

# Hypnosis plants seeds of a healthier life

These days, I'm looking to the heavens for direction about dealing with my chronic illness. So whenever something makes its way into my lap — three times — (that's my arbitrary number), I accept it as help from above and pursue it full-speed.

So I was reading a book on self-healing by Dr. Andrew Weil that extensively analyzed hypnosis. Then I received a couple of e-mails about hypnosis being used with medical conditions. It made me start thinking about who I would call locally to find a good hypnotherapist. Then, I



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thought, I'll wait for the third thing to show up. Sure enough, the next day, I received a fax from hypnotherapist Nicol Merline in Milford, 10 minutes from my home.

I have to admit I was a little nervous about seeing a hypnotherapist.

But I needed help dealing with this chronic illness and one particularly invasive diagnostic procedure scheduled for later in the month, so I decided to push away my doubts and call Nicol.

No, she didn't make me bark like a dog or quack like a duck.

What the former high school science and biology teacher did was help me discover how to relax, while calling attention to all the negative ways in which I was "seeding" my life.

The meetings were very emotional for me.

We started by talking informally about what I wanted to get out of the therapy. I told her about my illness, my fears, my goals.

As I sat on a small lounge in her office with a miniature water sculpture behind me, Merline sat at a desk in the light of a soothing desk lamp. She recorded the session on a cassette tape. I was to listen to the tape at least once a day.

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# COLUMN

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## Hypnosis therapy heals the fear of living with chronic illness

"twice would be better, three times would be excellent," Merline said in a soft voice.

My back was straight, eyes gently closed, as she led me through a visualization exercise guiding me to a "safe place" of my own choosing.

In my mind, my "safe place" was a veranda on a beach. My whole extended family was there, happy, healthy, relaxed. I walked into the covered outdoor area and felt the warm ocean breeze against my face. I could see sand dunes and, beyond that, the crisp blue line of the ocean. Palm trees, swaying in the light of a clear mid-day, framed the scene. I was overwhelmed with a sense of joy because I live so far away from my family in Texas.

I was "awake" in the sense that I could feel my body, but I had the sensation of lightness you get when you're just about to fall asleep.

This veranda was truly a "safe place," but there was more for me to discover amid the distant squawking of sea gulls.

Merline asked me to imagine there was a laboratory in the scene and to walk inside. There I would find a large throne with a screen in front of it. On the arm of the throne were buttons that I could push as needed. She asked me how the buttons were labeled. In my mind, I imagined labels that read "fear," "death" and "pain." So I mentally "destroyed" each of those buttons.

She then led me through a visualization where I imagined myself on a table about to undergo the dreaded procedure. She asked me to imagine myself in miniature, leading the catheter into my neck vein and into my heart.

During the second session, the image that immediately entered my head was myself, as a little girl, around 8 or 9 years old — before I first started getting sick.

That was a time in my life when I was adventurous, when I walked around barefoot and unafraid.

This little courageous girl led the catheter easily to the heart and even massaged the inside of the heart

and the arteries leading to my lungs. I felt so relaxed and suddenly a stillness came over my chest, a magnificent stillness that I hadn't felt in so long.

I felt as if my body were rocking itself back and forth involuntarily, but I opened my eyes to peek and I wasn't moving. So I sat back, took a deep breath and decided to enjoy this soothing inner motion.

When the session was over, I wiped away the tears, and thanked Nicol. As I walked

back to my car, I reveled in the discovery of my inner strength. I physically felt stronger and had more energy. It was a good feeling after feeling so tired for so long.

So now, I listen to my tape

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each morning and anxiously await the little girl from so long ago. In my mind, I see her leading me through the crooked mesquite trees on a hot South Texas afternoon. I hear the

ringing sound of cicadas and feel the warm gusts of wind on my face.

And I know I am healed.

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