

Agoraphobia

Contributed by Dennis McCarthy

At home for thirty five years

I received a phone call from a gentleman who enquired whether hypnotherapy could help his wife with her illness, he then went on to tell me that his wife hasn't been outside their home for the past thirty five years, and has been diagnosed as an agoraphobic

I suggested that we set up an appointment for a consultation for the following week, this was agreed upon and a date agreed.

With this neurotic illness it is normal for the therapist to conduct the first couple of sessions at the client's home for obvious reasons by the very nature of the illness.

As agreed, the following week I attended for the consultation. I was welcomed by a gentleman named Alf who then introduced me to his wife Gwen; she appeared quite nervous which didn't surprise me as this is a normal reaction.

During the consultation Gwen gave me a very clear insight into her past, I then give an insight to both Alf and Gwen into the workings of the subconscious mind and how hypnotherapy works and how it will work for them, I explained that it will probably take up to eight sessions and that these sessions would be hourly and conducted weekly.

Gwen now an enthusiastic sixty five year old lady was eager to go ahead with therapy immediately, and this was eagerly agreed upon with her husband Alf. It was agreed upon that during the therapy sessions that Alf would sit in another room; this was at Gwen's request.

I then went ahead and induced hypnosis, then encouraged Gwen to speak to me about her life and how the fear of going out as affected her life over the past thirty five years, what has she been deprived of, things you could have done if you didn't have this fear.

Although this seems to be asking the obvious, the exercise is to alert the subconscious of the life that Gwen has been deprived of, recalling what you have been deprived of can be an emotional event and this is what I wanted to encourage.

I'm encouraging the subconscious to focus in on the cause of the fear.

The session went very well with Gwen constantly consciously recalling memories of her life over the past years; this was a very encouraging beginning to the therapy.

The following week's session was a continuation of the first session, reflecting on what Gwen had been deprived of. A great regret that Gwen spoke of was not being able to attend her sons wedding sixteen years ago. Her son Edward was very disappointed also but very understanding and that her future daughter in law did call to the house on the morning of the wedding to show Gwen her wedding dress.

Gwen continued with her conscious mind memory recalls, I also asked Gwen in this session to imagine herself going out of her home and imagine what benefits would be gained by being able to go out, Gwen said this made her feel nervous. I encouraged Gwen to do this mind exercise although it made her feel nervous as this is a great exercise to stimulate the subconscious mind.

Just before I brought session two to its conclusion I encouraged the subconscious to begin focusing in to memories that had been repressed, negative memories that are causing Gwen's fear of going out of her home, to focus in and prepare to return those memories to the conscious mind and then release the emotions of those memories that will then relieve Gwen of this terrible fear.

This was another good session with the foundations of great hypnotherapy firmly laid.

In session three I encouraged Gwen to talk to me about her life before this fear of going out struck, she covered many parts of her life, for example where she worked, when she first met Alf, what they had done together, how long were they were courting. I also wanted Gwen to concentrate on her life when she was twenty eight; it was at twenty eight years of age that Gwen started to become nervous about going out, by the time she was thirty she wouldn't go out at all.

When I attended for session four Gwen told me that she had been dreaming a lot in the past week, this is a good sign as the subconscious mind is now bringing to the attention of the conscious mind matters of concern, although dreams are difficult on times to understand they all have meaning, never the less this remains a very positive reaction from the subconscious.

We then continued with the session with free association, a continuation of the first three sessions, now encouraging the subconscious to begin returning memories to the conscious mind, I felt now that we were getting closer and closer to these causal memories, at the moment all was going to plan.

When I turned up for session five Gwen hit me with a bombshell, she did apologize for not phoning to tell me that she wanted to bring the therapy sessions to an end. I sat there speechless knowing we were on the verge of success. She explained that perhaps there was no point in going out of my home now my life is nearly over anyway, I accepted

Gwen's decision, there was no point trying to persuade Gwen she had made her decision so I told her that I would respect her decision.

Gwen seemed a little surprised by my laid back attitude and commented on this, I then explained that my job is to encourage the subconscious mind and that the conscious mind must be enthusiastic for change, I went on to say that you have obviously lost your enthusiasm for change, although this disappoints me I will have to accept your decision.

I was just about to leave the room when Alf came in, seeming somewhat annoyed. She's told you then as she he asked, his attitude took me by surprise. Yes I said disappointingly, don't blame yourself he said, you've worked hard with her and she as been totally irresponsible during the past weeks, I'm standing there now totally confused, tell me I asked what's going on here? Alf asked me to take a seat then Gwen started sobbing, Alf then told me, I told Gwen that she cannot continue with the therapy because of her drinking addiction, I'm even more confused now what drinking addiction I asked.

Apparently Gwen liked a little tittle of brandy as a nightcap, that's acceptable said Alf but since she began therapy I've discovered she's been secretly drinking brandy first thing in the morning before you arrive to calm her nerves and unless she is prepared to promise me that she will stop drinking I am not allowing the therapy to continue. I promise screamed Gwen, she then told me that she wanted to continue with her therapy.

Shortly after this we proceeded with session five, I was contemplating continuing with session five the following week, as so much had happened since I'd arrived. But there was an attitude that I had recognized in Gwen's voice when she screamed I promise, that was an appeal not from the conscious but from the subconscious mind, so I seen the benefits of continuing the therapy immediately.

Gwen then sat relaxed, I then induced hypnosis and session five began. Memories that Gwen began recalling were of her son Edward when he was five years of age, Gwen didn't want him to go to school, Gwen sensed a fear for Edward she couldn't understand why, then at this point Gwen began abreacting from both eyes, the memories of Edward and of him going to school appearing to be a very emotional and frustrating event.

She then went on to say I even come out in a nervous rash and very painful boils, and totally lost her appetite. Gwen then went on to say that she didn't like the headmistress of the school a Miss Evans; Gwen was recalling memories from when she was twenty eight years old.

Now that we had achieved these abreactions the catharsis had begun, and believe me there is no finer sight for a hypnotherapist than abreactions.

When I turned up for session six I didn't know what to expect, thankfully every thing was fine, and Gwen hadn't touched a drop of brandy for the whole week.

Gwen reported that she continued to have very unusual dreams but still couldn't recall what they were about. Nevertheless knowing the subconscious was continuing to focus in was very encouraging, Gwen also remarked that she was feeling more confident.

Session six began with more memory recalls from the age of twenty eight, memories of going to the cinema and feeling very nervous while inside the cinema, the amount of people in the cinema seemed to make her nervous.

Gwen then spoke of her job when she worked in a factory and told of the girls she worked with, she felt O.K in work but she did get nervous when catching the bus home from work, she felt people were staring at her this is what made her nervous.

Then another memory recall was of waiting for the bus after work when not realizing it at the time but she was at the front of the queue, she looked behind her to discover a long queue, a lot of people looking at her, this panicked Gwen so much that she could no longer stay in the queue so she walked home that night and every other night also. From then on Gwen said that she began staying at home now becoming frightened of going out, so frightened she even had to stop going to work, by the time I was thirty she said that was it I never went out again.

This session was then brought to its conclusion leaving me with great anticipation, I was now very confident that Gwen would shortly be released from her malaise.

Again when I arrived for our seventh session Gwen assured me that not a drop of brandy had passed her lips; Gwen did go on to say that she was feeling a bit down this week and hadn't been feeling as good as she had begun to feel, and in fact I feel a little depressed she said.

Little did Gwen know that what she had reported, the way she was feeling was great news to me, this told me that therapy was well under way now with all those repressed memories coming forward just waiting to be released.

I induced hypnosis in Gwen and then deepened the hypnosis to relax Gwen even deeper; I then asked the subconscious mind to begin to return memories to the conscious mind that are related to the fear of being in front of people what has happened in your life to cause this fear, please compare my request to other memories of fear that you have also returned to the conscious mind.

Gwen immediately recalled being five years of age and being in school, there were about thirty children in the class and I don't think the teacher liked me, she always shouted at me this affected me she made me feel so nervous I couldn't eat my food. I told my mother about this, she went down to the school to sort this teacher out. At that moment there was the biggest greyest abreaction I have ever seen from Gwen's left eye.

This informed me that the memory that just went passive was a very old memory of a frustrating and angry nature.

I then continued to encourage Gwen's subconscious mind to keep focusing in, comparing memories of events that are of a similar nature to the memories it had just returned, those traumatic memories of past events. The response was immediate from the subconscious mind with Gwen reliving the next memory recall.

I'm in school, I'm sitting at the back of the class, I'm five years of age and Miss Evans as called me to stand in front of the class, I'm frightened she's going to shout at me.

At that moment there were abreactions from both eyes.

Gwen then continued, I'm standing in front of all the other children at the front of the class room, Miss Evans is making fun of me, shouting at me, embarrassing me, all the other kids are laughing at me, I'm wetting myself, I'm frightened, they're all laughing at me.

There were many more abreactions when Gwen was reliving that experience.

With the release of all those memories and emotions that had been stored for so long, I knew that Gwen's life would now begin to improve greatly. The memories that had just been recalled had lain dormant for twenty three years, the subconscious mind having repressed the memories of that traumatic experience when Gwen was five.

Then when Gwen was twenty eight years of age, and Edward being old enough to begin school, the thought of Edward going to school become a fearful emotion, this fear being in the subconscious mind repressed, with the conscious mind unaware of this fear.

It was Gwen's conscious mind thought about Edward going to school that alerted the subconscious, the subconscious memories of school were of a fearful nature recalling the events that took place in Gwen's life, the subconscious mind then released the repressed memories that went on to cause very similar symptoms to when Gwen was five years old, namely loss of appetite, but this time a nervous rash and boils also, but worse of all being in front of people, seeing large groups of people was a very frightening experience.

When Gwen was in the cinema she experienced a panic attack, this was an alarm bell going off in the subconscious mind's now active repressed memory. When this happens the repressed memory will then become more aggravated encouraging a greater protection. To the subconscious mind crowds are memories of danger so the subconscious will want to give that extra protection.

Another and much more traumatic event for Gwen was when she was at the front of the queue waiting for a bus after work, when she looked around and seen the large queue now in front of her this already aggravated repressed memory caused a major panic so bad that Gwen had to walk home that night and wasn't able to catch the bus ever again, even the thought of catching a bus would cause anxiety.

This repressed memory now being provoked to an hysterical nature threw a total blanket protection over Gwen and eventually stopped Gwen ever going out again, the outside world had become a very scary place to be.

When I asked Gwen to come back to the here and now and to open her eyes at the end of our seventh session she was in her words, absolutely shattered this being a normal reaction after a very emotional session, and after the release of so many abreactions, but reported feeling lighter, not surprising with that weight lifted off her shoulders. Another very distinguishing feature was her complexion; instead of being ashen it was now a lovely lively red.

I suggested that we have a break for two weeks before we continued with our eighth and final session to give Gwen a chance to recover, and to give time for the changes to take place. I was now very excited knowing the prospects for change was significant.

Two weeks later when I attended for our eighth and final session I was greeted by a very excited and enthusiastic Gwen, there was great excitement for both Alf and Gwen who couldn't wait to tell me about their shopping expedition, Gwen and Alf had been out to a superstore. Gwen had insisted on pushing this big trolley that you put your shopping in and paying for the goods when they got to the checkout,

The last time Gwen had gone shopping was just before her thirtieth birthday, thirty five years earlier that was in 1965, when I went to Davies the butcher for a pound of beef sausages.

We then continued with our eighth session, I induced hypnosis and asked the subconscious to continue to return memories from the past that have been repressed and to release the emotions of those memories. I wasn't expecting any other memories to be returned, but this session was more of a clearing up session making sure our work was complete. Some time after I had induced hypnosis Gwen began laughing, I asked her to share the joke with me, its Alf she said he's worried, I've told him to find a part time job to finance my shopping trips.

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