

Cherie's story of integrating NVC & Contact Improvisation, 13<sup>th</sup> April 2017

I am someone with a number of long standing musculoskeletal limitations. My body is not what you'd call physically typical and is in fact deformed by the psoriatic arthritis I've had for 45 of my 61 years. I've taken a truckload of drugs and had a bunch of surgeries to straighten my seriously deformed foot, to replace a hip and both knees and clean up the wounds that didn't heal properly. I am unable to lower myself to, or raise myself up from the floor without assistance. I have osteoporosis and if I fall it is likely that my bones will break - as have my collarbone and the ribs that punctured my lung. That little NDE (near death experience) had me absolutely certain that there were many of the moves in contact improv that I would not be engaging in and I even wondered if attending the retreat would be worth my while. I was also concerned that because of my limitations it wouldn't really be meaningful for other people to pair with me either. Yet at the same time as I feared it, I was also drawn to it.

I put this down to Tracy's enthusiasm and her sharing that she'd done CI with someone in a wheelchair. Well I thought, if someone in a wheelchair can do it then so can I. It was another reason that I was drawn to it and this was the fact that as a trainer / facilitator and coach of Nonviolent Communication (NVC), I work very consciously with the body. I have found that in working with myself and many others that the body holds valuable information and wisdom and that being able to listen to and sense what is happening in the body really contributes to greater self-connection & awareness; to a deeper understanding of what truly matters to us as well as to healing and growth.

Eventually I plucked up the courage to go to a contact improv session and I found it so amazing that I went back again and again. With guidance and support I found myself able to do way more than I anticipated. I totally exceeded my expectations and found myself rolling around on the floor with a much younger woman and high on the shoulders of a man I'd only just met. My fear or indeed my terror turned to trust and my fixed mindset shifted into curiosity. I embarked on an adventure in a wondrous landscape of touch, warmth, care, sensitivity and play. This damaged body with all its limitations began to transcend them and enter into a whole new world of delight, of learning, growing and healing. Session by session I could literally feel myself changing and not just physically. I found myself shifting internally and at times it was difficult to find words to describe my experience. Thankfully though, due to my knowledge and training in NVC and to the empathic presence of those who were willing to listen, I was able to find language to articulate what I was experiencing and this process amplified my experience and made clear the deep and profound meaning of it.

I'd been married for 21 years, single for 5 and in trauma recovery for 2. Apart from greeting and farewell hugs I was unaccustomed to physical connection with men. I was tentative to say the least however I was surprised to find that respectful physical contact without an agenda or domination was truly exquisite. I felt safe and this in its self was transformational. Whenever I felt unsafe or uncertain I could say so and movement would slow down or stop. Sometimes there was bigger, broader, stronger movements and other times soft and tender micro movements. Moving in contact with different people gave a broad palette to the moves. My body was stretched, extended, moved and touched in ways that nourished and nurtured my sense of self.

Sharing about my experience the day after had me weeping with the joy of knowing healing. I was so deeply moved by how my body remembered how to move and in awe of the power of Contact Improvisation and NVC to bring me home to myself.

