

Trager bodywork as a work of ART

by Carol Sakai, Ph. D.

At Kripalu yoga center I saw an announcement for a Trager demonstration and felt it was a Jungian "synchronicity" (*meaningful coincidence*). A year before, I had purchased a book on Trager mentastics. I didn't know "why" except there was something captivating about the photographs of an elderly man in meditative dance with an aura that I could somehow "sense". I walked into the demonstration not quite knowing what to expect.

The instructor, Ken Wieder led us in an experience of "being" a seaweed in the ocean. First the currents were caressing, the movements soft and gentle like a mother rocking a cradle. Then as we went deeper into the experience we soon became engulfed in rip tides as we explored larger and larger motions with our whole body. After this experience, the coldness in my hands and fingers were gone, and my body was bathed in warmth.

Ken then did a demonstration on a woman from the audience. He started to work on her shoulder with small circular movements. Gradually, the arcs became larger and larger until they became wonderful spirals of dance. He worked on her legs, with an interplay between her movement and his instinctive "catching" of her leg in midair leading her into another round of circular dance. As the motions got larger and larger, there were "oh's and ah's" and amazed comments from the audience. One woman said, "oh Lorna is a dancer, that's why she's so flexible."

Next Ken had Lorna turn on her stomach and worked on her left arm and shoulder. Within a couple seconds of working on her arm, he said, "you've had an injury here". Lorna nodded yes, someone in the crowd asked, "how'd you know?" and Ken replied, "I felt it". I could sense that Ken was in a deep intuitive state as he worked slowly on her arm. He moved carefully, gradually

exploring the motion and increasing the speed, until he said, "there that's better".

As Ken worked on Lorna's shoulder, I was engulfed in fear. The large movements scared me. I asked Ken, "does it hurt Lorna?". He told me to I'd have to ask her, and I did after the demonstration. Lorna told me that several years ago, she had injured herself in a dance rehearsal. Her shoulder bothered her from time to and time, and she had deliberately come to Ken's demonstration early, because she wanted to be worked on. After the demonstration with Ken, she said her shoulder felt completely OK and now there was no tightness or tension.

For me, this was an awesome statement. What I had seen in his demonstration made me both hopeful and scared. Could Ken Wieder "fix" my left shoulder? I had tried many forms of bodywork (Rolfing, neuromuscular therapy, Feldenkrais, Alexander) in an attempt to release the physical/emotional blocks which hindered my creativity. I had been severely abused as a child and, at an early age, my mother bound my left arm/shoulder because she believed that left-handedness with "bad". Since my left arm/shoulder had been bound with surgical tape for several days, I had rotator cuff injury to the tissue. I had tried physical therapy, and various holistic practices to deal with memories of abuse which bubbled up when I did my art.

I set up an appointment with Ken and felt both excitement and trepidation. My body was highly charged from doing daily yoga at Kripalu, and having a "hot" yoga session just the day before. I told Ken about my arm, he decided to start on my leg and had me lie on my stomach. He lifted my leg. I felt afraid but tried to stay in the feeling. All of a sudden I was a little girl again, my mother was swinging my body and I felt the terror as she bashed me against the wall. I start to sob hysterically. Ken released my leg, allowing the tears to flow, and gently, ever so gently putting his hand on my back. The sobs continue with the memories flooding in. I could feel the warmth of his hand on my back. I could feel him there and felt comforted.

The tears subsided and he worked carefully on the other leg. This time, I was able to stay in the feeling. He worked gently on the shoulders, very carefully working on the left shoulder with small movements. He was able to get more rocking motions with the right shoulder and I could see the image of a horse with a long beautiful neck. Suddenly, I realized that the horse's neck could be like my neck, long and graceful, connected to the deepest reaches of my body.

He asked me to turn on my back, and then worked on my neck. At first, I saw the image of a frog whose neck was stuck in his body. As Ken continued working on my neck, the image of a frog became wavy in the water and my head became a water lily in a pond. I could feel that my roots were deep in the water. For the first time, I could really FEEL that my head was connected to my sacrum. As the gentle circular rocking continued, I felt my chest move, and all of a sudden my chest became a cadaver. I saw death, and heard laughter. I started to cry, and saw my x-husband in medical school. I could hear his voice while he laughed at a woman cadaver. He is ridiculing the body in front of us and laughing at how fat she was. My heart was filled with shock at his insensitivity, but I said nothing. I realized now that the feelings in my chest had been stuffed down for many years. The rocking released the words, the memories flooded back and now I was finally able to cry. I allow the tears to fall, and felt Ken's gentle hand on my chest. I was comforted.

Then he worked on my right arm/shoulder and I enjoyed the rocking. On the left side, he stopped for a moment, and decided to take another course. In a wonderfully soft voice, he says, "Carol, I want you to push against me, wherever my hand goes, push against me." We started gently. I felt his hand and pushed the weight of his hand against mine, pushing, searching and pushing again. This movement reminded me of "push-hands" in Tai Chi and as we continued to do this, it started to be fun. I saw a little boy's face before me. He has a grin on his face and his little jaw was jutting out. He said, "no, no" and his eyes were sparkling.

Only many months later would I finally realize what this experience meant to me. In my childhood, I was never allowed to say, "no". I had to do what I was told or get beaten up. I was never, never allowed to disagree with authority. As my healing and integration progressed, I gradually recognized my own inner "voice" and came to realize that it was alright to say, "no" . . . that sometimes I needed to stand up and say "NO" from the deepest part of my being. I gradually learned to trust my feelings and gained courage to speak from my heart.

Ken Wieder is an exceptionally intuitive therapist. Often, he would "know" an area was blocked before I said anything. For me, the knowledge of my body would come through images. Once, I remember feeling my shoulder as a piece of cardboard, dry and stiff. As Ken worked on it, the cardboard disappeared, and then I felt only a slight pin, a slight area of tightness. With a few more rocking motions, Ken said, "there it's gone", and so it was.

I continued my Trager sessions for over a period of a year. I gradually felt more and more in touch with my body and realized that the feeling of "fear" would occur much before there was any real discomfort. I began to realize that "fear" was an automatic defense mechanism, and the reality of my body was often quite different than fear. And always, Ken's was there with his soft gentle voice and the hands of comfort when I needed it.

In the past, I have experienced numerous holistic therapies and knew that no matter how powerful the technique, the technique is only a tool, the technique was not what "heals". Healing occurs in relationship of client to therapist. For me, healing was a gradual unfolding, a letting go of the fear, a releasing of the memories of pain. Healing was possible for me, because of Ken's presence. He created a safe place, a sanctuary in which I could receive teachings from his hands and emotional support and comfort for my pain.

The experience of Trager was an opening, a window, a taste of what freedom could be. It

gave me a feeling of aliveness . . . a moment in time, when I could just BE whoever, or whatever I was. I was allowed unconditionally to be in my feelings and had no need to hold anything back. In those moments I was spontaneous, creative, and "in love" with the present moment. I am grateful for this experience, for Ken as a therapist, and most of all to the Great Spirit which allowed me to be at the right time, the right place, "synchronous" with a demonstration which would become a major transformational experience . . . an experience of Trager in the hands of a master . . . an experience of bodywork as a work of art.

Carol N. Sakai has a Ph. D. in Medical Physiology and works part time for the U. S. Food and Drug Administrations. She is also an artist, sculptor, writer, composer and her goal is to combine both right and left side of the brain talents to support herself full time as an artist.