

Client's Review of CST

My first experience with CranioSacral Therapy was one of the most unusual experiences in my life.

As the open person I pride myself on being, I tried this alternative therapy known to address any number of maladies when not much else can. My massage therapist, Cari, had suggested I do so when my headaches had not gone away after a year of weekly massage. I was impressed that she would care enough to recommend another option.

Cari referred me to a woman named Phyllis in Tenafly. I innocently went to her, trusting that if Cari recommended her she had to be good. Phyllis had a bit of a quirky personality but was pleasant enough, and certainly "present." She had short dark wavy hair and a bit of a nervous energy. She directed me down to her lovely, finished basement, where I noticed a plethora of books on her craft. It seemed like a comfortable enough space to relax in. She had me fill out some forms and verified any health conditions and concerns I might have.

I climbed onto her table having no idea what to expect short of a light and gentle touch. It could not have been more than two minutes after she put her hands on me, that my body started reacting in a way that I could have never imagined. I had the openness to go with what it, although it was shocking. My inner child was accessed and expressing herself. I'm about three years old and started sucking on Phyllis' thumb like it was my bottle. Phyllis was as kind and nurturing as any wonderful mother would be. That helped immensely in my being able to be mindful instead of jumping off the table. The whole thing felt nuts. But it was real, and I cannot negate that.

I am a relatively skeptical person, but I knew this was me. I knew enough about my background that this was my inner child claiming herself like she never had before and reliving something extraordinarily painful: my vulnerable-yet-strong willed inner child. I so naturally latched onto her thumb and was sucking on it as if it were my bottle and I was wanting that bottle so much, and desperate for it. My determination, strength and deep anger, fear and sadness at it being taken away was evident. In those moments, I felt extraordinary emotional pain. I remember that. My parents had teased me about how I loved my bottle and didn't want to give it up. This was before the day of the books explaining the feelings that children have. Now I actually witnessed this and relived it. It was tellingly surreal.

During that session, I went with whatever she said, which was mostly listening to me, holding a loving space for me, working at my own pace, and whatever surfaced. Processing the stuck emotions as they "released." This painful energy seemingly disappearing into thin air. The gentle touch was on my neck, my back and other parts of my body as they called out. Partly in shock, I was comforted that this screaming part was being seen, and its voice heard. That little girl was speaking very loudly - it's like there were two of me. It was similar to when you're a mother of a toddler, and your toddler is having a tantrum and you are there and just rolling with it. I was there, but it wasn't me that was experiencing what happened, I was simply observing.

When the session was over I was giving myself space to absorb my experience. Phyllis told me that sometimes these things happen and there were emotional releases that take place. Craniosacral Therapy releases old emotions and blockages from our cells, where they can be stored. They could be everyday traumas, trauma resulting from car accidents, issues at birth, to muscular dystrophy and spina bifida to autism including emotional disturbances. They could be as simple as a dog bite that was too overwhelming for a particular person's nervous system or a tumultuous family dynamic that was too taxing for a child.

When I left Phyllis's house, and got in the car I breathed deeply. I breathed and tried to make sense of our session together. In my mind it defied logic. Leaning against the seat, I noticed that my neck was moving, in an unraveling type of motion. To the right, to the left - it was shocking but it was just my body - nothing was off with my mood or mind/emotion. The image that comes to mind is the "warm up" that a boxer does before a match but only the upper body part. Again, I went with it, - what choice did I have? I could stop it if I wanted to or had to. Later when Steve got home, it became worse and worse. I dialed Phyllis and she said sometimes for 48 hours I could have some residual effects from the therapy.

Later that night, I sat in my loft upstairs, head bobbing around and twisting, contorting – not unlike Linda Blair in the Exorcist with the exception of turning all the way around, although emotionally I was fine. Steve was so panicked that he called Cari. She ran over with essential oils. I lay on the floor right next to my bed as if I was being treated for an emergency, and perhaps I was. She put her hands on me. She was gifted and studying to add craniosacral treatments to her repertoire. When she reassured Steve that this is nothing to be afraid of, and sat with me a bit doing a little bit more hands on, my body calmed down a bit. We knew we weren't alone with this.

A couple days later it was still happening, and I was at a loss as to what to do. I had a five-year-old and didn't want this to be anything that hindered her development or mine. So from the first day it happened I chose to normalize it (and I do to this day).

I decided to contact Dr. John Upledger, at the Upledger Institute who discovered this unique form of therapy. I wrote him explaining our predicament and how we didn't know what to do. Understanding that his waiting list was over a year long, I thought it would be a long shot to get him to even answer my letter – but two days later as I was running into the bathroom, my phone started to ring, I wasn't going to answer it but something made me run to it. I picked up and the person on the other line said "Hello, this is John Upledger. I received your letter, and I think you should come down to the Institute for a week to attend our intensive."

I told him how perplexing this was and that we needed to understand and were at a loss. He said "I understand what this is, and I think we can help you." I was hopeful, and pleasantly surprised and impressed that he would call me himself. His words that he "understands" and could help were beautiful music to my ears. I understood that this was truly a compassionate and human man. He loved what he did, and believed in it 100% and he knew I was afraid.

I said yes, I'd call and arrange it. I spoke to Steve and he was very generous and asked for the week off. He was scared, but he'd have gone anywhere to know that they could help me with this. We both needed to be ok for our daughter, especially me! I had gone through hell to have her and I wasn't about to succumb to an evolving debilitating state.

In June 2002, we headed down to Palm Beach Gardens, Florida to the Upledger Institute, for the five-day intensive program. Luckily, my parents lived nearby, so I asked them to watch my daughter while I attended this program that would help me, without going into details. They had absolutely no idea what was going on, nor did they ask questions. All I remembered was that my father wanted me home for dinner every day by 5:30pm, dead or alive!

Every day we did Craniosacral Therapy for eight hours. I was with about ten other people who ranged from babies to middle-aged people and elderly gems. One boy had spina bifida, and another person was in a car accident and hoping to be able to walk again. There was someone paralyzed in a wheelchair from another accident and there were a few there struggling with emotional issues, but I remember being the only one who didn't seem to have a serious physical issue.

There were many therapists, and they switched throughout the day. Everyone worked in a big room together (each person on their respective table with their respective therapist(s) – because they felt people's "energies" were helpful for one another in their healing. Although I didn't wear my issue on my body, those families desperate with sick children and family members told me they were praying for me to recover. It was a community experience.

The treatment and the experience was nothing short of amazing. On the Wednesday of that week, Dr. Upledger came in and spent about fifteen minutes with me. Being in his presence and having him work on me was like being in the presence of a miracle maker; a truly gifted master. His touch was like nothing I'd ever experienced before and I felt God working through him. His compassion and honesty crept out of his pores. I felt a little nervous to be with him yet somewhat star struck as I know how much he had accomplished and how renowned he was and now the incredible legacy that he left this world.

As hands were put on me, I'd at times do all and any kind of contortion imaginable. My neck and head twisted, and guttural sounds expelled as if a mother pushed her baby out. At times it sounded like I was being tortured, and gasping out loud. He and others would tell me it "doesn't have to be loud" and worked with me on softening, breathing, and with the breath "releasing." My body would tighten and then it would release, sometimes when I spoke about what was being held. It would contract and expand. It seemed like pain, hurt, fear, insecurity – trauma, the everyday traumas that we, especially in dysfunctional families, live with.

I dealt with a lot, I released a lot – it was a life changing and emotional week. It was difficult. I left with a permanent cellular memory of the love of the practitioners, Dr. Upledger, and the beautiful people and their families who shared our space. I left with a prayer that all would be healed, partially if not fully. I was afraid to leave, but the time had come. It was a connectedly painful experience, and one that I was grateful for.

At Upledger, they don't just say goodbye. They are a community, and they made sure I followed up with a contact in my area. I was referred to Angani DiBello, an occupational therapist in New York for "tune ups." They wanted me see someone upon my departure to continue my work and I did not disagree.

To this day I see the very skilled Angani in NYC, and she has worked with me lovingly and accepting where I am always. As I progressed, they started to morph into a pattern; a pattern that to this day is not understandable to me and although comes to me less frequently. If only I had fallen off a bike and had pain in my body that was chronic because of something easily describe it would be easier to gulp.

After many years and countless hours of Craniosacral Therapy, and other modalities to try to understand, I maintain that the exact nature of trappings will likely never be known. Perhaps I was choked or hung, because that is the sensation and that's where I react most notably. The movements seem like that of my birth – getting stuck with a chord around my neck, and squirming every way I can possibly squirm to get out, feeling choked and strangled and then gasping for breath just when I thought I'd die.

This is the mind/body, or a suggestion that it could perhaps have been from a past life. My reaction to that is "– past life?" That is hocus pocus! That is just insanity – it's not tangible and it's too goofy to even consider. After fifteen years I will rule out nothing. If you picture a baby squirming in utero or just when they get out, how they open their mouths like a little bird and their bodies squirm around, back and forth – that is what my body does at times. And there is often a lot of teeth clenching. I am certainly thinking that the birthing issue fits the best after all these years. Not to say that it could be anything that triggers me: an upcoming visit with family, too much time around things that I don't like, and hurtful family members are the biggest trigger, but certainly not the only trigger. I've learned to respect it and live with it, and it's certainly not a big part of my life at all – but, when my body talks I respect it.

When I left Upledger, in large part I left my painful headaches behind, and their energy was gently released from my cells into the universe. I felt exhausted but like a layer of my pain had disintegrated. Although my headaches have lessened considerably, they still surface on a rare occasion, and maybe it's just a part of me to continue to normalize, accept, and love.