

MY STORY: OVERCOMING PERSONAL PROBLEMS IS HOW I BECAME A HYPNOTHERAPIST

Learning Hypnotherapy from the Inside-Out

More than twenty eight years ago, I began earnestly seeking personal improvement. There were a number of things I had always wanted to change and overcome. For one, I wanted to overcome the habit of biting my fingernails. I always bit my nails at emotionally tense times.

I decided to pray about it, and one day, while listening to the radio as I drove to work, I heard an advertisement about people who were stopping smoking or losing weight or overcoming other habits through hypnotherapy. I felt quite strongly that this might be an answer for me as well.

I was surprised by my feelings. I had never been involved with hypnosis before, nor did I have any understanding of what was really involved. I had all the usual prejudices that people have from seeing stage hypnosis, yet this time I felt a strong positive impression and was curious to see if hypnosis could provide the help I was seeking.

My Anger Issue

I was also well aware that I had an anger control issue. It took very little to set me off into a rage—a self-defeating, maladaptive behavior that was certainly not working for me as a commissioned sales rep. Even though I attempted to be enthusiastic and friendly, and to build instant relationships, as taught by my sales trainers, my internal demeanor came through far too often. People had better options than to buy from an angry, irritable salesman.

This personality trait, or character flaw, was holding me back from being who I wanted to be. It also kept me from providing more substantially for my wife and eleven young children. This period of my life was one where my dog, Smokey, only with coaxing, would hesitantly befriend me. My children scattered when I appeared and my wonderful wife, bless her soul, tolerated and patiently put up with and unconditionally loved me. She is still a saint, unselfish and always serving, beloved of her family and all who know her—the heart and center of our family and the primary influence in our children's lives. I certainly wasn't being fair to her at this time.

Then one day, I had another of several recent altercations. Someone from a boat trailer shop incorrectly repaired an axle on my boat trailer (from my point of view) and (in my estimation) grossly overcharged me at the same time. The situation became heated and potentially violent. The person I was dealing with went to the back to get something and came back with a knife strapped to his side. I realized that I was so angry I was on the edge of being completely out of control, fully prepared to do whatever harm I could do to another human being.

Somehow I restrained myself, and a couple of days later, while thinking about the incident, I finally asked myself a penetrating question, "Why am I so angry all the time"? (Kind of sounds like a country western song, doesn't it?)

Getting a Cowboy to Do Hypnotherapy

At the time, I was quite involved with horses. My personal identification in life was that of a cowboy, and at home I wore what I had worn most of my life—white T-shirts, Levi's, and cowboy boots. During business hours, I described myself as a cowboy in a suit, someone who put on slacks, a dress shirt, and a jacket just to make a living.

One evening I was working with a mustang that I had adopted from the Bureau of Land Management. Reno, as I called him, was stout, coal black, and gorgeous, yet unusually skittish. My sister, who had heard about the altercation at the trailer shop, came out to the corrals to tell me about a friend of hers who had been helped with similar issues by a hypnotherapist, and she left me the therapist's name and phone number.

Since I had already been considering hypnosis, I put the number in my shirt pocket. But I struggled with the idea of actually making the call. I grew up in the 50's and 60's, part of a generation whose fathers, for the most part, had been in the military and believed "Big boys don't cry" and macho dudes don't show their emotions! It was the razor-strap and "spare the rod, spoil the child" era of childrearing,

I had a macho image of myself that could never allow for taking ridicule or chiding from my brothers or buddies about being in therapy. I didn't want to have to explain to anyone that I was going to a therapist. Then a week or two later, I had another altercation with someone on the freeway. I knew I had to get some help, and I made the call.

My Therapy Session

Arriving for my session, I felt like someone I had seen on television going to their first Alcoholics Anonymous meeting: "Hi. My name is, and I am an alcoholic." Even though it was just me and the hypnotherapist, it was difficult for me to open up and explain what my problems were and what I wanted to accomplish.

But in so many words it finally came out: "I am Dennis, and I am a fingernail biting anger-a-holic." I explained that I hadn't always been so, but in recent years it seemed to be growing worse. I was at the point where I felt something bad was going to happen if I didn't get things under control. I gave her some examples of the problem, including the boat incident.

She began to explain hypnosis and hypnotherapy. Most interesting and exciting to me was the concept that every conversation, every touch, every smell, every sensory perception, and every thought we have had, from birth until now, is archived in the subconscious mind and can be made available through hypnosis or trance. She described, in some detail, what she called "the theory of the mind"—how we inductively generate our own behaviors and deductively can learn to challenge and change them. She was the first person to explain to me that our thoughts generate our emotions and our emotions generate our behaviors, as we tend to behave the way we feel. She told me that she and I were going to explore my subconscious mind and thought processes to discover what *predominant thoughts or behavioral scripts*, as she called them, were driving the emotional content of my behaviors.

She also described what I would experience in trance, including what she wanted me to do at certain points to reduce emotions and clear up inappropriate thinking. I was skeptical, but intrigued, and I decided to continue with the session.

She began her induction ritual, and I passed into hypnosis or trance. As with most people, it was not what I expected at all. I thought I would be in some out-of-consciousness or unconscious state, maybe like when you're knocked out. But I was fully aware of everything going on around me while I was becoming more internally focused.

The more she talked the deeper into trance I went. She had me go back in an age regression to the time I first started biting my fingernails or was aware that I was biting my fingernails. She wanted me to understand where that habit came from and how it developed. With that knowledge, I would better understand what I needed to do to correct it and to handle similar *sensitizing* situations differently in the future.

The Initial Incident

My mind regressed back to an experience when I was six years old. As clear as if it were happening that day, I saw myself as a young boy in my grandmother's living room with my grandmother, my mother, and two of my aunts. They were having a heated argument in which I became emotionally involved. The situation was extremely conflicting for me. I saw myself standing over in the corner of the room listening to all of the bickering and fighting, biting my fingernails.

I realized right then that biting my nails, just as the hypnotherapist had pointed out to me, had become an emotional release or *abreaction*. I had undertaken biting my nails as an emotional release in conflict situations—a reaction to the emotions of the conflict, the same way other people tap their feet or twiddle their fingers.

In trance, I could tell the hypnotherapist the exact words of the argument. The entire conversation was clear and present to me. The feelings and emotions that I experienced were just as real to me thirty-one years later as they were when I actually experienced the conflict. I actually relived the entire situation and circumstance.

Then the hypnotherapist took me through a desensitizing process, and we discussed this experience in detail and at some length. I came to understand the false beliefs or *scripting* that I had incorporated into my belief system because of my youthful misinterpretation of the circumstances and the things said in the argument.

As the therapist talked me through the conflicts I was experiencing in my mind, I finally understood why I had begun biting my fingernails, why this problem had plagued me all these years, and why I still resorted to it in times of conflict: it was a learned means of emotional venting. This understanding gave me the power of choice. I could choose to react differently in similar circumstances in the future.

This personal knowledge of me, from what was now a conscious memory; shed new light on the incident. I began to develop a different interpretation of the original circumstances and argument from my current perspective as an adult, replacing what I had thought and understood as a child. This new understanding of the original experience became a source of power to me. As my original understanding was altered, so were my emotions and my behavior. The nervous tension I had carried for years in my fingers began to dissipate.

The Source of my Greatest Anxiety

As I sat in the chair, I could sense that I was still feeling uneasy and was moving nervously, but I didn't know why. The therapist, who had also picked up on my body language, prompted me to go back in my mind to the time of my greatest anxiety. The idea was to discover what my subconscious would reveal as she asked searching questions. She guided me to recollect the time of my greatest emotional upheaval: What was bothering me the most? What one thing was binding me down in my mind and spirit? (This was the moment when I came to understand the term *dis-ease* as an uneasiness of mind and spirit that eventually manifests itself in the body.)

In my mind's eye, I could see my sister Sherry's face. Sherry had been killed in a car-train accident twenty-one years earlier when I was sixteen and she was eighteen. She had been driving my car to a church social one snowy, breezy December evening. She crossed a train track at an unmarked crossing and didn't see the oncoming train. She was hit broadside, and the car burst into pieces. It was snowing heavily that night, which is why she took my car. I had just put on new snow tires. I believe the side windows must have been steamed over or covered with blowing snow, and there were no flashing lights or warning signs of any kind, so she drove across the tracks into the oncoming train.

I saw Sherry's face in my mind, and the hypnotherapist asked me what I was seeing. I was imagining the wreck and the impact of the train hitting the car and my sister. I didn't understand what was happening to me in my mind to imagine such things. The hypnotherapist asked me to tell her about my sister, so I related the above scenario of the accident. She prompted me to recall other details, times, or instances where I had experienced deep anxiety over this situation.

My mind went back again, and I could see myself standing in our family room. It was some two or three months after Sherry had been killed. I was alone with my mother, and we were discussing the accident. I told her that it had made me reflect upon my own life. I had stopped smoking, which I occasionally indulged in, and I had also stopped drinking the occasional beer with my friends and other inappropriate teenage experimentation.

I let my mother know that I was trying to improve my life and get my life back in order because I had come to realize just how short life could be. I said that I knew better than to do wrong things. In hypnosis, I could hear our lengthy conversation word for word, just as before, and I could hear my mother's exact words again in my mind. She was deep in thought, and then she looked at me reflectively and said, "Maybe the reason Sherry had to go was because of you."

The therapist said that she thought I was blaming myself for Sherry's death. "You feel responsible for her being killed," she said.

"I don't think so," I replied. That didn't make much sense to me.

She said, "No, I think that is it. Your mind has brought that incident back to you. You went back to the source of your greatest anxiety." She handed me a large pillow and asked me to take my right hand and hit the pillow. She told me that as I hit it, I was to say out loud, "I am not responsible for Sherry's death."

I began to laugh, to release the emotional pressure of having to hit a pillow in front of somebody else. I was not feeling any emotion or any real anxiety over Sherry's death at that moment. I now know that I had learned to stuff these feelings down, primarily with the defense mechanisms of amnesia and denial. I didn't want to believe that the therapist was right.

She then became more insistent and said, "Hit the pillow, Dennis, and say, 'I am not responsible for Sherry's death.'" I told her I didn't want to do it. Her tone became even more demanding as she said, "Hit the pillow, Dennis, and say it."

I kind of chuckled at the next thought that came through my mind, which was that I was paying real money for this, so I ought to go ahead and try what she said. After all, it had brought back the memory of why I bite my fingernails. So I raised my arm, made a fist, and hit the pillow lightly while I said, "I am not responsible for Sherry's death." "Do it again," she insisted.

As my hand came up to hit the pillow the second time, something inside of me snapped. All of a sudden I felt this huge emotional volcano grow and then erupt inside of me. I was no longer able to contain the enormous rage of hurt and anger. My emotional content, pent up for years, just came bursting out all over.

I started beating and punching the pillow with both hands, and then I broke down in tears and cried and cried, a natural and healthy emotional venting action that I had not done for many years. Now I was shouting, "I am not responsible for Sherry's death! I am not responsible for Sherry's death! I am not responsible for Sherry's death!" I said it over and over again, all the while beating on the pillow. I felt like I was going insane, like I was losing control or had lost it.

Resolution

I continued to do this until I had another experience that I never expected. As I was having this tremendous emotional release, hitting the pillow and yelling and venting, releasing emotions I had carried around inside of me for years, everything suddenly became clear.

I realized I had been angry with my mother for thinking that I could be the cause of Sherry's death. I was angry with God for having taken my sister. I was angry that I had not been able to do something more than just loan her my car. I should have been there. I would have seen the train.

I did believe it; that somehow Sherry's death was my fault. What a tremendous personal revelation and insight into my life. These thoughts had been building in my imagination and compounding their emotional content inside of me, becoming amplified in my subconscious imagination.

Then the hypnotherapist said, "Now tell yourself the truth. Say 'I am NOT responsible for Sherry's death.' Say it over and over again." I did so and began to feel an enormous weight—something pressing on my spirit that I had never recognized or understood—simply lift off from me.

Freedom from Misconception

For me it seemed normal to feel weighed down and heavy in spirit. I was not really aware that there was any other way to feel. My personality was mostly sober, and these feelings were so familiar to me that I had learned to be comfortable being uncomfortable. As the emotional content was released, I stopped crying, and was again emotionally in control and feeling relieved.

The therapist asked me how I felt. I told her that I felt as if great amounts of darkness had left my soul. She said, "What do you feel now?" I was then feeling the Spirit of the Lord stronger than I had ever felt it before. It felt like I was filled with love, light, and truth. I knew that I had gained an understanding of a process, of one way to heal mind, body, and soul mentally, emotionally, physically, and spiritually.

I was also feeling comforted. Peace and serenity flowed through me of a magnitude I had never before experienced. My spirit and body seemed as though someone had taken a hundred-pound sack of potatoes off my left shoulder and another hundred pounds off my right shoulder. I had become so accustomed to carrying this mental and emotional weight around that I had never even recognized it was there. My entire spirit and being felt lighter and free. Even my body seemed to move more freely.

When I recognized and embraced the truth, the darkness or weight or negative emotional content, whatever you prefer to call it, had left me; it had no more power over me. I now believe that the darkness of this world loses its power instantly when we finally accept truth in place of the lies, misinterpretations, misunderstandings, and deceptions that we have within us. The truth really does have power to make us free, to set us free.

The hypnotherapist then brought me to a lighter state of trance and suggested that I would remember everything that I had been through. I have clear recollections of it to this day. It has been over twenty-three years since my first session. I can still see clearly how I had developed false beliefs and believed lies.

My hypnotherapist talked me through certain necessary concepts and steps that helped me to reframe my thinking with obvious truths about the accident. I like to call it a reconstruction of the experience. I wasn't driving the car. I was not in charge of the weather. It was not my fault that Sherry did not see the train. In fact, I was the one who loaned her a car with new snow

tires so she would be safe. I am not in control, God is. He was very much aware of his daughter that night, and He is still in charge of things like this, not me.

I now understood the truth, and I had corrected my thinking errors. I overcame some false beliefs that I had taken on in a moment of emotional weakness. I had taken on these false beliefs when my mother inadvertently made a statement while trying to figure out why she had to lose a daughter.

The hypnotherapist explained that this is a common way that "inappropriate predominant thoughts" become part of our belief system. However, the therapist made it clear that my mother was not to blame. She had not intentionally tried to hurt me, but was just voicing her thoughts out loud. She had no way of knowing the effect it would have on me for all those years.

Hypnotherapy as a Path to Healing

It was vividly clear to me that I had just experienced an amazing way to clear the incorrect thoughts from someone's mind that help develop their inappropriate feelings and beliefs. It was an effective way to remove the effects of those thoughts from the subconscious—the fear, guilt, anger, and other negative emotions from my past that were harbored in my mind and spirit. I could never have overcome the thoughts that were making me angry and unhappy, that were weighing me down with a false sense of responsibility for my sister's death, unless I knew that I was carrying them in the first place. I had no conscious recognition of the root of so many problems in my life until this hypnotherapy session.

It was now obvious to me why hypnosis was the answer to my prayers. It was also obvious to me why the adversary would want others to believe these processes are evil in nature and not to be studied or understood. Evil influences do attempt to use our natural trance abilities against us, and the devil promotes the idea that these abilities are evil, because he doesn't want people to understand that this is one of the best ways to clear up the lies and deceptions in our lives.

Now that I had this understanding and knowledge, I knew I needed to pursue it further. I desired the same cleansing benefits for my family and for others around me. I began to study the materials given to me and bought books suggested by the hypnotherapist. Over the next several weeks, I went back to her and did a number of sessions. I cleared up all kinds of issues in my life, like conflicts with my parents from my teenage years. I had several other powerful emotional releases that freed additional trauma from my body.

My life was changing rapidly for the better. I was enjoying life more than I had ever before. My personality changed completely once all of the anger, rage, and hostility were gone. My sales career took off and my health improved. The hypnotherapist I worked with taught me how to self-hypnotize and to reprogram myself with positive affirmations or new predominant thoughts in any area of weakness that I identified. I began to look for other areas of false beliefs. I learned that while in trance, which might be described as when the conscious or logical thinking mind is set aside, I could call up subconscious answers or truths.

It was not always easy, without further training in self-hypnosis, to move from consciousness to the desired trance levels. Nor was it easy to formulate questions to ask myself. But I reviewed the questions of my life consciously, questions for which I earnestly sought answers and understanding. I would pray about my questions, asking for divine assistance, and then hypnotize myself. Once I was in a trance state, my mind could pull up answers to my questions, and I gained wisdom and understanding about myself that I never before thought possible.

I believe that what I was learning to do is pondering and meditation as taught in the scriptures. “Ponder the path of thy feet, and let all thy ways be established.”(OT | Proverbs 4:26) For me hypnosis skills are pondering skills, and hypnotherapy is meditation. “My mouth shall speak of wisdom; and the meditation of my heart shall be of understanding.”(OT | Psalms 49:3) I was gaining wisdom and understanding of life and the lessons to be learned from my life’s experiences.

With this newfound freedom and peace of mind, every relationship in my life improved. My sales skyrocketed, and within a few months I was asked to be the sales manager. Several months later, I was asked to be the general manager for the company where I worked. Life was improving all around me with the positive changes that I had learned to make in my predominant thought processes.

Some call this “The Secret” or “The Law of Attraction,” whereby we attract into our lives the people, places, circumstances, and things that harmonize with our most important predominant thoughts. We mentally put our thoughts out into the universe and begin to realize that thoughts are things of substance, and like attracts like, and kind attracts kind. This is also in accord with the law of the harvest, in that we reap what we sow. In fact, this is consistent with everything else we see all around us in nature.

Becoming a Hypnotherapist

Some six or seven weeks after my first session, I was out working with my horses in the evening when my brother, who was living next door, came over. He told me he wanted to know who I was—he didn’t know me anymore. “What do you mean?” I asked. He said that he’d been watching me for the past several weeks and that there was something different about me. For instance, he had noticed a marked difference in the way I treated animals and my family. My overall demeanor was friendlier and happier.

His observations and statements took me back because the changes I had been making did not seem to me to be that perceptible to others. He asked, “What are you doing that is making you so different?” I thought about it for a moment and then told him that I had been going to a hypnotherapist. As I knew would be the case, he began laughing and making fun of me. I told him that I didn’t really care what he thought, because of the difference hypnotherapy or meditation was making in my life.

When he saw that I was serious, he asked me exactly what I had been doing. I told him that I was about finished with the chores and animals, and that if he really wanted to know I’d be happy to visit with him in the house. When we went in and sat down, I explained to him about

hypnotherapy and my sessions. I explained how every thought, every word, every action, every conversation, even every sensory perception that we have experienced from birth is still in our subconscious mind and can be accessed through trance. I explained that we can come to understand those things that are binding us down, holding us back, and keeping us from being all we know we want to be, that all of these things can be addressed, dealt with, and changed with trance, meditation, or hypnotherapy, which were now all synonymous terms to me.

He then said that there were things that had been bothering him and asked if I would help him. I told him that we could give it a try. I had him sit comfortably in an overstuffed chair, as I had done, and simply started doing the same things that I had become so familiar with in the sessions I had been through. He immediately went into trance and regressed back to an issue that had been bothering him, and through the same processes that I had learned, he was able to clear it up. An hour or so later he walked out of the house feeling better about himself and his life. His demeanor and nature also changed somewhat.

The next day at work, he was talking to his best friend and said, "You'll never guess what my brother did for me last night," and he related the experience. His best friend then asked if I would spend some time with him. My brother called me and we set up a time. I worked with his friend and got the same transforming results. His friend then told someone else and they came over. Then they told someone else, and that person came over.

This started a pattern for about a year and a half where I practiced doing hypnosis and hypnotherapy with a number of people, all with beneficial effects. It seemed that I had an intuitive knack for it, thanks to the therapy and experiences that I had been through myself. I understood the processes personally and was able to duplicate them with others, and I never charged a dime for my time. Those I helped were all friends or friends of close friends, and everyone felt as though they had benefited from the experience. And I enjoyed it. There was a satisfaction in helping someone else discover and overcome limiting beliefs in their lives and eliminate unwanted behaviors.

Then one night, when I was putting some sales proposals together at the dining room table while my wife was clearing off the table and finishing the dinner dishes with some of the children, the phone rang. My wife answered it and started to laugh as she put her hand over the receiver. "Dennis," she said, "There is a man on the phone who wants to know if Dr. Parker is home."

When I answered the phone, I told him that he must have the wrong number as there was no doctor here. He then inquired, "Are you the Dennis Parker who worked with—last week from the Seattle area while they were visiting in Utah?" I explained that I had spent some time with them as a friend, as I had known the man since high school. The voice on the phone continued, "I have visited with—and he told me what you did and that he feels better than he has felt in many years. Whatever you did for him I want you to do for me."

He explained that he had been seeing a counselor for the past eighteen years. I told him that I was not qualified to work with him and that what I had done, I did as a favor for some friends.

He persisted and told me that money was not an object for him, that he would be willing to fly to Utah, put himself up in a hotel, stay as long as I thought he needed to, and do as many sessions as it took for him to receive similar results.

I then explained to him more clearly that I was not a therapist and that he need not buy a ticket as I would not be seeing him. He asked me what I thought he should do. I told him he should go out and find a local competently trained Certified Clinical Hypnotherapist. I wished him the best of luck in his search and expressed hope that it would turn out well for him.

With the phone back in place on the wall, my wife and I then discussed in all earnestness what I had been doing. We decided that if I were going to continue to attempt to help others and continue to study the processes myself, that I needed to receive further training. I contacted the hypnotherapist who had worked with me and asked what it took to become a Certified Clinical Hypnotherapist. She explained to me what school she had attended and where to find information on the courses. I enrolled the very next day.

I spent the next year attending classes—ten hours a day on Saturdays for most of the year, as well as doing the homework assignments and reading the books and manuals that were required to accomplish the courses. In 1991, I was certified as a Clinical Hypnotherapist by The American Council of Hypnotist Examiners (A.C.H.E.). I have attended many conferences and workshops since, keeping up with my continuing education and recertifying requirements. I have been a presenter at A.C.H.E. International Hypnotherapy annual conferences, and since 2003, I have been a Board Approved Examiner, Instructor, and Approved School Operator.

Hypnosis and hypnotherapy or pondering and meditation have greatly changed and enriched my life. It was no coincidence in my life that I was directed to Marilyn and hypnotherapy. It has been my privilege now for many years to assist hundreds of career associates and hypnotherapy clients in overcoming their self-limiting beliefs, eliminating inappropriate habits, and conquering maladaptive behaviors as I teach these personal problem solving skills. It is rewarding to be part of the change processes and progress of others, to assist them in going from being a victim of their life's experiences to being a thriving survivor. After reading the above, if you should feel a desire to move ahead in your own life, and if you have positive feelings about learning these processes, I would suggest that for you too. Reading this story might not be a coincidence.

Hypnotherapy processes and techniques develop conscious awareness of choice and free people to choose new courses of action as determined by them. They are given positive input and suggestions by the therapist in an effort to strengthen their decisions. This process helps the individual to deeply internalize their new decisions, which when acted upon, become their new behaviors.

Hypnotherapy is the re-decision-making process, choosing anew.