

Healing mind, body, heart and soul



<http://www.thehealingbridge.org>

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This personal account of a true life story is offered as support and inspiration for your own healing journey. It is not presented as a definitive method of healing, or seen as encouragement to pursue a particular path

The first time that I was aware that I was in a process of inner healing was in May of 1972 when I was 20 years old. I had been in and out of the Army Hospital several times for suicide ideations, self-destructive behaviors and was once more in the hospital. At this point I had reached a point of barely being able to meet my basic needs. I was not eating, talking or interacting with people. I found myself with my fingers in the wire mesh that was protecting the window, crying and asking God for some help.

About nine months prior to that, I had been sexually and physically assaulted and did not reach out for help at that time. What I did was to start getting back into a very addictive use of mood altering substances. I had been relatively clean for 5 or 6 months prior to that and as my substance use increased, so did other risky behaviors. I had been engaged at the time and that was not working out that well. And I was involved in illegal behaviors around drugs and guns. I became depressed and suicidal and reached out to the appropriate resources in the Army. But I was perceived as simply wanting a discharge from the service. At that time those resources were primarily focused on dealing with heroin-addicted veterans and I received a minimal amount of attention. I knew that something was wrong but was not clear what that was.

JH: Did you admit yourself to the hospital?

RH: Yes. Three times.

JH: You're twenty years old, you're in a hospital, your fingers are in the mesh, you're crying out to God for help and at that point you knew on some level that this was about healing?

RH: Yes. It was about healing. I knew that I was not functioning in the world. When I prayed and I felt something shift inside, and then asked my family for help my circumstances seemed to change somewhat. I was discharged from the hospital and from the Army. And I knew that something was still unsettled inside and looked to a twelve-step program for some help but was in denial of my own alcoholism and drug addiction. I had distortions around emotions that were related to my addiction and the traumas that I had experienced in my adult and childhood experiences but again, didn't know it.

JH: So you were aware of it. It was rather vague though, but did you have some kind of understanding about what healing was?

RH: I knew the intensity of my pain. Once again I found myself once again in a hospital setting, this time a Veteran's Hospital. When I participated in a group therapy process I described my situation as a "soul sickness". That lit up the facilitators of the group. The Veterans Hospital that I was in at that time had an approach to healing through medications but that approach did not seem to help me. I also had some compliance around the issue of my own alcoholism/drug addiction and reached out to a [twelve-step program](#) again. This time it was for the alcohol and drug problem but it was probably another two years before I had any real success with the twelve-steps.

JH: You could name soul sickness. Were there specific issues within it that you thought you were faced with?

RH: There were all sorts of life issues: relationship issues, authority issues, job related issues. Identifying that there was some sort of "soul sickness" gave me a frame of reference that maybe something could be done about it. But I didn't have any awareness of resources or skills that would specifically make that happen at that time.

JH: You had awareness of problems but you had a sense that they could be surmounted in some ways?

RH: Yes. Actually had been watching my parents' recovery process in a twelve-step program. I saw them change their life dramatically from totally non-functioning to more responsible citizens. The trouble that I was experiencing at that time was that I was constantly teaching my health care providers in the Veteran's Administration about alcoholism. I did not have a clue that I also had Post Trauma Stress Disorder from the assault in the Army or from my childhood experiences with physical, emotional abuse, and incest. Most of my therapeutic time was spent in attempting to educate people about alcoholism and having grown up in an alcoholic family.

JH: So a big piece of the obstacles was that the resources were not conscious of what you really needed. There weren't really available for you.

RH: Yes. In the mid seventies, I had not come across anyone who was treating adult children of alcoholics, trauma, incest, sexual abuse. At that point there was ignorance about these issues.

JH: The medical ignorance--that was another big obstacle. Then you consciously had to take steps of healing. And you said that one of them was a twelve-step program? And what other steps did you take?

RH: Initially, I was abstinent by association, rather than any significant recovery oriented efforts on my part. I did not have much in the way of financial resources to seek out too much help. After a number of relapses, I finally got sober in 1979.

JH: Then where did that lead you?

RH: My next steps were an intensive involvement in the 12 step programs. I began to notice changes in my life as I applied the principles of those programs into my life. After a period of abstinence and intensive personal work, I began to volunteer at a local Alcohol Rehabilitation facility. I found that I had some wisdom to share that was helpful and the rehab could use the volunteer help and was eventually hired on as a counselor's aide. The director of the rehab had seen some sort of promise in me and sent me to an advanced counselor training in alcoholism.

And I also pursued educational opportunities in counseling fundamentals. All this led to eventually becoming a Certified Addictions Counselor.

JH: So the first four years after you identified soul sickness was a back and forth hanging out in twelve-step programs and then you really threw yourself into it. And then you started doing aide work in your seventh year of recovery? Was that it?

RH: Yes. I had been around the twelve-step programs off and on for nearly eight years. I was more than a year abstinent when I got intensely involved. Prior to this I had periods of dryness, but I had not necessarily applied any recovery principles to my own life. Once I did apply them, my life started to change dramatically.

JH: It took awhile. Looking back on that beginning period of seven or eight years, would there be a metaphor or analogy or some kind of image that represents what that was like for you?

RH: What comes to mind is the image of a blindfold over my eyes and having some faint feelings of faith that if I kept reaching I would eventually find something. Occasionally a light would pierce through the blindfold and I'd see that I was going in some sort of an appropriate direction. Unfortunately for me at that time it was a time of feeling very much isolated. With the analogy of the blindfold, I was reaching and receiving very little feedback as to a positive course.

JH: But you kept going.

RH: Yes, I kept going. It was part of my life path.

JH: So you start to go into an intensive learning curve, being of service, and becoming a student. And then how did your healing process unfold from there?

RH: I had been exposed to a body of knowledge that was relatively new at that time. It was sort of a movement around issues with Adult Children Of Alcoholics. I heard a presentation by a therapist and author named, [Rokelle Lerner](#)--she had recently published a book of daily affirmations for Adult Children of Alcoholics. She addressed issues around shame, which broke me wide open. At about the same time, my mother passed away. Through all that I connected to intense pain related to issues of physical, emotional and sexual trauma that had gone on in my childhood. So I got involved in starting the first self help group in Northeastern Pennsylvania addressing Adult Child issues. And at this time I was employed as an addiction counselor for which I was involved in an ongoing training and development process.

JH: And, when you look back over that now we're talking at this point about how many years?

RH: It was about four years since I had achieved abstinence, and about twelve years since I had first cried out to God for help.

JH: During that twelve year period, were there any distinct periods or events that were most significant in terms of healing for you?

RH: One event that stands out in my mind was something that occurred at an [Adult Child of Alcoholics](#) Conference in Princeton, New Jersey. I had been intellectually stimulated by a talk given and when it was over I was talking to a man about the presentation. He was a tall, husky

man and he looked at me and said, "Could you use a hug?" I said yes, he gave me a hug and I collapsed in his arms with deep sobs of pain that I had held back for so long. That was an incredible opening.

JH: And as you're going through this kind of incredible opening did you feel at any points that something was healed?

RH: Yes. At different times the feelings of isolation and not fitting in seemed to be healed. The openings continued and the healings as well. I believe that the healings happen on levels and in a process.

JH: How did you know that there was a healing taking place around that? What was different for you afterwards?

RH: The best explanation that I can give is when you watch a black and white TV for all your life and then all of a sudden the TV becomes a color TV. That's the way that life shifted for me and has continued to shift a great number of times. I began to experience life with a deeper intensity of emotion, connection and appreciation for the beauty of it all. It was as if all of a sudden I'm in a whole new world. I was in the same place yet I was open to a whole new world.

JH: Do you think, Roger, that there were any wrong turns for you? And, if so, do you know what those learnings were?

RH: I have some difficulty accepting the idea of right or wrong turns. I really have to put wrong in quotes because as I look back now with 21 years of sobriety and thirty years in the recovery process that it was the incest, physical abuse, addictions and all that stuff that have been the greatest teachers in my life. I can't really believe that the teachers are wrong. I guess one of the greatest turns for me was the one that allowed me to work with what was presented to me.

JH: Looking back over thirty years really, what do you think were the most difficult times for you?

RH: The most difficult times were several where the only apparent answer seemed to be ending my life or leaving. I traveled through thirty-five different states trying to find a place that I fit in. Those were some real hard times-- being homeless was very difficult. Being sober and living in a park was a great challenge. Going to professionals who had Master's degrees and Ph.D. degrees, and psychiatrists where I was being thoroughly honest with all that I knew about myself and I did not feel as though I was getting help. Being given medications that were inappropriate or behavior modification approaches that just traumatized me. Those I believe were the toughest times. Being in an institution that's supposed to be about healing and being traumatized by it. There was nothing like being strapped down for seventy-two hours and being pumped full of Thorazine. That led me to think, "What's wrong with this picture here?" I was reaching out for help. I was not violent, not a threat to anyone else. That was probably the lowest point.

JH: When you were at those low points how did you know if what you were facing was spiritual, emotional or psychological? How was that for you?

RH: My family of origin carried the belief system that I was the sick one. So, when I began to get conscious of what was going on, in the mid 1970's, I had a sense that there were some

psychological things going on. The more I looked at things, the more I knew that there were emotional and spiritual twists going on as well.

JH: If you think back to one of those most difficult times, what were you experiencing through it?

RH: What I think about is my experience when I reached out to my second Veteran's Hospital and the feeling of utter despair. There was that deep feeling of aloneness being strapped down in a hospital with the sense of the total abandonment of care for another human being.

JH: And what did you most need at that point?

RH: I needed assurance that I would be kept safe rather than abused. I needed recognition as a human being, not a caged, trapped animal. I needed the basics. And they were not present.

JH: At that point were there any resources and tools that were present for you or useful for you?

RH: At that time the one thing that was helpful was some sense of community with the other patients. Other things that were helpful were the twelve-step process and prayer. It was about getting a sense of validation and worth as a human being and a sense of spirituality and connectedness. That place of despair had been very painful.

JH: You said that the twelve-step program was real significant for you. I want to ask you about what or who guided you most during that time?

RH: There was a man who is now deceased who had left his practice as a psychiatrist after he got going in his own recovery process and opened a small rehabilitation center for alcoholics. He gave me the expression, "Would that I could, I can but show you how." That was in reference to the use of the twelve-steps and bringing them into one's life. And there was a man named Charlie at that time that I would run into at twelve-step meetings who accepted me unconditionally. He was blind. I would come back to meetings after having been out drinking or using for a while and he would have this total regard for me as a human being that simply needed to be loved.

There was a third man, Bill in California who despite my poor choices at that time attempted to help me. He used his own resources and time to try and make a difference in my life. He had lifted his life from living under a bridge to owning his own business and going to college and he taught me that those who forget to remember are doomed to repeat. These men made all the difference at that time.

JH: And that came from men--that's beautiful. During that time, Roger, what beliefs did you have that were most challenged?

RH: At that time I was not conscious that beliefs were being challenged. Looking back, I can see that some fundamental beliefs that I had developed in my childhood experiences were being questioned. Some of those beliefs were survival beliefs such as, "don't talk, don't feel, don't acknowledge what is really going on." It was the greatest challenge for me because those rules/beliefs had helped me to survive the incest, the physical abuse, the rape at knifepoint. A lot of the challenge at first was unconscious until I got deeply into the steps and the ACOA work. I began to see that things had happened to me that were common to some other people and that we

all had developed some strategies for survival. And once I had grasped that, it made a difference. When I look back now with the insight I have, I didn't have a clue then, but I see now that I was having normal responses to abnormal situations. PTSD responses were normal for the traumas I had experienced. In society I had been perceived as the abnormal one.

JH: Can you speak to how those beliefs were reconstructed, some of those that you mentioned: "don't talk, don't feel?"

RH: I started to pick things up around twelve steps meetings. I heard people talking about things that were unspeakable prior to that time for me. I realized through the mirroring that I received in those meetings that no matter what I had done, where I had been, that I was still a human being who was and is worthy of security, love, recognition, and worth. It was people showing up for me regardless, people offering genuinely from their heart with no strings attached. They cared.

JH: And what you started to know was?

RH: I started to know that I was a human being, not some crazy being. I had inherent worth, that I was capable of anything, that I could make a difference in this world.

JH: During those difficult times, you spoke about the external resources that were there for you. What about internally, what inside of you kept you going?

RH: There was a basic instinct for survival and a desire for love. I also had a sort of knowing inside that said I had come into this life to make some kind of a difference. As I awoke more and more to myself, I was aware that my life path was about healing and supporting others to heal. That has been my drive for a long time. Soul level stuff kept me going.

JH: Looking back on that first phase of walking blindfolded with just little glimmers of light coming in to keep you going . . . what kinds of analogies would represent what came after that? What metaphors would you use?

RH: The best kind of example would be the experience of "connect the dot". I began to connect the dot with the things that I was finding out in reading, in workshops and different modalities of healing. I was exposed to things like [psychodrama](#), [Reiki](#), [movement therapies](#), [Alexander Technique](#), [guided imageries](#), the [Therapeutic Spiral Model of Psychodrama](#). I connected dots and made overlays of ideas and principles that were common in a variety of spiritual traditions. It was putting the pieces together of what made my life different, sometimes one simple step at a time despite the desire to have it all change all at once.

JH: Did you feel the blindfolds were off then?

RH: After the experience in the atrium in hotel at conference in Princeton, yes, the blindfold was off. Still there was frustration because I didn't have all the pieces of the puzzle yet. But I wasn't totally blind anymore--I just needed more of the pieces. I could see the puzzle, but couldn't find all the pieces.

JH: You could connect the dots, but you couldn't see the form that it was making? Even so, were there some points that were epiphanies for you?

RH: There have been a lot of epiphanies in my life. One was being in a body-centered workshop where I had trauma memories surface. At that point, I was being supported. I basically went into memories of sexual assault as a child, and ended up being able to sob, rather than contain it one more time. I was not crazy. The person that held me was able to let me know that they understood about this on a deep level. And it was not about being out of control. It was about regaining control through sharing and feeling that which had been unsafe to feel. Anytime I had gotten close to those feelings in the past, I had been shut down. This time it was okay to open and release them. It made a profound difference in my life.

I had grown up learning to be tough and stoic. One time I attended a Men's Retreat where I met a Lakota man who taught me that tears were really about strength and not something to hide. He taught me, "Tears contain salt. Salt heals the wounds of the warrior."

And there were epiphanies watching and working with adolescents in a rehabilitation center. There we attempted to make a spiritual container that allowed them to discover themselves. Many of them did. I watched them heal when they were supposed to be the "bad ones". These are some of the epiphanies over the past twenty years. Helping to create a safe environment in which people can connect to their humanness and heal and to facilitate a little and hold a space for people to do this work has been incredible. The strength of spirit at work is amazing! And it is not just  $1+1=2$ , it seems as though  $1+1=73$ . It would just keep expanding right before my eyes.

JH: In retrospect, would there be any part of your healing process that you would want to change?

RH: From what I have learned on my journey, the one thing that I would have wanted to be different would be that some of my basic emotional needs were met at an earlier time. It was really difficult walking around with the perception that there was something fundamentally wrong with me because no one could validate what I had experienced.

JH: When you look back on it, do you feel like there were identifiable stages to your healing process?

RH: Yes. I see that an important part of the stages that I went through was the one of denial. I needed a sense of community and support before I could proceed. Once the support/community was present, then I would say that the stages were; awareness/awakening, expression, expansion, learning, releasing, integration. Once the awakening happened, then it was like a spiral going through emotional work, mental awareness, putting the pieces together, looking at the things that were somatised in the body, releasing, challenging beliefs and challenging behaviors. As I put it in this kind of framework, there has been a lot of hard work. I have been busy for the past thirty years.

JH: What do you think is the healing challenge that stands before you now?

RH: My personal healing challenge continues to be around connection and relationship. It is important to belong to some sort of a community. At times I feel a lot of isolation. If I disclose too much of myself, it can be threatening to people who have not done their work or are in denial of the trauma that exists in our society.

My professional challenge remains to be able to create a safe environment for people to discover how wonderful they really are and to support their healing. I use the Therapeutic Spiral Model of

psychodrama and energy work to help people grow, connect and heal. And I am committed to an ongoing process of personal and professional growth that supports these.

JH: The challenge that stands before you now is that there is support and community as well as what feels like isolation. How do you feel you're facing this now, this healing process?

RH: I am involved in an ongoing training group in the Therapeutic Spiral Model of Psychodrama. That is a sort of mentoring program with a group of professionals who are working in the field of addictions and trauma. We meet 4 times a year for a weekend in which we have practice dramas and training to continue to grow in our professional practices. I have individual supervision and personal therapy. In addition, I have ongoing work with Reiki and other energy systems, which provides me with some sense of community. And I remain active in a twelve-step program, which provides me with a foundational kind of community.

JH: So, taking a leap from your own healing experience, your own healing process, how do you incorporate your experience of healing into your work? You spoke about really sharing more from your authentic experience. What other ways do you bring your understandings to your healing work from your own process of healing?

RH: One of the things that I bring forth is an awareness that before anything can happen, it is important to create safety for the client. It is important to see the client, not just as a client, but as a human being that deserves safety and support. It is a changed attitude that the "client" is also a teacher who is bringing forth wisdom from their life experience of survival and it is my job to assist these teachers to know what their personal lessons are. It is also important to remove some of the labels and judgments that many people carry from institutions that they have interacted with in their life. The attitudes that some clinicians bring, is one of superiority that labels people as the "sick one". It is important to allow people to have their own authority, since many of the traumatized people have had people not honor their authority to keep them safe and individually they have abandoned their authority to people that have not treated them with respect or dignity.

I have found that bringing in spirituality is most helpful for the healing process. It is not about attempting to convert someone to a specific religion or practice of spirituality. It is really about helping a person to make some sort of a connection with the Greater Whole so that they are much more than the trauma of their past or the trauma responses that get stimulated in the here and now.

It has been my experience to encourage people to make choices for their highest good, rather than only right or wrong choices. People who have survived trauma very often think in terms of extremes--survival kind of thinking--life or death. These people need encouragement to know that there are many choices that can help them change the quality of their lives.

JH: Roger, when you interact with people, with clients and others, from your perspective what needs most to be healed?

RH: Most is the listening to and validating the person's experience that they have been hurt. Their healing needs support and I know it is important to be present and to pay attention. It is most helpful to notice what has been hurt within the personality of the person and help the person bring their resources to bear on that hurt for healing. Each person has healing abilities. Healing



happens in an environment of support and love and a therapist/ helper can make a difference by paying attention; which helps restore balance for the individual.

JH: What have you learned from your clients about the nature of healing?

RH: Healing is everywhere. My clients have had healing experiences all over. That includes institutions as well as more ordinary events and places of their lives. Healing happens all the time.

JH: So now having walked through these questions, thinking about your own experience and thinking about those that you have cared for, if you were to present your understanding of what true healing is, what would you say?

RH: Simply, I would say that healing is the restoring of balance and truth of who the person really is.

JH: Is there anything else you want to say? Anything that strikes you?

RH: It is wonderful to speak out about these issues. And I am aware through this conversation that I have put a lot of energy, time and effort into the work that I have done with other people as well as myself. I am aware that it is a whole way of life for me. Not just something that I do for a living. It is truly a commitment to a path that I have walked. There are a lot of things that have been left behind as a result of this work. There are relationships, jobs, and many things that no longer worked that are now not in my life.

JH: Do you think that there's a time when you won't have to work so hard?

RH: Not unless I choose to give up my life purpose which is to heal and to support healing. There are billions of people on this planet. I suspect that there's enough to do for several life times.

The following websites are provided as sources of information about resources mentioned.

twelve-step program	<a href="http://www.alcoholics-anonymous.org/">http://www.alcoholics-anonymous.org/</a>
Adult Child of Alcoholics	<a href="http://www.adultchildren.org/">http://www.adultchildren.org/</a>
Rokelle Lerner	<a href="http://www.hci-online.com/rlerner/">http://www.hci-online.com/rlerner/</a>
psychodrama	<a href="http://www.asgpp.org/pdrama1.htm">http://www.asgpp.org/pdrama1.htm</a>
Reiki	<a href="http://reiki.7gen.com/">http://reiki.7gen.com/</a>
movement therapies	<a href="http://www.ncata.com/dance.html">http://www.ncata.com/dance.html</a>
Alexander Technique	<a href="http://www.alexandertechnique.com/">http://www.alexandertechnique.com/</a>
guided imageries	<a href="http://www.guidedimageryinc.com/guided.html">http://www.guidedimageryinc.com/guided.html</a>
Therapeutic Spiral Model of Psychodrama	<a href="http://www.therapeuticspiral.org/index2.html">http://www.therapeuticspiral.org/index2.html</a>

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