

Introduction

Ana is the adult daughter of a long-term client of mine. I worked with Ana for several months in early 2009. Her stabilization and growth was phenomenally quick, due in large measure to her determination and the effectiveness of the Conference Room.

Ana’s mother was suddenly forced to flee a Central American country when Ana was four years old. She and her brother were left in the care of their maternal grandmother. Ana experienced a profound sense of abandonment from this event that led her to reject herself on many levels, though her public persona was quite strong. With the help of the Catholic Church in Los Angeles that was very actively working with Central American refugees, Ana and her year-older brother were reunited with their mother a year or so later. Ana quickly learned in school in Los Angeles that it was not safe for her to be herself. She was hit by teachers and bullied by children for being Central American and not speaking English. So, she “put away” her Central American four-year-old self in a safe place inside herself and focused totally on acculturating as quickly as possible. Her story has made me wonder about the acculturation stories of countless other immigrant children.

We had targeted her mother’s leaving for the previous three sessions using EMDR. We had done EMDR with adult Ana and her 4 year-old self but it felt incomplete and not real

Because she “spaced out” during EMDR, I instructed her to do either the cross crawl or the butterfly hug during sets of eye movements. I timed the eye movements to coincide with the pace of her self-administered BLS. During these intense sessions, Ana had come to understand that the very strong frustration and lack of patience she had been experiencing recently with her daughter was because she was about to turn four, the same age at which Ana was involuntarily abandoned by her mother. Ana has realized in our brief work together that this was the core event that led to her hating herself, to her having a self-negating voice running 24 hours a day. I introduced her to the Conference Room and she agreed to try it even though she couldn’t imagine being able to do it.

This ninety-minute session began with a lengthy introduction to the Conference Room. I guided her down the steps and Ana entered a room. Her nickname as a child was Cheni.

Her persistent use of “me” to refer to younger parts of self is powerful, striking and often grammatically confusing. Most clients refer to other ego states in the third person (she/he).

A – Adult Ana

C – 4 year-old ego state “Cheni”

F – Farnsworth

17/18 – 17 or 18 year-old ego state

Conference Room

A I'm on the couch. I'm comfortable there and happy there. And through the door comes me as a little girl and my little dress that I wore to Montessori in [her Central American country]. (Teary.) And I'm just so sad and I look so scared. I'm trying to get myself to come closer to me, but she stands by the door. And I'm so sad for her.

F [I introduce myself. I talk at some length about Ana being grown up.]

Little one, do you remember Ana has been bringing you out of the darkness and holding you? Little one, what would you like to be called?

A Cheni (4 yr. old)
Ana reports Cheni is more in the room, closer to the couch.

F What do you see in that woman on the couch?

C Patience and love and someone who just cares.

F And would you like her to hold you?

C *Shakes head no.*

F Take all the time you need to feel comfortable with your grown-up self.

C I stand holding my doll really tight. Looking from me to you, a little scared but more confused.

F Did you have any idea that you were now living in the US?

C I've been in that dark hallway for so long and no one has ever invited me out. So, I'm scared.

F And what has it been like for these last few weeks for Ana to finally invite you out.

C &A It's like we've been waiting for this moment. And my adult self is happy and patient and reaches out and she just wants to hold her doll.

F Little one, Cheni, it's so beautiful you saw patience and love and someone who just cares. Just take in what you've been waiting for, for so long. Now the dry desert is turning into a beautiful waterfall. How are you feeling now, Cheni, as you soak up this long-awaited love?

- C I don't feel so alone. And I'm not sitting by myself wondering how long I'm going to sit there by myself. It's nice to see people. And it's nice to see me. It's comforting and I can relax now.
- F Cheni, take some nice deep breathes as you relax into the present.
- What are the tears about and who's crying?
- A I cry to look at it but neither of us is crying. Grown up me is very patient and comforting and little me is still scared. And I cry since it's been so long since I've seen her.
- F And what's it like Ana to have her back in your life?
- A It's warm. It's different and hard. It's been a long time. And we're both very, very ready for this. Like she has been waiting for me to enter this room and sit on the couch and patiently wait for her.
- C And, I came out scared. I didn't want to leave the closet. It's dark in there.
- F Cheni, I bet you've had many conversations with your doll. I'll bet she's been a big support to you. Who else helped you back then in that time. Maybe your Montessori teacher?
- C I didn't have anyone. Just me there.
- F I'm so sorry. You must have been so scared.
- C I never left that hallway to explore the rest of the house. [Cheni is using a metaphor of being hidden away inside Ana all these years. Cheni was never forced to be in a dark closet or a boarded-up house.] They boarded up the windows and the doors and I've just been patiently waiting in the dark, in the corner. And now the window is open. A big window (the conference room). The lights are on. It's so pretty.
- F Welcome to today. Today is different from all of the years you've been waiting. And what 's pretty in the room, with the lights on?
- C The furniture. New. Everything is bright. The sun comes through the window.
- F And what's it like to be in the sun again?
- C A little scary.
- F And what else? It's pretty. You said you really like it.

- C It's very pretty and also very intimidating.
- F Ana, can you tell her you will be right here with her and help her feel safer?
- A *big sigh*
- A&C I sit with me now. I'm able to allow myself, my little self is able to allow me to come over. I trust me.
- F Who trusts who?
- A My little self trusts me now.
- C I can sit right next to me [my grown-up self].
- F What's that like, to sit next to your grown-up self?
- C *crying*. I've just been waiting for someone to show they care and it's nice to have me there.
- F That's the best, isn't it?
- C And a strong me. Being little, it's nice having someone next to me who is strong and patient and who genuinely cares.
- F Take that into your heart and into every cell of your body, Cheni.
- C I'm comfortable now. I can put my doll down and be OK. I've been holding that doll forever so tight so it wouldn't go away. But now I have me.
- F And, Cheni, can you look into the eyes of your grown up me? (Yes) And What's that like?
- C The grown up me is really comforting me, robbing my back. We're together. I can see how much I care about myself. I can see it in my eyes. I know I will not let myself be in this house by myself anymore. My adult self came in, turned on the lights, opened the window, brought in this comforting aura. It's like I came back as an adult and I'm starting to take care of everything. I'm not a little girl in this house trying to take care of everything. I can make sure I take care of everything, that I'm OK.
- F And, Cheni, is there anything you'd like your grown-up self to tell you?
- A I already said it when I first came in the door and saw me standing by the door and I reached out my hand and said, "I love you. Nobody can love you the way I love you."

It’s strange. I understand my absence from me. I understand why I had to be in that house alone. And I believe me when I say I’m not going to leave.

F I’m sensing in this quiet moment, a sense of peace, of peace that you’re sharing with each other, with yourself. *(Ana cries.)*

A? C? I miss me.

F And you don’t ever have to miss each other again.

Several minutes of silence. [Conference Room sessions like this one have taught me to tolerate lengthy silences.]

F Perhaps you could tell me what’s happening now.

A It’s like I just took away all of this burden and all of this aloneness that my little one felt and I can take it on me now and handle it and let her grown up. It’s such a relief. I’m strong enough to take everything away from my little self and show her that I will take care of everything. All she has to do is run around and be happy. And that’s all she wants. The house is not what it was. It was dark and ugly and boarded up. And that’s why when my little self came out of the hallway she was scared. But now since I opened all of the windows and told her I love her, she can be a child. And I’m not an overwhelmed adult, for once.

F You certainly aren’t.

A Both of me are very comfortable.

F Is there anything else either of you would like to say to each other in this room, in this house?

A Just a lot of hugs. A lot of embracing me. Guilty feelings and then forgiving me right then and there. ...My little self will be OK now.

F And what would be just right for your little self. To stay in this happy house and you’ll check on her. Or to come live with you?

A I’ve brought my other self, my 17 or 18-year-old, in to take care of me [Cheni].

17/18 I am happy to do that.

F I was supposed to ask you and you did it on your own. [Remember, you want to tuck little ones in with an older part of self who would be delighted to do so.]

17/18 *Laughter.* I come in wearing my big baggy jeans and sweatshirt. Life is just starting for me. And I am so happy to be in that house with the little me, because I can't leave me alone. I refuse to leave me alone.

A It almost feels like I'm a mom of a teenager and of a four-year-old and I'm telling the teenager what to do before I go. And I'm more at ease now, knowing that I, a happy me, will take care of me.

F Any final words?

A I'm really proud of myself, of my little me for being there for so long and being so strong, and for accepting me back so fast with no questions. And I'm very proud of middle me for wanting to be there, for almost volunteering to be there. That part of me has also been waiting to be asked. Cries. It feels like I have my family back, if that's not weird. I'm the old one, the responsible one, and that feels good to know that I can...I almost don't want to go [leave the Conference Room and end the session.]

F You can come back soon, whenever you want. And you promised to help the four-year-old write a song.

A I'm very comfortable with leaving. And the little me is very comfortable with letting me go for now.

She suddenly opens her tearful eyes and says she's back. And cries some more.

Evaluation of First Conference Room

A Wow!

F And you thought you couldn't do it!

A It was so real. I'm so proud of myself for doing what I just did. I have never allowed myself to see myself [my four-year-old self], to rub my back, to just be there.

F And how was this different from the last several times when you've taken care of the four-year-old during EMDR.

A The other times I wasn't anywhere. I allowed me to touch and feel me but there was always part of my little self that said, "Whatever." I guess I knew I'd leave. It was always in the black open space. It felt more real being in the house and watching myself. And giving me the space to stand in that doorway for as long as

I needed to. And leaving an older part of me there. That really made it OK this time. Like I know I’m being taken care of.

F I was supposed to ask if there was an older part who would like taking care of the little one.

A I knew I needed to leave but I knew I couldn’t leave her. So I invited this other part, the 17/18 year-old part, of myself. And I was just so happy to take care of her. The 3 of us have been waiting for this for a very long time. It doesn’t make me feel guilty because my own daughter won’t be left behind. But it’s ok to leave my 4-year-old and take care of my own 3-year-old daughter. I had to be sure I was OK first.

A But this wouldn’t have been as easy this time if I hadn’t given my little self the hugs I had given her the last couple of sessions. WOW. ... What a relief. I didn’t think I could do that. But the feelings are so strong that there is no denying them once you’re there.

She agrees with me that this experience of being involuntarily abandoned by her mother as a 4 year-old was the core event that led to her hating herself, of having a self-negating voice running 24 hours a day.

A I’m so happy to be grown up. I felt like a very little girl for a very long time. Now I’m allowing myself... I took away the pressure from me to take care of the 4-year-old and gave it to my 18 year-old who was so strong, stronger than I am now. Things have been hitting me so hard.

F Stronger than you were. But I don’t think stronger that you are now after our work together.

A I’m very relieved to know I’m OK and that I can forgive me for not being there.

The End

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Reevaluation

For a couple of reasons, including a need to grow into her new sense of self, we did not meet again for a month.

Ana told me, “I feel like I grew up [to adulthood] in one week after our last work a month ago. I can take care of me and my daughter; I can take care of my inner children, both the little one and the teenager; and I can take care of my sister, my nephew, my brother, my mother. Lay it all on me and I’ll tie it all up with a nice little bow and give it back. I feel this is my time right now.”

At another point she shared that she was finally telling her daughter’s father that he had to consistently step up to the plate and spend time with her or be out of her daughter’s life.

When Ana was a child, she was called by her nickname, Cheni. When adult Ana is speaking, I use A:. When four-year-old Cheni is speaking, I use C:. At the end of the first Conference Room, adult Ana spontaneously invited her 17/18 years old to come in and take care of Cheni until our next session.

Ana’s mother and I have worked together for a number of years, typically in Spanish. During that time, I have met all three of her adult children several times. They all call me by my Spanish nickname, Francisco. These transcripts speak eloquently to the price children (perhaps especially) pay in the process of immigration. I cried quietly as she sobbed in the latter part of this session.

In 2009, I routinely spoke to parts directly. My study of Structural Dissociation has changed that and now I emphasize speaking through the adult client, or preferably, through her most mature part of herself.

Conference Room

I guide her down 5 steps, through a door, into a large room with a conference table and comfortable chairs on one side and a living room with comfortable chairs and sofa(s) on the other. I invite her to find the seat just right for her.

- F When you’re there, let me know what you notice. Your kids are probably not there yet.
- A It’s bright. The windows are open. There is lots of light. It feels good to be there. I’m sitting on the couch in the living room.
- F I’d like to invite the child and adolescent parts to come through the obscure hall and door.

- A I feel a lot of happiness. I can almost feel her and hear the giggles before she comes... Seems almost too good to be true because she's so happy.
- F And is the little one shy again? Or perhaps she'll skip in.
- A She laughs walking in, just a warm ...not alone, and happy.
- F Hello Cheni, it's so nice to see you again and I'm glad you're happy. Remember me? I'm Francisco.
- A It's almost like she's shy again, holding that doll.
- F And where is she in the room?
- A She's next to me, looking at you, not scared, just shy.
- F Little one, what have the last few weeks been like, since we first met in this room?
- C Alive. Happy and bright. There's no more sitting in the corner in the dark. I'm just not alone anymore.
- F I'm wondering what sorts of things you did with the 17 year old. Did she take good care of you?
- C A lot of tickling. I feel a lot of laughter and hugs.
- F I'm so glad. You've been waiting a long time.
- A It's almost like they've been together forever. *(teary)*
- F And yet it's only been a month. Little one, have you also been feeling the presence of grown-up Ana? Ana sure has had you with her.
- A I knew she would be back. She knew I'd be back.
- C 'm very shy. *(A. drops her head. Eyes have been closed all along in the CR)*
- F I'm wondering if there are other ways we can help you? I'm wondering if you have other needs after all these years of waiting that we can help you meet. *(Sniffles and I bring her tissues.)*
- C I think about my grandmother. I feel as if she is there with me somehow.
- F Would you like it if we invited your grandmother into the CR?

C I don't know. I think she may be mad at me for leaving. I used to sing to her every night before I went to bed. And we haven't sung together for so long.

F Do you remember one of the songs you'd sing to her?

C No.

F Little one, did you know that you grew up to be a singer and a songwriter? What does that feel like to know that now?

C A little sad.

F How come?

C Because I missed everything. I wasn't there for anything. (*Cries.*)

F So it sounds like one of the things you need is to get told a lot of stories about how you grew up. The good stories. The strong stories. But not the bad trauma stories. The 4 year old doesn't need to know those.

C It feels like everyone forgot about me.

F Ana, the 4 year old was hidden for a very long time. Maybe to survive you had to do that. Maybe you were also protecting her.

A That's true. I put her away so no one would touch her. I did everything in my power to hold her. (*Cheni begins to cry.*) I never knew what I was doing to her. I never forgot her. But I did have to turn my back once or twice. And nothing makes me sadder. BUT I never forgot! I never walked away. Whispers, “I'm so sorry.” It's hard because she doesn't understand, you know? It's really hard to explain.

F: Can I interrupt A? I would like to ask the Cheni. “Cheni, what is it like to hear these words, of why she put you away and tried to protect you and to hold you?”

C It's nice. I knew (*still crying*). It was easy to wait for so long knowing she would come back. But it was a long time.

F And how could you be so certain, little one, that she would come back? Lots of grown up don't know that kind of thing.

C Cause I sat and waited in the spot where she left me. I didn't move. I didn't change rooms. I didn't touch anything. (*Cries more*). And I waited.

F Do you remember, Cheni, that moment when she left you?

- C There were different moments. When I met my [younger] sister for the first time. Changing the country I lived in all of a sudden. Learning English for the first time and forgetting everything. THAT WAS WHEN I SAT DOWN AND WAITED.
- F So when Ana came here to the US and realized that she had to learn English to survive, and put [her Central American country] behind her, that was when you sat down and waited, that was when you felt she left you?
- A I think our innocence was ripped away from us. Being hit by the teachers and beaten up by the kids. That was when I turned my back on her the first time. That was when I did what I had to do. Everything I knew was gone and I had to be new, a different person. So that’s when I had her sit down and had her wait for me. I somehow told her I’d be back. (*Crying steadily*). And she listened and she did.
- F What a story, what a powerful story. I’m sorry coming here was so full of difficulty. First you lost your mother and then you lost yourself.
- C I miss my grandma. [*I asked who was talking.*]
- A This is weird because I feel like the Cheni doesn’t know the life I had. She looks at me confused. It’s so hard to explain. She doesn’t understand that the only way to keep going was to turn my back on her. (Several minutes of silence). I have a lot of guilt for leaving me there instead of just taking me with me.
- F You were only a child and you survived the best way you knew how. What would help wash away that guilt?
- A Time. Just time. I just want to pamper me (the 4yo), just be there now. Me getting older is like I almost forgot.
- F But of course, as you’ve learned these last few months with me, time can be speeded up and healing can happen very quickly. Cheni, I’d like to ask you a question. Can you forgive your grown up self for leaving you behind? (*Someone is crying.*) she nods yes. (*A big sigh and more crying.*)
- A She forgave me a long time ago. There’s no anger that I left. There’s none of that. There’s no resentment. I’m just so happy to be here with her and I know I can feel it from her, too. (*Even longer silence.*)
- F Are you holding the 4 yo?
- A Yes. She’s sitting on my lap. And she’s fine. It’s almost as if she were never alone. I just can’t believe it took me this long.
- F But now is now and now you’re here.

A I can love her like you couldn't believe. It's sad it needed to take that long. But only the adult me is sad. The little me is ecstatic that everything is happening. I'm very grateful to be seeing her again. And I feel the other me is just kind of lurking...the 17 year old. It's funny, because I am so so sad, so guilty. I will never turn away from myself again. My 17-year-old self is so proud to be looking at me doing this and my little self is just so happy.

F So, Ana, it sounds like your younger parts are wiser than you are and know that it's time to let go of the sadness and guilt.

A I feel so old and I wasted so much time. *(She sobs.)* And everybody could have turned away from her. But why did I?

F And what can your wise 17yo tell you? About surviving, about forgiveness?

A She's not around. She won't come in. She knows I just need this time with the little me.

F So I would like to say to the 17 year old that I look forward to meeting with her another time, to hearing her story, to helping her heal, as well. And I want her to know that she is very important and right now she's expressing her wisdom that this is the time for the grown up and Cheni to be alone together.

Ana is no longer crying. She has become very still. Then she tips her head and sniffles.

A I am very, very grateful to be there with them. I'm proud of myself for waiting. I'm sad but I'm not. I'm very sad at the situation that sucks but I'm very happy to be allowed back in. And it is a tremendous amount of guilt to feel sitting here, but my 4yo likes me! She really does like me. And it doesn't matter to her. It's over for her. Everything has passed. The house is bright. Everything is giggly and happy. It's just me, my older self that feels all of this. They'd pat me on the back for anything. I can feel the warmth, the absolute love that I have for myself. [Another long quiet pause.][I have this sense of being in the presence of healing that is going on within Ana. I need say nothing now.]

F [10 minutes later] Ana, perhaps you could catch me up on what's been going on, how you're feeling now.

A I'm very much more relieved. There's just been a lot of hugging. She smiles a lot to me. It's almost like she reaches in and takes away that guilt for a time. A lot of hugs and smiles. She's like a normal four year old. And I just enjoy looking at her.

F Ana, if she is just like a normal four year old, what does that say about erasing her past and erasing your guilt?

A I feel like the only person who can help me with that is Cheni.

F She’s already doing that.

A All I can feel is her outgoingness, her playfulness, and her joy. I’m so proud of her.

F Ana, I spoke here a little while ago about the way EMDR speeds up healing to warp speed. [I offer a post-hypnotic suggestion even though she is not in a formally induced trance.] And I want you to know, that each second that you spent with your four year old today, can be a day. And each minute, can be a month. And so as she is reaching into you to heal you, the clock is spinning through days and months and years. (She’s crying again). And I want you to know that every minute you spend with your daughter “Ileana” [who is three], you are also spending it with your four year old.

A *(crying and nods)* That’s how she feels to me. Cheni is like Ileana, with a twist. *[Ana breaks into a full smile]*. We are healing together and my four year old Cheni is helping me a great deal. And it’s funny because I thought I was the one that would have to help her a great deal. I feel so happy that she would accept me back. A part of me felt it wasn’t going to happen. I didn’t realize how much we cared for each other....She’s so excited she almost can’t sit with me anymore. She has a huge house here and it’s not dark anymore.

F It’s time to be closing down and tucking in. Where would be the best place for Cheni to tuck in?

A Her day is bright. The sun is shining. She’s off to be a 4yo in the house and we’re happy to see each other and happy to let each other go.

F And will you check in with her every day, Ana?

A Always. And she knows that. That’s why it’s so easy to be able to say goodbye. *(Crying steadily.)* I’ll miss her a great deal from now till the next time I come here.

F Ana, I would to suggest that you don’t have to wait. You really can, on your own, check in with her.

A It feels like I can’t yet by myself. I would love to do so.

F [NEXT TIME WE NEED FIGURE OUT HOW.]

A I'm very happy and she's very happy.

F Leave and climb the stairs. 1...2...3...begin to be aware of the sound of passing cars, 4...wipe your nose (she is) and maybe get a new Kleenex...5. When you're ready open your eyes and be here in my office in this space that we have made so sacred together.

Reflections

A I just don't know how to word any of my additional thoughts. Sad, happy, surreal. I'm very satisfied. It's almost like you physically touch her, so it's very emotional. It feels so good to be back and know everything is OK. It's almost sad I have to leave again.

F Were there any parts that were most helpful?

A Just the time that I took to really absorb the moment, to really get inside myself to the point where the silence allowed me...

F ...to heal.

A Yes, that's the word for it. I was looking for that word. The silence let me settle in myself, to pull in the energy, to really, really know she was OK. Now I can get back to my life.

F I knew that very deep healing was happening in those silences. It was probably the longest I've ever sat in silence in all of the years I've been a therapist. (25 minutes in this hour?)

A There was a lot of forgiving in that time.

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**Bringing a child ego state, who has been guarding
the past for forty years, into the present.**

This four-hour journey (in two two-hour sessions) with “Ava” is some of the most moving and powerful ego state therapy I have ever done. I am grateful that she gave permission to share these and other sessions with my consultees, and chose the name “Ava” for these transcripts being shared.

Ava grew up in an extended family embedded with alcoholism and abuse. She was the victim of torture (waterboarding) and sexual abuse by her mother’s sadistic sister, who had abused Ava’s mother as well. Her mother was unable to protect her or even be present for Ava. When Ava’s father left when she was six, Ava and her mother and brother went to live in a home with her mother’s sadistic older sister.

In talk therapy, Ava thought she had figured out her childhood. In EMDR therapy she was hit with an overwhelming recovery of abuse memories and then the waterboarding became uncovered as well. (She had written fiction and poetry for nearly 30 years about water and had never known why.) Her EMDR therapist’s competence did not include any knowledge of ego state therapy. Standard EMDR helped Ava the adult and she no longer had PTSD. But standard EMDR didn’t help her child ego states. Ava, herself a therapist, drove a distance to see me for ego state based EMDR therapy. Her goal in requesting Ego State Therapy was to overcome her inability to trust enough to get close to people and to let close friends and her partner to get closer to her.

We met twice a month for two-hour sessions in May and June 2011, once in Sept., once in Dec.; and then three times in early 2012 following the suicide of her younger brother Paul. She had survived all of the abuse in part because she thought she was protecting her brother. Ava’s sadistic aunt got her compliance in part by always making sure her younger brother Paul was watching the torture.

Ava “ran away” to college at 18 but got lost in drugs and alcohol. She ended up in rehab, became active in AA, and later went on to graduate school and became a social worker.

In 2010, her brother Paul came to live with her for the summer and Ava finally had to face how damaged psychologically he was. In the fall of 2011, Ava agreed to have Paul’s son John, 18, live with her and her partner while he attended community college nearby. Ava has a very strong community of women friends who are very supportive and who understand that no one is allowed to get too close to her emotionally, not even her life partner. Ava wanted to change those rules!

May 13, 2011

Ava: Anytime I run long distances, I see parts in my mind. IT’S WHY I CAN MOVE FORWARD SO WELL AND STAY SO STUCK. When they come up, they are photos that I remember.

As preparation we use the Theratappers to do Calm Place, Container, and the last five steps of the Affect Skills Management Training. Her grounding image is having both feet flat on the floor in my office “feeling solid like a rock and connected to the earth.” This enables her to repeatedly let go of her fear of this work today.

We are ready to start the Conference Room and she asks me to guide her down the steps. I turn on the Theratappers.

A – Ava

11 – 11 year old Ego State “The Easter Dress Girl”

F – Farnsworth

Conference Room

A Before I get down the stairs, I hear the noise of a little kid. “Get down here! Come on!”

I’m in the room. She’s laying on the table, 6 or 7 years-old. Green pair of shorts on. Tank top and sneakers. She’s laughing and being silly.

On the end of the table, seated quietly and disapprovingly, there is another girl, older, with really short bangs. She’s dressed up in a tight dress.

A 20-year-old is standing by a big bay window, smoking a cigarette.

That’s all I can see now.

F Where are you?

A At the head of the table. 6 or 7-year-old is nearly face to face with me. Serious girl at far end, notebook and pencil. 20-year-old ignores me. There is a lounge chair on the side. Can’t see who is there.

F Introductions. I establish Hallway. Waiting room. Play room.

A In the playroom there is a baby sleeping in a crib. Sun is on her. She looks content.

A Now the very serious girl is at the door blocking anyone else from entering. The other one is like a colorform character, not a full person. She slides in and out.

F How old is she?

A An adult.

F What is the adult’s purpose.

A To hold the underlying guilt.

F Any more thoughts about the Conference Room?

A The girl who is farthest away in the dress. It’s the part that took all of the abuse, so that the rest didn’t have to experience it. It didn’t happen to the silly girl. The serious girl doesn’t feel very liked because she’s uptight. The serious girl says, “It’s pretty simple. These really bad things happened to me.” She knows they’re over. There is a distant angry quality to her.

F I introduce myself.

Would she speak to me, Ava? [In Ego State Therapy it is not uncommon to speak to parts, though not preferred. In Structural Dissociation, this is discouraged when parts are co-conscious. The preference is to speak through the adult to promote integration. More on this during the weekend workshop.]

A Yes.

F Do you have a name?

11 The Serious Girl: No name. I have on the Easter dress so you can call me The Easter Dress Girl. I’m 11.

F Where do you live?

11 Benton Street.

F Anything OK there?

11 Nothing.

F I’m sorry. That’s so tough. What would you like us to understand?

11 I know it’s over but I can’t leave. Everyone else gets to leave and I have to stay.

F Why?

11 Ava, the whole group left. I have to guard the house.

- F How come you had to stay?
- 11 My job. They all get to go. My job is to stay here. *(scrunched face)* My job is to keep my aunt there locked in the house.
- F That sounds really scary.
- 11 She’s pretty scary. She’s a butcher. She chops up animals. *(tears)* She lies, a lot. She isn’t who she says she is. I don’t know if she’s a boy or a girl. I know I have to keep her there or she will contaminate everything. No one else gets it. They get to live and go forward because I’m here. They think I’m too serious and should change my dress, etc. That little silly girl couldn’t be who she is. The drug addict smoking a cigarette who ruined everything couldn’t be who she is. And Ava wants me to leave and be free and be a kid but she wouldn’t be who she is if I didn’t do stay here keeping my aunt locked up in the kitchen.
- F That sounds like you have a weight of 1000 lbs on your shoulders. How do you manage to be so strong?
- 11 I was always like that.
- F Do you remember when you came into being? *[Ego states have a specific purpose and usually come into being in a particular situation or time. This is important to know about her.]*
- 11 When we moved here, at 5 or 6. Everything was good before that. Then we moved here and it’s such a mess. Somebody had to be strong. Mom is crying and useless. Dad is gone. Grandma is drunk. Grandpa is crazy. My aunt is a butcher. Her girlfriend is useless. My brother is younger. They got out.
- F And you were left behind as the guard.
- 11 Yes, thank you. I know it’s over. But there’s something I have to guard. I’m not being hurt. I remember it. The little girl didn’t feel the bad things happening. My brother doesn’t feel it.
- F Is there a spirit you are guarding?
- 11 It’s like if I leave the house, everyone else gets ruined, and I’m ruined. *[Remember her purpose is to keep everyone else from being contaminated.]* So, if I stay here, everyone else is ok, even the partier (yuck!) I know the addiction is over too.
- F Could I ask Ava a question?
- Ava, what is this like for you? Is there anything you can tell her?

A I really like her. She’s the one who took the worst abuse. I didn’t remember anything that happened until EMDR. Maybe she stays because she was forgotten all those years. I would like her to leave. I would like all of us to leave. I know [about the abuse and torture] and I am not contaminated.

F 11yo, what do you feel in your body when you hear Ava’s words? [*The 11 year-old is stuck in an ancient protective role that no longer serves a purpose. I am trying to get to the 11 year- old somatically.*]

... Sometimes it’s hard to our connect to our bodies... I don’t have any feelings. I like the idea of leaving, but not so easy.

Ava knows it all and she’s not contaminated. Ava, do the other parts now know the story too?

A Yea

F Are they contaminated?

A No

F And 11-year-old, is this new information?

A They were around when I was doing the EMDR. They watched. I would think of a bad memory and see them in the therapist’s room. Sometimes I would hold the little girl’s hand. Sometimes the 20yo would hold my hand. And I would imagine that we swim and kayak together.

11 Ava doesn’t really know everything. [*Ava has recalled enough new memories in EMDR that she knows that she may not know all that happened. But she is clear that she knows most of what happened and can handle new information.*] She says she can handle it. But I hold it all. I’m not sure she can. I’ve been holding it all my life. The EMDR thing made it come out and it was hard.

F Of course, very hard.

11 It’s not for little kids.

F And it should never have happened to you.

11 Or that [our] mother put us there.

F She did not know how to protect you.

11 Ava sends her mother’s day cards but not the good ones. It’s a compromise. I wish she wouldn’t send her one at all.

F 11, you know that Ava is 50, and that she is a social worker, and that she has a very strong group of friends that have seen her this far and have never left her.

11 Yes (to all). And she got rid of all of those losers [addicts and alcoholics in her late teens and twenties].

F Can you begin the process of trusting Ava with the rest of the story so that you can be free and she can be close to people?

11 **I won’t let go but I am thinking about it. But it’s the colorform character who is the barrier to closeness.**

F That’s really helpful.
It’s time to tuck in. Who will go with the silly little girl? Who will tuck her in?

11 Ava can tuck her in. All love her.

[I FORGOT TO ASK IF ANYONE WANTED TO SAY ANYTHING BEFORE THEY LEFT.]

F Everyone goes down the hallway and tucks in until the next time we can do this work.

Is the room empty?

A Yep.

F Climb the stairs. 1-2-3-4-5

Reevaluation

A I knew the struggle with her. But I didn’t know that the 11-year-old knows everything. She is the gatekeeper in a way. I am aware of that struggle. When I did the straight EMDR work, I knew I didn’t know all of the trauma. And I knew nothing until the EMDR. I spent many sessions in my earlier EMDR therapy just choking and choking. Then I remembered being choked and I’d see another little girl watching. We didn’t understand ego states then.

The colorform piece is new. I loved playing with them as a child. I was kind of surprised that there is this colorform part who is also interfering. That amusing little girl is always making me laugh in the midst of my upset.

F Does she represent keeping things safe?

A There was no jokester in my family. That wasn't tolerated. I had a great first 5 or 6 years. Even during the trauma, my paternal grandparents took us swimming, boating. Neighbors often had us outdoors. The silly young girl is a very healthy part of who I am.

May 24, 2011

Revaluation: Overall, doing well. Some weird dreams ...I've had great success at home practicing the grounding techniques we did last time, and I've been teaching it to my clients. I went birding with some friends and felt extra grateful for their friendship.

Ava has come to understand on her own that her parts are on two docks. She has always been a swimmer.

When I do a SPIN class on Saturdays, sometimes I go into my ego states work spontaneously. I pictured the two docks – girl with dress and spunky girl. On the other dock is my party girl, a see through character. The adult me [*she is referencing several of them*] are on the shore with the baby. In the middle of the water is a drowned girl. I had a dream of a 15-year-old drowned girl that started my therapy. Around that age, I was drinking heavily and I remember consciously deciding whether I would come up or not when I fell off a boat. The 15-year-old is in between the children and the older girls. That goes back to the 7-year-old being drowned by my aunt – guilt. Part of the 7-year-old felt she should just die and not do what my aunt wanted me to do.

At 15 I'm acting out my avoidance of others caused by my sexual abuse. My mom has remarried a racist bigoted Catholic and becomes Catholic. She views me as a sinner. I was punished for graduating high school and going to college. In fact, I cast myself out.

Review of CR:

Colorform character allows intimacy without feeling. My father's sister. Not real. That character is very allied with the drinker. Me in my 20s so different. I took a bus to college and worked f/t to buy books. Surrounded by wealth. I did really well there and made really good friends and drank a lot.

Ava, can you be present for the trauma work with the 11year-old?

Ava: I think I can be present and hard not to. I have only vague recollection of the sexual abuse that came later. The 11year-old in the dress took the hit. The little girl stays present and spunky. Then I began drinking and partying as only way to try to hold back the abuse. I had to adjust slowly to the idea of abuse over many years. It was so painful to have my brother live with me last summer. The 11year-old thought she had saved John and when he came to my home, obviously I hadn't.

Conference Room

Therapists on.

Stairs

F Does it look similar or different?

A Silly girl on the table. 11yo with notebook and pen right across from me. The girl in her 20s in the corner with the colorform. Baby in sunny playroom sleeping.

F I welcome the parts and thank them for coming.

I ask those present if they have any thoughts on the last week or two?

A Not a lot of talkers. The 11year-old has snapped her pen. Impatient.

F 11, please speak up.

11 I am impatient but no one will listen.

F What if we really are listening?

11 I think it would help.

A Absolutely.

F I am too. We are so clear you hold the keys to this puzzle. So please share.

11 It's my job to keep everything together. And I am really irritated by the party girl and Colorform for screwing everything up, always partying. They're in the background but I'm still afraid that they'll take over and screw it up again. They make stupid choices. I had a plan and they screwed it all up. They put us back with the losers, the addicts and drunks.

11 They don't listen to me. I got us out of that mess and they got us into another one. I am always afraid. I know they are me, and therefore I can't trust me.

F How much can you trust grown up Ava? She's been sober for more than 20 years.

11 *[Some tears.]* She doesn't do any of that bad stuff. She doesn't like those people. She lets us be kids and do fun things. She doesn't make fun of me because I'm kind of prissy. She defends me. People tease us. She says its OK. I trust her. I know that she loves me. She thinks about me a lot. I can feel it. But I can't leave the house. I have to stay there, because I'm ruined and I don't want anyone else to be ruined. (Cries.) And I know my brother's ruined and that wasn't supposed to happen.

- F You tried so hard to protect him. You sacrificed yourself so he'd be OK.
- 11 And he'll never be OK. You shouldn't make deals with people like that. I ruined myself and then I made another deal that I won't ruin anyone else, that I wouldn't ruin Ava's beautiful life. And I want her to just leave me alone now. It's been working. I don't know why she's always messing with it. She keeps coming back for me. She's a royal pain in the ass.
- F May I ask Ava?
- 11 Yea.
- F Ava, why do you keep coming back for the 11 year-old?
- A Nobody belongs there anymore. We never should have been left there. No one will get ruined if everyone leaves. *[Cough]*
- F Can your aunt hurt you, grown-up Ava?
- A No, my aunt is an old woman who lives very far away. I told my mom I will never talk to my aunt again. I'm not afraid of her. She's old and sad.
- F So, 11year old, you've been carrying 1000 lb weight on your shoulders for 40 years. That's not right for kids. Parents take care of kids, not vice versa. Grown-up Ava is an adult. That is why she keeps coming back for you.
- 11 *Silent tears.*
- F She loves you so much.
- 11 *Silent tears.*
- F Just take in her love. That's the only reason she keeps coming back for you.
- The only reason.
- 11 I am the pet of a monster, my aunt. I am the one my aunt loves.
- F To torture?
- 11 Yes. Who can want that?
- F Ava, do you?
- A No. *Silent tears.*

F Take in this truth, 11 year-old; Ava can't be whole till you feel safe to leave that house.

Silent tears.

11 Ava is showing me she knows all and it's not my fault. It's hard for me to realize that my aunt is old and that I am now bigger than she is.

F She was terrifyingly big when you were a child.
Can you let Ava hold you?
Can you put your hand on her heart as she puts her hand on your heart?

11 We have to step outside the house and sit on the fence in the yard to do that.

[This powerful right brain to right brain, heart felt connection is the turning point in these four hours of therapy to help the 11-year-old leave the past behind and come into the present.]

F And how does that feel.

11 I keep thinking I'd like to burn that house down.

A We've gone back there. It looks the same. Yet different people live in it now.

F And does your aunt still live there.

11 No.

A She lives in Florida. And my grandparents are dead. And my mom lives somewhere else.

F 11, Ava knows she doesn't know about all of the sexual abuse. Is that why you're still protecting the house?

11 I don't think so. I belong there with my aunt who ruined me. I'm not sure I remember it all. That whole water thing (waterboarding me) has me freaked out. I don't remember a lot after that. I like being out of the house looking at it. I like to think of my aunt being old and smaller than me. I was her pet and she had a thing for me but I never loved her. I just did what I had to do. That makes me feel better. I loved my mother. That was stupid. I didn't love my aunt or her stupid jokes and her stupid girlfriends. I never loved her. I just kept my mouth shut. That way she never won. There was a piece of me she never got even when she held me under the water, the part that loves.

F The playful little girl?

- 11 Yes. She’s the best part of me. I refused to let her have that little girl.
- F 11 you were heroic. You never gave up.
- 11 I wanted to live and I felt bad about that. *[She said earlier that if she had let her aunt drown her it would have brought down the house of cards. There would be no more ignoring what she did in the basement. Her aunt would have been sent to jail.]* But when my head was under the water I wanted to get out of there and live. Now I no longer feel guilty about that. She was going to get what she wanted anyway. She was a monster. She never got that other girl.
- F So she never won.
- 11 No. There was a time of a really bad fight and she wanted to kill herself and I was all right with that but she didn’t. Such a bad fight. She broke her girl friend’s fingers [Ava had flexed her right hand.] I hid my brother. My mother said it never happened and you’re never going to talk about it. Ava is good about that now. She doesn’t let her mother give her any crap.
- F 11, out here in the back yard sitting on the stone wall looking at the house, hands on each other’s heart, do you have more safety?
- 11 Ava sees everything, sees me and is patient. She doesn’t see me as a monster. I am not that bad thing that happened. [Silent tears]. It’s not my fault. I cannot save anyone but myself. I tried to save my drunken grandma. I can’t save her, either.
- F As you sit on this fence and know these things, and as you are child Ava, does some of you begin to realize that you don’t have to guard that house.
- 11 I’m just thinking of all of the other things I used to do. I’d step on mulberries to make mulberry wine, dolls I loved, cats,
- F And so you’re remembering the good things. [Being out of the house she now has access to positive memories that had been blocked off.]
- 11 I had friends. I loved my grandparents. And I can take that with me. I had a garden and I still have one. I have woods where I live now and a rock garden and I love my dog. I love to swim and when we go on vacation I make everyone swim around the islands in Maine. So I took that with me. And that makes me feel like I can leave. [Being connected to those positive memories creates the stepping-stones to complete the leaving.] All of that is with me now.
- F What will be the perfect way to leave, arm in arm with Ava or inside of Ava?

- 11 I can imagine walking with her side by side, down the street, down the hill, walking out of that town and towards where we live now. And I won't forget that place but I won't live there anymore.
- F And, Ava, will you keep her with you and cherish her?
- A Yes.
- F And will you take her all the way to your home now. Taking alllllll the time you need just let me know when you're there.
- A I can picture her with me in the sunroom with the dog.
- 11 This will take some getting used to. A little weird. Who will I be like if I'm not in that old house.
- F Can you go with Ava and explore all of the parts of her home and garden and area that she loves so you'll feel comfortable.
- 11 I used to wish as a kid that somebody would take me out of there. I learned I would be the only one who could save me. So, it feels right.
- F I am sorry you had to wait so many years, and I am so glad today was the right time.
- 11 I had to let go of my brother Paul, realize that he wasn't in the house anymore. He's not there.
- F And 11, is there anything else you need Ava to tell you, that you need to know?
- 11 No. I just want to get used to being here. I think I'm going to be the gardener.
- F And you'll always be outside.
- 11 Yea.
- F And, Ava is there anything else for you to do here, or is it time to go back to the Conference Room?
- A She just wants to settle in.
- F And just tell me, taking alllllll of the time you need, if you can shift gears.
- A I'm back in the CR, in gardening hat and clogs, staying close to the silly 6-year-old. She has a lot of plans. I've been thinking about getting bees. That would be really a fun project.

F And Ava, you’ve done light-years worth of work, is this a good stopping place.

A Sure

F Who will tuck in the 6 year-old?

A I picture the 11 and 6 year-old together.

F So do you need to take the 6year-old too?

A yes.

F Can the party girl and colorform girl go back to the dock on the lake?

A Yes. They’re there.

F Is there anyone else in the Conference Room?

A No.

F So the 3 of you climb the stairs back to your home and then Ava is going to come back to my office.

A I’m here.

Re-Evaluation

A We’ve been moving there slowly. I had to let my brother go last year. It was so healing to have him live with me. **I grieved my inability to save him but I had to acknowledge that in order for the 11 year-old to leave the house on Benton Street.**

I will never understand how my mom left me with her sister.

F The power of the abuser.

A I read Middlesex. So confusing. Both male and female. My aunt was very masculine. She was a butcher and came home with blood on her clothes. My mom told me, “Your aunt tortured me. I don’t remember anything before age 12.”

I told my mother 5 years ago that my aunt abused me. I think she believed me. This came out because she wanted to be closer to me. I told her, “But you view me as a sinner and we have to talk about the past.” She said she was sorry for the

abuse but didn't know it. I realized I didn't need someone in my life like her. She lives an hour away and has only joined us for holidays once.

I will have to adjust to the fact that no one is guarding the old place, Benton Street.

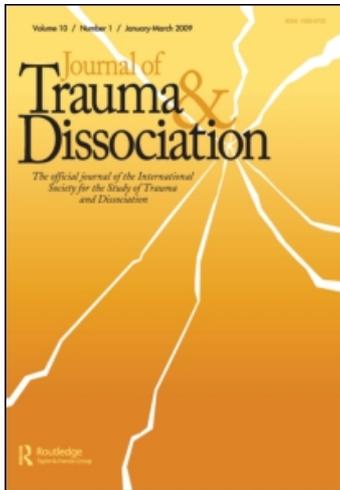
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Fraser's "Dissociative Table Technique" Revisited, Revised: A Strategy for Working with Ego States in Dissociative Disorders and Ego-State Therapy

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