

Gone with the Wind: A Pain Management hypnotherapy session

This pain management hypnotherapy session was conducted as a demonstration in a hypnotherapy training workshop. The client is a 32 year old man, Lyndal, who had already experienced one very successful hypnosis session to address the effects of severe, residual pain and complications from pain medications following several automobile accidents. Most particularly distressing to him were symptoms of Tardive Dyskinesia which resulted in an inability to relax his left arm which jerked involuntarily almost all the time. This painful movement made it very difficult to sleep. In his previous session, he had responded so well to suggestions that he was able to be completely still for almost an hour in trance.

Prior to this first session, he had been completely skeptical about hypnosis and afraid of it as people in his church had warned him that it was 'bad, not Godly, and likely the work of the devil.' However, he had been experiencing such discomfort that he had decided to come in and give it a shot. And as it turned out he was a very good subject.

To begin this session, Lyndal explained to the workshop participants how the medicine that was supposed to be helping him was in fact making things worse. But the residual effects from hypnosis had been nothing but beneficial and he requested another session with tape recording so that he could use it to 'be talked to sleep every night.' He proceeded to briefly summarize the series of accidents and drug reactions as beginning when he graduated from high school and was in a car wreck in which his friend's car flipped seven times. In this accident, he 'tore up' three vertebra, had several compression fractures, and had to wear a brace for 6 or 8 months. He was in college and managed to 'just keep going and live with it.'

He went on to describe himself as 'a magnet for car wrecks' since a few years later he got in another wreck. I challenged this notion and called it an arbitrary limiting belief that we might want to eliminate from his language so as not to further any self fulfilling prophecy of more wrecks. He described the next wreck when he was driving and somebody sped through a red light and totaled his car and tore up disks in the lower back and one in his neck. Since that time he reported having up to thirty epidurals, tinge units, handfuls of medication including methadone to remove the nerve pain from damaged nerves. It was overwhelming and he couldn't sleep at all. He was taking medicine to go to sleep and medicine to wake up and medicine to not hurt and medicine to move. It was when Elavil was prescribed that he 'lost his arm' as he calls the development of the neuromuscular disorder that would later be diagnosed as Tardive Dyskinesia. He went to specialists throughout the southeast and had cooperated with all available treatment but to no avail. He experienced the pain as if 'there's a car that's sitting on my back.' He wore a back patch which was not providing relief. At this session, he acknowledged the despair he feels and stated that 'I'd jump out of a plane, I'd do anything to get the pain out of my back.'

In addition to the impaired motor function problems (rocking and flexing his left arm) his speech was also labored. His speech had been normal until a week after he took

Elavil. He developed a very pronounced stutter but had successfully retrained himself to speak. At this point in the demonstration, I informally nominated Lyndal as a contender for the Milton H. Erickson Resilience award for just surviving and bringing himself back from the brink of extinction, surviving enormous odds, and relearning, retraining and bringing his speech back. Lyndal responded that at present it had become a depression thing, and that he knew better but found it very hard to handle the worrying and stress.

I acknowledged that he had been through the entire gamut of everything the medical model doctors have to offer. And while they do have some great and miraculous stuff, they are also limited in what they can do because they don't have as much power as he has inside of himself – the answer within. And they are necessarily challenging him to find his power because they are saying: 'we're at the end of what we know how to do.' He agreed that the medicine is a poor temporary fix and eventually makes things worse when it stops helping.

We then discussed his goal of gaining his independence back because he'd always worked and taken care of himself. But now, at age 32, despite working through school despite the pain, he reports that it has never been so intense as currently experienced. And he finds that he must depend on others to a great extent.

At this point, I asked him to rate and measure his current pain as a baseline and to give me feedback regarding what happened over time in the days after the first session., whether he was able to hang on to that degree of comfort and relaxation. He reported that he had been able to sleep alone, was in a better mood, 'and it just seemed like there was a weight off my shoulders.' Though he had not spontaneously or intentionally used any sort of self hypnosis, he did report trying 'to remember what you were saying and then it just seemed like everything just kind of came out, like a balloon kind of deflating - all the stress and everything just went away. I remember feeling like I went to sleep and woke back up and left the pain somewhere.' He summarized that he 'just wanted to stay there. We did more that day than in years.' He had left in a euphoric state.

I wanted to understand more about this useful verbal metaphor he had used. I asked him: 'So, did you see something or did it feel like that thing deflating? Like a balloon? Or just a release thing?' Lyndal responded: 'It felt like someone else kind of just took it out and held it, I didn't have to hold it all inside. And I didn't have to battle mentally and try to imagine that it wasn't there. For once it felt like it wasn't there. For a while it felt like it wasn't there. And I'm still wondering how.'

So I remarked that: 'Your conscious mind does want to know how, and probably won't ever be able to really explain how but you can wonder and your unconscious just keeps doing it anyway even if you don't ever figure out how to explain it, it's just a curious thing. And you are a man who does articulate well. You put a lot of things to words. You are obviously very smart. You think about things. You have a very active conscious mind that likes to explain things and understand things. And your conscious mind just got a proof of your capabilities and I just want to help you have another direct experience so you learn even more solidly at the unconscious level, even though you still

won't be able to consciously understand, how to just let yourself go back there again whenever you want to. Maybe by just remembering what I said, or more importantly, remembering what you're feeling and intentionally going there.'

But before embarking on this next experience, I asked him to rate and describe the current pain so we could use it as a barometer for how it would be noticeably different when complete. In response to my asking him how he feels right now, he reported that it 'feels like a car sitting here right now.' This was a metaphor he had used previously to describe the pressure he feels. He was concerned regarding the involuntary movement in his left arm: 'I'll try to make it be still, but I don't know how. It's annoying. It's like a mosquito. They say it only stops when I sleep and I can only sleep through medication. It feels like aerobics the rest of the time.'

At this point, we concluded the interview interaction and I initiated this session with the paradoxical prescription to utilize this annoying symptom in the service of learning how he can create a beneficial control:

Carol: I think it would be interesting, in fact, today for you to let it do some other interesting things like maybe let your unconscious decide, since it's going to be moving anyways just explore how your unconscious might levitate it and let it float in a way that's a little smoother. You never know what a levitated arm is going to do, sometimes they rise up all the way and touch your face and sometimes they just kind of float off to the side. And sometimes they get really still, and they get very detached. And with a certain curiosity, you can just look out at it, at a ring on the finger. And you know it's apart of you but it's also apart from you.

There's this other induction I want to teach you. Put your hands together like this for a minute, not quite touching but just hold them together and if you need to move while you do this that's fine. Just kind of be in that circle of energy, like a circuit that's not quite together but close enough that you can either imagine feeling or actually feel or pick up on the sense of the tingling sensation in the finger tips. And sort of feel the heat between the fingers like a magnetic attraction and just let yourself focus all of your attention on the tingling in the finger tips and maybe a pulling them together, maybe letting them come together. Or you can just sort of experiment with this ball of energy, moving your hands back and forth a bit. And just letting your conscious mind pay attention to how the sensations change and shift with the movement that sometimes feels tingling, sometimes light, sometimes just good. Maybe you just call it some kind of good. And feeling it first in your finger tips and then noticing if you focus your awareness you can let that little tingling lightness move upward toward the bend of the finger into the knuckle. And on into the top knuckle and into the wrist and then into the forearm and then into the elbows. And up the bicep and into the shoulders rapidly or gradually, still feeling the tingling in the fingertips and maybe even experimenting with letting your fingertips come all the way together when you know that your unconscious is ready to develop another level of learning about how you can use your attention in a focused direction. And still feeling the lightness and tingling flowing up into your shoulders and neck.

And when you let your fingers touch, you can close your eyes all the way and let yourself begin that process of just flowing, going into that depth of trance that's got a vibrational quality to it as you move certain parts of your body. And notice the movement of sensations that sort of goes between that closed circuit you create with your fingertips up through your hands and forearms, biceps, shoulders, and neck and moving into your head just like the circuit is complete. You can let the circuit of energy bring you comfort throughout that entire loop, an energized comfort that you can feel as you slightly move that right leg while the left leg is stretched out with the foot on the ground. And there are all kinds of alternations you can make with your posture by letting yourself find in this setting the depth of trance that's relevant for you to have the learning that you drove all the way out here to have today. You'll begin to have that learning now. Just shifting, that's right, because there's really no one way to move or to become still and maybe you find some meaning in keeping your fingertips together in that way. Or perhaps some other alteration that your hands find to be in relationship with each other. Perhaps one of them floating up and apart or both returning to your thigh. Maybe one goes up and the other goes down. Maybe you just allow with permission for your hands to find their own comfortable meaningful relationship with each other as a means to find the depth of trance that fits for you.

And I know that with your eyes closed it's possible for you to go anywhere, see anything, say anything. You can do anything as if you're in a dream. And all the while that I'm speaking to you, you are aware of a number of things. Foremost in my mind is the wild wind blowing right outside the door, a wind of change, an energetic wind that's just blowing. And you know beyond that there are the waves that you can realize that you're able to hear sort of crashing onto and rolling onto the shore. In constant motion as well just as you are breathing, the constant motion of wind moving inspirational, miraculous breath moving through you. And your conscious mind has probably forgotten to notice and appreciate how it is that each breath comes and goes, just like each wind current circles the building and swirls about us and releases and is gone someplace like a bellows or a balloon. In that image you retained and spoke about something being released. It's nice to let your awareness of your own breath expand for your use in such a way that you think about taking a breath and letting the fullness of your lungs represent an awareness of tension and stress that can be simply released through nice deep cleansing breath. Just letting it all go, letting thoughts come and letting thoughts go. And I don't know if you would call what you are already experiencing something like complete relaxation but I would like for you to become aware of the comfort and how it is that your sense of the comfort you're able to have here continually increases and maybe you can do that remembering the comfort you had in that other trance. Maybe you do it by following the suggestion from that other time to let a curiosity develop about just where in your body you are already the most comfortable. Maybe it's in that spot on top of your head underneath your hat. In that warm cocoon space where your brain is being stimulated gently with ideas that remind you of things that work, that you can do, that you already experienced in your previous success.

I'd like you to have a sense of discovery like you do when you come back to a familiar city you haven't visited in a long time. Or like when you come back to a dream

that has recurred and as soon as you get into that dream or inside the perimeters of that city, you start remembering stuff, you start having a sense of “oh yeah” I’ve been here before, I know what this is like. You just let yourself settle into both this trance and this feeling of comfort as though it’s a secret hideaway. It’s just a place to nestle in and be very comfortable and very secure in your ability to just be there breathing in and out and sometimes remembering to focus on each breath. Sometimes forgetting to focus on it, and just knowing that your unconscious is automatically following that task of taking that breath and letting it go. Just like that sense that somebody else was doing it and you don’t really have to, you don’t have to do anything really with your conscious mind but wonder and appreciate and maybe notice, think about what you are doing, what your hands are doing and the alteration and relationship they have with each other. The sense of tingling and comfort that I hope you can still remember or experience now from the finger tips that flows upward and continues to just relax there in a sense of knowing you don’t have to do anything but just sit there. You get to be the passive recipient of the planes flying over, waving rolling in, the wind encircling, the attention to the comfort that continues to develop. Occasionally being aware of my voice, but realizing that you don’t even have to think about that. You can think about the others who are supporting your progress and you can anticipate listening again to this tape while you’re laying comfortably in your bed at some point waiting to go to sleep. You can let a variety of images parade through your conscious mind, coming and going as if you’re sitting beside a river watching your thoughts pass by. And maybe in your case, your conscious mind can appoint some part to monitor from a detached perspective and you can be aware and notice that there are sensations that you experience that your conscious mind might have called pain but that you can experience as simply a very distant, turned down, muted sensation, as if you were sitting beside a river watching some piece of drift wood just float by and you could be aware of it, but somehow it doesn’t really concern you because it’s out there and it’s floating past your awareness.

And just like the sensation in your body which you can begin to attend to, you notice that while you can be aware of it, you don’t have to do anything about it. You can just let it float right on by. And in those spaces between breaths, those spaces of comfort can seem to last three or four times last longer than they normally would. It’s nice to fall into a little envelope of ‘right now,’ a little space bubble that feels so comfortable. It can surround you with a hula-hoop size buffer zone of comfort. And on the other side of that hula-hoop, it’s as if the pressure of daily life and responsibility and the pain itself are all camped outside of the hula-hoop, but that buffer zone keeps that space activated and safe as a hideout place away from the pain. Like a treasure place you go to in a dream, like a well, a wellspring that you can imagine diving into, falling into. Another self induction that might be interesting for your conscious mind is to imagine letting your consciousness just fall downward through the tube in the center of your body down to the base of your spine and collecting a feeling of warmth and tingling and comfort. Imagine as if you were falling and looking upward against your closed eyelids and watch the top of the tube getting further away and the light at the end of the tunnel getting smaller and smaller as you just let yourself rapidly drop deeply into the wellspring of comfort and wellbeing, into that little hideaway. I don’t know if you ever saw the Disney version of Alice in Wonderland and how she fell or actually jumped into that hole that led to Wonderland

because she really wanted to go and follow that curiosity and see what was going on at that other level of experience. And she just jumped into that hole following that magic white rabbit. Suddenly she was falling and falling, as your consciousness deepens, and she wasn't afraid at all and was totally safe. And once in awhile she would be surprised at how rapidly something was shifting and she would say: 'Goodness!' as she continued going down down down until you reach that place and then from that vantage point it's like you can go anywhere because you're in a whole new level of being.

And just what is important to do while you're there? Maybe you just want to hang out someplace and just let your unconscious memorize all the sensations of that absolute utter complete relaxation and comfort that you can feel inside, even at the cellular level of your body in each breath, or the way your arms are working, or to that comfortable cocoon spot underneath your hat. Or there's the place at the bottom of your feet where it's as if you are connected with that wellspring, incoming wellbeing, so that you have that sense of the circuit being complete with yourself being the recipient being charged and relaxed at the same time. And memorizing somehow, though you can't just say how, the conscious mind can certainly appreciate that dissociation that your unconscious mind creates. And then you can even discover, just like you forgot to pay attention to your breathing until I mentioned it every other once in awhile, that there was a dissociation you were appreciating but it felt so normal and so natural that you forgot you were even detached from something. It may have been some thought or some sensation or some tension or even some pain but it's as if that is detached and belongs to someone else outside of you. Because you have just dived into that buffer zone space of comfort. And sometimes when you're in the little hideout, sometimes just going to the beach alone, it is as if you can completely forget about there even being life on the other side of the bridge where cars are going and people are doing some kind of work. And there's responsibilities and papers and challenges because you just get in that world where the wind blows and the horizon stretches out to infinity. And the ocean is out there and its mystical way of representing one level and a surface you can dip into and imagine going beneath, and about how you become familiar with yourself at another level. Completely present and yet completely relaxed, attached and detached at the same time. Able to remember how it is that there are a lot of things you don't need to think about now that you've completely forgotten. And that you can set your conscious mind though you can't explain how, but just appreciate your ability to forget all kinds of things. And before you decide to forget about something, it's good to just pay attention on how to remember that you have that ability whether you think about it and appreciate it or not. Just like you have the ability to breathe, whether you think about and remember to appreciate that or not.

And so what does a person do while you're in that state of well being in that little hideout? One thing you can do is let yourself experiment with going into a lighter depth of trance and into a deeper state of trance so that you're able to reassure yourself that you are going about the process of learning how to return to that place at the very first signal, the very first awareness, the tiniest little input of some sensation that you would have called pain. And at that moment you immediately let yourself just drop, melt, flow down into that hideout place, that wellspring spot. And while you're there it is like being

in a virtually reality chamber. I don't know how many starships you've been on lately, but they all have a dedicated virtual reality chamber available to insure the health and wellbeing of the inhabitants who are going along like a spaceman on a long ride. And you just go into that chamber, entering the room with a hand stretched out that activates the keyboard without pressing actual keys, just those little twitches with the fingers that, with their ability to move, can indicate and program in your intention to bring up on the screen either an event from long ago or perhaps a time in your earlier life you felt the absolute greatest. I don't know if you can remember a mountain top experience or mountain you had climbed or some mental accomplishment in which you had prevailed, some interpersonal moment where you just felt really very well loved. Or a time when you just felt so comfortable physically, floating in a warm bath or swimming in water that supported you completely, cooled and warmed at the same time, which ever of those experiences. And if you can't decide between them you can just see them all represented somehow superimposed on that virtual reality screen. And in the virtual reality manner discover how you can really step into and be inside of that picture and feel those feelings of those events that you call up to relive again and to intensify the comfort and delight.

I remember talking about Milton Erikson learning how to walk again as a 17yr old boy after his polio. And yesterday we were talking about a woman who overcame some terrible pain from her accident simply by calling up on the screen of the virtual reality chamber how it was when she first learned how to walk. I doubt you remember when you were a baby and learning to walk, but it isn't all that big of a stretch to make an adjustment and let yourself imagine, or pretend, or hallucinate, or remember that little baby Lyndal who probably learned to walk earlier than usual being so curious, and energetic, and precocious like he probably was. You can see him on that virtual reality screen just bursting with and reaching for life and discovering this thing called balance and trying to stand on your own two little almost wobbly legs, but having so much fun connecting to the earth and discovering you can stand up and move those muscles in ways that get you where you want to go. And that's another wonderful experience, you can imagine climbing in the virtual reality chamber and remember it and learn it and have it so that 31 years later you can sit in this chair here now by the ocean, deep inside some virtual reality safe spot that you've created. And feel that feeling of delight and balance, getting the hang of balance like you first learned how to do 31 years ago. And memorizing the whole set of all of the stream of experiences and pleasure and comfort, relaxation and power and capability that are attached in that file and letting them all play in front of you just like some screen savers do. Like glimpses from the past, and here's another one and there's another one. And your history is just full of them. And you can use your mind, programming in with those movements of your fingertips exactly the scenes of success and comfort that you really want to relive and remember and have again over and over. And every time stimulated to reach that access point by your awareness of the first signal of any pain or any tension or any stress or any depression.

And I don't remember if I told you how Erickson's son Robert would go to his father every time he would have some stress, or depression, or problem and ask his big famous important dad what he should do, and that very wise father would always just tell him the one word answer to his problem, he would point to Squaw Peak mountain and

say 'climb'. And the son would turn around and walk out the door and go to the base of that mountain, and set about to climb: one foot at a time, taking those little steps up, higher away from the problem that had been on his mind when he approached his father. Just like you go into a trance where you let the depth fluctuate with each breath that you remember to take; that you forget to take, or don't notice you're taking. Letting yourself remember to hear my voice or tune into the wind or remember that picture on the wall that lead, as if through a dimensional gate, into another reality which you can choose to go to. And in his case, Robert's dimensional gate to that alternative reality was up that mountain path. Until he would finally be at the top of the mountain, and from the top of the mountain be able to just look out so clearly. From that vantage point, you can see into the past and future, you can see the present time you can see deeply inside and have a sense of knowing what you want to do and how you want to handle some difficulty, some problem, some goal, something that's important to you. You know what's upcoming in your immediate day-to-day challenges that are sort of lined up on the other side of this hula-hoop buffer zone of comfort. And you can imagine how you can take them one at a time, you can put them as far away as you like on the screen that we're imagining of the virtual reality chamber, and you can just watch from a very comfortable, detached, dissociated perspective. And notice how the Lyndal out on the screen dealing with this situation or that problem or this person or even that pain. And watch how it is that when he notices and feels a sense of that pain stimulus, that he can let himself immediately access that spot of comfort and wellbeing and detachment without anybody's help. Just stepping into the intention to let yourself have that experience and maybe watch him dealing with other sorts of challenges - like the kind that people bring in brief cases and red tape wrapped around different permissions and authorizations. And you can watch as the representation of yourself is very comfortable, and confident, and persevering, just proceeding in a manner that you approve and can be satisfied about. And moreover above all else watch that self that you see out there handling that problem in a way that retains your ability that your conscious mind is still curious about just how you're doing that, but notice how it is that you maintain that magical cocoon of comfort that surrounds you as you go about and deal with all those things that are actually possibly even interesting to deal with in some manner when looked at with this perspective.

And the times that you are in trance are just like timeless moments. I read one time that some author said that love is not measured in moments of time, but in timeless moments. And it doesn't really matter whether you sat here in this timeless moment for 5 minutes or 20 minutes or an hour or two hours. I personally have no idea either just how many minutes have passed because time distortion is a wonderful thing that swirls all around us just like the wind does and nowhere moreso than when you're sitting beside the ocean. It could be a minute; it could be a lifetime, but there is a continuity of comfort that runs between these timeframes.

And you can come out of trance with your eyes and keep your body in trance as long as you like. So well enough left alone that you really don't need to change anything very much. Your body is very still. And how are you?

Lyndal: I don't have to move.

Carol: And how very nice to not have to move, isn't it? How long of a time do you think we spent there? Maybe somebody knows, but how long does it feel like?

Lyndal: Hours

Carol: Hours? How many?

Lyndal: I don't know. I want to stay like this.

Carol: Did you hear that wind? All the time or just sometime?

Lyndal: I was in a hammock. It's hard to describe, it was warm, I was rocking with the wind.

Carol: I'm not sure if that's how the white noise sounds. Part of it's the wind or the waves and I was noticing how I couldn't quite separate that out in my conscious mind which part was wind and which part was waves because the wind makes the waves anyway and I don't think, or maybe the waves make the wind it's all connected out there. Did you fall asleep? I don't know did you think you did? It didn't seem like you did. You didn't snore.

Lyndal: I felt like just a rock.

Carol: Did you hear me most of the time you think? Some of the time?

Lyndal: I heard... it sounded like I was talking to myself.

Carol: You were having your own thoughts and you could hear your voice as well?

Lyndal: I heard a voice, I guess your voice. Seemed like something was out of me, like something was missing, something taken.

Carol: It's not something you need is it?

Lyndal: Nah, it's something that's gone.

Carol: Then you're glad to say goodbye to it right?

Lyndal: Yeah, my arm is real heavy.

Carol: Is that nice?

Lyndal: Yeah, it's just really relaxed. It's like just normal warm feeling. I feel relaxed...really sleepy.

Carol: Well I thought about where we could allow you to enjoy your relaxation between events and the beach is nice and soft out there and you could take a blanket and pillow and go lay out on the soft sand and let the wind caress you.

Lyndal: I just feel so heavy.

Carol: More relaxed than you normally feel?

Lyndal: My body just feels so heavy. Just kind of like ah, it doesn't feel like I'm moving all the time.

Carol: So lets compare those places we noticed initially. Put your awareness in your leg, for a minute through there, the place where that car was parked. Can you say how that's different?

Lyndal: Feels warm and tingling, doesn't feel so heavy like that. Feels a lot lighter.

Carol: So your body feels heavier but that place where your body was hurting feels lighter.

Lyndal: Yeah, yeah...can we make it stay like that?☺

Carol: Yes you can. I can't think of any reason why not. Can you?

Lyndal: No

Carol: It's alright for it to stay like that isn't it? Well you can invite it to stay that way and transmit a permission, intention, green light plan for it to stay that way. And then additionally make the deal with it that at any time you lose the attention to keep it that way, realize that it slipped off or something, as soon as it gives you a signal that hey I want to feel that way; then all you have to do is go back and get it again and discover how... In fact you can do that right now, just notice how quickly you can let yourself drop all the way back down there to the depth of that place.

Lyndal: I want to stay right there. That's... that's kind of neat. That's k-kind of neat.

Carol: And you'll have a tape you can use as a back up. Most of the people I make tapes for find out they don't really need them. They might keep them as insurance in case of any doubt of your learning. But you have already accomplished this learning and your ability to go there is un-questioned. You absolutely have the ability to do it. And the only ticket to getting there is wanting to. Your intention to go there is all it takes because you know how and you can.

Lyndal: I feel I feel...like I did I did the first time. It's just something is different.

Carol: You look like a different person kind of.

Lyndal: It's just different. I feel like I slept for a month. I don't get it. I don't understand. I don't get it. It's like I know the pain is still there, but I don't care.

Carol: You look younger. You look kind of like you did back before.

Lyndal: My arms kind of numb... it's kind of neat though. Just dead, but trust me that's good. That's kind of neat. That's what I needed. I just want to go to sleep now. I do, I don't want to feel all that pain again.