2014

## Healing and Recovery



September 20<sup>th</sup>, 2014  
is World Recovery Day

Recovery, what does that mean? It can mean different things to different people. One way to think about recovery is to think about healing. Our Fall 2014 newsletter will focus on emotional and physical aspects of healing.



### My Path of Mourning and Healing

#### A Personal Story

On May 11<sup>th</sup> 2013, my life drastically changed... I abruptly began travelling on a new pathway — a pathway no parent ever wants to journey.

On Friday, May 10<sup>th</sup> at 10:30pm, I sent a text to my son Jamie asking him how excited he was about the fact that the Toronto Maple Leafs won the game and he responded, "Yes, I am so happy!" At 1:20 am, I was woken by the sound of my cell phone. It was Jamie's close friend informing me that Jamie was in the hospital unconscious.

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**Timmins Family Counselling Centre**  
Centre de counselling familial de Timmins

**"There is a crack in everything.  
That's how the light gets in."**

Leonard Cohen

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Saturday, May the 11<sup>th</sup>, found me on a plane with my unconscious son flying to London University hospital where Jamie was diagnosed with a tumor on his brain stem.

For two and half months my son was in ICU on life support. He did regain consciousness but could not speak, could not move. After surgery, he was locked in...locked into his own body and could only communicate with his eyes. On July 21<sup>st</sup> with his family surrounding him and his favourite music playing, my precious Jamie died.

As a mother, it was my worst nightmare. I am Jamie's mother and I am also a counselor. I have facilitated workshops on dealing with stress, grief, the mourning process. I have journeyed with families whose adult child died and here I was on this mourning journey. I have come to know grief in a much more intimate way.

In March 2013, I was in a bookstore and came across two books that I purchased thinking that they might be very helpful - "A Lamp in the Darkness" by Jack Kornfield and "Untie the Strong Woman" by Clarissa Pinkola Estes. I never did share them with my clients but had them with me as I travelled with Jamie all those days in ICU. I had been practicing Mindfulness on a regular basis and had found it so very helpful but had no idea how much it would help me on those challenging days. Jack Kornfield is a leading author on Mindfulness and his words gave me strength and reminded me that the only moment that existed was the moment I was in. There were mornings I would awake and think, "How am I going to do this?" I would breathe into that moment, return to my son's bedside and be there, really be there with him. By staying in the present moment, I stayed away from "If only..." and "What's going to happen if...?"

I struggled with and continue to struggle with the fact that I am not the same woman I was on May 9<sup>th</sup> 2013. I don't know who I am...I have changed. For a woman who likes to be in control, this is challenging for me. I continue to journey breathing one moment at a time and trust that I will come to know the "new" Claudia.

I came to realize that I first needed to process the trauma. The flashbacks and nightmares have subsided and I am now fully in the grief.

There have been times when I feel I am suffocating in my grief, drowning...and then I take a deep breath and tell myself that I am OK in this moment.

I love my son and feel so blessed to have had the opportunity to be his mother. Because of that love, I know that I will continue to live and live fully and in that way, will honour the memory of Jamie!

Have a cried...oh, yes, I have sobbed!!! The grief feels like waves on the ocean that wipe me right off my feet but I know, I trust that I am exactly where I need to be.

I was invited to attend a grief group offered by Hospice Northwest and I found this very helpful. The group was so well facilitated and provided a good balance of information on grief and a safe space to process with others who have also experienced the death of a loved one. I have facilitated similar groups but knew that I needed to be a participant. It didn't matter how much I knew about the grief process. That knowledge of grief process was in my brain and now it was my body and spirit needed to be processed in healthy ways.

The arts have always been integral in my development as a human being. Since Jamie's death, I have spent time learning new pieces on the piano, I have also choreographed my feelings. During the last couple of days before Jamie's death, I found myself singing phrases from the song "Into the West" to him. I have since choreographed this piece. The arts have always been a way for me to express what I am feeling and even if I don't know what it is I am feeling, moving, playing the piano, helps me to identify and express them.

I am also a strong introvert and have also honoured that fact. There have been such incredible support from family and friends but I know that at times I need to be by myself and I give myself that time. This has been very healing for me.

As I type this, I am thinking "Did this really happen? Maybe he will walk through the door and I could hug him." It did happen! This journey — the time with Jamie in the hospital, learning to live without him is both a very painful and a very spiritual journey.

As I have reflected on my journey, I am recalling a beautiful book that I have read "The Mourner's Dance" by Katherine Ashenburg and am thinking, "Yes, it is a dance...a dance that I am doing one step and one breath at a time." ••



## The Importance of Resiliency In Healing

"We humans are complex beings with many aspects, all of which can be impacted by depression and anxiety. Yet we are incredibly resilient and remain capable of restoring ourselves throughout our lives, even when illness has kept us down. The Resilience Model offers seven interconnected pathways to recovery, which we call the Roots of Resilience.

The first three focus upon our physical selves, the body and what it requires to function as it is meant to. They provide the foundation for resilience, like the three legs of a stool, providing a stable platform for cultivating the rest of one's self. The three areas are interconnected, of course. If you improve your diet, for example, you will not only improve your brain chemistry, but you will have more energy. And if you exercise, you are also likely to sleep better, and so on.

The final four roots are reflections of the mind and soul, which comprise our inner selves. The fourth and fifth factors deal with thoughts and emotions—different aspects of the mind. Unhealthy thoughts and feelings are the source of much of our distress. The focus is on doing less harm to ourselves by being conscious of our thoughts and feelings, and not reacting to them in a way that makes things worse. Becoming more conscious of what we are thinking and feeling, and more skilled at calming the mind and facing the emotions allows us to release ourselves from their grip. It is possible to step away from much of the distress that they cause.

The sixth and seventh roots, cultivating a good heart and creating deep connection, take us beyond our attempts to feel better. The focus here is upon developing positive, healthy inner qualities that build upon strengths that we already possess. They open us to the life we are longing for, where we feel more alive and engaged, more and more like the self we would wish to be. ••

Adapted from *The Chemistry of Calm* by Henry Emmons, MD

## Steps to Consider While Healing Physically

### STEP 1: Believe You Can Heal Yourself

Don't believe that positive belief can cure the body? Think again. Exercise physiologists used to think the body was physiologically incapable of running a mile in less than 4 minutes — and so no athlete ever did it. Then in 1954, Roger Bannister ran a mile in three minutes and fifty-nine seconds. Once that limiting belief was shattered, virtually every athlete that competes in a world-class event has run the mile in under four minutes. Today's world-record time for the mile is 3:43:15, more than 15 seconds under 4 minutes.

Scientific data proves that once you believe healing is possible, it can be. So what do you believe?

### STEP 2: Find The Right Support

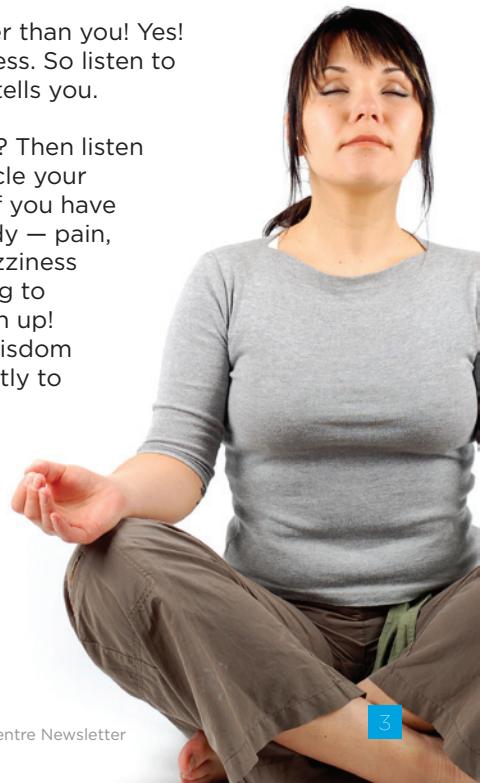
To say that you can heal yourself is sort of a misnomer because the scientific data proves that, equally essential to positive belief is the nurturing care of a true healer, someone optimistic who shares your positive belief, includes you in true partnership, respects your intuition, cares for your wellbeing, and ensures you that you won't be alone on your self-healing journey.

Do you have the right healers on your health care team?

### STEP 3: Listen To Your Body & Your Intuition

Nobody knows your body better than you! Yes! Your body is indeed your business. So listen to your intuition and trust what it tells you.

Not in touch with your intuition? Then listen to your body, which is one vehicle your intuition uses to speak to you. If you have a physical sensation in your body — pain, tightness, nausea, clenching, dizziness — ask your body what it is trying to communicate to you. Then listen up! This is the voice of your inner wisdom and it will always lead you directly to your true north.



**STEP 4:****Diagnose The Root Causes Of Your Illness**

What aspects of your life are activating your stress responses? What relaxation response-inducing activities — like meditation, creative expression, laughter, engaging in work you love, massage, yoga, or playing with animals — have you been neglecting?

Illness is often a wakeup call, forcing us to get down and dirty with what's really true in our lives. We can either play the victim or we can use illness as an opportunity to awaken.

**STEP 5:****Write the Prescription For Yourself**

This won't be the kind of prescription you fill at a pharmacy, though it certainly may include elements of Western medicine. It's more of a self-guided action plan intended to make your body ripe for optimal health and full recovery.

So ask yourself, "What does my body need in order to heal?" Your Prescription may include diet changes, an exercise regimen, and a conventional medical treatment plan. But it may also include getting out of a toxic relationship, quitting a soul-sucking job, adding a meditation practice, taking steps to get out of debt, or following a passion.

Be as specific as you can. Then muster up the courage to put your plan into action!

**STEP 6:****Surrender Attachment to Outcomes**

What if you've adopted a positive attitude, found the right healer, tapped into your intuition and your body, diagnosed the root cause of your health condition, written The Prescription for yourself and put it into action—but you're still sick? Are you doing something wrong? Is it your fault you're still sick?

Absolutely not — and any talk of guilt, blame, or shame for someone on a healing journey only activates more stress responses and harms the body. ••

Liisa Rankin MD

# Helping people is what we're all about.



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