

## **Healing Stories for ‘Scared Speechless’**

**by Carol Lankton**

Judy experienced quite a dilemma when she came into my counseling office desperately seeking healing for an anxiety disorder that manifested as an almost complete inability to speak. And she had a long and complicated life story she was trying to tell about her abusive background, the onset of this mysterious symptom, the speculations by physicians she had consulted, and their eventual conclusion that it is nothing physical. She could breathe in but words seemed to be stuck in her throat as she attempted to speak.

With great effort she managed to tell me that she is 51 years old, that this symptom first developed last year following an illness and that it was first believed to be asthma or some other kind of throat blockage. She indicated that she had survived a horribly abusive childhood in which she had been frequently choked and tortured by parents who have both died in recent years. She described how she had been caring for her father on his deathbed and that he was still being verbally abusive. In an uncharacteristic burst of empowerment, she ‘told him off’, said goodbye, and departed. It was the first time she ever spoke back to him. Her illness and the anxiety symptoms manifested a bit later. The ‘Scared Speechless’ descriptor was the diagnosis by the psychologist who referred her to me.

Judy isn’t able to say much during our sessions but she cries and nods and goes into a calm receptive place while I tell her stories. Then afterwards she brings me poems that capture the essence of what we had been doing the week before. She tells me her stories in writing after she hears mine in our sessions.

### **Assessment**

Through her written accounts of her childhood, I learned details of her abuse and how, in her hopelessness, she had attempted suicide twice before graduating high school. She had married and has two adult children with whom she has good relationships. She operated a successful antique business

after a divorce and she is involved in a healthy relationship with a man now. She is severely limited by this speech impediment and hoped that this therapy would be the last time she would have to tell her horror story and that in telling it she could reinterpret it, heal its wounds, forgive herself and others, replace anxiety with relaxation, and speak freely.

Rather than continue assessment by means of questions, I invited Judy into an experiential relaxation training to first determine if she was able to relax. And, if she could relax, would it impact her ability to speak? I wanted to facilitate her being able to develop and stabilize a calm state from which she could dissociate and review traumatic events from her past that we could both reinterpret and pair with relaxation. I invited her to focus attention on her breath and to simply review what she had told me without additional need to speak. I talked to her about these treatment goals and what it was possible to accomplish by setting her intentions to this relaxing and claiming her long overdue power to find her voice and speak freely. I talked to her about containing the traumatic memories and rethinking them in such a way that she could imagine the happy and safe childhood she had never experienced. I told her about Milton Erickson's idea that 'it's never too late to have a happy childhood.' While I talked, she successfully breathed her way into a calm, relaxed state and silent tears flowed steadily over her cheeks. That was the end of our first session.

### **Clients resources and strengths and skills**

When Judy returned for our second session, she brought me the following hand written poem about the ray of hope she had experienced as a result of the first session.

A little ray of hope, I felt as I spoke to you.  
Even though tears did fall, I felt something good come through.  
Hope's what's kept me going, in hope that I would find a reason to keep living, a little peace of mind. A brighter day tomorrow, to shine within my life, to help smooth out the wrinkles, make the wrong somehow seem right. I know the things that seem so bad will never go away,  
But I think you can help me find a place for them to stay.  
There's really not a reason for some thoughts to hang around.  
Without them I'd be better, feel more safe and sound.  
I'd like this to be the last time my horror story's shared.  
And then just go on living, each day without a care.  
I like the idea of pretending, changing bad to good,  
Putting wrong things in their place, and leave it as one should.

And then when it is stormy and cloudy all around,  
I'll just close my eyes, and let the sun shine down.  
I guess this journey makes us friends in some sort of way.  
And I thank God you crossed my path to help me find my way.  
A way to inner peace, a little ray of hope.  
If I find these treasured gifts, then I feel I can cope  
With the things that come within my life each and every day.  
Then maybe I can share a little ray of hope with someone along the way.

Several strengths became evident in this transaction. Her writing and communication skills were excellent. She had the capacity to experience hope and believe in her ultimate healing, not just of her voice but her defining life trauma. She was willing to trust open relationship with a stranger though her learning history did not support such a choice. I asked her rather immediately to settle into a contemplative state and simply gaze at a painting of a wooded path while I talked to her about pretending that this painting was a dimensional gate through which she could enter a walk in imaginary woods.

It wasn't a formal metaphor but rather guided imagery she could use to go inside and create a context for appreciating her strengths and value. In this regard, I directed her to imagine coming upon a river flowing through these woods and to encounter herself sitting beside it. I reminded her about angled mirrors from department stores and how she could see herself in the center panel and also look to the left or right and see infinity selves in either direction, flowing like a river. I suggested that she look deeply into the eyes of the center panel self and then transmit to her the validating message: "I accept you unconditionally right now." Then I suggested that when she looked at the infinity selves flowing off to the left that she imagine them stretching back through time younger by weeks, months, or years until she could even imagine the innocent baby she had been first emerging into life at the farthest end. Inside this arrangement, I encouraged her to transmit this acceptance message to all the younger selves and to simply review her lifetime in that way people report from near death experiences. They describe their life passing in front of their eyes and in that review, everything suddenly becomes clear and makes its own perfect sense. I didn't know all the horrors of Judy's life but I knew it was important for her healing to be able to remember them differently from when it happened and to accept the traumatized self who had been beaten, blamed, and choked.

I directed her to review this lifetime dispassionately, just like she would observe from an objective place, any life forms, boats, barges, or driftwood that might go floating past her on that river she was imagining sitting beside. I invited her to send the message of acceptance down the lineup of selves as though it were a magical river of hydrogen peroxide that would seek out and bubble up to cleanse and heal any particular wounds. Particular emphasis was placed on having a communion with her precious baby self and validating her existence, welcoming her to life, holding her with love, and warning her of the rigors ahead that she would experience. But she would be supported now with this resourceful self who was back from the future as proof of survival and to reinterpret and empower.

While Judy was pondering these suggestions, I talked about the process of repotting plants and how rewarding it is to free the life force that has been root bound and choked by constriction in a tight pot without proper nutrients and support. The plant manages to tenaciously cling to life, but almost in suspended animation. I illustrated this phenomenon of survival with a diversion into the movie 'Harold & Maude' and how the wise and loving earth mother, Maude, had taken the young and tormented Harold under her wing in order to expose him to the richness of life in all its glory since his actual mother had fallen way down on this job. I described various adventures these two protagonists enjoyed in the process of Harold coming to life, starting with how they met while recreationally attending the funeral of someone neither knew. I particularly detailed the scene where the two of them came upon a horribly root bound tree clinging to life in a too small pot, choked by fumes, and sunlight blocked on a city street where strangers hurried by oblivious to the anguish of the desperate tree. Maude, of course, was the exception. She saw the tree and recognized in an instant that it deserved a better life. She and Harold lifted the tree in pot into a pickup truck and spirited it off into the wide open living, breathing, wooded spaces where they busted it free from the constricting pot, dug a nice, new, moist and fertile space in the receptive mother earth, and reverently placed the tree inside, blessing it to thrive free and strong, able to breathe freely and give full expression.

When Judy returned after this second session, she brought a brilliantly vibrant arrangement of

flowers she had grown and collected for me and also brought her second poem she called 'The Path':

I traveled down a path today in a most unusual way.  
I felt a peace and quietness in the beauty of the day.  
The path was long and winding, beckoning me to stay.  
The path was a place of Awe that took my breath away.  
A stillness inside my soul as I walked there all alone,  
Trees were swaying all about, the road was cobblestone.  
I heard a river flowing as I wandered deeper in.  
Silence flowed within the breeze, peace came with the wind.  
A calmness covered me as I sat beneath a willow tree.  
And then I felt a presence come and join with me.  
I felt the warmest tender feeling, deep within my heart.  
Then I realized she'd been with me ever since the start.  
She had a look within her eyes, just wanting to connect.  
A longing to feel loved, her love you could detect.  
I held her in my arms as tears rolled down my face.  
I could feel her emptiness, I longed to fill the space.  
We walked along hand in hand with a closeness we'd never felt.  
We bonded, became as one, our hearts just seemed to melt.  
A perfect understanding as we shared each other's thoughts  
And carried with us as we left things that can't be bought.  
Hand in hand we scanned the past, we had so much to share,  
`the greatest of them all I let her know I cared.  
The first time we'd been noticed by others on the path,  
Like a dying, wilted flower given its first bath.  
We promised each other dearly as we exited off the trail,  
We'd meet here much more often, we had much more to tell.  
But this was our beginning coming out to live,  
Now we have each other, we each have more to give.

Upon receiving this poem accompanied by the brilliantly beautiful flowers, I experienced a deep appreciation for this client's strength. During this session, I asked her to talk about the events of her life she had viewed in the previous week. She still spoke haltingly as she began to tell me about caring for her father as he was dying and still speaking to her abusively. For the first time, however, as she reported his criticism and demands, she suddenly spoke with authority, clarity, and power telling me how she had spoken back to him for the first time in her life and had told him that she didn't want his money and she was done taking care of his hateful, sarcastic, controlling, and mean spirited self!

I told Judy I wanted to use her story for this chapter because she inspired me with the tenacity of her strength and tenderness. I asked her if she could share with me the details of the horror story with

sufficient thoroughness that she could truly put it behind her. She talked more clearly than she had previously been able to do and shared her pain from a place of safety. During the next week, she brought to my office a notebook in which she had written her entire life story beginning with coming to consciousness at 5 years old, having lived in several orphanages and now learning that she and her younger brother and sister are to get a permanent home with a mom and dad. Their dream life quickly unraveled into their worst nightmare as the adoptive parents unleashed their unthinkable cruelty. Judy carefully included every horrible detail as if feeding it to a transformational fire. She also included this poem entitled 'The Lost Child':

She loves it when you tell her she didn't deserve the pain.  
She has hope when you tell her there's so much more to gain.  
Her tears fall from the broken past, her smiles break through, there's hope at last  
To hear someone acknowledge that she has been done wrong.  
She waited what seems a lifetime to have this come along.  
She hated when it was hidden and no one seemed to care.  
The whole world passed her by like she wasn't even there.  
The words feel so soothing, someone knows and feels  
The pain and broken heart, the life without a shield.  
She longs for the comforting feeling that some things can be took back,  
That she can regain full control when the odds against her were stacked.  
She loves the fact you have the skill to help put things in their place  
And longs for the day the past will only be a trace.  
When she came to you, she often felt she didn't have a prayer.  
Now everything is changing, just because you care.  
She deeply feels that you're her friend because now you're one who knows  
The dark ugly secrets she didn't want to show.  
But you can watch her as she changes into something good.  
And have a life full of joy like all children should.  
The timing may be off, may be a little late.  
But that's okay with her, it's just part of her fate.  
She feels a sort of comfort within herself today.  
Waiting on her friend, guiding her on her way.  
And she's so very thankful for you and your concern.  
And she is very anxious, new ways to deal and learn.  
She doesn't feel as lost since you she has found.  
And awaits the day that she arrives and feels more safe and sound.

On our next session, I told Judy a story about Milton Erickson's son, Robert, and how, as a teenager in Phoenix Arizona, he would ask his world-famous, wise father for help whenever he was faced with a problem. He reported that his father would always answer every question with the same one word

answer. Pointing his finger at the mountain called Squaw Peak, he would simply say: “Climb.” Robert would have no other option than to then climb the mountain with his question weighing on his mind. I then described a typical climb up the mountain that always began with a heavy problem on the mind of the climber. I detailed the stages of a climb up such a mountain and the phases of frustration, pain, fear, isolation, and doubt the climber experiences. I invited Judy to enter that relaxed, receptive state she had found so beneficial in previous inner work. I described how Robert had been lucky enough to have a father wise enough to recognize that the child was the best expert for solving his own problem and the father’s ‘help’ was simply to direct him into that inner space where he could find his own superior answers to what troubled him.. Obviously Judy had no such wise father but I invited her to identify with this imagined ideal father as though he had been her real father. After all, the permissions and validation were just as true for her as they had been for Robert Erickson. After this session, Judy brought this written response entitled “My Mountain Climb.”:

I stood at the base of a mountain, thoughts flowing through my mind.  
I looked to my father with questioning eyes, he said ‘my child, let’s climb.’  
I wanted answers to questions I thought that he would know.  
He said ‘just keep on climbing, even if the climb is slow.’  
I thought, what good could climbing a mountain possibly do for me.  
He said just keep on climbing, that’s for you to see.  
I felt a comfort in the mountain’s breeze, relaxing in the sun.  
The earth, the wind, and myself almost seemed as one.  
It became harder with every step, my problems still were real.  
But as I rested along the winding path, my soul before the earth did kneel.  
The farther up the mountain, the smaller things were below.  
The quieter my mind became, the more reasoning was bestowed.  
To look off of this mountain blowing quietly in its breeze,  
My troubles seemed so far away, peace blew in the trees.  
Time to stop, time to rest along the mountain’s path.  
To me came an inner calmness, my spirit took a bath.  
Again I met this lonely child, just waiting for me to arrive.  
I reached out and took her hand, and to the top helped her arrive.  
We knew we each held the answers, to help each other’s pain.  
And needed each other’s strength the mountain’s top to gain.  
We realized the answers couldn’t come from somewhere else.  
But learning what to do would come within ourselves.  
Far far from our problems, they almost seemed extinct.  
So far away all we could do was just to sit and think.  
We realized through the mountain’s climb, all we had was time.  
We looked at each other face to face and sung ‘you are my sunshine.’

She depended entirely on me to make the journey through.  
She said you be strong for me and I'll be strong for you.  
As we approached the mountain's top with what seemed like a breathless view,  
We heard our father whisper 'to thine own self be true. I love you.'

Judy brought living metaphors with her flowers and poems and willingness to go into the belly of this beast of her past to confess and release her shame and fear. She wrote that she experienced a strong feeling of peace at her mother's death in knowing that she would not be back. She wondered whether she should feel bad for having this relief. She had forged a kind of connection with her mother prior to her death but even that was fraught with the mother's insistence that she had always loved Judy and that it was therefore her own fault that she had stayed away in those years before their limited reunion. Judy recognized and clearly stated the goals that were foremost now: "I want the lost child on the path to feel the comfort and love and compassion I'm able to give. I want her to feel the worth I feel she deserves. I want her to see the world through happiness and hope and begin to love at its fullest. I want to cover her fear, help her grow strong, and find the power to overcome the chains that haven't completely let her go. I want her to come out of the darkness, into the light. I want to help her find a way to move forward and look forward and let the dark tales that haunt her be put away forever, buried to return no more, like at her mother's funeral." Rarely is a treatment plan so clearly communicated and orchestrated from the client's deep conviction as this was. Her incredible responsiveness to metaphor was my indicator to proceed with even more detailed metaphoric interventions that would carefully address each of her stated goals.

I decided to address this sequence of goals in a multiple embedded metaphor format, telling not just one but a series of goal oriented stories designed to challenge limiting beliefs, retrieve and strengthen preferred emotions, illustrate and allow desired behaviors, transform and move through those old traumas, say goodbye to the horrors of that past, clarify her heartfelt desires, and set her mind and intentions firmly in the service of living these desires, breathing freely, finding her voice, and giving full



emotional expression to all of her experience, taking to heart the wisdom of Milton Erickson who said we deserve to have all of our feelings by virtue of being alive! This final sequence of stories was delivered as the crowning completion of her brief therapy, this turning point in her life that reoriented her onto her preferred path, empowered and permitted.

**Story One begins:** The man played flute in the symphony orchestra. He was exceptionally talented. One day he uncharacteristically ventured to disagree with the conductor who severely criticized him, practically slapping him in the face with his biting words to the effect of ‘give me no lip – how dare you talk back to me?’ Almost immediately, the man’s lip swelled to such a distorted size that he was completely unable to play his flute. His distraught family took him to many physicians seeking a medical cure that was not possible for this emotional condition. Finally, the man was referred to the wise and venerable Milton Erickson who carefully listened as the man related the horror story of his abusive past and how the father had disallowed any of the children to talk back or give any objection in response to the unreasonable authority he wielded over them in his tyrannical way. The father may have even meant well but his relentless devaluing of his children in favor of his own egotistical control had practically choked the life force from his cowering children who had held it all inside as if their sur-

I selected this story due to the parallels in the character’s and client’s life, the character having developed a symptom (swollen lip) in response to abusive parents just as the client had done with her throat closing. In both cases, the symptom interfered significantly with giving full emotional expression to those impulses which had been forcefully silenced. Also, the protagonist had been through many physical evaluations finding no cure for this stress related symptom.

There is acknowledgement for the client that her survival did depend on her compliance with the de-

vival required it. Erickson carefully listened to this sad history and at the end informed the man that his symptom could be cured but that it and would require that he give full emotional expression to all the toxic bitterness, resentment, rage, and anguish that had been accumulated over this entire lifetime of pain. The man was desperate and yet still fearful to take this leap into the now prescribed but heretofore forbidden expression. He pitifully wondered whether Erickson couldn't just give him a medication to cure the swelling. Erickson forcefully commanded him to 'shut up with your stupid request for medication and get on with the expression you need to give.' With that, the man erupted into 'a most vituperative' attack on Erickson himself, spewing insult and rage in a powerful flow that had been waiting for a long time. And each person must find the courage to give this kind of thoughtful and thorough and empowered expression of that which has been built up and choked back into you. And you can do that even now from inside this protected place. And you can take all the time you need to give that expression from within yourself even now while I talk about other things.

**Story Two begins:** The emperor penguins who live in the south pole make an annual trek of seventy miles to their breeding grounds in the most severe conditions imaginable. It is a love story and a survival story of epic proportions.

mands of her parents. But in both cases, contexts had shifted and now survival, or symptom remission, required giving that same full expression that had been necessarily squelched.

This is an indirect suggestion designed to give direct permission to the listening client to personally review and give expression to those things she had needed to repress.

I selected this story as a natural context to reinforce the incredible courage, strength, determination, and will to survive that I see this

Aptly titled, *The March of the Penguins* is a National Geographic documentary that captures the strength, perseverance, and incredible power of the instinct to survive we are all hard wired to blindly follow. In response to an invisible yet strongly felt signal, the birds suddenly emerge in unison from their life sustaining waters and begin the incredibly arduous trek, shuffling along on their bird feet across the frozen tundra of their extremely harsh and downright abusive home. The ones who survive the challenging trek arrive at the breeding ground and set about the process of selecting their mate for this cycle. Signals are exchanged, vows accomplished, and the dance of love begins and culminates with the miraculous arrival of the egg which must be transferred to the protective custody of the father while the now famished mother must return that same seventy miles to eat and replenish her capacity to nourish her chick. Meanwhile the fathers carefully and precariously hold the precious egg of new life on top of their feet and covered by a protective pouch and huddle together against the dark sub zero arctic winter with its ferocious winds of sometimes 100 mph with nothing to eat for months since they left the life sustaining sea. There will be nothing to support their survival, only severe challenges and adversity - yet tenaciously they hold on to life and wait for the return of the mothers. The chicks begin to hatch and must be fed soon or

client as possessing but underrating in herself. I hoped that in admiring the penguins embodiment of these traits, that she could identify and begin to appreciate the same strength within herself.

Again, the harshness of their context was parallel with Judy's abusive home.

I also intended this story as an opportunity to reinforce the precious miracle of Judy's own existence and to invite her to 'hold that precious egg of new life' which is herself with the same reverence and seriousness with which the father penguins hold their literal eggs

they will die. The mothers are making the long trek back. Miraculously, the majority of them return just in the nick of time, recognize their mates and offsprings whom they have never seen outside of the egg, transfers are accomplished and the life giving nutrients are transmitted. The fathers who have now lost more than half their body weight and haven't eaten in months must trek back to the feeding grounds. On and on this tag team parenting continues as the babies come into consciousness knowing nothing other than the harsh reality they were born to – and the inherent strength hard wired into their very existence to not only survive but thrive as examples of the life force itself and the awesome unquestioned worth and value that you have by virtue of being alive. And each being resonates with an understanding that you can trust this instinct and capacity to trust the power of being who you are. And you feel it deep in your bones and let it bubble up through your heart and in each intake of the miracle of each breath – you being breathed by the great life force itself that moves through you sustaining you through all expression of your unique way of seeing and being and experiencing...

**Story Three begins:** This matter of saying goodbye to a parent is a complicated thing. Getting what we need from a parent is even more complicated. The man had asked for hypnotherapy to control the symptom of hypertension

And now Judy is metaphorically invited to identify with the hatching chicks as they come into consciousness inside this brutal reality. Here, I switch pronouns intentionally in the middle of the sentence to transition into an indirect suggestion to again speak directly to Judy's unquestioned worth and value. Additional suggestions further invite her into an experience of feeling this life force as it moves through her.

Judy had directly requested help in putting the deaths of her parents into a better resolution. The man in this story also has a physiological

which he was afraid would lead to problems of the heart such as the ones that had just killed his father. He could work out or use biofeedback to force this fear to temporarily subside but as soon as a life pressure arose, back into the alarming range his anxiety would soar. I contracted with him to use hypnosis to make friends with his fear and to begin with the fear of emotional vulnerability. He had just buried his father a few weeks earlier but his goodbyes were far from fully said. He agreed with the goal of experiencing the full catastrophe of emotional vulnerability and as such followed the suggestion to go in his mind to the gravesite where he could say what needed to be said to finally bury that parent and all the unfinished business waiting to be resolved. When you bury a parent, you start with thanking them for what they were able to give and saying goodbye to the bitterness for all that was unwanted and painful that they also gave. You say goodbye to the hope that the parent will ever be able to make good on the love and acceptance and approval you so desperately wanted from them. It is a terrifying moment when you say goodbye to that dream and let go of any hope of it ever being reality – at the hands of that parent. But the more you succeed at releasing hopes for that parent to come through, the more it suddenly becomes possible to become that ideal parent who is able to materialize beside that aching and grieving child self to finally

symptom (hypertension) that resulted from the heart limitations of his parents. It is again a parallel metaphor which I included to stimulate Judy's thinking about the goodbye to her parents that she had not yet completed.

I wanted to encourage Judy to let herself feel the power of fully feeling all of her emotions, including fear and vulnerability.

The second person pronoun was used to blur boundaries between telling the story of how 'he' said goodbye and how she can experience this process directly.

This is an apposition of opposites suggestion to commemorate the shift that can occur when she releases hopes for approval from her

respond to those heart felt yearnings with all that had ever been needed.

So the man sat there at the grave of his parent and released into the fires of transformation all that bitterness and pain. He transmitted to the spirit of the parent that he was going to learn more than the parent had been able to teach and he issued forth a forgiveness that freed not only his own psyche but that of the parent, reassuring the parent that his limitations would not limit the man he had become from realizing and knowing both his fullest worth and the wondrous depths of emotional vulnerability to which we're all entitled. And then he entered into a communion with the child he had been, taking that essence of himself into his heart and arms and soul, tenderly embracing that spirit and receiving questions, assuaging pain, transmitting the deepest acceptance, validation, and permission to be that the child had been hungering for through the eternity of its existence. And the child releasing to the Olympic flames that burn in the inner sanctum the burden of guilt and fear and shame he had been struggling to bear all alone. And that burden was transformed and crystallized into a multifaceted crystal core of unquestioned worth and deep calmness. He was breathing very easy and radiating with well being when he finally finished burying that parent and saying goodbye. Thereafter, any signal of that previous symptom only

parents and finds it newly possible to receive that nurturing from the unexpected source of herself upon doing so.

The continuation of the story and what the man told his parents just serves to stimulate her thinking about similar transmissions she might want to make to her parents. And when the man nurtures the child he had been, these details provide an opportunity for Judy to transmit acceptance and love to her inner child as well.

This sentence recapitulates the re-

served to transport him back into that wellspring of wellbeing he had memorized that day. And you take all the time you need to bury all that needs to be buried and to memorize the solidness of your connection to this power spot at the inner sanctum to which you can always return immediately at the first signal of your anxiety.

**Story Two completes:** When the penguins return at last to their beloved sea, they instinctively know just where the portal is that promises entry and release into the waters that wait below. They don't pause at the water's edge to behold their reflection on its mirrored surface. If they did, they could see and memorize the indicators of that incredible strength and power and tenacious determination that somehow shows up even on a bird's face. Maybe they would see it deep within the soulful eyes. It is a universal experience known to all who have suffered long and prevailed to experience the sweet relief at the journey's transition. And in that moment, it is as if you are giving birth to yourself, fully seeing the unquestioned worth and value just like you could see it in the infant you once were when you imagined a travel back to that bittersweet beginning when the life force delivered you into the harsh climate you would have to suffer through with those misguided parents who knew not how to celebrate and nurture the precious life given to them. Perhaps they mourn their missed opportunity just as

association in experiential life I want to foster here. She has retrieved and memorized feelings of calm wellbeing which I want her to associate to any time she detects an anxiety signal.

I mention the possibility of seeing a reflection in a mirrored surface so that I can encourage Judy to 'see herself' in her mind's eye and how she looks as she experiences these resourceful feelings.

I want her to memorize the sweet relief she has earned the right to as she comes into this knowing of her value. I refer to a directive from an earlier session to imagine encountering her infant self. She had been quite moved by her capacity to appreciate the value of that infant self. I suggest that her parents may

those penguins grieved when they inadvertently allowed the precious egg to break and freeze and die. But you are able to immerse yourself in this celebration of witnessing the coming to life you have accomplished. Drink it in. Breathe it in. Feel it in your heart and soul and as if you were sitting beside a mirrored reflecting pool of a deep primordial well, look upon yourself and pronounce it good. I accept you unconditionally right now. And slip even deeper into the daydream you're dreaming and imagine the backgrounds of the various situations in which you are going to want to breathe easy, experience unblocked passages, give full emotional expression, experience the pangs of emotional vulnerability, speak your truth with kindness to anyone you need to tell how it is for you or what you need or want. Know that wanting to is a good enough reason and you deserve to let your mind's strongest intentions be set to achieve your most heartfelt desires. So just what do you desire anyway? And what does it look like and sound like when that you who is empowered with all that strength and worth and kindness and compassion goes after what she wants? Notice how it is tempered and balanced with such an exquisite sensitivity and caring for the needs of others. Be very pleased with what you see and know that this daydream being born now continues forever.

**Story One completes:** That flute player with the swollen

well have mourned their mistakes and would join in the celebration of her spirit prevailing.

I want her to create a visual self image that captures this resource state. Then I want her to associate this self image into and through all the contexts of her life where she wants to have those feelings available. I also want her to mentally rehearse her preferred interaction in the various situations where she needs to be able to give full emotional expression.

I want to focus her awareness on identifying what she wants and giving herself permission to adopt that motivation strategy, recognizing that she will inevitably do so with sensitivity to others as well.

After suggesting she let this arrangement be ongoing, I return to



lip vented his attack on Erickson, following orders to give full emotional expression. One day as he criticized what a horrible father Erickson was, he had a burst of insight about his swollen lip spasms having something to do with unfinished business with his own father. Erickson congratulated the man and encouraged him to go home and finally say to that father only what needed to be said, no more and no less. It seemed so obvious then but it had taken nine months to dig out from all that pain and abuse and trauma. He then went home and announced quite simply but emphatically to the father that he would be making his own decisions from now on as he was a grown man and didn't need his father telling him what to do any more. The father readily conceded and congratulated his son for this rite of passage he had successfully negotiated. And of course the swelling in the lip subsided and he went back to moving the breath through the pipes of his vocal instrument to make the beautiful music that he loved.

the original story and the insight that man experienced as a result of holding nothing back. It was intended as a tribute to the fact that things take the time they take to honor and resolve. I want her to honor her own journey.

I am suggesting that she speak her truth directly and with kindness, letting that permission for free expression gradually open the pipes of her vocal instrument and her own breath, no longer blocked, being allowed to freely flow.

This last sequence of stories were delivered in a single session that lasted about an hour. Judy's response was profound as was expected considering her very literal and personal application of all previous stories. My existing ideas about therapeutic metaphor were validated and I was re-inspired with the power they can tap into and access. The answers within are indeed abundant and available no matter how thick and stubborn the crust of pain, scabs, and scars. It was very gratifying to be in the presence of

such resilience and tender strength as this client manifested. I would not do anything different to this point but will encourage Judy to proceed with taking these learnings into the wider world and releasing herself into the wild of total freedom to be. Breathwork, massage, singing lessons, yoga, dancing for joy, hiking to high heights and meditating there, gardening, and reading celebrate your life stories to children all come to mind as complementary and conducive activities to grow the seeds for personal transformation we have initiated with our work together in metaphor.

About Carol Lankton:

I am a marriage and family therapist in private practice in Pensacola, Florida. I have always loved stories and the capacity they have to stimulate thinking, emotion, and direct experience through identification with the protagonist. I first heard of Milton Erickson and his use of therapeutic metaphor in 1976. I particularly loved his stories about his children and would always long to have him give me the same permissions evident in those stories. I was able to meet him in 1979 and experience both his direct and indirect instruction and have coauthored The Answer Within which is a framework of Ericksonian hypnotherapy as well as Tales of Enchantment which is a compendium of goal oriented therapeutic stories. I live my life with an awareness to enlarging my repertoire of experience which will invariably find expression in therapeutic metaphor.