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Case Study - Trust the Process

By Jane Butterworth, BS, LMT, CHT, EFT-CC, CIIG

I recently taught the ImagineHealth!™ class. As those of you who are familiar with the ImagineHealth!™ class know, there are six classes, each with a taped guided imagery session that the class experiences as a group (and which I guided "live"). Class members then take the taped version of the imagery session home with them to practice with for a week. It is a powerful class and a wonderful introduction to imagery.

As the time for the sixth class drew closer, I decided that I really wanted to do a demonstration Guided Imagery that is interactive in nature. It is not in the class format, but I wanted the class to see what an interactive imagery approach is like, to see its magic and power in action, and to have a better idea of what I have to offer them in private sessions. I selected as my "volunteer" a participant who appeared to be "getting it" and having fun with her imagery.

Bonnie (not her real name) graciously consented to participate in the demonstration. We set up a private appointment at my office for a practice session so that Bonnie could become more familiar and comfortable with the process. The practice session couldn't have gone more smoothly. Bonnie wanted to work with an image for her eye muscles. She is an artist and said she holds lots of tension in her eyes and wanted them to be more relaxed.

Bonnie's personal place was her bedroom at home, where she was "in the darker warmth" while it was sunny outside in the late morning. On her bed, she enjoyed the soft pillow, the warm burgundy sheets, and the fresh mountain air. When Bonnie called to mind her concerns about the tension in her eyes, the image that came was of really tight, long, stretched to-the-max rubber bands, pulling out a couple of feet from her head, and especially tight at the back inside her head. The rubber bands were tan, thick, wide, strong, and taut, and they were getting tired. A little construction worker guy in a yellow hard hat appeared and said, "You can call them Bindy."

Bonnie said to Bindy, "I know you are tired. You can get off the job now." Bindy replied, "Whew! What a relief." Bindy immediately backed down, the construction guy went home, and Bonnie reported that her eyes felt better.

Bonnie said, "They are sorry. They thought they were supposed to do that for me. Now I feel them glowing warm golden light. They want me to pet them every day. Stroke them a few times. Don't forget about them; keep them relaxed and calm."

I asked if there was anything else. "The rest of my body needs to stay relaxed so they can, too." I asked if there was anything more. "They just want to rest now. They are tired. I forgive them. It's okay. They didn't know they were hurting me. Bindy is

peaceful now." Bonnie was surprised by the whole thing, and about how different this experience was from the imagery work she had been doing with the tapes, especially regarding the variety and strength of the feelings she experienced. A week later, her eyes were still staying relaxed.

After the practice session was over, we talked about the demonstration session, which was to be another "getting to know an image" session. We decided that we would see how Bonnie felt on the day of the class and what she wanted to work on at that time. I discussed with her the possibility of exploring a pre-determined image such as a tree or a star. I was feeling pretty confident about doing my first live demonstration, as this practice session had gone so smoothly and quickly.

The sixth class and the day of the demonstration session was the following week. We covered the topic for the sixth class, which was putting insight into action. I prepared the class for the demonstration, emphasizing respect and consideration for Bonnie for sharing about herself so openly with us. Bonnie said she had been to the dentist that week and he had told her two very surprising things. The first was that her teeth were really big (!), and the second was that her teeth were showing wear indicating that she had been grinding her teeth at night. All of this information was new and curious to Bonnie: "I had no idea that I was grinding my teeth at night, and I'd like to learn more about that." I reviewed the format of the interactive approach with the class, with reminders that we don't judge or interpret and evaluate another individual's images. Then we were off and running.

Bonnie did not need a long induction to help her become relaxed. After just a few deep breaths she was ready. The personal place that was "just perfect for the work that you have chosen to do today" was in a high alcove of the City of Rocks, a state park in southern New Mexico.* "I am curled up in a burgundy blanket, very comfy. I see the vast sky above with little clouds. It is 11:00 am. I like the warm ochre texture of the rocks, the shaping and the shadows. I have a strong, grounded feeling. It is a massive, safe base."

Calling to mind what the dentist said about signs that she had been grinding her teeth, the image that came to mind was of massive ocean waves. "They are huge, out of scale huge. I don't know what this means." I said something here about just going with the image and that she didn't have to know what it meant. (I am reconstructing from my scratchy notes here, where I recorded what Bonnie said but not what I said.) Its qualities? "Strength. It is big, massive, almighty, all-powerful. They are dominant. Nothing could survive in it. It is so massive." Its name? "Massive." I said something here like, "What would you like to say to or ask Massive?" or "What else do you notice about Massive?" Bonnie: "It is going to take note of me. Acknowledgement that it is there is enough. It is so overpowering. I can't do a thing about it. It's being nice and noticing that I'm there."

Then I asked, "What would you like to have happen now?" Bonnie said, "I want to ride the swells. It's kind of like breathing, life-giving." Then the tears came and we

passed her some tissue. "I know. I didn't have fun as a kid. I wanted to run and play and I wasn't allowed. Now the sun is coming in and I am going with the flow. I am wanting to feel a mother. I want to belong. I want to be close. It's not just water, it represents a big life force. I am going to hold my nose, get off my raft, and go down to the center. Now I am in the big warm light center of the heart of this big thing that I don't know or understand. My body is dissipating. I am happy and giddy."

Bonnie felt the happy and giddy feelings focused in her stomach, so I had her put her hands there, to enjoy and allow the feeling to grow to the perfect comfortable level, then suggested that she could put her hands on her tummy any time and remember this happy giddy feeling of being in the big, warm, light center. Bonnie was ready to end the session. The hindsight portion of the session was an interesting group experience as Bonnie permitted her classmates to ask her questions. She was surprised by the City of Rocks, but felt they were symbolic of her big teeth. She was really surprised by the big water, and had no idea what it meant at first, but just went with it, and the journey took her to the insight she had about her childhood and how she was sad because she wanted to run and play but couldn't. We talked about putting her hands on her stomach to recall the good feelings of being in the heart of Massive. She planned on returning to the beach in her imagination and in the physical world, and to do some drawings about her experience. She also reported feeling relieved about her upcoming visit with her family, thinking that it would go more smoothly with her new understanding of her childhood. She was very forgiving of her mother, saying something like, "She didn't know how to be any other way."

I followed up with Bonnie after her visit with her family. She said, "During the visit I was open and allowing the love to flow. The problems were still there." (Basically, her parents act like her husband doesn't exist.) "I feel so good about my healing imagery that I just love my mom now for what she is in my life. I don't have needs anymore that I wish she could meet but can't. When I was on the raft, it felt like the water was the nurturing body and breast of the mother. And as I went down into her heart it was like I was four or five years old. I was happy and jumping and somersaulting around. I was a little four- or five-year-old playing in a sphere about six feet around. The heart was happy that I was there and I felt that all the natural emotional needs that any kid has finally got met in there—the emotional needs that had never been met before for me. I have closure on this issue now. The circle is closed. I can't believe it all came from the teeth! But I do have closure and I don't know what else could have done it." What I expected to be a simple demo turned out to be a lot more than that. I was reminded yet again that by simply trusting the process, imagery leads us just where we need to go.

*City of Rocks: Formed of volcanic ash 30 million years ago and sculpted by wind and water into rows of monolithic blocks, City of Rocks State Park takes its name from these incredible rock formations.