

OdySSEY

Holistic Lifestyle Magazine

How I Healed Myself by Healing Others

Or, How I learned to stop thinking about myself and started to think about other people for a change...



It's a fairly straightforward story really, and one I must have told a hundred times. The first question I always get asked (apart from 'can you turn my mate into a chicken?' which always ranks number 1) is *'how did you first get interested in hypnosis?'* At this point I go on autopilot and recite the whole tale, the amount of detail depending on how much time I've got (five minutes if I'm talking to a journalist, or super quick if I'm on the radio – got to get the whole anecdote over with before they cut to the news!)

But it's not really as simple as that, because the real story is of how hypnosis changed *my* life in ways that I didn't even notice at the time, and for the better, as it turned out. My voyage of discovery was not just about learning everything there was to know about hypnosis, but about learning about myself. That was the most surprising thing for me at any rate, if only because very little ever went to plan.

Maybe I should start at the beginning. It was never my intention to become a professional hypnotist or even become involved in hypnosis at all for that matter. The thought just hadn't entered my head. Well, it wouldn't would it? I mean, it's not as if it's one of those things that's offered as an alternative to accountancy when it comes to career choice. I'd just left Music

College and I'd played with some of the top orchestras in the country - the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic, The BBC Symphony Orchestra, that sort of thing. As a percussionist, my life was now mapped out, say five to ten years on the triangle and then I would be promoted to the bass drum. And just as eagerly as I had looked forward to my first professional gig, I now looked bleakly down the years that would be my musical career. For playing the triangle, £1; for knowing *when* to play the triangle, £29.

But I had this girlfriend who was studying psychology, and even when we were going out together, I thought her a bit odd. She was one of those types who preferred walking in the mountains in the freezing rain than in the sunshine. I had become a drummer because I wanted to make loud noises; she was becoming a psychologist because she wanted to make soothing noises. So there we were, hopelessly mismatched, the joker and the compassionate, trudging over the hills and dales, hand in hand, on totally different wavelengths.

I had hired a car because we planned to go up to the Lake District on the Friday, but she had a lecture in the morning and so I found a quiet corner right at the back. So that I wouldn't stand out from the rest of the students, I pretended to be asleep. That lecture (the first of two to be delivered on hypnosis) was the turning point. I had never seen anything like it in my entire life! And as a result, half the rest of the weekend (fortunately the all too stormy weather prevented us from venturing too far) was spent by me picking Becky's brains. In return, I taught her how to do a drum roll. I got the best end of the deal because I got a crash course on all the background psychology, and Becky learned how to make a series of loud noises in rapid succession.

So *of course* I went to the follow-up lecture. And suddenly I had this new toy which was both fascinating and tempting at the same time. The only problem was that I had nowhere to play with it. But that too was about to change.

The great thing about being a student is you get to go to a lot of parties. I went to a lot of parties and practiced hypnotising anyone who cared to give it a go. Sometimes I was successful, other times, not. I tried to hypnotise this girl once and just as it seemed I was getting nowhere, there was a loud thump on the floor. We all turned around and there was this flute player I had known at college, flat out. So I forgot about the girl and made the flute player bark like a dog every time I said the word 'walkies!' But it was a rapid learning curve and I soon acquired the reputation of someone who was, well, a bit odd.

So one Sunday lunchtime, a group of us found ourselves in a pub in Yorkshire. On the next table, three or four of the local yokels had started to chat to us. The gist of the conversation was that they thought us a bit posh and had decided to give us a good going over at closing time. Becky, always able to communicate better than I (mainly because her people-skills were much more finely tuned than my own) suggested to them that if I could hypnotise one of them, we would escape the inevitable thrashing and they would stand us a round of drinks instead. They agreed, in that deeply unpleasant way English youth has when they think they are onto a sure thing, and within a couple of minutes I had this guy slumped in his chair, gurgling like a baby.

Things had gone well. They went even better when the small crowd of lunchtime drinkers started offering their own input and ideas. And, to cut a long story short, the landlord booked

me on the spot! The following Monday evening saw me as the star attraction, and with the help of an act that barely lasted half an hour, I walked out with more money in my hand than I had ever seen at one time and about five times what I was making as a musician.

And from then on, my ambition got the better of me. Within eighteen months I was doing the some of the top theatres in the country. I went abroad, to tour Australia and New Zealand and eventually ended up in Las Vegas for three months. I bought a nice apartment, a Rolls Royce and took flying lessons. And I became an obnoxious, arrogant little twerp. One night, after a full house at the Royal Court Theatre in Liverpool, Monty, the stage door keeper came into the dressing room and told me there were some people wanting autographs at the stage door. 'I'll do the first half-dozen and no more' was my reply. 'Well, there's only two' was *his* reply. And I stood there feeling all the humiliation one feels when one has just learned a valuable lesson about life.

Still, what I can tell you is how easy it was to get used to the lifestyle. I flew first class, which is a bit like being in intensive care, except you're not ill, and stayed in the best hotels and ate in the best restaurants. In New Zealand I often paid the hotel chef to stay on so I could eat after the show. In Liverpool I once played Monopoly with real money and in Sydney I hired a helicopter to get me to the airport because I couldn't face the rush hour. I was able to take copious amounts of time off, go wherever I pleased and got used to the seemingly never ending series of radio, TV and press interviews and sell-out audiences. Crowds of two and a half thousand was not unusual, in fact it was the norm. And this went on year after year. What a wheeze!

Yes, I had done it all, on my own, by myself, with no one with me. I was a complete loner - and that was the problem.

Over the two decades of my career during the eighties and nineties, I learned a few more lessons - lessons that imperceptibly crept up on me and took root. I had hardly noticed that by this time, with a major TV series in the offing and riding the crest of a wave, I had lost all my old friends; Becky had long gone, and most significantly, I had lost touch with real people, and without realising it at the time, I had become shallow. Applause can do that to you.

The TV series came and went and it was then that the final important lesson was delivered. Of course everyone had seen it on TV, and it was of course marvellous, or so they all said. But the problem with TV is that it is a voracious consumer of material and because everyone had seen it, they didn't want to see any more of it. The theatre tours stopped abruptly and I stayed home a lot more and for the first time in my life I started to get bored. I stopped being invited to chat on radio shows, and was soon no longer recognised in supermarkets.

And so, in my new little prison of self-doubt and plagued by an almost complete loss of confidence, I started to take stock of all that I had done wrong. I would examine, in the minutest detail, every one of my misdeeds, transgressions, offences and insults to humanity. I forced myself to admit that I had lived a trivial life and that my pursuits had been fleeting and inconsequential, that my beliefs might, after all, have been misguided, my jokes not that funny, and my accomplishments of no earthly use to anyone else. I came to the realisation that to be genuinely and sincerely fulfilled, I would have to redirect my thoughts and energies, to think in

ways that had erstwhile been alien; and as awful and hideous as the idea first seemed, I would seek joy and contentment in trying to help others.

But how could I possibly achieve this when I knew only one thing? The very thought of going into private practice – playing to an audience of only one – appalled me, filled me with the most unimaginable horror. Oh heavens, I might even have to *go to work! Like everybody else!* But in the end, that's just what I did. I persuaded, cajoled, sweet-talked myself to the realisation that if I was to discover the true meaning of achievement, I must start to use my talent for good, for the sake of those who might benefit from my skill.

And so it came about that on the first Monday of the first week of the first month of the New Year, my first client walked into my office. That was twenty years ago, give or take, and in that time I have come to the realisation that there is no more uplifting experience in life than making a difference to the lives of others. That doesn't mean to say of course that there aren't times when I've been thoroughly frustrated because I can't find a solution to a problem, or that I have had to refer a client to a different therapist, someone who knows what they're doing for instance. But those occasions are very few and far between these days because I *have* found new ways of doing things, of finding solutions that are not just quicker and more permanent, but present me with a challenge at the same time. I used all my knowledge and experience from the stage to work out ways of doing things that would have been unthinkable ten years previous. I still have a reputation of a bit of a maverick but I have learned to use this to my advantage too.

I now get invited to talk at psychology conferences and hypnosis seminars all over the world, so much so that in recent years, teaching and lecturing has largely taken over as my main activity; New Zealand at the beginning of the year, Norway last month, London next week, Australia in September, South Africa this July. 'So what can this former stage hypnotist possibly teach us?' is an attitude I come across a lot, but the challenge of winning over the doubters has turned out to be a lot more fun, and also rewarding, than making someone run round like a chicken (not that I ever actually did that by the way!) Teaching these new techniques and ways of doing things to therapists with years of experience is something that I have found I enjoy very much. I still do stage shows, but I pick and choose where I want to perform very carefully.

A few years ago, I bumped into Becky again. I had seen her very briefly a couple of years before that. I was driving into the city centre the day the IRA bombed Manchester, but by the time I had turned the car around, she was gone. 'I saw you once' she said. 'You were driving into town – I remember it because it was the day the IRA bombed Manchester. I waved but obviously you didn't see me; you should try using your rear-view mirror!' And that was the last lesson of my life. Sometimes you miss the good stuff because you're looking in the wrong direction. My jokes are still not that funny, but I'm happier now because I no longer know everything.

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