



Conversation Between Matthew and Randall

Matthew: I'd like to express my appreciation to you for recording this conversation. It means a lot to me to have this opportunity to share with a wider audience what you and I are doing in terms of collaborative relating as so fundamental to good therapy.

Randall: I appreciate the opportunity as well because the work that we've been doing together, for almost two years, has been massive in terms of its impact for me and to be able to talk about it is also a valuable experience. Maybe the thankfulness is part of the collaboration.

Matthew: I'm grateful to have you as a client who I greatly respect in terms of all the courageous healing in relation to a history of severe sexual abuse, you have done. There is so much I am learning in terms of being fully present with you in your healing process. I know there is much we are learning together.

Randall: Yes, absolutely! I originally started to see you because I had been doing a certain amount of somatic healing with an acupuncturist that in terms of bilateral body stimulation and bilateral brain stimulation had begun to give me a sense of myself. That led me to wonder out loud about the cognitive process and the impact of my own abuse history on my body. The foundation for that is that I have abandoned some time ago the notion that the mind and body are separate. Much of my memory content from my abuse history was body memories. So for me there's a very clear awareness emerging of what I wasn't aware of before—how much I had to disassociate from my body. This makes me wonder about the original thinking about the separation between mind and body and that maybe it's a rationalization for disassociation.

I was severely sexually abused as a child. It was violent and there's no such thing as gentle abuse. There was abuse from both genders and as I began to reflect on it I began to be aware that I must have lived my childhood in a state of hyper-vigilance. The abuse would occur on a random basis. There were times that it was very intense and times that it was not, but I could never tell what was going to happen next. My suspicion is that I developed severe hyper-vigilance.

I did a bit of work with my wife's rehab massage therapist and she commented on the tightness in my body. My trainer had told me the same thing. And so I began to draw the conclusion that my hyper-vigilance had become habituated. I wanted to find out if there was something I could do about that and I spoke with my acupuncturist and he came up with a list of recommendations and I said I wanted someone who is wise. I want someone who knows what he's doing and someone I can trust. That's what led me to your work and at the end of the first session you directed me to your website. I remember reading your material and there were two paragraphs that I might have written myself about hyper-vigilance and hypertension and the process of myo-fascial release.

So that's the basis on which I started. I didn't understand how fully collaborative the process would be. I had an understanding that it was likely this process would become inextricably woven and appropriately so with broadening the base of my healing process and I continue to work with a very skilled trauma therapist whose using EMDR. The process with you is radically different because of the innate nature of touch and because of the nature of the skill of your touch. I remember in the first session not being exactly sure what you had done but knowing that my body felt differently and that's become a more discerning process because I've grown through working with you.

At the end of each session you ask me to "take my space" while walking around the room and I do. Also, I walk to work so I have this laboratory where I move all parts of my body while walking a mile. I've become very observant about it and self-aware so there's this excitement after each one of our sessions knowing I'm going to walk to work the following morning and have different experiences. There's been



some element of movement and an element of self-awareness that has emerged from the work with you the night before. For me the amazing part of it is that the work is accumulative. I didn't necessarily expect it would be. I knew there would be a sequential element to it. But I didn't expect it to be accumulative. The work we've done builds on itself and that's made where we are much richer than where we started.

Some thoughts about process from my point of view are, there were certainly some moments of epiphany. I remember you were doing work on my thighs and I remember feeling muscle sensations all the way up through my lower back up to my shoulders and I commented on that and your response was that I was no longer disassociating in my body. So that was a statement that I had been and I laughed and I was thinking about that for the longest time and what it meant that the protective disassociation that I had been engaged in as a child to survive from the ongoing abuse that I was raised in also is reflected in being disassociated from my body and that my body parts were disassociated from each other. This was not a thought that occurred to me until I began to see that it was linked. That was very exciting for me. It was very powerful. I think there's no doubt that the process with you has supported expanding my base for memory recall and processing them, as a sexual abuse survivor.

There are two categories of survivors. Those who have cognitive memory but tend to shear off the emotions and the people who tend to have developed the ability to disassociate from the entire package and I fall into the latter. So in my adult life memory recall becomes safe as various parts of me bring all those memories back up as part of the process. I was curious how that would work with you and your comment about keeping my eyes open during the session allows me to stay present so I stay in the adult and the memories can return freely and safely. I have some awareness that even though the memories are as intense as they are I can stay in the current moment. There have been some epiphanies with that as well.

I discovered I had memories around realizing I had been orally abused when you were doing some work on my upper pallet and your response was quite powerful in how you supported me by affirming me in where I was until I was ready to take a next step and do intense emotional work. It's become a safe place for me as a survivor of childhood sexual abuse and that's not a casual term. A safe place is a powerful description for me that means I can trust you to work with me in a way that allows me to reclaim my body and movement, and relaxation and rhythm. It's an amazing process,

I remember most recently when I was processing a very tough memory of horrific abuse and you asked me what I wanted, including what the seven-year old part of me wanted in the moment, and I said that I wanted to be safe. I wanted to know it wasn't my fault and I wanted to know that I had done as much as I could in the moment of abuse to keep myself whole. Your response was one of understanding and compassion and that even though you didn't know how that would play out in the work we did that evening, you were confident I would come to a place of knowing I had.

I became aware that a posture we were working with was reminiscent of the posture that I had been in when I was abused and I thought about that and I reminded myself that I was an adult and that it was safe and managed to find the place where I could be both fully authentic to that seven year old wounded part of me and to the adult.

At the end of that session you asked me to walk as you always do and I commented on feeling lopsided and you very patiently said that actually I was walking balanced possibly for the first time. With that recognition I began to understand that what had happened during the session was being able to be fully present as an adult and fully honoring of that deeply wounded collection of seven-year old parts.

I further realized that the adult allowed me to gain perspective on what had happened physically when I was seven and that my unbalanced gait had probably habituated to that imbalanced posture. So that was a profound session for me. It spoke to what we could do and what safety I could hold close to myself for those wounded parts of me. I experienced truly letting go of a habituated way of walking with a slight favoring of one side and releasing the affect of the abuse while realizing I'll never be able to change



what happened. The abuse is locked in my memory but I can change the effects. This was a dramatic way of very joyfully discarding one of the effects and replacing it with a different way of walking.

Matthew: It's profound that act of reorientation you just described because your engaging with such a creative place in the brain and in the mind to get to that place of possibility for change without freaking out, Our self-protective defenses are there for a reason. That's how we survived and so to me that's where the crucial role of collaborative partnering comes in to create that safety and that understanding to where that reorientation can take place. It is crucial to understand that the context for this re-orientation process to unfold is one of abiding together in a profound silence that allows space for the non-verbal nature of self-healing.

Randall: Yes.

Matthew: I'm so appreciative of your ability to articulate your awareness of your body process like you do.

Randall: (laughter) Well I live in three dimensions because I'm an architect and an Urban Planner. So it may be that I have a more, to use your word, kinesthetic awareness than some others because I tend to see my own actions three dimensionally so I see movement as accessing three dimensions including the kinesthetic.

Matthew: And the way I would frame it as I get to know you is that the visualizing ability you have is what allowed you to survive as well as you did. It's also what contributes to your excellence, professionally. What our work is adding to the visual ability you bring to healing from your past wounding, is connecting you to your kinesthetic awareness.

Randall: Yes, absolutely!

Matthew: The excitement you feel when I'm working with you and your body is not the same as dissociation. Touch can be confusing and terrifying when we're not in our body. Embodiment is a process of learning to comfortably recognize and appreciate the presence of sensation while being touched safely and respectfully.

Randall: Living in my body as a unitary personality wasn't safe so fragmenting and dissociating was essential to my survival. There are a couple of aspects that you're speaking to that remind me of my work with my trauma therapist. It's very focused on where the trauma is and the affect. That was all new language to me and part of what she did that seemed absolutely bizarre to me was when I would articulate the feeling, she would ask, "Where do you feel it in your body?" And I would think, "What the hell is that all about?" It hadn't occurred to me that my emotion had a physiological presence and that I could have a physiological awareness. I remember articulating a certain sense of feeling sad and she allowed a lot of space for me to connect my intellectual understanding to my sadness and eventually to feeling sad in my body. Part of me was skeptical because I was paying two dollars a minute to figure out what sadness is. Part of me was going through this amazing discovery process that my mind, emotions, and body are connected. That established a foundation with my trauma therapist and that's why the work with you has such a magnificent dimension to it.

Matthew: I can see that the work you point to with your trauma therapist has paved the way for the impact of our work together.

Randall: Yes. Absolutely. And I have thought about it a lot. I wondered about the obvious aspects of another person touching me that physically and intimately and to trust it and you. It's developing that trust with my trauma therapist, my acupuncturist, and you that's so reparative. It's confirmation as an adult that I do have the capacity to make reparative choices, a knowledge that is priceless. It means that I know how to find a safe person with whom to do profound work. Differentiation from the involuntary events in my childhood and making these choices in my adult life becomes a very powerful resonance



with someone who is both powerful and kind. It shows me that I can make voluntary choices as an adult that were not available to me as a child. These choices are mine now.

Matthew and Randall: (Laughing together in enjoyment of Eric's liberating truth)

Matthew: This is such a wonderful conversation. I'm so enjoying it. (both laughing again) What we just started talking about of how you learn to reorient to touch addresses the nitty-gritty of dealing with dissociation as it's actually occurring. We're so right on with what was said earlier about needing lots of silent time for your neuromuscular system to have room to breath.

As I'm touching you I pay attention to your breathing, restricted or otherwise, and encourage you to find a natural breathing rhythm. I know this will facilitate your embodiment. The pace with which I move my hands on your tissue is attuned to several natural rhythms in your body. This conveys respect and safety and builds trust. Most importantly, it connects you kinesthetically so that this physiological re-orientation to touch can take place.

Randall: It's a fine balance because I want you to push me as far as you can. There's also a desire certainly on my part to explore outside the envelope I previously lived in...

Matthew: Productively.

Randall: Yes. Productively. My trauma therapist repeats the phrase, "making haste slowly".

Matthew: (Both laughing) I love it.

Randall: Part of what we're talking about reminds me of a session in which you had been doing work on my pelvic girdle and were beginning to work on my rib cage. You asked me very quietly what was going on below my waist with my legs. I couldn't feel anything so I couldn't answer your question. I realized from previous discussions that I was dissociated from the waste down. For me dissociation was always an act based on an automatic response of fight or flight. As a child I always fled in my mind and body. In the space that you created, in the next several moments I found that I was in a safe place for me. I'm not sure what activated me at that moment... Maybe it was the thought, let's see if I can come back in my body.

First of all it was a surprise to me that I wasn't out of my entire body, but that I was only dissociated from a part. That was news to me that caused me to reflect on some of my abuse history over the subsequent weeks and months. But what was incredibly useful to me was that very quietly I would guess within five minutes I could feel myself return so that I was fully present in my body. It reflects on what you were just talking about in terms of creating time and space for those new connections to be made. In fact, you didn't prompt me. You didn't ask me to do something. You didn't do anything that might have interrupted my process. And then it was my role to take that observation and go some place with it. Where I went with it for me was fascinating and enormously informative. Having that space and freedom to explore in silence, my internal landscape, brought me present in my body.

Matthew: You know there's many different levels of self-awareness skills that people bring. The self-awareness you bring is such that I find I don't need to do much talking to prompt you while we're doing bodywork. I don't need to micro-coach you because you already have the tracking skills necessary to become more embodied. When I'm touching you it's to give you an external framework for you to practice your tracking skills as part of holding on to yourself. What I'm doing on my end is tracking me and tracking you, as I'm touching you. So here again is another working definition of collaborative partnering.

Randall: Yes.



Matthew: Here we are being two trackers tracking in all dimensions possible for the purpose of facilitating your embodiment.

Randall: (Deeply sighing)

Matthew: It's practically fail safe...(laughter by both)...we've set it up to be successful—two people collaborating.

Randall: It is a shared commitment. The collaborative nature of it is interesting because the transaction doesn't necessarily automatically compose itself that way and yet that's what it is.

Matthew: It's imbedded in the context.

Randall: Yes, that's right. That's what it is. It's imbedded in the context. You're right.

Matthew: So it's interesting to be actually giving voice this shared awareness we have because that's not something we do when were working. Were just in it.

Randall: Were doing work...(Belly laughter)...and were focusing on this, by now, very practiced process. I remember when I first saw you. It took ninety minutes of talking to get to a half an hour of bodywork. That verbal anchoring was and still is important for me. I recognize that it's important to co-create the gestalt in which the bodywork can occur, and that's been profound. Like the session where you asked me, "What does the seven-year old part of me need now?" It created just a profound basis for that session.

Matthew: That's why I'm not that comfortable with calling what I do bodywork. Body education, body psychotherapy, or body therapy are more accurate terms. Bodywork, as the public generally understands it, covers a very wide swath. Usually, it's thought of as a form of massage therapy that doesn't include psychotherapy. This is why I do two-hour sessions. I find that bodywork in the context of psychotherapy needs a longer block of time than verbal therapy alone. This gives us the time and space necessary to feel into words for their energetic meaning to prepare the groundwork for moving to table work by finding out what there is in your conscious or unconscious mind that's ready to take the next step in the healing process. Then, when you lie down on the table whether it's an hour or an hour and a half into the two-hour session it's in an informed and engaged way. Often, we can go right to that deep non-verbal level as soon as I start touching you.

Randall: Then we're both informed because we're honed in on what's present for me. That's also very interesting for me. Having learned to dissociate and being in a process of learning how not to dissociate has been somewhat compartmentalized as a cognitive exercise. I've begun now to talk more freely about the work I do with my trauma therapist, my acupuncturist, the intense work I do with a close group of friends with whom I periodically do psychodrama, and the work I do with you. Before I had you all, including the work I do with my personal trainer, in separate boxes. I thought it was my job to leap from box to box. What I'm beginning to feel is that it's more innately comfortable and productive for me to allow myself to flow from process to process. I'm deriving a richer therapeutic process from the integration of all these elements. That makes the whole context of my healing journey much richer, much deeper, and much broader.

Frankly, the work that I've done with you has resulted in a difference when I'm sitting in my trauma therapist's office. When she asks what I'm feeling I can genuinely feel more deeply and articulate what I'm feeling. It directly derives from the processes I've been in with you. So the spill over is there. The challenge for me has been to embrace this not as a challenge, but as a grace. But coming from the world of my childhood where living in the world of boxes and boxing things up physiologically and emotionally, was critical to my survival. That's a learned response that I'm unlearning and replacing with a more fluid way of being.



Matthew: Let me ask you a question.

Randall: Sure.

Matthew: What's your experience of your growing capacity to experience pleasure in your body as an integrating force?

Randall: (Gleeful laughter)... My wife and I have a good friend who lives in Boston whose really into improvisational dance and he invited us to join him one evening. It's something I had never seen before. It's a free form that's very fluid and organic, and it's probably half a generation younger than me. But we went! We were adopted as the nice older couple in the corner. My wife has some physical limitations, so we danced only the slow dances together. But on my own I found myself very moved by some of the rhythms of the African Music. I found a balance between my inhibitions about my being physically active in the setting and my getting reactivated when I remembered an abuse moment from my childhood. I was in my body and enjoying myself for about twenty or thirty percent of the time that I was moving with the beat of the music. When I sat down next to my wife I said, "I sure wish Matthew were here because he'd be smiling (said with laughter) and admiring the work we've done.

I have, absolutely, sheer pleasure in walking to work in the morning. I have a beautiful walk through Philadelphia that I take as I tune into my body. I'm beginning to re-orient to a certain kind of physical playfulness. I've been reading a book on the importance of play in adult life and the abandonment of play in the American culture. It's very interesting because I've picked it up at the right time in my life because I can be physically playful now in a way that doesn't feel like I'm being a threat to other people or myself. It just feels like a joyful act. It's very physical. I can shoot a few hoops of basketball now with my friend in Boston, who has his own complex abuse history. I can go boating and swimming. I can do these activities and they are not a chore. They are pleasurable now that I'm being in my body.

Matthew: (42:23) So, I would imagine that in the joyfulness, freedom, and all that you're experiencing your childhood parts are appreciating being conscious beneficiaries.

Randall: This is true in a way, yes.

Matthew: Are your parts mostly integrated into the whole of you now or are there times when you and your parts find yourselves conversing?

Randall: (43:06) It's both, leading to the latter. Let me try to explain. Let's talk about that a little bit. The process of dissociating means that I have a number of parts that essentially froze in time and some of them played a very limited role; they contain a memory chip or two. Some of them have very active roles and play a bigger part. My choice as an adult is to work at understanding that they are safe. The abuse is behind us. We can't make the abuse go away. It's part of our history. But I can address the effects. What's happening with those child parts is that I can and do become actively playful with them. Over the long run those parts that began playing with the adult me have become integrated into my adult life. I want to be very careful about this because it sounds very harsh but it's a fact I think—a pragmatic recognition of reality—I can never reclaim the innocence of that child that I lost in my childhood. My childhood is behind me. I'm 58-years old. What I can do is claim a legitimate playfulness in my adult life. I can make certain connections. I played with blocks as a kid. I'm an architect as an adult. Is there a connection? I guess there is. I'm still playing with blocks. When I can take this sense of playfulness into my adult being and recognize it for what it is, I smile and enjoy it.

It's a process of recognizing what you no longer have and working with what you do have to maximize it. I don't have a happy childhood. I'm never going to have that. What I can do is nurture those frozen parts as we deal with the traumatic memories and process the intense feelings with my trauma therapist and with you. And then those child parts feel free to begin to trust the adult me and to blend with me and then contribute their attributes and their strengths to who I am as an adult. So it's not that I suddenly will go off and be playful with my seven-year old part. Rather, it's more that the seven-year old in me becomes



a conscious part of me in a way that allows me to enjoy being playful as an adult. I don't know whether that makes sense.

Matthew: (46:13) Yes, you make total sense. It also makes sense in terms of me coming to know you and myself in terms of my own abuse history.

Randall: (Laughter with recognition of what we share in common)

Matthew: What I can say for myself is that I believe that there is a way in which we reclaim our innocence. It's a more worldly kind of innocence. There doesn't have to be a contradiction between acquiring worldly knowledge and being connected to our innocence. The adult form of innocence rests in being able to appreciate beauty, wisdom, holism, and each other's humanity. Being open to perceive the goodness in others, and ourselves in spite of, or maybe even, because of having been victimized by our loved ones calls upon our courage, wisdom, and compassion. Reclaiming our innocence is the ground upon which walk in learning to live life on life's terms. The role of learning and healing from abuse or any other form of disenfranchisement is that it's part of the hero's journey. Our mythology is filled with countless stories of heroes and heroines overcoming tremendous obstacles that teach and inspire. We're all heroes, even the most humble among us. The wound we carry sits side-by-side with that which is divine in us. As we come to know both, through our growing connection with our inner process, there is the presence of happiness, peace, and compassion. It's all wrapped up together.

Randall: Yes, I would go back into what you said and for me reframe it. I would say I'm not reclaiming my innocence, but I'm reclaiming the use of it. I've come to believe that I never lost my innocence. There are other abuse survivors who would disagree with me. I think my innocence had to go into hiding.

Matthew: I agree with you. That's a very crucial point.

Randall: Yes, as an adult I can now find that essence within me. It's safe in my adult life to enjoy it and let it be the platform for my adult life.

Matthew: That's a crucial point you make. Our innocence goes into hiding. We don't lose it. When I'm working with people for whom that clarity is not yet present I try to offer that perspective to them with the understanding that to the extent that we say that we've lost our innocence we are identifying in a convoluted way with the abuser. Saying that we've lost our innocence is akin to saying that we believe in original sin.

Randall: Yes.

Matthew: Then we're in the victim place rather than in a place of healing.

Randall: I never wanted to give the perpetrators in my life that much power.

Matthew: Amen, amen.

Randall: Laughter. Not in my adult life.

Matthew: Shall we take a little break?

Randall: (51:00) Okay. Well, during our brief break we were talking about embodiment and I was talking about my experience as of late. There were times in my adult life when I would be walking down the street and I could tell people were aware of me. I'm 6 ft 2 and hard to miss. That's not an uncommon experience for someone whose taller than average. At the same time I must have felt as if I were invisible. It was frustrating when I wanted to get somebody's attention in a public setting. I've begun realizing in the last six months or so that those times when I feel invisible have diminished.



I think it's because I'm present in my body as a matter of habit, not a matter of an accidental moment or only when I'm in extreme comfort. It's become easy for me to be in my body so it's easy for people to see me in my body. I think the impact of our process on my body is stronger than the empowerment I've gotten from a more word-oriented process. Embodiment, as a way of being fully invested in my physicality, really changes the way I am in my professional setting, with my wife and friends, and when I'm by myself sitting in a hot tub enjoying the sensation of the water. I'm not relating to my body as if I'm only involved in a more outward form of therapy, like because my back hurts, but enjoying this process because it feels so good to connect with me. It's not an abstract process. It's not intellectualized anymore. It's more intuitive.

One of the things I'd be curious about, since I've spoken to some of my moments of profound understanding and awareness, is your experience of working with me as a client. What were some moments for you and what's it been like for you?

Matthew: Well...(thoughtful silence)...understandably, there have been so many moments for me, given the depth of the work we've been doing together that are incredibly meaningful and exquisitely poignant. There were numerous moments when I felt uncomfortable on your behalf, given my desire to be truly nurturing through my touch, and wanting to be equal to the task. This isn't because I doubt my abilities. I think it's more about being empathic and fully present. It's extremely satisfying and fulfilling when I know I'm making a difference in someone's life. So, feeling connected to your process of coming alive in your body is very exhilarating for me.

As you shared more and more of your abuse history with me it matched up with how I was experiencing you in relationship to your body when we started. In terms of your invisibility that you were speaking to before, without mincing words, when you came to me, as far as being in your body, you were pale and washed-out. Understandably, given your abuse history, there were still vestiges of a quality of mystification surrounding you. I couldn't readily feel you being in your body and connected to your being. I could feel that you were, although not massively, still dissociated or muted. The sense I got was that the habit of being in hiding was still operating in you. I readily acknowledge that some of what I'm attributing to your abuse history could have had just as much to do with our relationship and the time it takes to build trust with a new person.

However, to your great credit and the life-changing work you had been doing with your trauma therapist and acupuncturist, you were definitely present on an intellectual level in your psychological understanding of yourself and your healing process. Even though on the level of mind-body consciousness you were still relatively disconnected and not completely integrated, I could feel myself connecting to the faint glimmer, that kept getting brighter as we worked together, of a "you" that deeply longed for a conscious, life affirming connection with his body.

Being on my side of our collaboration has been deeply meaningful, educational, and personally healing. I can feel similar vulnerabilities in me, in the service of empathic connecting, when I sense your vulnerabilities emerging whether you give voice to them or not at any given moment. Step-by-step through the combination of touch, body awareness coaching, and deepening conversation in the context of our healing partnership as you've connected to all those micro-moments of self-healing. I have had the honor and privilege to be a participant.

I just spoke about how I experienced you in terms of what I perceived as you being to some degree dissociated. As a therapist I am obligated to become conscious of my own dissociation relative to yours. That's why I constantly emphasize the importance of being aware of the healing partnership as providing context. Living my commitment to self-awareness promotes your self-awareness and visa-versa. So, even though when we're in the work, the focus is primarily on you and increasing your self-awareness, as it should be, my responsibility, professionally and personally, is to keep pace with you by being diligent with my own self-awareness process—two human beings in this together.



What I've noticed throughout is that you have been diligent in choosing to go with your growing capacity to self-regulate your affect so that you can feel your body. You've been crystal clear about why you came to me and what kind of healing experience you've wanted and needed. You have been equal to the task.

E - (Pleasurable laughter...)

M - You're a tall thin man, whose structure is filling out, becoming more robust and even plump. The pinched and spare you are gone. Increasingly, you have an awareness of your body process as something that you can track from moment-to-moment. With that tracking there is an ownership of your process. Now there's a vitality and expressiveness. You're a very articulate person; a quality I much admire. Now you have a warmer tone when you speak. You're even more enjoyable to be with. It wasn't that you weren't before...(pause). Before...(pause)...you were a wounded puppy.

Randall: (Belly laugh...) it's fascinating to hear and I sense the accuracy of what you're saying. It resonates...

Matthew: You know that at the same time that this transformation of yours is profound, only one of many on the healing journey, there's also an ordinariness with it all, in the sense that this is how it should be.

Randall: Yes, yes, that's very true.

Matthew: So we just continue to be with what's next.

Randall: Right.

Matthew: And so be it.

Randall: Absolutely. I've come to value just doing what comes next. It's part of an intuitive knowing I've come to respect.