

# Somatic Psychotherapy Today

Trending Somatic Practices Influencing Our Field Today

*In The Bleak of Midwinter?*

**A Somatic Strategy for the Holiday Season**

*Family Vacations: A Negentropic Opportunity*

Addiction and the Holidays:  
A Mother's Story

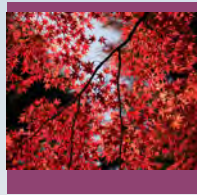
**Happy  
Holidays:  
A Somatic  
Approach to  
Surviving and  
Thriving in  
2019 Season**

*Always Home for the Holiday*

Over Coming The Obstacles  
to Self-Compassion

*Open the Gift of Mindful Awareness*

# Contents



4

Letter from the Editor  
by Nancy Eichhorn



8

In The Bleak Midwinter?  
by Emma Palmer



18

A Somatic Strategy for the Holiday Season  
by Ann Todhunter Brode



22

Family Vacations: A Negentropic Opportunity  
by Genovino Ferri & Mary Jane A. Paiva

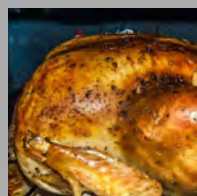


32

Open The Gift of Mindful Awareness  
by Bhanu Joy Harrison

BOOK REVIEW 38

Origins by Joan Davis  
Reviewed by Mary Abrams

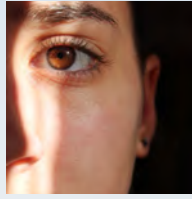


46

Happy Holidays: A Somatic Approach to  
Surviving and Thriving the 2019 season  
by Jenifer Trivelli

54

Addiction and the Holidays: A  
Mother's Story



60

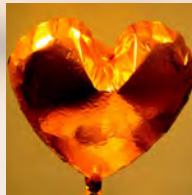
Always Home for the Holiday  
by Holly Holt



*\*\* Life Notes \*\**

67

Embodied Awareness:  
Ferocious Family Love  
by Beth Haessig



The Routledge International  
Handbook of Embodied  
Perspectives in Psychotherapy:  
Approaches from Dance  
Movement and Body  
Psychotherapies

68

BOOK REVIEW

Reviewed by Nancy Eichhorn

70

Over Coming The Obstacles to  
Self-compassion  
by Ronan M. Kisch, Ph.D.





**Nancy Eichhorn**  
Editor


**LETTER FROM  
THE EDITOR**

Family. Holidays. Tradition. Three separate words, each ripe with their own experiences, positive and negative. Each contain layers of stories, positive and negative. When tethered together in a single moment, the outcomes are boundless. The emotional states unique, individual. One might feel immersed in love, surrounded by all they hold dear. Another might feel lost in chaos, struggling to breath, choking on tears. And someone else might feel numb, distant, dissociated from the entire scene. There's no telling how someone will react when faced with family gatherings during holidays often loaded with traditions that started who knows when.

And it's not just families. Friends, co-workers, even passersby in the mall. The intensity that comes with connection is just one aspect. Throw in holidays and all the expectations that ride along and you create the potential for complete overwhelm, be it intense joy or abject depression.

Our earliest experiences with family imprint our psyche, our body, our being. Family experiences during holidays adds another layer. Toss in traditions from family as well as religions, cultures, societies, and there's another layer. Trying to fathom the depths of all these layers, emotionally and physically, can be confusing and result in feelings of resignation, segregation, degradation.

I know, I sound fatalistic. Like Eeyore on steroids. And it's interesting because I love the holidays, the traditions, being with my family even



with our hiccups. I've missed one Christmas eve with my family in 59 years of life. And that was one too many. Sure, life brought changes. I lived 3,000 miles away for 26 years and had limited time off so holidays like Thanksgiving and Easter were shared via Hallmark cards and phone calls. The physical distance didn't hamper our emotional connection. Our family seems to flow with what is. But I also know that as the holidays inch closer friends and colleagues will lament, clients, even strangers standing in long lines, will share their woes. This is not always a happy time, for many reasons. But there are ways we can help those who are not bursting forth with holiday cheer.

Our contributor's offer resources to help ourselves and our clients not only survive the holidays but in fact move into a healing space resulting in positive and supportive changes. Holly Holt shares her transformation from an introvert who loved her small quiet family traditions to discovering the freedom of her own voice and singing as loudly as she wants with her boisterous extended family as in-laws and brothers-in-law interject their traditions too. Ann Todhunter Brode offers somatic strategies to change holiday dynamics while Jenifer Trivelli offers somatic mapping exercises to discover and release tension held in our body. Bhanu Joy Harrison offers tools to navigate holiday induced stress by identifying your story and attached expectations as well as your triggers and your resources to help with boundary setting, breathing and a sense of wellbeing. Genovino Ferri and Mary Jane Paiva discuss the negentropic opportunities that family vacations can offer and how to translate simple bodily activations into the setting of a vacation. They offer "bodily activations that are a little phylo-ontogenetic, a little pre-subjective, but that, in association with cognitive subjectivity, can intelligently re-combine it into a new connection, so as to better protect the boundaries of the complex living-system 'family' and permit them greater embodiment-individuation for the return to the social field of daily life." And Emma Palmer writes about the freedom to pick and choose which holidays you celebrate, where and how.

Perhaps something will resonate for you, for a client, a family member or friend. Perhaps one or two strategies will find their way into your repertoire. And if you do have a reaction, a thought, a sensation while reading our magazine, please share. Our contributors offer their email addresses, you can email me, Nancy@NancyEichhorn.com. We write to offer our thoughts and experiences with the hopes of creating a conversation, forming connections, and nurturing our community.

Warmly,

Nancy Eichhorn

# Love & Imperfection

## A Therapist's Story

*"This book is a rich offering, full of wisdom and insight."*

Dr. Richard Struzzi-Heckler



by Clare Myatt LLB, MA



Clare Myatt is a seasoned practitioner specialising in trauma, shame and addiction. She celebrated thirty years sobriety in 2011.

**Love & Imperfection: A Therapist's Story**  
159 pages • ISBN 978 1 9160456 2 0  
\$16.99 US & Canada • £12.99 UK

Available from  
[www.claremyatt.co.uk](http://www.claremyatt.co.uk)

This book is an intimate memoir about the brave journey of a seasoned practitioner and her client, Bill. She dares to use the word love to describe their mutually healing relationship, where they delved deep into emotion, empathy and compassion. Both struggled with trauma, shame and addiction. Both changed. Relying on profound honesty, transparency and vulnerability, together they unwillingly experienced the healing power of agape. This revealing, poignant story will inspire those in the healing profession, as well as anyone interested in personal transformation.

"I deeply appreciate this brave book. The writing style makes this book one of the most accessible and effortless accounts of the work of therapy and the life of working as a therapist that I have read. The level of transparency is inspiring, deeply honest and I can imagine many readers, whether clients, therapists, students or the general public, being touched, enlightened and relieved by the candour and insight into the world of therapy."

Dr. Greg Madison  
Author of *Theory and Practice of Focusing-Oriented Psychotherapy*

"Through her personal, poetic story of a therapist's journey to self-awareness and growth, Clare has woven a memoir of mutual help and change through the shared power of AGAPE – the selfless love of one person for another without sexual implications. Clare shows us that the deepest experiences of help and of change occur when both therapist and client have a commitment to truth and authenticity with each other."

Dr. Stephanie Brown  
Deacon, The Addictions Institute and author of *Treating the Alcoholic: A Developmental Model of Recovery*

"I loved this book. It is a profound, brave exploration of humanity in the therapeutic relationship, and the role of love and spirit in that endeavour."

Pete Hamill  
Senior Teacher at Struzzi Institute and author of *Embodied Leadership*

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# In The Bleak Midwinter?

By Emma Palmer



My Mum recently asked my partner and I what we were doing for Christmas. I was slightly surprised to find myself announcing that I was cancelling Christmas this year. Here we were, together in late summer, celebrating my stepdad's 70th birthday. I was more than happy to get together, to mark midwinter, to mark the passing year, maybe, but I had no desire to mark the 25th December.

The past few years I've celebrated Christmas less and less. I still partake in many of its rituals: card writing, cake-making, present giving, and watching my nieces in their nativity plays. But Christmas day?

I have been re-thinking Christmas for a while now. Eight years ago, I went on retreat at Christmas to EcoDharma in the Catalonian Pyrenees, one of my favourite places. The centre offers courses, events, and retreats supporting the realisation of human potential

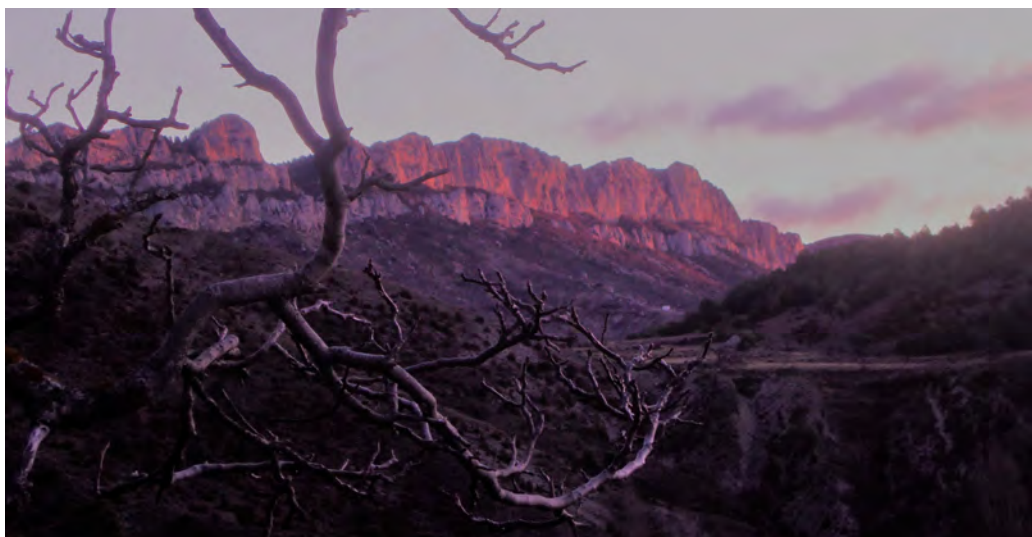


and ecological consciousness within the web of life. Sitting on a huge sun-drenched rock below the Serra de Carreu-Sant Corneli one day I remembered it was Christmas. I felt fabulously uncluttered - no sign of big meals, presents, and dozing in front of films. It was quite a departure from my regular routine as it coincided with my Mum's 70th birthday. My family celebrated early, and it was lovely calling my Mum en route to Spain, first from London, St Pancras, then standing beside a crepuscular Notre Dame in Paris, mid journey – I enjoyed having a virtual travel companion. The three trains and two buses I travelled on snaked their way from Bristol to London, London to Paris, Paris to Barcelona, Barcelona to EcoDharma.

The end of a significant relationship in my extended family 18 months ago has also had a catalysing effect on my family and me, encouraging us to re-think how we spend Christmas.

We're finding ways of being more creative in how we spend time and not wanting to miss out seeing anyone, whilst respecting the changing dynamics.

Since I consciously decided to pay less attention to Christmas and more attention to the season itself, something has gradually been changing. I give myself more and more free rein to listen to what I want to do at midwinter and to ask others what they would like to do. I realise it's a question and a discussion that might not happen often enough.



*Sunrise at EcoDharma*

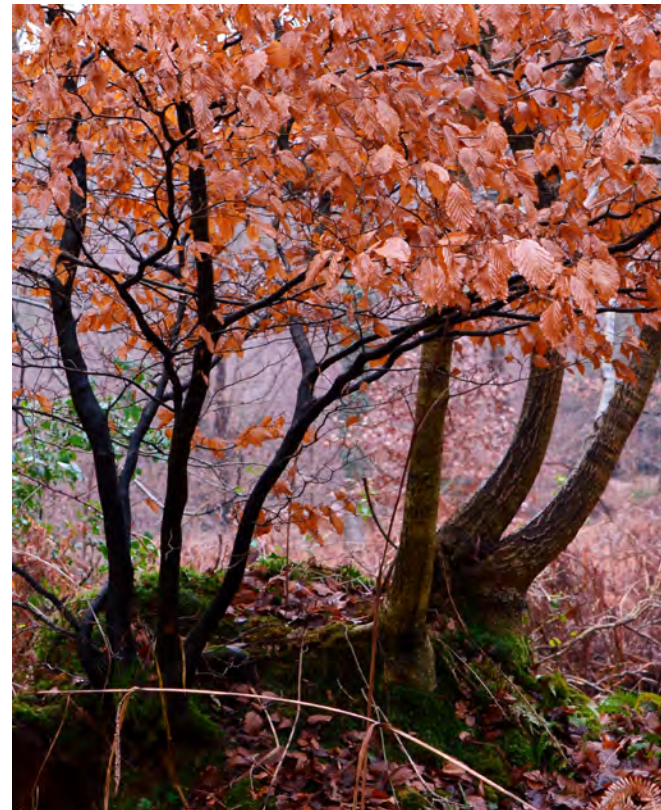
Continued on page 10

I hope I offer the same permissions and space to therapy clients. It is pretty common place for quite a few of my clients to feel the pressure to conform to the plans of others at this time of the year, or to maintain traditions that lost their meaning many years ago, or to feel split in figuring out how to divide their time between families, or to feel acutely alone in their unwelcome solitude, and many other difficult emotions. It can be a time of potential and actual crises.

The chance to write for this themed edition of *Somatic Psychotherapy Today* has usefully got me thinking about Christmas, this over-loaded midwinter festival, and how I want to spend my time now and during holidays at other times in the year, too.

What am I/we marking?

Nowadays, in the month of December, I am personally marking the midwinter and the turning of the year. I ask my body this question 'what are we marking?' and it tells me of the deliciousness of noticing, relishing, the short, dark days. Slowly, carefully. At this time of year, I find it so much easier to read, to write, and to stay home more. My body reminds me how invites to festive socialising create a pushing and pulling - I want to gather, to see people, to wish them well for the coming year, and at the same time I am also happy to stay home, hermit-like and to wander slowly in the quietened, dormant land, enjoying the skeletal trees and icy puddles.



I'm re-reading a book called *The Real Middle Earth* (Bates, 2002) and synchronicously I came across this quote this morning:

*The people of ancient England lived in a way which reflected their perception of the sun and moon, day and night. They maintained a balance between the brightness of 'sun thinking' and the imagination of 'moon thinking'. The objective days were when they could 'see what is there' and 'get things done'. But their lives were also informed by the intelligence of the night, the power of the imaginal, the states of mind that manifest when the constraints of a visible, material world are lifted (Bates, 2002: 127).*



I strongly agree with Bates. I, too, draw parallels between summer, being, for me . . . at least, more about 'sun thinking' and winter about 'moon thinking'. For me it's a time to go inward, create, let my mind wonder, to digest, to stew, even, in readiness for the more outer productivity of the following year and the burgeoning of spring.

I want to honour nature's going inward by doing it myself. I want to be in sync with the seasons as much as I can. This isn't entirely possible. I would love to rise with the sun and hunker down as the light fails, except my everyday work/life timetable doesn't permit this. At least I can try for quieter evenings, enjoying the closing of the door when I come home on a dark winter's night.

I want to understand the depth of dormancy like the far-reaching roots of the mighty oak, my favourite native cousin. Dormant but not passive, still but very much alive. What would that feel like, in my bones? I want to learn from the other than human and more than human world, re-embodying parts of myself and my ancestors which have become culturally divorced from the air, earth, water, and all the elements and other beings. In these times of climate emergency, extinction, and other interrelated crises, it feels more urgent than ever to enter into the dormancy of

Continued on page 12

winter as fully as I often enter into the full-blown action of summer. The one needs the other.

With these things in mind, and thinking again of Bate's above quote, I find it saddening that Christmas has, for many, become constrained and filled with the stress of the visible, material world, rather than the 'lifting' of these constraints. The stress of consuming: presents, food, drink, experiences, get in the way of this chance of dormancy and deep reflection. When do we let our body-minds rest? How might the world be different if we did?

I want to mark this time of the year in other ways. I am not a Christian. I do not want to celebrate the birth of Christ, even though I can marvel at parts of its beauty as a story of new life. There are more Buddhists than Christians in my family; yet, there are long-standing traditions I want to uphold, many, of course, with their roots in earth-based pagan traditions that Christianity took on and often altered, *sometimes beyond recognition*.

I want to decorate the house, bring the light into the darkness as the year turns. I want to send cards to friends I mightn't see from year to year - I love to send news and to receive theirs. I love that the news is often still handwritten, arriving by 'snail mail', which is, in itself, exciting in the age of

immediate digital communication and social media. This year I shall finally get organised by designing and sending New Year rather than Christmas cards.

I love cooking for family and friends, so I shall continue to prepare cakes and the odd seasonal feast in the wintery gloom. Most of all I shall look



forwards and back on those short days leading up to the end of the calendar year, giving thanks for what went well and being glad for the hard times passed and what was gleaned from the experience. Being a grower I am more and more acutely aware that midwinter was once the 'hungry gap' in the year, no doubt with some of my direct ancestors starving in these months, so I also count my blessings that I live in plentiful times and avoid waste.

There's also a part of me that finds it hard to let go of the celebrating of the Christmases of times passed. I asked to go to church when I was five and carried on going into my mid teenage years. I sang in choirs, played music for festivities, and knew carols by heart. I get withdrawal symptoms if I don't sing some sort of Christmas song or carol; these days this is satisfied by listening to carols sung by the talented folk singer Kate Rusby, who sings the carols that were sung in the villages around her South Yorkshire home, some to well-loved carols, some to more local adaptations.

I'm still trying to figure out how remnants of my church-going past fits (or not?) with my present marking of midwinter. I found myself at midnight mass two years ago in a pretty church five minutes from home. It felt like someone else's service and celebration, even though the people couldn't have been more welcoming, and even though the Christmas story is so familiar to me, having being part of it for years.

It brings home the fact I sometimes long to be practising the religion of this land. For the past 25 years I have been a practising Buddhist celebrating Christmas - once a festival of my country - that is now a largely secular place with Christmas a mainly commercialised venture.



Continued on page 14

In fact, what I long for is to practise what I imagine were the pre-Christian traditions of our land, knowing that there are times for sun and times for moon thinking. Celebrating the return of the light and warmth on May's eve. Celebrating the harvest as the days shorten and the light turns softer and golden, remembering the thinly veiled places and beings gone before on the eve of November.

I will channel this longing into creating what happens now, individually and collectively in how I/we, my people, celebrate the turning of this year, rather than harking back to times past, which can rather easily descend into over-romanticising and nostalgia. Nostalgia rarely ends well for me, especially at this time of the year, and it's always a relief when I re-realise that nostalgia can be born of what I wanted to happen which never did actually happen when I was a child,- a form of grief for what might have been.

A year or two back I wrote a blog piece entitled Reclaiming the Midwinter. I want to continue to reclaim the midwinter in how I live and take a step further. I want to encourage that in others. Nowadays, rather than miss the moment in nostalgia I hope to



pay attention to traditions as live practice and to encourage others to do the same - listening carefully to how our individual and collective practices honour ourselves, our families, and friends, as well as, equally importantly, the other than and more than human life around us. Being curious about what might emerge in the quiet dormancy as well as the heart of connection. I am quietly excited, knowing that nothing's set in stone.

However you spend this midwinter, I wish you all that you wish for, and peace and creativity for all of us and the way we relate to one another and the planet in 2020!

Reference:

Bates, B. (2002). *The real middle earth: Magic and mystery in the Dark Ages*. London: Pan Books.

Information about the music of Kate Rusby:

<https://katerusby.com/>



*Emma Palmer is a relational body psychotherapist, ecopsychologist, supervisor, and writer. Practising as a therapist since 2003, she is engaged in using therapy skills and contemplative practices in helping to face the realities of climate emergency, our disconnection from nature, and in building more creative, reflective and resilient communities.*

*Previously a steering group member of Psychotherapist and Counsellors for Social Responsibility, and editor of its Transformations journal, Emma is also a member of the Climate Psychology Alliance.*

*Author of several journal articles, she has written three books: *Meditating with Character*, *Other than Mother: Choosing Childlessness with Life in Mind*, and *Bodywise*. Her fourth, a co-edited collection written by therapists in the wake of the #MeToo movement will be published by PCCS Books in 2020. She has been a regular writer for *Somatic Psychotherapy Today* since 2012.*

*For 25 years she has worked as a facilitator, from teaching postgraduate international development studies at Bristol University, to working with NGOs in sub-Saharan Africa, offering Wild therapy, and leading retreats - she has been a practicing Buddhist since 1995.*

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*Kansas City, MO	January 3-6, 2020
*Sacramento, CA	January 10-13, 2020
*Tulsa, OK	January 10-13, 2020
*Nashville, TN	January 10-13, 2020
*Brownsville, VT	January 23-26, 2020
*Denton, TX	Jan. 31- Feb. 3, 2020
*Tucson, AZ	February 7-10, 2020
*Montclair, NJ	February 7-10, 2020
*Silver Spring, MD	February 14-17, 2020
*New York, NY	Feb. 28- March 2, 2020
*Atlanta, GA	March 6-9, 2020
*Asheville, NC	March 13-16, 2020
*Berkeley, CA	March 20-23, 2020
*Dana Point, CA	March 27-30, 2020
*Glen Ellyn, IL	April 3-6, 2020
*Austin, TX	April 24-27, 2020
*Seattle, WA	June 26-29, 2020

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\* Online - November 14, 2019

\* Online - December 19, 2019

Monthly dates for 2020 are being scheduled!

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*“Trauma is a fact of life. It does not, however, have to be a life sentence.”*

*~ Peter A. Levine, PhD, Founder of Somatic Experiencing®*

[www.traumahealing.org](http://www.traumahealing.org)

# A Somatic Strategy for the Holiday Season



by Ann Todhunter Brode

Our ideas of how the holidays *should* go can be a sticky combination of tradition, experience, marketing, and . . . fiction. Year after year I see my clients reflect the stresses of the season as old issues surface and old patterns take hold. Just around the corner from Halloween, the body starts to brace for the inevitable and resiliency disappears. Conflicting feelings of anticipation and anxiety show up in the body as a tangle of shoulder-neck-jaw tension, low back pain, random injuries, and general uptightness. In order to extend the good work beyond our ninety- minute session, I've developed a simple somatic strategy to change the holiday dynamic.

Whether being social with friends or colleagues, gathering with family, or negotiating the consumer onslaught, it's easy to get triggered by old issues and unreasonable expectations. The physical body reflects this by getting uptight. When this happens our body space feels smaller, tighter, denser. By contrast, when we're at ease, our body space feels bigger, softer and lighter. Being conscious of this small space-

big space differential is a good way to stay calm, centered, and present when everything else feels out of control. During a session, I encourage clients to notice how tightening and releasing the muscles effects not just their sense of ease but their attitude and experience as well.

Try this out. To feel the impact of the small space versus big space, suck in your stomach and imagine a future activity or encounter with a family member. Gage the degree of tension, receptivity, optimism, and enthusiasm in this small space. Then, let go to see how big space changes your outlook. Often, clients report that letting go not only expands their relative ease and self-confidence but broadens their perspective to include compassion and acceptance. Perhaps, being in big space helps you see the big picture.

Paying attention to the small space-big space differential can change your experience and help you relax and enjoy this special time of year. Instead of tightening up and holding on, why not let go and see what happens? Good times to practice letting go and getting big are before, during and after an event. Here's how it might look:

Beforehand. In anticipation of a gathering or event, tune in to what's happening in your body. Slow down the pace and scale down the tension. Notice any places in your body that hold tension and let them soften without giving them a story. Let your breath fill and empty internal space. Expanding your awareness to external space, notice the quality of light, weather, and surrounding sounds. Bring this sense of unencumbered big space with you.

During. Every once in a while, check in with your spacious body to

Continued on page 20



feel what's happening. In big space it's easy to notice, savor, and appreciate the best of the season. If you encounter a moment of discord and get small, just expand your body space and move on. Remember: small space is holding on; big space is letting go. Even, if you bump into the same old story, don't expect the same old results. When your intention is to let go and get big, the dynamic has shifted. Now there's space for something new.

Afterwards. When you leave the gathering, do a body check. Is your breath easy and full? Is your body free-flowing or is it encumbered and heavy? Even if you're tired, do you feel nurtured and full or spent and depleted? When you get home, take a few moments to return to your expansive, spatial self. Move your limbs around a bit, take a fresh breath, make some sounds on the exhale, and imagine all negativity floating away. Now, your big self is ready to drift off to sleep.

Paying attention to the body is a straight forward way to notice what's happening, change the program, and show up for the season. The clarity of tension versus relaxation, dullness versus awareness, and ease versus difficulty avoids the complexity of who said what and where it all went wrong. Directing awareness to the basic small space-big space experience is a good way to by-pass a chattering mind and assuage ruffled emotions. When big space is the reference point, there's plenty of room for the beauty, magic and mystery of the season.



**Ann Todhunter Brode** has been an Aston Patterning practitioner and body-oriented therapist in Santa Barbara for over forty years. A recognized master in her field, she is dedicated to helping people understand and feel comfortable in their bodies. In addition to her clinical practice, Brode shares her personal and professional experience through down-to-earth, compassionate articles on the challenges & rewards of living consciously in the body. Look for her book, *A Guide to Body Wisdom- What Your Mind Needs to Know About Your Body* (Llewellyn Worldwide) online and in bookstores.



*The holiday  
season is a  
perfect time  
to reflect on  
our blessings  
and seek out  
ways to make  
life better  
around us.*

*- Terri Marshall*



## *Family Vacations: A Negentropic Opportunity*

As the holidays approach, many families consider this an opportunity to leave their domicile for adventures near and abroad. Some travel to visit family, some leave as a form of escape, and others pack up the entire clan for a much-anticipated vacation.

But what, in fact, does vacation mean and what does it entail?

At the word level, vacation derives etymologically from the Latin *vacantia*, which is the

neuter, plural noun-form of vacans, which, in turn, is the present participle of vacare, meaning "to be empty" but also "to be free".

So, do we consider a vacation a chance to explore the emptiness that is freedom or a freedom that is emptiness?

As you consider the holidays and perhaps even a family vacation, we offer our experiences with vacations as a negentropic opportunity if started with some questions, some explorations, and some certainties.

### **Question One: Explicit Expectations**

What do people usually, explicitly, expect from a family vacation?

Typically, we see three perspectives:

The first is for resting or re-posing—a term which, like those following, should be read and interpreted in the sense of body to mind. The hyphen is intended to suggest posing again. Re-positioning ourselves on the parts of our personalities that we recognise as functioning well and as being egosyntonic.

The second explicit requirement, which also permits the first, is that of re-charging, re-covering, re-discovering ourselves; stocking up with new energy after a period of tiredness; making a new embodiment by recovering our own corporeity and rediscovering our own subjectivity, which may have become a little lost in our frenetic day-to-day lives.

The third is having fun by doing pleasant things that we have been looking forward to for some time; inhabiting and breathing different territories, both real and mental, which are different from those of our

daily lives. Thus, going beyond our usual boundaries to decompress and wash away those tensions full of toxins which we have accumulated during the year.

### **Question Two: Implicit Risks**

Next we must ask what implicit risks usually present themselves during vacations.

Typically, we associate the following three:

The first is the interruption of rhythms – is this break bearable? How does it resonate with our life-history in relation to the theme of distance-contact? What about our identifying scene-position and or our working scene-position in the daily theater of life?

The second is the risk of emptiness. And, in connection with the first risk, is this emptiness bearable? Could it, itself, be a factor producing angst and adaptive stress? Can the greatly desired "doing nothing" become emptiness to be filled by repeated doses of acceleration?

The third is that of being too full. Can't doing so much that is so greatly desired represent another possible cause of adaptive stress, again dystonic, for the return to the boundaries of the person's usual daily life?

How much neurotic complicity is required of our holidays to be able to return with "liberti" to our daily lives?

In ancient Rome, the liberti were former slaves who had been freed, but who, however, continued to have an unequal relationship with their former masters, as if they had still been slaves.

How many people set off on a vacation, for

Continued on page 24

example, still thinking about work? About how to plan their time after their holiday? About how to conclude that business deal? Or about how to manage a situation at work?

Although the implicit requirements and risks associated with vacations can reveal them to be times of crisis or of opportunity, from a complex systemic viewpoint, it is not possible to determine which they shall be. This is thanks to the numerous variables to consider and the unpredictable outcomes of their interaction on the complex living system in question, be that as an individual, a couple, a family, or a group.

## Explorations

By definition, a vacation represents an opportunity for greater contact with internal time, "in the inside", when compared to normal daily life, and could favor a return to more balanced, vital pulsation between internal and external time "on the outside".

Time spent on vacation, with its explicit requirements and implicit risks, brings us to a reflection about the time in which today's holidays are set. We really can't avoid focusing on the present time in society and in families and its interdependence with time spent on vacation.

Every person experiences internal time and external time (Ferri, 2005). There is a subjective time, which we "feel" more, and there is objective time, which we "think" more and which it is possible to measure.

But these two times do not coincide exactly, proof of which being, for example, a state of happiness in which internal time seems to fly very quickly, or, the opposite, an angst-ridden state in which internal time is dilated – in both states external time remains unaltered.

Reconciling the two times, both internal and external, is both intelligent and a necessary operation for our own bodily-psycho-emotional equilibrium.

Internal time is indispensable for relationships and to transform emotions (immediate





feelings) into sentiments (emotions which persist over time). Today, internal time has become less, both quantitatively and qualitatively, we are almost living in "rarefied" time and the equilibrium between the two times has been disturbed and has moved towards the external time.

The external time of a family on vacation is, however, a time that is set in a different energy field, with a different atmosphere and with very different pre-dispositions of the individuals.

And what about the internal time of families on vacation?

Indeed, a family itself may be interpreted as a complex living system, with its own corporeity, with its own traits, its own individual parts, its own boundaries, its own sustainability, and its own history. There are marks incised from the family history that characterize it. There is a dominant trait mind, and it has its own internal time which, today, is often defectively insufficient and rarefied!

### **The Theft of Time**

We are living through a technological age that involves a great acceleration in external time. Technology, in fact, represents a powerful attractor, like a strong magnet, which can pull the individuals in families, and in society in general, towards itself, thus taking time away from relationships, which belong to the affective circuits of the limbic brain.

If we imagine these "energetic circuits" as vectors, we could draw them as circular arrows within families, in groups and within society as a whole. However, with the advent of the technological age, the flow of energy has been redirected with the arrows now all heading in the same direction, towards a technological, multi-media "totem". This is why the circularity, in circuits in general, and in those in families in particular, has been weakened or, often, completely interrupted.

We are all constantly pushed into living in

Continued on page 26



*Image by tookapic from Pixabay*

the outside by the assault of these multi-media totems, which propose dominant forms of behavior, habits and values - they represent the new Super-Ego!

Multi-media totems use the language of emotions, through producing immediate feelings to grasp our attention. They induce ever-greater orality to be satisfied, with the associated risk of an escalation in consumerism and in new forms of addiction.

Indeed, it has been the theft of time in relationships.

### **Time and The Social Environment**

Zigmunt Bauman (2003), using a most appropriate term, viewed modernity as being liquid - there being no time for form, slipping shapelessly through time like liquids, having been liquefied by velocity.

From a psycho-corporeal, analytical perspective, over the last few decades, we have witnessed the lysis of the "father", of law, of boundaries, the collapse of the parental couple, the modification of the Super Ego, with movement away from the family towards the multi-media totems, and an alarming transformation in the Living Body of Society. Many differences have been lost and there has been a significant increase in indifference.

We have witnessed the liquefaction of armoring and, to tell the truth, a free-fall, first into oral liquidity and then, with volatility in relationships, even further down into borderline rarefaction.

We find ourselves living in a time with more moments but fewer roots, with more emotions but less sentiment, more excitement but less awareness, more communication but fewer relationships and with more information but less knowledge (Ferri & Paiva, 2019).

In our rarefied liquid modernity, the Living Body of our Society is heading towards a reduction in serotonin (5HT) and an increase in dopamine (DA). Isn't this a form of depression masked by acceleration? Isn't it a Living Social Body which is moving forwards with a reactive, unsatisfied oral, primary trait mind, with the associated trait patterns?

### **Time and The Family Environment**

Today's multimedia Super Ego is non-affective, non-reciprocating, quite persecutory, certainly demanding, often excluding, superficial, narcissistic, and with great limits in terms of emotional intelligence and experience. The family (parents, grandparents, aunts, and uncles . . .) is no longer the seat of the Super Ego.

We are in a young person's society, which can be defined by the tribe, in which you go from the relational pair to 10 or more, missing out on the relational 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 and, in reality, missing out on the field of close family affection, which would have the task of organizing pulsionality. The point of reference for the young is the tribe. This is an unstable, fragmented, polyhedral point of reference, which has a number of unidentifiable

interlocutors (Ferri & Cimini, 2018) and is overshadowed by the demanding multimedia totems!

We are living in a time deprived of affective limbic relationships. There is primary oral insatisfaction, which welds the amygdaloid patterns of the reptilian brain to the cognitive, bypassing those of the anterior cingulate gyrus and the limbic brain, as neuroscience might express it.

We are witnessing a multi-factorial process of transformation in this rarefied liquid modernity in which parents have been moved away and become depressed, resigned and impotent with children who are often lost, alone, frightened and impulsive. Rarefied liquid modernity functions more and more along the lines of "business practices" with the values of what we have currently defining the Being that we are.

A relational vacuum is created by the "theft of time" perpetrated by this Super Ego, which today inhabits the space of a multimedia, technological attractor, dictating the velocity of time outside and rarefying time inside. It defines which is the Luminous Object to be followed.

### **Potential Certainties**

At this point, we offer three steps for a negentropic opportunity on a family vacation.

Step one: The first important consideration is knowing that, even though it is temporary, going away on vacation, re-calls the transitions of our own life stories. These transitions (or "passages" between our lives' successive evolutive stages), however, represent the individuating patterns of separation along our own arrows of time.

The family will distance itself and individuate itself with the vacation, like a complex living system, as it moves into another field with fewer toxins. This represents the first condition that could facilitate a redefinition of that family. That is to say the opportunity to incisively mark certain specific patterns that could induce a negentropic reset and that are not merely chaotic or chance occurrences.

The second step involves marking out a time for special meetings during the vacation (and only then), which is dedicated to talking about ourselves and telling our stories, looking into each others' eyes with as slow, intense prosody as is authentic, bearable and including. Gathering together, that is, in shared, identified space and creating very precise temporal oases during the vacation. In this way the circularity of the vectors of the living body family can be re-established.

Giving internal time back and giving back to ourselves in these meetings, internal time, limbic time, time for the chest and for breathing; time for sentiments, for being with and for listening to ourselves and listening to others (children, parents, aunts and uncles, grandparents, grandchildren, nieces and nephews, partners), giving back "Us Time" to our families.

Continued on page 28

Reading and recounting together, in these meetings, the bottom-up time of the family history and its meaning; the times of the life experiences of the family members and their expression, even bodily, over time.

In this way affective serotonergic (5HT) time is given back to family relationships with knowing eyes that look at the other and return to their own Self and to their own nose (to mention a very precise, bodily activation of ontogenetic patterns in the Reichian Analytical setting)(Ferri, 2019).

All this is experienced in a circular arrangement of family members, which makes the vector-arrows' circularity marked, but also establishes the field boundaries, making possible new, or renewed, relational density within the family's internal time.

And then the third step, which is another important oasis of special meeting-time during the vacation, which accompanies and completes the preceding step:

Walk together . . . in beautiful dopaminergic silence, crossing our own cortico-spinal pathways (Ammanniti & Gallese, 2014), feeling the movement of proceeding alone and together as a living-family-body and going forwards looking at the way ahead, be it smooth, problematic, beautiful, complex, straight or undulating. Taking it on with intelligent flexibility, and with the possibility of modifying it, so as to reach that objective previously shared and agreed by everybody.



*photo by Allen Taylor Unsplash*

Walk together, waiting for each other, if necessary, in truth even strolling slowly, looking sideways at each other and turning the neck to the left and to the right (to mention another, very precise bodily activation of ontogenetic patterns in the Reichian Analytical setting) (Ferri, 2019), without too many words, allowing corporeity to express itself in facial expression, in looking, in movement, in breathing and in lifting the eyes above the horizon towards the sky.

Those proposed are two means of translating simple bodily activations into the setting of

a vacation. They are in succession on the arrow of time, codified and belong to the post-oral stages in the evolutive stratification of our Self. They are bodily activations that are a little phylo-ontogenetic, a little pre-subjective, but that, in association with cognitive subjectivity, can intelligently re-combine it into a new connection, so as to better protect the boundaries of the complex living-system "family" and permit them greater embodiment-individuation for the return to the social field of daily life.

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# Open the Gift of Mindful Awareness

*By Bhanu Joy Harrison, LCSW, SEP, UCLA Trained Mindfulness Facilitator*

It's already starting. Holiday decorations are showing up at the stores, music is playing at the mall, pumpkin lattes abound. The cultural and familial buildup to this season is magnified every year and, for many people, becomes totally overwhelming.

The experience of "too much" can replicate traumatic overwhelm in our nervous system, creating a whole season of nervous system dysregulation. This dysregulation then creates heightened emotions and reactivity ("What!? They didn't make a vegan pumpkin pie?!"), depression and anxiety ("They don't like my gift or I have to get the perfect gift") and often a desire to literally escape the season's events (fleeing by not going to the party) or a desire to dissociate (fleeing by leaving your body - I'll just be on my phone for the whole dinner).

How can we assist our clients and ourselves in navigating this extended stressful season? Here are a few areas to consider:

### ***Identify Holiday Childhood Trauma Histories and Beliefs***

Many of my clients report a history of trauma around holiday events that is re-triggered every year. One survivor of early childhood abuse and neglect shared that her mother always requested a wish list for Santa. My client happily wrote down a few toys and books she really



wanted from Santa. What did she open on Christmas Day? Socks and underwear. Not once in her childhood did she ever get a gift from her list! This deep ongoing disappointment left her with a belief of “don’t ask for what you want because you’ll never get it” and an extreme dislike of the holidays.

Another client shared that his mother always returned his holiday gifts, leaving him with a deep sense of “I never get it right” and “I’m just not good enough”. Needless to say, any gift giving creates a high level of anxiety and he often cannot take in any appreciation when he “gets it right”, thinking the recipient is lying to him.

For those with abuse histories, the holidays can re-trigger memories of physical, sexual or emotional abuse from relatives or family friends, making present day holiday events with their perpetrators simply unbearable.

**Tools:**

Dan Siegel’s (2012) *“Name it to tame it”*, can be invaluable for those with holiday trauma. When we can identify our traumatic history, we move the experience from the brainstem and limbic areas to include our prefrontal cortex “knowing” of what happened. While this may not prevent retriggering, it can keep us more in the ‘present moment’ where we can make a choice of how to take care of ourselves in

the moment.

“Wow . . . I just noticed I’m worried about my family judging how I make the turkey dinner. I’m feeling tight in my chest. Maybe I’ll take a few deep breaths.”

*Identify Our “Story”*. In mindfulness practice, we gain skill in noticing when we are “in our story”, which is often based in the history of the past or the expectation of the future. Being aware of our storyline can, help us return to the present, which can mitigate somatic triggerings.

“As a child, I remember getting so excited during Hannukah! I had to tamp down my exuberance because my family said I was “too much”. I feel so uncomfortable and depressed during this time, feeling SO much energy inside me that has nowhere to go. What can I do differently this season?”

*Be aware of our expectations*. A wonderful holiday mindfulness exercise is being curious about our expectations. This can include identifying our wants and needs, noticing how our minds are “playing out” the holiday dinner, or gift opening scenarios. If we are hoping for the perfect Hallmark holiday, we will be disappointed.

Continued on page 34

*Working with Expectations:*

- a. Sitting quietly, ask your body how it wants to feel during the holidays. Perhaps the answer comes as *"relaxed, content, calm, peaceful"*.
- b. Write down some wants and needs such as: "I want a calm holiday dinner with no yelling" or "I don't want to have to interact with Uncle \_\_\_\_\_ at all."
- c. Now, write down some strategies for these wishes:  
"I will make a request to my mom not to bring up child rearing issues at dinner because it always ends up with an argument."  
"I will ask my partner to notice if Uncle \_\_\_\_\_ is coming around near me and pull me aside so I don't have to interact."
- d. Finally, create some self-care strategies, if your plan goes awry. "I'll excuse myself from the table if Mom starts an argument" or "I'll tell Uncle \_\_\_\_\_, I have to check on what's happening in the kitchen." And, if it all goes downhill, "No matter what happens, I'll hold myself with care and kindness and be gentle with myself".

***Know Your Triggers and Your Resources***

Knowing your triggers is extremely helpful in managing holiday overwhelm. Are you sensitive to lots of sounds, people, later nights, or sugar? If you are familiar with Stephen Porges' (2011) Polyvagal Theory, notice what polyvagal state do you go into when you are triggered...High sympathetic overdrive with anxiety, anger, irritability or restlessness? Or do you drop into your dorsal vagal collapse state, with withdrawal, depression, disconnection, numbness or hopelessness?

***Develop a Resource List***

Help your clients manage their triggers by understanding their polyvagal system and create a resource list they can access easily. When we are triggered into high sympathetic or low dorsal states, we don't have access to our linear frontal cortex brain functioning, so it can be difficult to remember what to do to help ourselves. Work with clients to develop a Resource List to help bring themselves back into a more regulated ventral vagal zone. Write these down, put them on your phone or post on your refrigerator. Some examples of resources:

Pet an animal	Drink water	Take a walk
Exercise	Reach out to a friend	Dance
Sing	Journal	Meditate
Be creative	Prayer	Laugh

## ***Practice Boundary Setting***

The holiday season is full of opportunities and challenges to set boundaries. Many people with trauma histories have difficulty saying “no” to family and friends, and set themselves up to be overextended, dysregulated and stressed. Most of us know in advance what obligations we will have with school events, family, gift giving, etc. which gives us time to practice this skill.

### ***Tools:***

Help your clients by having them *choose in advance* what events they can handle. Say “yes” to their child’s Christmas concert, “no” to neighborhood association party.

*Encourage dialogue* in advance with family members so everyone knows what each family member needs. Perhaps the rest of the family can attend the neighborhood party while you sit this one out.

### ***Somatic Boundary Setting Practice:***

If you are teaching this to a client, do this in session first, so you can support your client in noticing their reactions. It is a very powerful exercise! Have your clients begin saying “no” to smaller events to build some courage around this practice.

In front of a mirror, practice saying “no” in all the different ways you can imagine. Shaking your head, saying “no” loudly, softly, firmly, tentatively. With each “no” you utter, take an actual minute of time to notice what happens in your body. Does it feel scary, or like something bad will happen? Does it feel energizing, overwhelming, empowering? What is your body posture like? Erect and strong, or collapsed? Try this sitting and standing up. Take a few breaths.

Now do this same exercise saying “yes” in all the ways you can imagine. Nodding, saying “uh uh”, uttering a loud, enthusiastic YES, a tentative yes, a begrudging yes. Again, take some breaths and see how these ‘yes-es’ feel in your body. Does it feel authentic, or people pleasing, obliging or joyful?

Remember . . . if you can’t say ‘no’ authentically, your ‘yes’ doesn’t mean very much.



Continued on page 36

## Be present and S-L-O-W Down

The most powerful gift you can give to yourself and others is *being present* in the moment. No matter what happens, you can still connect with your niece, notice the pine fragrance, hear the rustle of wrapping paper, and notice your own breath. Take joy in the delight of children around you, donate if you can, enjoy the songs and traditions in the moment. Be ever so kind and gentle with yourself. Try slowing down to help your nervous system regulate . . . walk more slowly to your car in the parking lot, eat with slow attention to the flavors, take long deep breaths.

These mindfulness practices, being present to whatever is happening in the moment in your body, mind and emotions, with an attitude of kindness, curiosity and non-judgment, can be the greatest gift to yourself this season.

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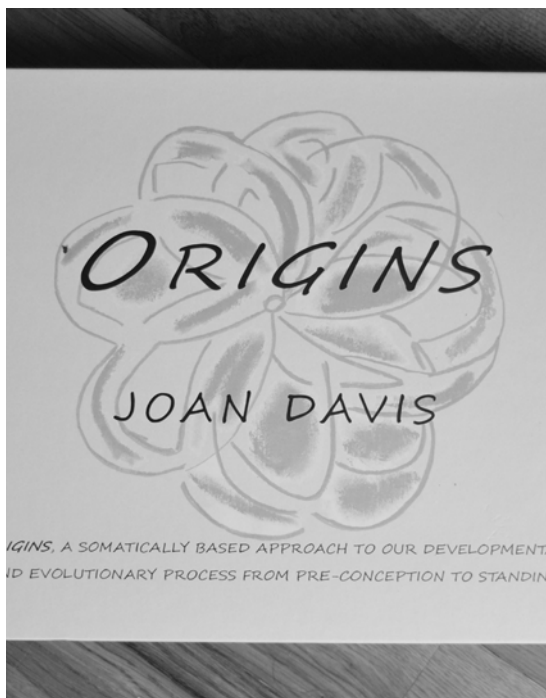
bodyworkers, social workers and counselors. She is a licensed Clinical Social Worker in private practice in Albuquerque, New Mexico focusing on body centered and mindful approaches to trauma resolution and self-regulation.

She lived a contemplative life for eight years in the 1970's at Kripalu Ashram, now the Kripalu Center for Holistic Health which, along with her family's alternative interests, influenced the direction of her life towards awareness and mindful living. Over the years, she has continued to practice mindfulness and participated in many personal and professional growth retreats.

Bhanu is available for presentations and workshops and can be reached through her website at: [www.choosingmindfulness.net](http://www.choosingmindfulness.net)

*Sending you our  
cheerful wishes and  
Warmest Heartfelt  
greetings for a  
joyous and festive  
Holiday Season!*





By Joan Davis

Reviewed by Mary Abrams, MA, RSME

As a Somatic Movement Educator who has read many books by authors in the field, I felt a quickening and rising in my body and became curious, shyly excited, and a little nervous when invited to review a book by Joan Davis. Davis is among a generation of creative professionals in Ireland and across the UK dedicated their lives to in-depth explorations

and research through the silent level (non-words) processes and expressions of the human body. In this very small, yet internationally growing world of somatic movement, Davis is among the “rock stars”, and she has rightfully earned her honor and fame through decades of creative, intellectual, emotional, and spiritual research that she integrated into a training programme called *Origins*.

The book, *Origins, A Somatically Based Approach to Our Developmental and Evolutionary Process from Pre-conception to Standing*, is an overview of the curriculum and methods of practice covered over three years in the training programme. When I acquired the book, my fingers, hands, wrists, arms and back galvanized with heated tension. Receiving the hardbound printed book weighing approximately five pounds was like holding a large, recently unearthed, stone. Its shape, size, and density—700, 11 x 7 pages, at first appeared and felt difficult to penetrate and absorb. The surprise of this immense book landing in my hands, slowed down my curiosity and shy excitement. My body deflated with a slight increase of edgy nervousness tightly holding my gut-throat-center. The question arose, “What have I gotten myself into?”

Committing to the task of this review, I took a few deeper breaths, felt the weight of the book settle, grounding more fully into my lap and legs. Then, as with a large heavy stone, my hands, eyes, listening mind, and whole body slowly began to take in the details page by page, word by word, image by image, texture by texture, space by space. What came to life from what initially appeared to be a dense, long inanimate book, was a spiraling journey moving with imagination, scientific research, creative play, perceptions, reflections, enquiry, PAUSES . . . , and whimsical illustrations; all articulated with sincerity, devotion, and inquisitive playfulness.

As a journey through a training programme, *Origins* is written primarily for an audience interested in self-inquiry, an audience most likely familiar with and educated in somatic and psychology-based practices. The writing is accessible for both self-learners and professionals. Davis includes substantial reference material to support quotes, definitions of concepts, anatomical and psychological theories and research; as she draws upon her backgrounds in Body-Mind Centering®, Biodynamic Craniosacral Therapy, Embryology, attachment work, trauma work, Authentic Movement, and Family Constellation work. Many of her more current theoretical and scientific resources are often seen in other somatic therapy and somatic movement writings—Bainbridge Cohen, Blechschmidt, Grossinger, van der Waal. If one is versed in a variety of somatic authors who integrate similar interdisciplinary approaches, the references can seem a bit redundant and limited. Yet, they also make the most sense as these are the scientists, researchers, and direct experience practitioners who articulate the undeniable value of our human biological processes in all the ways we develop personally, socially, and culturally. Davis includes a complete reference list for each chapter, which reveals a full range of influences supporting the fullness of this work.

The structure of *Origins* includes a preface written by Franklyn Sills, a thorough introduction to the intention and purpose of the book, an introduction to the author, a layout and brief description of each chapter, an overview of basic understandings that inform *Origins*, a diagram of the somatic practices covered, an afterward, acknowledgments, and a detailed reference section. This structure offers a clear scaffolding or skeletal structure, which grounds and spaciouly supports the fluid spiraling, floating, flying, juicy organic contents.

In the introduction, Davis specifically outlines why she chose to structure the book this way, and why each chapter includes the material that it does. In this way, she begins to guide the reader into the experience of the book, offering ways to orient one's experience: To enquire, explore, disorient; and to awaken to new bodily expressions, emotional awareness, and meaning making.

There are nine chapters, called Spirals, based on the nine spirals (modules) taught/facilitated on the training programme. Each one is inspired by the nine months of human embryological-fetal gestation and birth. What follows is an abbreviated description of each Spiral as written on pages xiv-xvii.

**Spiral 1—Earliest Beginnings:** Perception, vibration, discovering one's essential fluid body, cellular selves, cellular breathing; journey through embryology—fertilization, conception, implantation; experiencing developmental and evolutionary tasks of sponging and pulsation.

Continued on page 40

**Spiral 2—Attachment:** Embryological formation of the heart in function and form; exploring blood, the umbilical cord, and placenta; practicing the developmental task of navel radiation; exploring attachment through the umbilical cord; opening understanding of bonding to significant others.

**Spiral 3—Nourishment:** Organs, digestive tract, attention to the spiral along the sphincters of the body; exploring developmental tasks of mouthing, sucking and swallowing; experiencing primitive reflexes and ability to respond to environment; looking at primary principle of "Receiving as an Act of Love."

**Spiral 4—Preparation for Entry into the World:** Finding our midlines and exploring the nature of connective tissue; looking at the act of forming and how limbs and bones form in utero; experiencing developmental tasks of differentiating the 'soft spine', notochord, and primitive streak; experiencing spinal reflexes and core beliefs.

**Spiral 5—Birth:** Resourcing in Preparation for Birth; making a birth plan and visiting the process of birthing; exploring the muscular system and sense of agency; giving attention to the psoas muscle complex; discovering how we bond to the earth and Mother after birth; discovering tone and what it means for humans; exploring the developmental tasks of head to tail connection and repatterning birth imprints.

**Spiral 6—Onto Land:** Exploring the major evolutionary step of coming onto land after birth; exploring the beginnings of self-formation; enquiring about the good and bad of it all..."a journey of primary felt experience duality"; experiencing the neuroendocrine system; examining the differentiation of the upper and lower body and the homologous patterns of the infant with underlying reflexes; exploring the movement dynamics of yield and push, reach and pull; beginning a more conscious exploration of transitions.

**Spiral 7—Perception:** Exploring the embryological development of the nervous system; exploring the vestibular system (hearing and equilibrium); learning about perception of sight; skin as a primary organ of exploration; delving into the perceptual cycle—how we perceive the world around us; exploring developmental tasks of differentiating the right and left sides of the body in creeping—homolateral movement—and underlying reflexes; deepening understanding and experience of attachment along with magic and transitional objects.

**Spiral 8—The Flow of Life:** Exploring differentiation within wholeness—a foundation principle of *Origins*; embodying the fluid systems through



somaticizations on differentiation and wholeness; looking at the crawling pattern—contralateral movement; looking at the impact of projection in relationship; finding out what it is like to dis-identify with bodily experiences; talking about and exploring ending, leaving, and goodbye.

**Spiral 9—Authentic Movement as Embodied Spiritual Practice:**

Through the practice of Authentic Movement journeying through early embryology, birth, and attachment, and working to strengthen the adult witness; standing as a collective, holding hands to contain each other equally; being present with what can rise and fall within the multi-dimensional space, held within equanimity by participants all in the adult role.

Each Spiral includes embryological material relative to that month of development, corresponding psycho-emotional developmental material that relates to the embryological themes, questions of “enquiry”, personal perceptions, intellectual interludes, illustrations, PAUSES, and somaticizations. The pages are laid out spaciouly, with good amounts of blank space. The font size is large bringing the words to the reader’s eyes, inviting the reader to receive the letters, words, and spaces in between. Text is offered as poetry, song lyrics, short prose, longer prose, and questions.

In keeping with the spiraling nature of nature, human development, and of this book, themes from earlier Spirals reappear in later Spirals; carrying the reader in their own spiraling movement, awareness, and reflection. Occasionally this reads a bit awkwardly, yet Davis consistently keeps the spirals moving and integrating as developmental themes spiral around, through and integrate with each other. Each Spiral reveals more complexity of life processes with Spiral 8 exploring a variety of perspectives on how we differentiate within wholeness biologically and psychically; and Spiral 9 exploring how as adults in community we can support ourselves and each other in an unending process of sacred becoming.

The spaciousness in the visual design and textual content make it easy for the reader to pause, spiral more deeply into their own somatically moving experience and return to the book. The word PAUSE is offered directly numerous times throughout, often as a Principle Pause after which Davis highlights a principle significant to the Spiral. From p. 298:

Principle Pause

WHOLENESS cannot be good or bad but surely must be both and neither

WHOLENESS has differentiation within it

Continued on page 42

Each version of her pausing offers the potential to interrupt well-learned habits of the reader's comprehension and perception.

PAUSE . . .

The Spirals, as much as they are to be read, are also to be explored through direct experience alone or with others. All Spirals include enquiry and Somaticizations with explicit invitations and directions for what to explore, including supportive facilitation cues for timing and post-enquiry, post-experiential reflection through writing or drawing.

At times the reader is encouraged or instructed to grab a friend or two, or even a stranger, to fulfill an exploratory enquiry. In these enquiries the duo, trio or more, fulfill different roles together, such as: Interested witness, movement partner(s) offering touch or exploring with a prop to embody various concepts, and someone to verbally share experiences with.

Given that I had to meet a review deadline, minimal exploration was engaged in while reading the book. Even so, I immediately found myself integrating conceptual material and themes into my daily self-exploration and classes, i.e. gut-brain-body and organ origins supporting movement that awakened softer vision and more fluid spongy connections through back, belly, legs, and feet.

The most densely written prose throughout the book appears near the end of each Spiral as Davis articulates the Somaticizations. These offerings are intended to support movement explorations that flow through and integrate all the embryological-anatomical themes of the Spiral with corresponding psycho-emotional development. This writing is clear, full, and rich with one theme after the next unfolding, enfolding, refolding. These portions and the last two spirals are places in the book where the writing becomes a lot to read, requiring more extended periods of tension to sustain direct focus and comprehension. Paradoxically, the Somaticizations intended for the longest sustained inner-outer movement exploration and body awareness.

Given that Davis clearly formats the rest of the book with a more, easy diverse range of movement and feeling potential, is it possible that she intended to challenge the reader to sustain longer periods of tension for reading comprehension? Or challenge the reader to memorize the Somaticization, or to create a way to explore it after reading the book? This is not entirely clear. Possibly including something in the introduction or a reminder to the reader along the way, that the prose in these sections requires more sustained visual and cognitive attention, could help prepare and facilitate the reader to feel for what will support their reading experience. And, what will support their direct non-words explorations of the Somaticizations. Ideally, one would have a recording

of Davis' voice reading this material to them as they move through their own Somaticization from each Spiral.

For anyone with the knowledge and wisdom acquired by years of in-depth experience such as Davis, creating and offering a training programme is an act of devotion, courage, and generosity. The living experience of moving, discovering, and researching with others is filled with an endless range of feeling expression, serious focus, patience, and compassion. All of this is palpably present in every aspect of this monumental book. What is also present, is joyful, curious, whimsical, wild and wonderful creative play. Davis sprinkles this throughout her book with illustrations that spiral, float, entangle, fly, and land upon the pages; and with silly perceptions and questions, references to magic and faeries, and the sparkle in her eyes and smile in her author's photo.

In Spiral 7, Davis invites the reader to enquire into perception, noting that while our perceptions are made possible through all our innate senses, our perceptions are also colored by all kinds of learned information that operates implicitly within our conscious awareness. She offers ways to explore our perceptions from different perspectives—visual angles, sensation awareness of texture, shape, and sound; imaginary narrative—and to emerge from these explorations back to, *what is your perception of XX-object-thought now?* As I emerge from my initial perception of this:

large, heavy, unearthed stone  
book, heated tension in my body  
nervous doubt in my mind;  
slowing down, breathing,  
weight, grounding legs-lap;  
reading spiraling, floating, flying, focusing, wondering,  
landing, digesting, juicy, comprehending principles  
PAUSING . . . exhaaaaaaaaaaaaaaling . . .  
questioning, reiterating, spiraling, pulling  
detailing  
through writing this review;

Continued on page 44

my current perception is alive, vibrating and sparkling through my whole body with even more curiosity; and a mountain of appreciation for a well-conceived, well-executed, succinctly articulated, comprehensive book; that in a truly personal, artistic, and professional way embodies a three-year training programme. A training that can be experienced through reading with Davis' voice holding, guiding, and facilitating an invitation for further moving self-inquiry alone and in sacred circles with others.



**Mary Abrams, MA, RSME**, founder/director of Moving Body Resources, NYC, teaches classes, workshops, and private clients; and on the MA Dance & Somatic Well-being Course at the University of Central Lancashire, Preston, UK; and the Somatic Adcademy of Berlin's Continuum Training Program. She is a Registered Somatic Movement Educator with the International Somatic Movement Education & Therapy Association (ISMETA) and holds an MA degree in Consciousness Studies focusing on embodied movement, affect theory, and Epistemics. Her work continues to be supported by over 20 years of working with Emilie Conrad (Continuum), Susan Harper, Gary David, Caryn McHose and Kevin Frank, among others.

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**Joan Davis** has lived her whole life in Ireland, where she has pioneered innovative contemporary dance practices since 1976. From 1996, when she moved to Wicklow and opened a small wholistic center, she developed the arts practice and performance offerings of Maya Lila. Two books *Maya Lila, Bringing Authentic Movement into Performance: The Offering* and *Maya Lila, Bringing Authentic Movement into Performance: The Process* was published in 2007. A film of the work of Maya Lila called 'In the Bell's Shadow' was made in 2013.

In 2012 Joan offered a somatic training, the first of its kind in Ireland, called *ORIGINS*. This training covered somatic experiences, developmental and psychological movements from pre conception to approximately eighteen months of age.

Currently Joan is offering a new programme called *ORIGINAL NATURE* (2018-2021) which follows on from *ORIGINS* and holds the intention to deepen and refine the quality of our direct embodied presence with ourselves, our clients and groups not to mention daily living.

She has three children, four grandsons and two grand-dogs.

[www.gorsehill.net](http://www.gorsehill.net)

A photograph of two young women in a forest, looking upwards with joyful expressions as they watch colorful autumn leaves (red, orange, yellow, and green) fall from the trees. The woman on the left is wearing a white top and large blue earrings, while the woman on the right is wearing a black top and a necklace. The background is a soft-focus green forest.

***Take in the colors . . .***

***Breathe in the crisp air . . .***

***Relax and just BE***

***in Scents of Fall***

# *Happy Holidays: A Somatic Approach to Surviving and Thriving the 2019 Season*

*By Jenifer Trivelli*

"You can't pour from an empty cup."

"Put on your oxygen mask first."

Phrases like these suggest an overly simplistic and logical approach to navigating what might be a stressful holiday season in our lives, but as the readers of this publication are well aware, there is a difference between the cognitive understanding of something and the embodied experience of it.

When it comes to the holidays, people have myriad responses. Underneath the traditions and trappings the season brings, most of us really just want to feel connected to something or someone. Connection in and of itself is a beautiful and neurobiologically sound plan. What we've learned from Stephen Porges (2011) is that social engagement is a feature of a higher-level functioning human nervous system. You might find it easy to think of a time you felt connected to someone else, and in turn assign high value to an overall sense of connectedness in



your life. And, just as easily, you might have memories of feeling alone or disconnected.

People who may or may not identify as introverts can also readily bring to mind the many pitfalls we can experience with an intense focus on connection. We might ignore (or be completely unaware of) our own needs, choosing instead to put the other person first. We can become so busy chasing connection that we find ourselves depleted, stressed, and no fun to be around by the time we get there. Most noticeably, perhaps, is the effect on those closest to us - our partners and children. That moment we lose our temper or regress into some earlier form of survival reactivity, we know we have jumped the track and lost alignment with what was most important.

Knowing that you tend to overschedule and end up yelling at your family is different than establishing a connection to the felt sensation of it and being able to identify that sensation in the earliest of stages, while there's still time to shift. As you navigate the upcoming holiday season, consider the following somatic mapping practices to help you shift from a reactionary state to a mindful place, where you can sense into what you are feeling and choose how you want to react.

**Anchor the experience you'd like to have with somatic mapping.**

Begin by imagining scenes from your desired holiday season. Perhaps you have a past experience you can draw upon. If you're into journaling, you might write it out; artists might choose a creative medium to elaborate upon their visions. You might be a person who feels a strong connection to visualization and find it easy enough to simply bring ideas to mind. The way you get there is less important than getting there, which is to focus intently in a way that brings sensation into your body.

If you have trouble noticing any sensations, you might like to try starting instead with a word (or words) for the experience you'd like to have. Remember that the word needs to represent what you want to experience, not what you don't want to experience. Words like connected, seen, strong, or joyful, instead of "not ignored" or "not talked over". Once you've identified words that describe your desired experience, think of a time in the past when you felt that feeling - as intensely as you're able to recall. If you haven't yet

Continued on page 48



experienced the general feelings you're hoping for this holiday season, imagine what it would be like if you did.

When you're noticing sensation changes in your physical body as a result of your visioning, writing, or artistic expression, begin to hone in on those sensations. You might begin by noticing where you experience sensation and then zoom in to notice as much detail as you are able. Try to access

a sense of open curiosity and give yourself as much time as needed for the sensations to be as clear and expressive as you think they can be.

The next step is to "download" these anchor sensation maps into your memory. Again, choosing a modality for expression that suits you and this experience you are imagining; perhaps writing out a description of the sensations, drawing/painting how and where they are in your body, or maybe expressing it verbally by sharing this exercise with a friend.

An optional step is to also create a visual anchor for the experience you want to have. This could be what you produced in the above step, or you can create something new that easily brings the "downloaded program" back to your physical body. You can use a photograph, a collage of words and/or images, or a symbol to remind yourself.

**Create a contrasting somatic map for reference.**

While you might bristle initially at the idea, imagining either a future experience or bringing to mind a past experience in which things have not turned out how you've desired during the holiday season provides you with



another valuable somatic reference point: contrast. No need to “download” this body map of undesired sensation. As Rick Hanson (2016) illustrates, our brains are like velcro for negative experiences.

### **Utilize your somatic maps for staying aligned.**

When you notice your undesirable sensations creeping (or blowing) in, shift so your body feels a different way and sends a different signal to your brain. In tune with Porges’ Polyvagal Theory (2011), you might choose a sensory experience that is comforting or reminds you that you are safe. For example, scent is a common sensory experience that comes to mind. No need to pick up a guide to essential oils; your own internal guidance system gives you just the feedback you need to know what scent would help you stay most aligned. Explore different scents, for example, noticing how cinnamon or evergreen or lavender affects your physiology. (This is also a fun mindfulness strategy to share with a child in your life.) Alternatively, you can use your sense of touch by wrapping up in a warm blanket or asking for a hug from someone you love. The hug also carries the added benefit of utilizing your social engagement system, which Polyvagal Theory tells us is an evolutionary step-up from fight/flight/freeze.

Another strategy you might consider is one you may already be familiar with from Peter Levine’s work with Somatic Experiencing (1997, 2010). To try it, simply notice things around you; allowing your head and eyes to look up, down, and to each side. This noticing draws on a positive feedback loop in our brains that evolved long ago when our ancestors used it to survive. Being aware of the environment back then meant not getting eaten. We can draw on this strategy today, despite the lack of predatory animals in our environments.

People also often discover that sometimes the simple act of bringing awareness to the sensation and holding it with openness and curiosity can begin the shift.

### **Use your anchor and contrasting somatic maps for decision-making.**

We are often flooded with decisions during the holiday season: when to visit your in-laws (and for how long), finding a non-screen-based gift for your tween, whether to exchange gifts with your partner, the company parties,

Continued on page 50

staying connected to your food plan and yoga classes. When decisions need to be made about how you'll spend your time or which actions to take, try envisioning each option and notice your corresponding body sensations. Which options feel most aligned with your desired somatic map?

**Support your somatic mapping with good ol' fashioned cognitive strategy.**

Consider the following questions. You might find added value in journaling your answers or discussing them with a supportive friend or therapist.

What decisions or actions end up as 'shoulds' that are in direct conflict with the intelligence of my embodied brain as evidenced by my somatic maps?

What can support me in staying aligned with my desired state?

Who can support me in staying aligned with my desired state?

What are some tools or practices you have in your back pocket that may be helpful if (or, when - it happens to all of us) you notice yourself off track?

**Create a larger road map with those closest to you.**

Utilizing this process with children, teens, partners, or others you find yourself navigating the season with has many potential benefits. One is that you have a shared frame of reference for bringing things back on track quickly when any one of you notices that you're off track. And that means you have shared accountability and responsibility for how you spend time together and individually as the season unfolds, which could be especially useful if you're usually the hub of decision making and find that people get grumpy with your plans along the way. Creating buy-in from the very beginning usually allows for more flow and collaboration along the way.

As with most things, practicing these strategies before you find yourself in the thick of things will provide maximum benefit when a stressful situation strikes. Keep in mind that the strategies presented in this article are not meant as a prescriptive checklist to guarantee a stress-free holiday; rather, they are offered as possibilities for support along





your holiday journey. Chose what feels interesting to you and in what order and to what extent and leave the rest.

May your holidays hold many moments - big and small, shared and separate - that take up space in your heart and keep you warm through the winter.

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**Jenifer Trivelli** is a parent of two with a graduate degree in Counseling and more than a decade of experience working with children and families. She offers Parent Coaching, Consultation for Organizations, and Professional Development for Educators through her company, WiseMind Educational Services.

She received her M.S. in Counseling from OSU-Cascades in Bend, Oregon in 2009. Since then, Jenifer has pursued additional training in the fields of Interpersonal Neurobiology, Attachment Theory and Trauma. She also received certification through Yoga Calm, and facilitates mindfulness and movement for both kids and adults.

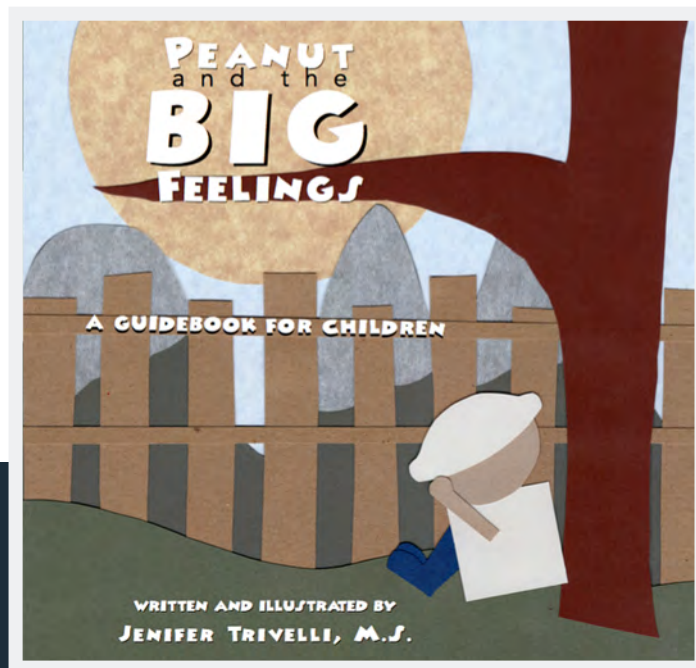
In 2014, at the encouragement of her colleagues, Jenifer published her first book, *Peanut and the BIG feelings: A Guidebook for Children*. As Peanut grew, the need became clear for a second book, written collaboratively with a teen, for teens, called *Jamie's Gift: A Young Teen's Guide to Fears, Worries, & Other Life Challenges (Like Being Irritated By Other People)*.

To learn more about Jenifer's work, publications, and offerings, please visit [www.wisemindservices.com](http://www.wisemindservices.com)

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This book is a must-have resource for every professional who works with children who have BIG feelings. It is a simple step by step guide that supports our physiologically innate way of processing stressors which leads to an increase of resiliency.

**-CARMEN HEIDECKE, SOMATIC EXPERIENCING PRACTITIONER**



*digestible neuroscience &  
practical tools for ages 3+*



JENIFER TRIVELLI, MS RYT, IS A PARENT, AUTHOR/WRITER, SPEAKER, CONSULTANT, AND YOUTH RESILIENCE EDUCATOR

**Find Peanut and the BIG Feelings on Amazon  
and at [www.wisemindservices.com/books](http://www.wisemindservices.com/books)**



***Everyone must take the  
time to sit and watch the  
leaves turn.***

***Elizabeth Lawrence***

# Addiction and the Holidays: A Mother's Story

Editor's note: The author requested anonymity to protect and preserve her family.

Smells, they heighten the senses and oh how amazing they can be! I inhale the whiff of my turkey a few hours before carving and I smile. This one perfect moment in the holiday, this one second where the world seems right, visions of Rockwell dance in my head and time stands still if only for a fraction of a minute.



I hear the familiar sounds from the television as the parade marches by with the laughter and songs of the season. Traditions. I love our holiday traditions, but they fill me with hesitant anticipation and wearied memories.

Something simmers and starts to bubble, but it is not on the cooktop. No, this simmering is inside me. Deep in my stomach; how I wish it was just the craving for the pumpkin pie baking. I can recall the melodies and the aromas of the holidays and quickly dissipate those gut emotions. After all, the aromas trigger special, good emotions, the ones that should bring me joy. However, even for that split second those aromas and feelings are always over-shadowed by the apprehension of something else, something on the verge, the not yet known, our absent "stressor". You see, I am a mother of an addict.

All of my senses are stretched tight and thin by the smells and that lingering tune playing over and over in my head, "Silent Night". It sparks memories; yet, I wonder, will it be a silent night? As the holiday season begins, I always reflect.

Then questions flood my mind: Is this the year? Could this be a year that goes as planned? Will my grandkids be running, nicely, of course, through the house all smiles and giggles? Will presents be unwrapped and plates left with crumbs on them?

Silent . . . slowly . . . creeping . . . enters the shadowed alter world, the one I live in. This could be the year of disruption, stress, discomfort, and a family that wishes they could leave. I must stay vigilant and strong; I must be the peacekeeper, and I must make this holiday a happy one, regardless, of what abuse or stress I put myself through because it is my job. I am the mother of an addict and live in a shadowed alter world.

As a mother, you want to “be” that mom, “be” that grandma, and “be” that daughter, the one that provides the absolute, perfect Rockwell-Stewart vision of comfort and warmth that surrounds your family at the holidays. However, this notion of “perfect”, that is a fantasy for us. This fantasy is not an option when you have a child suffering from addiction. My holiday preparations and our traditions depended on my addicts’ cycle of either a good year, meaning no jail time or legal issues, or a bad year filled with arrests and the dark depth of addiction that takes hold, strangling him of a worthy life. It sets the tone for all holidays. Let that sink in, no, wait . . . let a dash of resentment sink in, followed by heaping cups of guilt, layered with a smothering cover of depression that I felt as a mother. That dish is always available at the holidays, I know, I am a mother of an addict.

I think back to a few years ago as we gathered around the table to finally eat that amazing turkey. We always begin with a prayer. My father typically leads this prayer. As every year past, he will pray for the family but not specific names, the food, for a good new year, and to our health. It is during this quiet prayer time that my mind drifts to my secret silent prayer, “Dear Lord, please don’t let him walk through the door, wait . . .

Continued on page 56



sorry, Lord, I didn't mean it, wait. . . yes, I did, but only for today." Let me start over: "Lord, please don't let the phone ring that he's in jail or dead, at least not today, Lord, I just don't want him here today not this holiday." Suddenly, overwhelmed, I think, "Oh no. I am a terrible, horrible person. What mother doesn't want her child there for the holidays?" Surely, no sane mother would pray for that. Who thinks this way? Apparently, I do. But then, sadness, depression, and hopelessness slide their way in

when I remember with tears I hold back. This year . . . this year was a bad year.

Don't anguish, my soul, be careful, my worrisome heart, you forget, he won't be walk through the door, he is homeless this year. I am a mother of an addict and do not know where he lays his head this holiday. The spectrum of emotions I feel in just the course of a prayer are now what determines my mood. How can I be happy this year when I do not know whether he is alive or dead, eating or hungry. What right do I have to be joyful?

My journey is raw, and it cuts deep. I have been the mother of an addict for over 15 years. Holidays have a very different meaning for those

of us with children of addiction and for family members of addicts. I used to believe that this time of year brought about hope and new possibilities for change in the New Year. However, that is not the case with my journey.

I am a mother of an addict. I share with you the true words of my journey, but it is not over.

I have been powerless, helpless, a watcher while my son has destroyed his life, his brain, and our family, time and time again.



Photo by Ben White on Unsplash



I have been the enabler, the hopeful, the desperate, and the victim to his lies. I have been the believer, the dreamer, the ever-there parent. I am a mother of an addict.

I have inwardly abused myself with questions of parenting, questions of: wasn't there enough love, did I do enough, was I that terrible, how did it spiral, why can't I fix it? Why is everything I do never good enough to stop this?

I am a mother of an addict. The emotional spirals and rollercoaster rides throughout the past 15 years have been anything but thrilling. There were times on that ride that I felt excited, exhilarated. I was able to breathe, to laugh. I became a believer again. And then comes the plunge, the gut punch, the sinking to new depths and that turn into either a new unknown of drug use or a return to the same old vices.

I am a mother of an addict. I hide the guilt. I hide the facts. I've lied for my addict. I've turned a blind eye and prayed. I have also prayed for relief. I have prayed for death. I have prayed for miracles, but mostly I pray for peace.

I have experienced the nights of crying, the endless wait for the phone call to come in that either brings news of death or news of jail. I have experienced the years of silence, the years of "more money", the years of progress, and the years of relapse. These are a vicious cycle. I am a mother of an addict.

I have watched my parents' faces as tears stream down and wonder, did I cause this pain, this suffering, did I do enough? I have watched my beautiful daughter grow frustrated, and yet listen, grow mad and distant yet sad for her only brother. I've

Continued on page 58

Photo by Claudia on Unsplash



watched my grandkids fall short because another drama involving my addict has taken away time from making memories, enjoying holidays, and family time. I've watched my husband fall short of answers, short of temper, and short of money because I am a mother of an addict.

The kind words of others, the encouragement they give, and the realizations of what needs to be done they are all there and yet . . . they fall upon my deaf ears as I try to understand and feel something other than rage, hurt, disappointment, depression, guilt, unworthiness, and stress. I hear them. I know them. I cannot apply them because his addiction has control of NOT only him but ME. I am a mother of an addict.



Lies, promises, and false agreements are the life of my addict. Denial of abuse. Denial to seek help. The search for his next high to kill his brain and take his life. There will never be **ENOUGH** love, never be **ENOUGH** money, there will just never be **ENOUGH** because my son is an addict and that addiction controls him.

This holiday there is a healing change that I have embraced. It can be yours too if you know the suffering I have just laid out.

### *The Serenity Prayer, Redefined*

*God, grant me the serenity to accept  
The people I can't change, the courage to change  
The one I can, and the wisdom to know it's me.*

I choose ME. I choose my functioning family. I choose my husband, and our life. I choose to be the strong and healthy person I know I am and leave my addict to his own choices, his own life, his own problems created by his addiction.

During the upcoming holidays, I choose ME. I will tell myself daily and remind myself that it is NOT me: I did not **CREATE** this problem; I cannot **CONTROL** this problem; I cannot **CURE** this problem. God, grant me the serenity to accept the people that I cannot change, the courage to change the one I can, and the wisdom to know it's ME.

With these choices, I pray I find the strength and that in turn you may find the strength to choose yourself too. I hope my story gives you the encouragement to find your life away from your addict and that you find peace within yourself to be the best you that YOU can be this season for all who can and will benefit from your joy and your love. You are worthy!

Terms and Prayer are from *Nar-Non Handbook*.



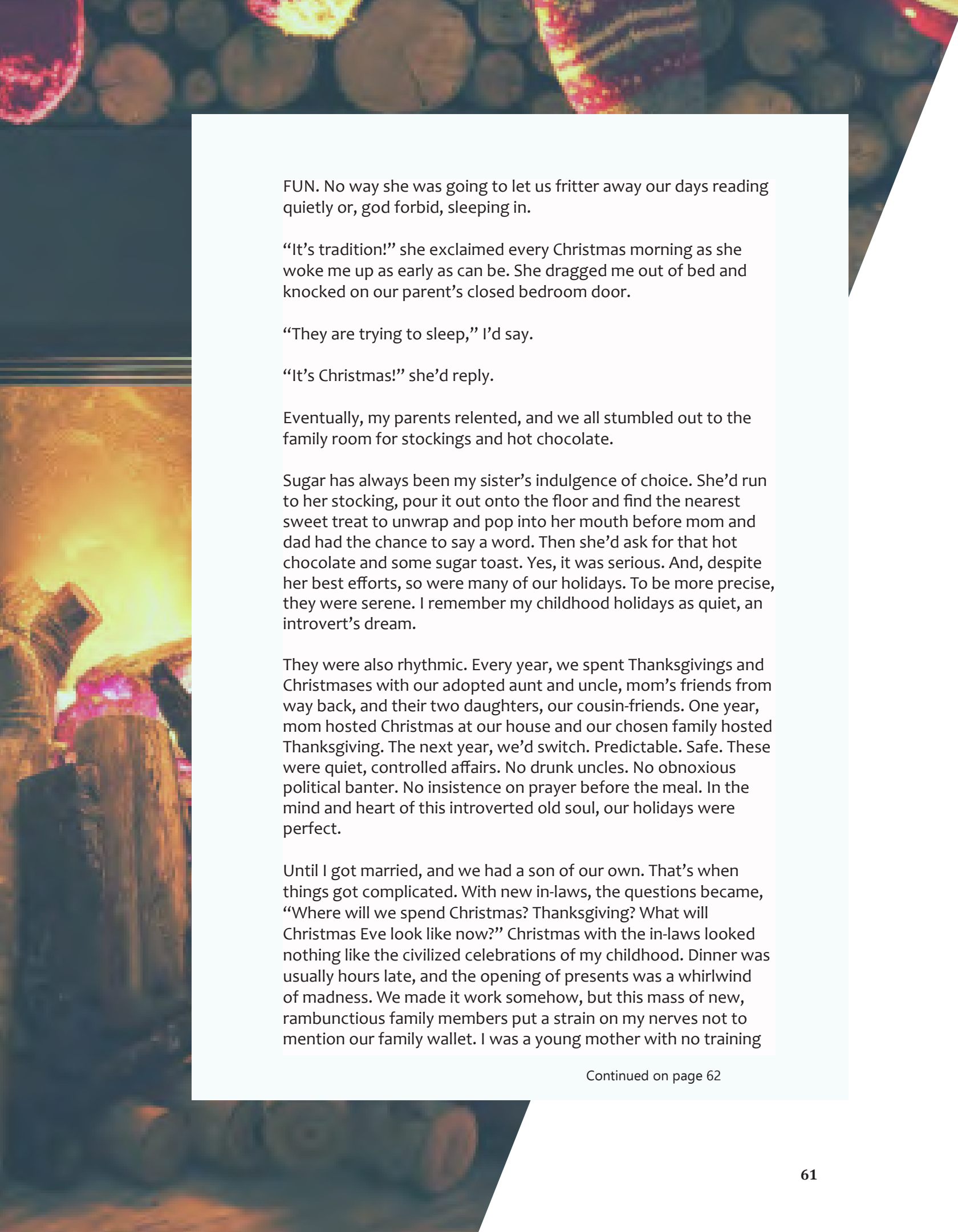
## ALWAYS HOME FOR THE HOLIDAYS

by Holly Holt

“When I was a child, Christmas happened on Christmas Eve. Mom, dad, sister, and I piled into the car and drove around the empty streets looking for Rudolf’s nose. I remember the silence illuminated by twinkling Christmas trees in windows and the slow, steady headlamps of whatever Chrysler dad was driving that year. But we were looking for the special light. The red one. Since we lived beneath the flightpath of the San Jose airport, it was not hard to find red blinking lights in the sky. Every year the question remained, “Which one is Rudolf’s nose?” It didn’t matter. My sister, Jenny, and I usually pointed one out and exclaimed, “There it is!” Mom and dad always answered with, “Let’s drive around a bit more, look at the neighborhood Christmas lights to give Santa time to bring your presents.” We did not complain because we knew that gifts were waiting under the tree when we returned home. It was like magic.

The whole thing felt pretty special because, unlike my friends, we received our presents on Christmas Eve instead of Christmas morning. This, I learned later, was part of our Scandinavian tradition. Was it because Sweden was closer to the North Pole? I didn’t ask. Neither did my sister. We delighted in presents on Christmas Eve and, mysteriously, stockings on Christmas morning. Were we so special that Santa Claus visited twice in one night? Who knew? It was tradition, and my sister for one, LOVED it.

The fact is, my sister has always been an advocate of tradition, especially the holiday variety. It brings her a certain kind of comfort and, dare I say, joy. She, the lone extrovert in the family, was a girl who slung one of mom’s old purses over her arm, asked for a clipboard, and took on the role of cruise director for all holidays. She was going to make sure that our holidays were going to be



FUN. No way she was going to let us fritter away our days reading quietly or, god forbid, sleeping in.

“It’s tradition!” she exclaimed every Christmas morning as she woke me up as early as can be. She dragged me out of bed and knocked on our parent’s closed bedroom door.

“They are trying to sleep,” I’d say.

“It’s Christmas!” she’d reply.

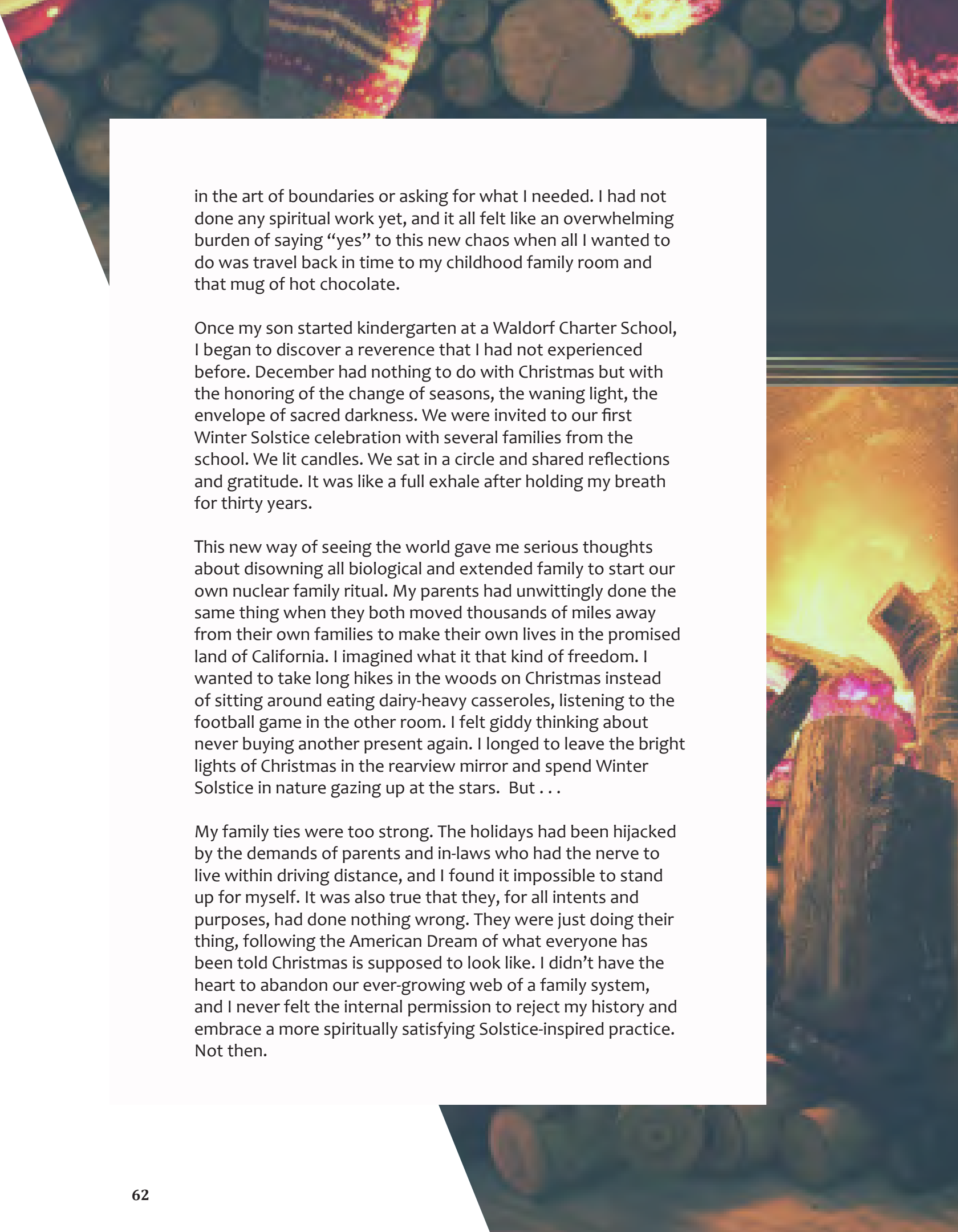
Eventually, my parents relented, and we all stumbled out to the family room for stockings and hot chocolate.

Sugar has always been my sister’s indulgence of choice. She’d run to her stocking, pour it out onto the floor and find the nearest sweet treat to unwrap and pop into her mouth before mom and dad had the chance to say a word. Then she’d ask for that hot chocolate and some sugar toast. Yes, it was serious. And, despite her best efforts, so were many of our holidays. To be more precise, they were serene. I remember my childhood holidays as quiet, an introvert’s dream.

They were also rhythmic. Every year, we spent Thanksgivings and Christmases with our adopted aunt and uncle, mom’s friends from way back, and their two daughters, our cousin-friends. One year, mom hosted Christmas at our house and our chosen family hosted Thanksgiving. The next year, we’d switch. Predictable. Safe. These were quiet, controlled affairs. No drunk uncles. No obnoxious political banter. No insistence on prayer before the meal. In the mind and heart of this introverted old soul, our holidays were perfect.

Until I got married, and we had a son of our own. That’s when things got complicated. With new in-laws, the questions became, “Where will we spend Christmas? Thanksgiving? What will Christmas Eve look like now?” Christmas with the in-laws looked nothing like the civilized celebrations of my childhood. Dinner was usually hours late, and the opening of presents was a whirlwind of madness. We made it work somehow, but this mass of new, rambunctious family members put a strain on my nerves not to mention our family wallet. I was a young mother with no training

Continued on page 62



in the art of boundaries or asking for what I needed. I had not done any spiritual work yet, and it all felt like an overwhelming burden of saying “yes” to this new chaos when all I wanted to do was travel back in time to my childhood family room and that mug of hot chocolate.

Once my son started kindergarten at a Waldorf Charter School, I began to discover a reverence that I had not experienced before. December had nothing to do with Christmas but with the honoring of the change of seasons, the waning light, the envelope of sacred darkness. We were invited to our first Winter Solstice celebration with several families from the school. We lit candles. We sat in a circle and shared reflections and gratitude. It was like a full exhale after holding my breath for thirty years.

This new way of seeing the world gave me serious thoughts about disowning all biological and extended family to start our own nuclear family ritual. My parents had unwittingly done the same thing when they both moved thousands of miles away from their own families to make their own lives in the promised land of California. I imagined what it that kind of freedom. I wanted to take long hikes in the woods on Christmas instead of sitting around eating dairy-heavy casseroles, listening to the football game in the other room. I felt giddy thinking about never buying another present again. I longed to leave the bright lights of Christmas in the rearview mirror and spend Winter Solstice in nature gazing up at the stars. But . . .

My family ties were too strong. The holidays had been hijacked by the demands of parents and in-laws who had the nerve to live within driving distance, and I found it impossible to stand up for myself. It was also true that they, for all intents and purposes, had done nothing wrong. They were just doing their thing, following the American Dream of what everyone has been told Christmas is supposed to look like. I didn't have the heart to abandon our ever-growing web of a family system, and I never felt the internal permission to reject my history and embrace a more spiritually satisfying Solstice-inspired practice. Not then.

Things changed again when my sister got married. You see, she married a big man from a big Byzantine Catholic Polish/Ukrainian family. He was gregarious, friendly beyond belief, and his family was endless. A small gathering for them was 25-30 people. At first, my sister and I brought our husbands and kids together at mom and dad's for Christmas Eve; Christmas Day was reserved for our respective in-laws. The natural order of things began to twist and turn as dear brother-in-law put his foot down. In his family, on Christmas Eve a ceremonial dinner called Wigilia was shared. It was their Christmas, he said. Tradition, he said. There was that word again! I knew in that moment that although I was going to resist this change with all my rigid quietness, my sister had found her perfect match, a man who valued tradition as much as she did. And that she would relent. That year, she spent our sacred Christmas Eve with another family.

“What do we do now?” I cried to my mother. “Jenny’s going to their house for Christmas Eve. What about all that tradition she always went on about? She has betrayed that tradition, OUR tradition!” I said this realizing I had yearned to jump ship for years. I complained and groused because I never had the guts to put my foot down, or to be more precise, my family didn’t care that I wanted a pagan holiday. They were going to celebrate Christmas.

And so they did. My sister’s husband’s family - who enveloped in-laws as if they were blood - invited us to join them for their version of Christmas Eve. The invitation came a year or two after the first time Jenny made our quiet family Christmas Eve celebration infinitely quieter by not being there. At first, I was having none of it. I was still relatively young and spoiled. I wanted my parents to say “no.” I have a vague memory of stomping my feet.

But mom and dad were nothing if not polite. What a kind invitation! How generous! Of course, we’ll go! They had been taught manners and expected me to follow. We didn’t need to drive around the neighborhood on Christmas Eve looking for Rudolf. We didn’t need our quiet, introverted Christmas after

Continued on page 64

all. The unspoken rallying cry seemed to be, “Let’s not make any waves.”

“Fine!” I said (again, strong possibility of another foot stomp).

Here’s the trouble with what happened next.

We had fun. Big, loud, extroverted fun, the elusive quality my sister had sought and cherished as a shining north star her whole life, had been found. No, she didn’t like the meal. Beet soup, cold herring, some foreign grain covered in unknown spices, perogies, and a sour fruit compote did not measure up to the “fun” food of our childhood. But the rest of it? She tried to say she wanted what we used to have, but I felt her heart yearning for and finally choosing this new boisterous celebration.

And for once, I understood why. What happened after the meal was like something out of a movie. We sat around the living room and sang Christmas carols at the tops of our lungs! We belted out the old standards like “Silent Night” and even the non-religious “Jingle Bells.” In a place where I expected to have to “behave,” I discovered a new freedom, the freedom of my own voice. I could sing as loudly as I wanted, and no one would say a word. In fact, hardly anyone could hear me over the booming voices of my brother-in-law and his four football-player-sized brothers.

At the end of the evening, my sister got her sugar plum wish when people brought out cookies, pies, and all kinds of sweet treats to share. The volume in the room only grew louder and more celebratory. What was it about this frivolity that felt like home? Coming from a family where “being good, nice girls” was valued above all, this Christmas Eve was a breakout moment, a breaking through of old patterns that (I didn’t know until that moment) needed breaking.

I didn’t want to be “sugar and spice and everything nice” anymore. I wanted to raise my voice. I wanted to be free. And, somehow, celebrating Christmas in this way, a way that felt



ancient yet new, opened me up. Perhaps, it was simply that I was ready.

By that time, not only had I integrated some of the nature-based Winter Solstice rituals into my family's home life, I dedicated much of my own time to yoga and meditation. I fortified my nerves, my mind, and my body with my own rhythmic devotions. I made my practice personal. I walked by the river in the rain. Alone. I lit candles. I had given myself permission to honor it ALL. Honoring the change of the seasons with small ceremonies helped me understand that things are always in flux. Studying the Eastern concepts of impermanence taught me that everything changes. Sometimes, our families are large and unruly. Sometimes, we are lonely. Sometimes, the room is filled to bursting. Sometimes, people die. Every one of these life moments can be considered sacred.

Knowing myself more deeply and honoring the complexity of relationship has given me the strength to welcome more and more "family" into my heart. I have come home to myself. Now, no matter where I am and what I'm celebrating, I am always home for the holidays.



**Holly Holt** is a writer/ storyteller with a deep devotion to practices that heal the body and wake up the mind. For most of the early 2000s, she was a performing singer/songwriter who recorded a well received CD of original music. Currently, she is working on a novel, teaches yoga, blogs, and leads Word Gathering Writing Circles in Sacramento, CA.

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# EMBODIED AWARENESS



BETH HAESSIG, PSY.D.

**Beth L. Haessig, Psy.D.** is a licensed psychologist, a certified body-centered psychotherapist, and a certified yoga therapist. She is the former president of the United States Association for Body Psychotherapy. She works privately with children and adults in schools and in an urban hospital as an integrative health psychologist.

See [www.BethHaessig.com](http://www.BethHaessig.com) for more information.

## ***Ferocious Family Love***

*What happens when people who have ferocious love, gather? Ferocious love is ferocious vulnerability. Love is sometimes hard to hold without making me feel wide open to the possibility of hurt, pain, or loss. To protect from this level of openness, I have a habit of holding behavioral expectations toward family members. Expectations act as a shield at the ready, to make another wrong. This activity helps me NOT feel the vulnerability of my love. Instead, it allows me to feel victimized by their behavior, viz., "can you believe SHE did this?" If I make myself a victim to their behavior, I feel self-righteous. That's much better than the alternative, which is helpless. Or is it?*



*How can we hold onto expectations for our family members when they failed to give conscious agreement to how we want them to behave?*

*As holidays approach, see how it feels to hold NO expectations of how anyone behaves. LET THEM BE EXACTLY THE WAY THEY ARE. Don't forget we always have freedom of movement—an ability to remove oneself from the table, go outside, catch a few minutes alone to listen to the chatter from a distance, or hear the sounds of life outside.*

*Join me as I try to hold everyone around the holiday table in the vulnerable fiery feelings that are living in my heart at the next family gathering. Surely it's ferocious love.*

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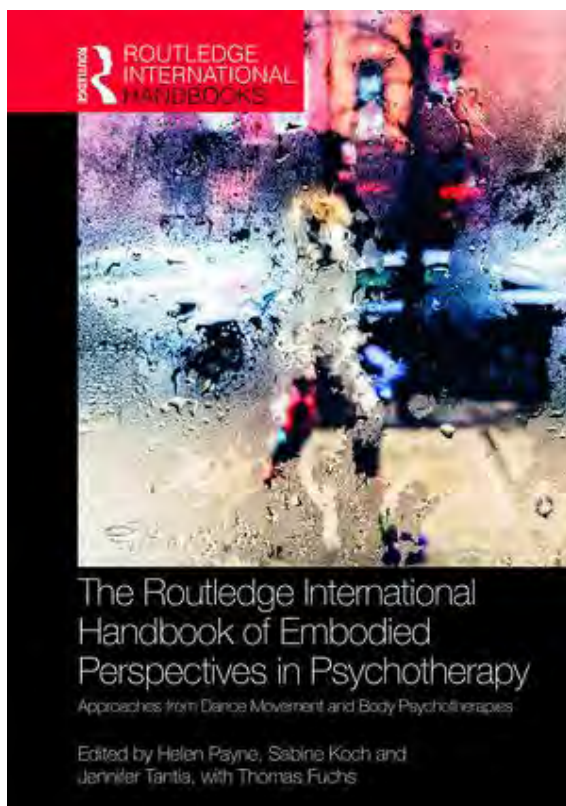
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# BOOK REVIEW

Reviewed by Nancy Eichhorn, Ph.D.

What do you get when four seasoned academics combine their scholarly resources and put their pens to the page?

An impressive “fertile intersection of fields of inquiry” with a star-studded list of contributors writing about body psychotherapy and dance movement therapy.

This 400 plus page anthology highlights ways for clinicians to immerse themselves and their clients into the “silent worlds of sensing, touching, moving, breathing, and feeling” via psychoanalytic thought, cognitive science, and phenomenological views.

*The Routledge International Handbook of Embodied Perspectives in Psychotherapy: Approaches from Dance Movement and Body Psychotherapies* (2019) edited by Helen Payne, Sabine Koch, Jennifer Tantia, with Thomas Fuchs, is a valuable addition to our current literature.

It is divided into three sections: Essential dimensions of being a body; theory and practice in dance movement psychotherapy; and theory and practice in body psychotherapy. The editors co-authored an in-depth description of embodiment then clarified two disciplines—dance movement psychotherapy, also known as dance movement therapy and dance therapy, and body psychotherapy—as they pertain to psychotherapy.

They introduce each section and offer a summary of the material that follows. There are three forwards as well, written by Don Hanlon Johnson, Vassiliki Karrou, and Babette Rothschild. All material presented is well written and well edited. It is a comprehensive reference book—clearly academic but fleshed out, personal despite the movement from anecdotal to evidence-based generalities. The chapters are interesting to read. Although some of the information has been presented in other publications—the contributors are well established in their line of inquiry—most appeared to offer fresh perspectives on their foundational line of thought.

As noted, many of the contributors are active in our field as researchers, clinicians, teachers, presenters, and writers: Maxine Sheets-Johnstone, USA; Shaun Gallagher, USA; Jennifer

Tantia, USA; Tina Stromsted, USA; Amber Gray, USA; Suzi Tortora and Jennifer Whitley, USA; Helen Payne, UK; Gill Westland, UK; Halko Weiss and Maci Daye, Germany; Nick Totton, UK; David Boadella, Switzerland; Michael Soth, UK; Ulfried Geuter, Germany; Michel Coster Heller and Gillat Burckhardt-Bartov, France; Tom Warnecke, UK; Asaf Rolef Ben-Shahar, Israel; Rae Johnson, USA; Christine Caldwell, USA; Michael Changris, USA; and Maurizio Stupiggia, Italy.

There are also a number of names new to this reviewer who offer a refreshing take on research and clinical applications including: Margit Koemeda-Lutz, Switzerland; Helma Mair, Ireland; Ursula Bartholomew and Ingrid Herholz, Germany; Iris Brauninger, Switzerland and Radwa Said Abdelazim Elfeqi, Egypt; Rainbow Ho, Hong Kong; Miyuki Kaji, Japan, Teresa Bas, Spain, Diana Fischman, Argentina, and Rosa M Rodriguez, Spain; Haugit Ehrenfreund, Switzerland, Alexander Girshon and Ekaterina Karatygina, Russia; Sylvie Garner, France; Susan D. Imus, USA; Rosemarie Samaritter, The Netherlands; Annette Schwalbe, UK and Kenya; Marianne Eberhard-Kaechele, Germany; Johannes Michalak, Naomi Lyons and Thomas Heidenreich, Germany; Diana Cheney, UK; and Jessica Acolin, USA.

The content ranges from narratives in embodied therapeutic practice to a model for conceptualizing and treating mental illness. One chapter offers a developmental taxonomy of interaction modalities in dance movement therapy, another looks at somatic body mapping with women during life transitions. There's information on the development of the self (body) in dance movement therapy. You can learn how dance movement therapy can contribute to suicide prevention and work as a restorative modality with survivors of relational trauma. The insights from Japan and Hong Kong as well as Swiss and Egyptian perspectives on dance movement therapy—embodiment of space in relation to self and others as well as stillness and movement in different cultures— is fascinating.

Within the section on body psychotherapy, chapters relate to embodied-relational therapy, relating through the body, and functional relaxation in psychosomatic medicine. Biosynthesis therapy, emotional regulation, oppression and embodiment, safety in psychotherapy, touch and embodiment, and research-informed body psychotherapy clinical work are addressed.

When confronted with reviewing a "handbook", I think it's best to give a general sense, let readers know, *hey, this is worth checking out*. It isn't a sit down and read it all at once book. It is meant to be a resource. A place to come for current insights into dance movement therapy and body psychotherapy that are supported by research and personal clinical experience. I appreciated the opportunity to immerse myself in the text over the summer, time to be with chapters and explore what resonates for me, what feels applicable to me and what challenges me so I can continue to grow and stretch beyond my comfort zone and embrace new perspectives.

# Overcoming the Obstacles to Self-Compassion

by Ronan M. Kisch, Ph.D.

When I employ somatic kinesiology (muscle testing) to assess my clients' inner truth regarding their self-compassion most go weak—they have little motivation for self-compassion. Many of these people work in professions where they successfully bring compassion to their clients, but, in turn, not to themselves. How can this be? And, more importantly, what can be done?

## Compassion

To start, I think it's useful to understand what compassion is and what it is not. My working definition of compassion represents tender, empathic, and caring sentiments. It involves loving feelings that emerge when an injury (physical, emotional, or spiritual) is recognized and nurtured. Compassion is bringing a concerned, reinforcing spirit in the presence of wounding.

Self-compassion is loving feelings directed to one's self. According to Rick Hanson, Ph.D. and Richard Mendius, M.D. (2009), "Self-compassion isn't self-pity but is simply



warmth, concern and good wishes. Compassion has the potential to bring about emotional healing."

Being self-compassionate is not being self-centered, egotistical, or narcissistic. Nor is it about self-esteem. Self-esteem is different from self-compassion. Self-esteem derives from what we do. It involves good feelings about ourselves that result from achievements performing a role at work or in a family. If overly identified with one's self-esteem, it can lead one to feel grandiose, judgmental, and superior to others. Self-esteem can become confused with who we are — our spirit as individuals. Maintaining the preciousness for who one is, along with the spirit that emanates from one's self leads not only to feelings of joy but health and absence of depression despite wounding.

Kristin Neff, Ph.D. (2011) states that self-compassion is self-kindness. It involves recognition that our wounded feelings reflect a common humanity. And our awareness of ourselves in self-compassion is mindful. Mindfulness is not just thought but an awareness that thoughts, feelings, our body and our spirit are one. Compassion is tending to the mind.

As Neff indicates, mindfulness is a clear, non-emotionally biased perception of our present vision. Being human is being imperfect. This leads to a sense of unity with humanity. Being accepting of this allows us to see more perceptively rather than blurring our vision by self-depreciation. It provides a sense of reality, safety.

### ***Compassion as a healing agent***

Compassion can be a healing intervention for individuals suffering from external or internal life injuries or wounds. Christopher Germer, Ph.D. (2009) believes that there are two aspects to overcoming wounds: mindful awareness and self-compassion. This rests on the belief that the mind is not merely the conscious prefrontal cortex of the brain but rather that the mind consists of: conscious awareness, unconscious memories, the hippocampus, the amygdala, the vagus nerve, muscles, neuro-networks, the stomach, adrenal glands, and skin. All of which are part of bodily systems that either communicate or withhold the expression of feelings.

If individuals are wounded and feel compassion for themselves, they typically remain free from negativity, anger, and self-withdrawal. When people are compassionate with themselves versus being negative and

Continued on page 72

entering a sympathetic *fight, flight, or freeze mode*, they remain in a parasympathetic mode associated with *rest, digest, and recover*. They are open to self-perception, creativity, and growth, and to perceiving opportunities rather than maintaining a closed mind. Self-compassionate individuals have the potential for enthusiasm, interest, inspiration, and excitement more so than those who are self-critical. They have the potential to be more optimistic and their gratitude can then lead to joy. This means they tend to be less anxious and depressed. Compassion tends to minimize rumination. These individuals often have fewer negative feelings and lower heart rates.

### ***The origin of opposition to self-compassion***

Compassion, in action, has two components. First, it is perception of a wound or injury. Second, it is empathy and love for that wounded person or wounded people. It is eliminating one's defensive reaction to a painful situation and opening to consideration and kindness. To be able to have these feelings one must be sensitive to their own perceptions, open to their feelings and those of others, and be willing to respond to positive, nurturing awarenesses.

To generate self-compassion, one must recognize it is not merely generating emotionless words (thought or spoken) to one's self. It is a sense of spirit that embodies what is fully felt and experienced in addition to thought and/or spoken words. Self-compassion derives from the spirit and the body, as well as from words emanating from one's left brain. Words that are not emotionally and somatically experienced are powerless.

A foundation of positive self-compassion needs to be



*Image by 5540867 from Pixabay*





Image by ambroo from Pixabay

taught and nurtured from birth on. Most parents possess an instinctive disposition that engenders warmth, support, and compassion; they nurture and protect their children. Unfortunately, many parents were also unrecognized, under supported, and not reinforced by their own parents. They can't pass on knowledge that wasn't role modeled for them. So, generationally speaking, this sense is often not recognized, instilled, reinforced, nor celebrated in childhood. Thus, many traits, skills, and talents that children have go unrecognized and unappreciated. They simply do not develop. These children grow up internalizing their parents' unhealthy role models. They might even believe that in order to be accepted their role is to take care of others. Because of this

disconnect, internal integrity remains undeveloped and unappreciated. This leads to a lack of development in the personality and a minimization of self-appreciation and yet other symptoms.

To further complicate things, there are also parents whose anger and hostility regarding their own lives spill over as they punitively displace their resentment onto their children. Their children then believe that there is something basically wrong with them. They often end up thinking, *Why else would my parents act that way?*

As a result of these childhood experiences and resultant wounds, they are unable to be compassionate and supportive toward themselves. They may even be self-punitive. Although self-compassion is a remedy for criticism, rejection, and diminishment, words and even actions not backed by feelings and spirit are powerless to remedy deep often unconscious emotional wounds.

These patterns are passed down generationally. And while it's important to understand one's parents' role modeling, it is just as important to not blame them for what they did or did not do. Blaming gives away one's strength and sense of command. But, recognizing one's

Continued on page 74

parents' personalities can be extremely helpful for self-knowledge of one's own identity, personality, and growth. It lets people know who and how they do not want to be and who and how they do want to be.

### ***Lacking Self Compassion***

An inability to provide one's self with self-compassion is a symptom of an underlying wound or trauma. Therefore, minimizing the presenting symptom does not eliminate the underlying cause.

Imperfections (or life wounds) are often met with self-criticism, even condemnation. This leads to somatic bracing that further increases discomfort and pain, minimizing one's potential. Internal frustration also arises as one can never achieve her or his goals. I recently identified what I call the sweetie-pie syndrome (Kisch, 2019). In short, even if one's goals are met, a sweetie-pie never feels good enough so something else must be achieved. The problem is, if people believe they are not deserving, if they are unworthy of compassion or suffer from



imperfection then compassion, even if offered, is deflected, rejected, and not received, whether it comes from another or offered to one's self. Healing does not occur. The wound continues. And, if the imperfection is contemplated over and over, it becomes deeper and more permanent and part of the individual's personality. It inhibits compassion, self-worth, inner strength, healing, and growth.

To address the underlying cause an effective intervention is necessary that both identifies and addresses the cause and treats the wound that led to the holding pattern beneath the presenting problem or symptom. The psychophysical holding pattern must be released, and a new path taken.

### ***One possible remedy***

Wounds remain from dysfunctional, inadequate, or hostile parents or guardians. How does one transcend what happened in the past? That's the question. When people have low self-esteem and do not self-confirm and do not believe they deserve compassion, they cannot feel compassion for themselves. The work does not involve blaming the other nor feeling sorry for one's self. For healing and growth, self-compassion, recognition, confirmation, and transcendence must be done. Self-confirmation of one's traits, skills, abilities, talents, and achievements solidify one's sense of identity and strength. One must take action to reverse and heal past wounds allowing for reinforcement of one's identity and strengths. This action involves significant mindful (thought, feeling, body and spirit) attention.

Self-compassion allows for calming and comfort. It may even allow for motivation to take further steps to treat the wound and heal what remains from the past cause. There are three steps to overcoming obstacles to self-compassion. The first is to identify the blocks to self-love and provide some action that provides warm supportive feelings to comfort the pain. The second is to release these blocks. And the third is to

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Continued on page 76

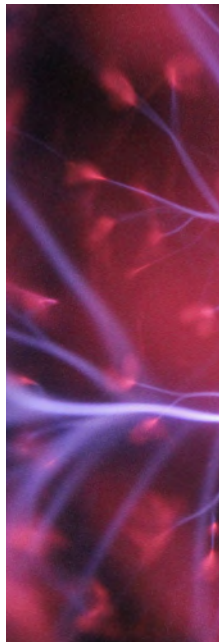
provide an alternative intervention, new skills and coping mechanisms to deal with life's threats and wounds.

There are many well-established techniques and procedures that allow for somatic comforting and relaxation, e.g. self-touch, massage, Yoga, Tai Chi, Craniosacral work, and Trager® body work. However, each has limitations when addressing self-compassion. For instance, when someone is traumatized, enraged, or depressed as often experienced in my clinical setting, mindful meditation is not always possible. Post-traumatic thoughts and feelings reemerge with somatic stress and cognitive agitation. People cannot achieve a meditative state if they are not calm, relaxed, and focused. If someone is in shock or trauma, is upset or angry, they cannot be calm and open to loving feelings. Because of childhood or life wounds that many have endured, they do not believe they are worthy of self-compassion and are unable to achieve a meditative state.

And while Thought Field Therapy (TFT) and Eye Movement Desensitization Reprocessing (EMDR) are often used to minimize or eliminate troubling psychological distress, they do not identify and may not address age old, deeper causal variables connected to the event that results in a lack of self-compassion.

In my clinical practice, I use Dr. Scott Walker's NeuroEmotional Technique (NET) (1996). This utilizes applied kinesiology—testing muscle strength as developed by Dr. George Goodheart in 1964. Dr. Walker's procedure appears to be a particularly powerful intervention for identifying the presence and origin of emotional trauma. It utilizes Goodheart's procedure to identify somatic meridian points and emotions that are connected to these meridian points. It utilizes visualization and respiration to extinguish the somato-emotional trauma.

In my office, I often hear many clients profess to have or to engage in self-compassion. However, when I apply somatic kinesiology—muscle testing—it is evident this is not true. Their arm muscles go weak; their arms actually go limp in my hands.



To demonstrate how the process works, I offer the following cases where poor parental role modeling, lack of reinforcement of preciousness and being deserving led to psychological wounding, low self-esteem, a paucity of integrity, and lack of belief in lovability. It also led to feelings of unworthiness of self-compassion. If these individuals were not doing for another, they had internalized feelings of unworthiness. They had histories of reaching out to help others but not themselves.



Photo by Hal Gatewood on Unsplash

In the following cases, I used Milton Trager, M.D.'s work to identify and release physical holding patterns, Craniosacral Therapy developed by John Upledger, D.O. to assess and release holding patterns in the pathway between the cranium and the sacrum, and Neuro-Emotional Technique (NET) to release physical-emotional holding patterns from the past, as well as from the present. Talk therapy was then used to find new ways of confronting such problematic situations. Clients were also supported to have conversations with their younger selves, not to reprimand or give advice but to offer the compassion that was never offered in the past offering statements such as: "You are precious, lovable, and deserving. And you don't have to do anything for it. You are one of God's children."

### **Case I**

Joyce is a married 64-year-old who volunteers with abused, neglected, wounded children. She believes "my childhood wounds give me drive to do for others." She is a sweetie pie; she gives to others but not herself. Her wounds come from what she describes as her "narcissistic mother". She will not call her mother, "mother," but talks about her by her first name — Rebecca. Her mother wanted a son; she had two daughters. Joyce, who is soft-spoken and non-verbal, was the first. She says, "It's safe for me to keep my thoughts in my head. I keep them inside, then I don't feel important and a threat to my mother." This minimizing behavior projects throughout her relationships.

Joyce pulls out her cell phone and shows a quote from Shahida Arabi. Joyce explains

Continued on page 78

that the quote suggests that children who are abused by parents don't blame the parents but stop loving themselves. Joyce said, "It was my truth when I read it."

Joyce also presented in her psychotherapy treatment session with left-sided neck pain. When NET was applied, her neck pain was related to internalized "anger" toward Rebecca. "Just hearing her voice hurt me," she said. Muscle testing took this wounding back to the age of one. NET extinguished the emotional holding pattern and the physical neck pain.

Post-treatment Joyce is somatically strong with the statement, "I deserve giving myself compassion." This soft-spoken, passive woman was feeling strong enough to confront her younger sister, her mother's companion, and set a boundary: "I do not want to have contact with Rebecca at family events. Rebecca is toxic." Joyce did not go to the next family event. Joyce is also strong enough to admit she was sexually molested by her uncle, her mother's brother. Joyce took on a new appearance - soft, calmer, more relaxed. She felt more comfortable expressing herself more fully in treatment, with her family and at work. She stepped into a new stage of her life development.

## **Case II**

Tom, a senior technical consultant, presented in therapy with frustration of not being able to stay focused and get his work done. Using NET with the statement, "I deserve giving myself compassion," Tom was not okay giving himself compassion. This led to feelings of being "lost." This was related to Tom at five years of age when his mother had a nervous breakdown and was hospitalized. His mother never fully recovered. Tom reports, "That was a confusing time for me because my mother was my main support. She would give me confirmation. Then she started to flip out." Tom was the middle child of five children. "My father was not there all the time. He was away at work. When he was there, he was strict and regimented." The father was publically charming

and available to give support to people at the church, but not to his wife and children. Tom had neither the support of a male role model nor did his mother have the support of a husband. Tom lacked early academic support.

There was a second issue for Tom that dated back to 3 years of age. He went to a parochial school until age 13. Then he transferred to a public school. His close friends went away. He was not accepted by the new peer groups at public school that had already formed and bonded together. This often occurs for elementary and high school students who transfer to a new school. He was an outsider. This left him feeling unaccepted and unacceptable. As a result, cognitively he felt himself losing concentration, getting off track and forgetting. Losing the support of his familiar peer group may have been an anniversary event (Kisch, 2019) of losing the familiarity of his mother at five years of age.

Tom had a loss of a meaningful sense of connection that was then emotionally interpreted as, "There must be something wrong with me. As a result, I am not deserving." This emotional distress was then connected to a cognitive distress of not being able to maintain focus.

NET extinguished both traumatic events from Tom's body, mind, and spirit. Tom now says, "I'm doing well. I feel like I have a secure warm blanket around me. My old anxiety is not prevalent. That was the way I was. This is the way I am. When I pray, there is more spirit coming from inside me." At work and at visits back home with his aging parents, Tom feels the strength and focus of an adult in command unlike his previous anxiety.

### **Case III**

Pam, a supervisor at work, is the youngest of five siblings. Her mother was violent with Pam's oldest sister. Pam braced herself for protection as a child, a trait she maintained in adulthood. She was conscious of not being self-accepting. She had low self-esteem and was unwilling to ask for something for herself. She was aware of her unwillingness to ask her husband to hear and respect her needs.

Continued on page 80

NET was used to test Pam with, "I'm okay with self-compassion." She tested negative. This was related to emotional anger; the anger was related back to herself. However, she said the anger she felt was toward her mother, but it was not safe to be angry at her mother, so she turned it back on herself. Her mother would lock her sister in the basement, strap her sister down and beat her. Pam walked partially down the basement stairs and watched her mother beating her sister. On one occasion the mother struck the sister in the head with a wooden board. When her mother turned to come up the stairs, Pam ran and hid. Later Pam would go back down into the basement and try to comfort her sister. At night Pam snuck into her sister's bedroom and the two cried together. During the day Pam tried to be supportive of her mother. She maintains feelings of shame, guilt, and embarrassment over this. Pam said, "Emotionally, there was no way I could handle what my mom was doing to my sister. To be safe came at a price."

Pam's lack of self-compassion affected her in many ways. At work Pam asked less of her workers than their job commanded. In staff meetings she did not speak up to express what she believed others should do. She procrastinated preparing for meetings when her boss came to town.

After NET treatment, Pam felt more confident expressing her feelings and needs to her husband. She felt more competent at work. She reported that in the past, she "put a costume on to go to work." She now believes, "I don't need that facade. I'm feeling comfortable in my own skin. I feel on the top of my game." There is evidence of self-compassion. "I'm giving myself credit for small moves. I don't procrastinate preparing for my boss. At staff meetings, I ask more from others. I am making good decisions. Work is exploding with opportunities."

With self-recognition and appreciation there is self-esteem. Pam is flexible in her body — no longer braced. She perceives herself as



worthy. She signed up for exercise classes. Emotionally and physically she looks solid and self-assured. She repeats to herself, "Don't be bitter, be better."

## **Conclusion**

In each case, poor parental role modeling, lack of reinforcement of preciousness and being deserving led to low self-esteem, a paucity of integrity and a belief in being unlovable. It also led to feelings of being unworthy of self-compassion. If they were not helping another person, they had inner feelings of emptiness and feeling as if they lacked value as a person. While these individuals had histories of reaching out to help others, they were lacking in doing the same for themselves.

What we know is that early life wounding and trauma, if not addressed, can leave emotional scars for a lifetime. Most of the time these events are neither consciously recognized nor addressed. But they can be. Not only can these symptoms be minimized or eliminated, in each of these cases the personality of these individuals was strengthened to actualize their true identities and potentials. To embody self-compassion is not merely to heal and strengthen one's self, it incorporates the mindful healing potential to extend to others.

*To embody self-compassion is not merely to heal and strengthen one's self, it incorporates the mindful healing potential to extend to others.*

Merely providing cognitive words of sorrow or advice will not support healing one's life's wounds. Powerful parental love, understanding, compassion, appreciation, and confirmation that was never provided is still needed, but from someone capable of giving it or from one's self. Passive, emotionally empty words, even if saying the word love, will not allow for this change. Genuine love later in life needs to be generated from the self

Continued on page 82

and be re-directed back to the self. One needs to take deep soft breaths, open to quiet, touch one's self gently, and be in touch with a spirit of caring and concern. Somatic self-love and compassion expressed through affect, along with touch with kindness, caring, support, and spirit can turn one's life around. Following the release of past emotional trauma, affective compassion reinforces the release of the physical/emotional brace and holding of the wound. This deeper work is necessary to release the roots of the presenting problem. Then the emotional-physical-spiritual wave of self-compassion can overcome obstacles and promote healing and profound recovery.

When there are physical holding patterns locking in past wounds and traumas, merely talking or meditating does not release these internalized somato-emotional holding patterns. These wounds take physical as well as emotional releasing. As individuals bring self-compassion to themselves, they gain a greater sense of self-esteem, as well as personal fullness. From these core feelings and strengths, they can take actions in their lives that they have never been able to take before. It takes strength to get in touch with one's underlying spirit; we derive strength from this spirit.

In turn, this strength provides the integrity and courage to deal with issues from the past and new issues and problems that emerge in new stages of life and development.



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**Website: [www.SomaticPsychotherapyToday.com](http://www.SomaticPsychotherapyToday.com)**

**Publication:  
Volumn 9, Number 3, Winter 2019**

**EDITOR  
Nancy Eichhorn, Ph.D.**

**Managing Partner  
Linda Heck**

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