

# SHIATSU & SEXUAL / CHILD ABUSE



## CASE STUDIES

### **Shiatsu as a Recovery Tool for a Survivor of Childhood Sexual Abuse. As told to Marianne Steel, AOBTA R-CP and GSS**

Case Study: 50 year old Female – Keri

My client/colleague Keri told me her story over the course of a long series of Shiatsu treatments. Her sharing will, I hope, help other practitioners open up discussions to gain a deeper understanding of similar clients. She inspired both of us to learn more about adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse through research interviews and treatments. Keri's journey of learning and practicing Shiatsu became an essential tool on the path to freedom from armors, holding patterns and protective layers. Practicing Shiatsu gave her a tool to re-write the nature of human interactions in her life. To do this re-write, she had to go back to the mind of a child and work her way through her childhood trauma.

She knew in that first moment of trauma, she ceased to be a child, and displayed many of the obvious signs of sexual abuse. Unfortunately at that time, the 1960's and 70's, the subject was still taboo. Keri spoke to no one, was withdrawn, had difficulty concentrating in school and had a much greater sexual knowledge than any of her pre-teen peers. She even described the abusive encounters in her diary, as if describing a love story; all wishful thinking on her part.

Keri's mother read the diary and told her husband, who grabbed his shotgun intending to kill the man. Her mother stopped him from murdering the abuser, fearing a likely imprisonment would mean a loss of financial support and destruction of the family. Sadly, they turned against Keri instead, blaming her for causing the problem, and punisher her with beatings and verbal abuse.

By the time she was ten Keri realized that she could only help herself by enduring the ongoing abuse, because it was not going to stop, and it didn't, for several more years. Being an abused child she was vulnerable to serial abuse. Keri found that if she collaborated she would survive.

#### The Healing Process

As an adult, receiving, learning and practicing Shiatsu satisfied many of Keri's unconscious longings for safety, trust and respect between people. And a body-oriented form of psychotherapy (Pesso Therapy) helped Keri recognize for the first time the impact of her experience and its connection to the choices she made later in life. One part was highly intelligent. In the other part, psychic gaps replaced the trust, hope and safety she did not have as a child.

So how did Keri evolve into adulthood? She described an aspect of human survival as the paradoxical ability to disassociate emotionally during the actual traumatic event, even though the event was recorded in memory. As she honed this ability she acquired the skills to function as an imposter in her own body. Keri admitted that she perfected positive survival skills over time. She knows that survivors of long-term sexual abuse often have an unusual capacity for out-of-body experiences, yet are experts at intuitively predicting behaviour in others.

When a child is sexually abused he/she can become convinced of possessing great sexual power no one can resist. Or he/she can totally shut down emotionally and physically.

Childhood sexual abuse prompts a life-long pattern of physical and mental dysfunction directly related to the breach of physical borders and respect, as when a child is forced into a situation beyond their understanding by an authority figure and threatened into silence. This prompts mistrust in all future intimate relationships, since the first intimate experiences were based on secrecy, shame and guilt.

Shiatsu as a two-way healing Process

Keri's physical symptoms, which began almost immediately after the first experience of abuse – were skin outbreaks, the source of which could not be found. Years later, I observed that Keri's border (her skin) was violated, leaving her susceptible to not only more violations but to infection as well. (Lung meridian)

Respiratory disorders, hypersensitivity and digestive disorders were a continuous problem (Large Intestine meridian). Recurring bladder infections were the result of long-term stress (Bladder meridian). Migraine headaches (Liver meridian) were the only expression possible for rage over “the nameless”.

Shiatsu was a wake-up call. By the time Keri discovered Shiatsu in her early forties, she had been through the ringer and had developed an addiction to more and more dangerous situations in order to feel anything at all. Her past included slicing herself across her breasts with razor blades at the age of twelve, then using surgical scissors to cut her hymen, a last ditch effort to have some control over what was happening to her. Then came drug abuse, falling into a trap of human traffickers, forced prostitution, multiple abortions in multiple countries and the short-term abandonment of her only child. Only then did she begin to wake up and question whether this was normal.

Though she did not know it at the time, learning and then practicing Shiatsu prompted a two-way healing process. In her early practice, Keri was continually confronted with clients trying to mask their fear and deny the trauma they were living on a daily basis. Keri began to experience a sense of transference as their strategies for coping, mainly denial, so matched her own life long survival strategy. This detonated the deeply buried mine of emotion she had suppressed for decades. She started to experience outbreaks of rage, helplessness and exhaustion that she could not explain. So she sought professional help. Pesso Therapy became essential to any progress or continuation of her work. Shiatsu and specialized Qi development helped her rewrite her template.

Awareness of the three Dan Tien, moving from the Hara and learning to listen to the language of the internal organs and to follow their energy pathways in the meridian system, were all the essential steps necessary to integrate and restore her own personal energy. The emotions locked for decades in certain areas of the body, found mostly controlled release through repetitive Shiatsu and Qigong training.

She describes the deep gratitude she experienced through the positive contact with fellow students, while developing the skills of the Asian body-mind system of health. She decided to make it her life work.

Through her Shiatsu training, Keri gained perceptions and insights that helped the layers of her own healing. But she soon realized that though some colleagues also had the ability, skills, and wisdom to work with clients who had been sexually abused, others couldn't handle the topic. Her own past experiences gave her the unique ability to recognize past abuse in clients.

Shiatsu therapists without training in counselling skills would see this work as perhaps beyond the scope of shiatsu treatment alone and all bodywork therapists without training in psychotherapy should have a list of competent psychotherapists on hand for referrals.

My goal is to open up a discussion forum to create a constructive approach for Shiatsu practitioners to recognize and work with adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse.

If you want to share your own experiences or your work with adults or children who are in the healing process, and your ideas on how to help others heal, please feel free to contact me.

Marianne Steele's Shiatsu and Qigong teaching and private practice in Germany includes working with the US Military and The Committee for Basic Rights and Democracy's Vacation from the War program giving children and young people in war torn areas a break from the violence. She has also reached Instructor level in Earth Energy Qigong for Women.

*(Published and reprinted with the kind permission of AOBTA. Featured in their AOBTA Pulse news Spring 2009).*