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Letting it go: A transformative session of massage therapy

By Amanda Brauman King, MA, LMT, ZBHA Faculty

Recently, after a deep massage, I went through what I would call an emotional storm. It started the next day and was exacerbated by a disturbing dream in which someone I loved called to tell me she was in the hospital, but her voice trailed off before I could find out *which* hospital. I woke with a pervasive feeling of crisis and dread which I could not easily shake. These feelings were as familiar as breathing, or not breathing, bringing me back to a period a few years ago when my elderly parents, who lived in another city, experienced a string of medical emergencies, falls, fractures, emergency room visits, and the like, causing me repeatedly to drop work to drive the 200-mile distance to their aid. That period ended after a succession of harrowing shocks and losses, and finally, my husband and I settled back, after my parents' bittersweet passing, to "normal life."

Then the process of grieving began, which took its own toll: heaviness in limbs, heart and lungs; difficulty smiling; new, deeper pouches under my eyes; grayer hair; the feeling that life might punch me in the gut again when I least expected it.

Slowly, and with the help of many gifted practitioners—a grief counselor, Zero Balancers, acupuncturists, a specialist in flower essences, a polarity therapist, and massage therapists—my heart and limbs felt lighter and I began to feel like myself again. Until this week when, after the most recent massage offered by a strong and sweet young woman just one year out of massage school, all the tumultuous feelings returned.

Returned? No. Released? Most definitely.

How beautifully our bodies store in their many layers and depths emotions and sensations we are not ready to process. Then, in a moment of quiet and safety, they can bubble to the surface of our skin and our consciousness. In this case, I felt the massage, one of the deepest I've requested, scraped residual sorrow out of my cells.

My teacher, Dr. Fritz Frederick Smith, the founder of Zero Balancing, often says that every session is like a wrapped present: you never know what you will find. This was certainly the case for me in receiving work from this lovely young woman.

It also helped me to understand on a corporal, visceral level how the soft tissue, the muscles, fascia, internal organs (heart, lungs, guts), absorbs and cushions the daily shocks and frustrations of life. Psychiatrist and trauma expert Bessel van der Kolk, M.D. writes about this extensively in his book *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind and Body in the Healing of Trauma* (2014): "One of the ways the memory of helplessness is stored is as muscle tension or feelings of disintegration in the affected body areas." (p. 267). He goes on to write: "One of the clearest lessons from contemporary neuroscience is that our sense of ourselves is anchored in a vital connection with our bodies. We do not truly know ourselves unless we can feel and interpret our physical sensations; we need to register and act on these sensations to navigate safely through life." (p. 274)

Zero Balancing teaches that the soft tissue, also home to acupuncture meridians, typically stores emotions expressed and unexpressed, while bone, the deepest, densest tissue

in the body aside from the teeth, frequently holds experiences from early childhood when bones are so plastic and forming, as we take our first steps, for example. In childhood, our soft tissue *is* soft, not yet hardened into a protective layer that so many of us over a certain age share. In childhood especially, things “cut to the quick” because physical muscular barriers are not there. In my own Zero Balancing sessions, I have uncovered long-forgotten memories and sensations from pivotal childhood moments, along with other experiences that affected me to the core.

Which brings me to my point: how wonderful to let go of grief, anguish, anger, frustration, humiliation or whatever else our loyal tissues may have packaged up in literal human Ziplocs.

Sometimes you can let go by yourself, through methods such as running, yoga, meditation, boxing, etc. But sometimes, like I did, you need a helping hand.



Amanda Brauman King is a massage therapist and Zero Balancing practitioner and teacher and writer based in Salem, Massachusetts. She had her first Zero Balancing session in 2002, a revelatory experience, and was so transformed that she decided to train in ZB and entered the Muscular Therapy Institute in 2003. She now focuses on pain and stress management, personal growth and trauma work in her private practice. Contact her on Instagram @amandamtzb

Photo by Kimberley Lindner, Time Bandit Photography

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