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**Seeking Andrew's SEEKING System**

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*This article brings the work of neuroscientists and GAINS Advisory Board members Jaak Panksepp, PhD and Steven Porges, PhD into the mindbody of clinician and client and the process of change, in this in-depth story of interpersonal neurobiology informed therapy.*



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## Seeking Andrew's SEEKING System

Rich Armington, LCSW, CGP

*"Insightful modern psychotherapists have known for a long time that the goal of psychotherapy is affect regulation. Even though psychotherapy may appear to focus on thoughts, insofar as patients largely communicate in words, the aim of treatment is to positively change the patient's affective experience."* (Panksepp & Biven, 2012, p. 45)

At certain times during my 30 year psychotherapy career, a new way of understanding what it is to be human makes it possible for me to see people with slightly changed eyes. It may be a scientific discovery or a theoretical paradigm that gains my attention. That shift of perspective then allows me to relate somewhat differently, opening the door to new avenues of healing. Two areas of interest for me have been living human systems, emphasizing connectedness, relationships, and context, and alongside that is the developing field of interpersonal neurobiology. One important linkage between these areas is the growing understanding that at the intersection of human suffering and transformation is a process requiring the participation of a trusted other. This process is rooted in the living experience of connection, which leads to increased affect regulation. This is the story of such an experience.



Andrew and his wife Joan were contemplating reuniting after a long separation when he came to see me. Joan was in individual therapy, and they had recently entered couples counseling to “try again” to have a more fulfilling and emotionally engaging marriage.

He arrived in my office having had a number of unsatisfying individual therapy experiences during which he agreed on two occasions to try antidepressants, though he did not believe, as Joan did, that he was depressed. It felt important that I hear his conviction that depression was not the core of it for him. He also had a series of career counseling experiences that led to no relief in his struggles with work.

As a place to begin, Andrew and I dipped more deeply into his early history and schooling, and then his more recent work experience. He had little to report except a vague, mostly lifeless description of growing up in a small rural town with few friends because even the closest neighbors lived rather far away. With little sense of connection to me or his story, he said his relationship with family was “ok,” but he had been bullied at school. He was perpetually bored with rural life and had little interest in learning even without the bullying, so his classwork had been mediocre. After a series of early “dead-end” unsatisfying work contexts, he settled into his current career of two decades in property management. Andrew’s hope for more job satisfaction hadn’t materialized and he expressed little felt sense of fulfillment and engagement, very little motivation, leading to the feeling of there being no real opportunity for him. In light of what he reported, I understood the earlier psychotherapy focus on depression as well as adjunct career counseling. However, I also sensed something more in the way he told his story.

Andrew’s lack of motivation and general lifelessness was calling the work of Jaak Panksepp to my mind. His most recent book (with Lucy Biven, 2012), *The Archaeology of Mind*, speaks eloquently about our primary emotional-motivational systems, those powerful inborn drives that stimulate movement in the service of survival. They are located not in the limbic or cortical regions of our brains, but deeper in the recesses of the early-developing midbrain. *Emotion* and *motivation* come from the same root having to do with the vital urge to *move outward and explore*. While Panksepp identifies seven of these systems, he emphasizes that SEEKING<sup>1</sup> is primary and animates all the others.

*“We have already established that the neocortex does not provide its own motivation; the neocortex is activated by subcortical emotional systems. It is your subcortical SEEKING system that helps energize your neocortex... Similarly, the SEEKING system of architects, writers, artists, politicians, and scientists urge them to discover new and better ways to solve problems and to express themselves. This system energizes all human creativity – it has been a mental engine for all civilizations.”* (Panksepp & Biven, 2012, p. 102)

Might it be possible that Andrew’s SEEKING system had diminished in response to his life experience at some point in his past, so that his sense that he was suffering from something other than depression might be accurate?

As Andrew and I continued our beginning explorations, I felt a resonance with his past therapists, feeling my own version of stuckness with him. There was little joy or proactive intent in his life that I could sense. It was not that he was unwilling to discuss his history, he was. Yet it seemed he was satisfying my own curiosity, which he was willing to tolerate once again at the start of this new therapeutic relationship, with the tedious recounting of an earlier life colored with aloneness and the pain of quiet boredom. I could not sense many moments of joy or success. I had the distinct and sad feeling inside myself that though he was very willing to engage me, he didn’t like this line of inquiry, nor the vice grip

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<sup>1</sup> Panksepp decided to use words that the wider culture could relate to, but to capitalize them to promote a scientific understanding of the concepts and their power.

these experiences had on his life. At one point, I asked him what he was feeling in his body while he told me of his misery, and we discovered that he was aware of almost no bodily sensations. Only occasionally did his pain prompt him to take some kind of outward action. Probably because he was largely unaware of his body, he sought out chiropractors only when he began to enter into “migraine territory.” At the same time I felt his deadness, I was intrigued by the contrast between the lifelessness in his narrative and my felt sense of the ongoing muscular tension in his body. It was palpable and discomforting to me, touching me via my own mirror neuron and resonance system (see Iacoboni, 2009). I wondered what all this pent up energy might be holding for him.

The relationships among Panksepp’s seven primary process emotional-motivational systems came to mind. Through decades of devoted research and unflinching regard for the science that led the way, Panksepp offers a convincing case that all mammals (including us) and possibly all animals share a set of emotional systems that reside primarily in the more primitive parts of the brain. They focus on survival; for us humans this means they focus on maintaining connection with one another as the foundation for growth and development. These seven primary process affective systems are instinctual. SEEKING (eager anticipation and the quest for resources, including ongoing connection with each other) animates all the rest. Panksepp describes the SEEKING system not so much as a “goal,” rather he speaks of it as a “goad” - a useful distinction, helping to situate the power of this system *below* the higher orientation of conscious intentions linked to a goal or a plan. Instead it is the primary energy that moves us forward. The three primary systems that are active when we lose connection are GRIEF/PANIC/SEPARATION DISTRESS (felt sense of being out of connection), FEAR (the threat to safety - for humans, centers on loss of connection), and RAGE (response to having resources/connections repeatedly taken). When connection is present, the remaining three primary systems come online - CARE (nurturing love), PLAY (the deep joy of social learning), and LUST (sexual excitement and connection, with the onset of adolescence).

As Andrew and Joan searched for a more deeply connected relationship, I began to sense that perhaps the diminishment of his SEEKING system might also mean that the resources for connecting were not available. CARE and PLAY might well be largely inaccessible without the energized outward movement toward one another of SEEKING. When we are very young, our SEEKING goes primarily toward attaching to those on whom we depend for emotional and physical survival, and when it goes unmet – as it apparently did for Andrew – that system may go somewhat dormant. A kind of hopelessness sets in that may then be felt less when it is protected by frustration and complaining, as the lack of SEEKING spreads upward and shapes the thoughts and feelings of the limbic and cortical areas.

*“... one aspect of the CARE circuit deserves particular emphasis. A branch of this system extends through.... to the very heart of the SEEKING system. This segment of the CARE system most likely arouses SEEKING impulse... again, we see highlighted one of the ways in which most other emotional systems utilize primal SEEKING to fulfill their affectively rich, action-oriented functions.”*  
(Panksepp & Biven, 2012, p. 291)

However, Panksepp's work also provides hope of recovery. His research reveals these same primary affects are genetically built in to at least all mammals, with some also shared by non-mammal creatures such as birds. If this is a genetic endowment, then there is the possibility our SEEKING system can reawaken, most likely within the warmth of a relationship that reestablishes connection. As described above, there are also built-in neural connections between the SEEKING system and the other primary emotion systems. All seven systems talk with one another. Directly related to Andrew's experience, the SEEKING system is linked to the PLAY system supporting the joy of social learning and the CARE system. The SEEKING system takes us into relationships to experience joy and learn about the ways to respond to one another playfully, and to give and receive nurture, the very experiences he and Joan were yearning for.

Directions I could have taken in my work with Andrew might have been to reconsider a diagnosis of depression, proper medication support, even possibly a new focus on career counseling. Not neglecting these avenues, I had a sense that these directions, though likely quite accurate in some explicit ways, were missing a focus on his subjective life and its impact on the relationships he molded with himself, with others – and now with me.

Rather than falling into hopelessness with him, my own SEEKING system began to activate



and I made a decision that I was not going to focus on his past pains - initially. "How might we free his energy?" was the question I pondered within myself over and over. Systems Centered Therapy (Agazarian, 1997), my other area of study and training for the last decades, emphasizes that change requires energy, and Andrew's energy was palpable, even if extremely bound in his intense frustration with his work situation. So I became interested in his role as a property manager, a source of steady complaining and disappointments. Each session began with many stories of complaint, usually about the difficulties of managing multiple properties, with out-of-touch property owners, tenants who did not follow procedure, and workers who were not dependable, combined with the challenges of Austin life with perpetually stalled traffic making his multiple trips here and there nearly intolerable.

The theoretical underpinnings of SCT theory and practice (Gantt & Agazarian, 2010) suggest that all human complex adaptive systems (one person, a dyad, groups, a large organization or nations) survive, develop and transform from simple to more complex by integrating differences. When the differences, for whatever internal or external reasons, are deemed too large, we become frightened and our adaptive protective survival states will close boundaries to shelter us. However, boundaries will open in the presence of perceived similarities, paving the way for development through the integration of differences in an environment that offers safety and social engagement, thus enabling new integrations to occur. In other words, when we feel joined and understood, we become safe

enough for our nervous systems to allow in different perspectives and feeling states both internally and externally.

To make this specific to Andrew, we could imagine countless experiences of having his own felt sense of himself and his need for empathic attunement responded to with differences that were too big to easily integrate: by being ignored (frequent and intense allergy reactions not responded to); overridden (being argued with and put on medication twice for depression); discounted (frequent creative and generous acts towards bosses, workers, and tenants not noticed nor acknowledged); interrupted (told to “stop complaining” frequently at home when attempting to be seen in his emotional distress and turmoil). Being engaged by others with a tone of “yes” was a rare “similarity” in his personal and professional life. It is only natural for all of us to protectively adapt by closing our boundaries to unrelieved misattunement, even when unintended by another. My own felt sense was his interpersonal world, sadly, offered no safe haven.

This concern for safety brought the work of Stephen Porges (2009) to mind as an additional support for moving forward with Andrew. To summarize briefly, we can picture our autonomic nervous systems as having three branches that activate hierarchically depending on what Porges calls our *neuroception* of how safe we are. This word, coined by Porges, captures how our systems adapt to inner and outer conditions from moment to moment, below the level of conscious awareness. When we have a neuroception of safety, our ventral vagal parasympathetic system comes online to support connecting with others and opening to new information (such as differences). When we neuroceive danger, but still feel able to act, we adaptively enter sympathetic arousal – fight, flight, and momentary freeze prior to action, closing down our ability to connect and greatly diminishing our ability to take in new information (as in the presence of intolerable differences). If the threat becomes more severe and we have a neuroception of helplessness, our system begins to shut down, feigning death to avoid death – this is dorsal vagal parasympathetic collapse, a state in which we are completely cut off from relationship with others and unable to take in new information.

Because we are so entangled with one another via mirror neurons and resonance circuitry, if my system were to be in a ventral state, Andrew’s system might also be able to move in that direction, toward the kind of safe connection that could foster reawakening of his own SEEKING system. I did sense that in his early life, very few people came to his side to join him in his experiences, so he had likely felt chronically unsafe and disconnected.

Given this understanding of safety and first joining around “similar-enough,” when Andrew complained, I didn’t let him sit alone with the experience. I instead joined him in an authentic way that matched my own genuine version of such disappointments and complaints. My intention was not to form a complaining subgroup, but to join him below the details in the actual unmet *experience* of the frustrating situation where the visceral energy for change resides and to do this through establishing connection. Nonverbals are critical here – I am not referring to a “cognitive understanding” but rather my intent was to get into his rickety row boat, pick up an oar and row with him rather than watch him struggle while I stood on the shore watching, calling encouraging words, or worse,

evaluating his defense(s) at this stage of our work. Over many moments, and many sessions, we slowly built a relational field that had resonance, attunement and empathy as the basis for slowly moving out of mere survival and forward into the uncharted waters of development and transformation. The practice of SCT, along with Porges' work, has taught me that as the attuned interpersonal tone develops, the system begins to move, in this case from an intense sympathetic stress state to a reactivation of the social engagement system within the context of a secure attachment bond.

Beyond the complaining and dissatisfaction with his daily life, I had come to quietly sense during my hours of sitting with him that he was an especially creative man. While this was not strongly evident outwardly, I sensed it. Beyond simply the various and frequent solutions within his work, he had an ability to occasionally see things from a more holistic and creative perspective. However, his discouragement was so strong that these impressive moments of mechanical solution were overshadowed by a tone of frustration and self-neglect. Not unlike a magician distracting the audience to one hand while the other performed the magic, his complaining veiled these moments of elegance. I was moved by the ingenuity he demonstrated in finding mechanical solutions in fairly complex contexts including the various and diverse pulls of tenants, owners, and skilled workers hired. I wondered if others could sense the gifts this man had or if the seemingly mechanical activities he complained about were the smoke screen that kept his true gifts invisible to others.

Dealing with lots of tenants and subcontractors, he consistently followed some implicit pattern in pushing past his own comfort to meet the needs of others – taking calls late, not setting boundaries over weekends, giving shorter time frames to suit others' needs at the unrelenting cost to his own ease. We talked almost every session about the stress that was enveloping him, slowly sensing together his felt sense narrative of no one "having his back." We discovered this was a familiar feeling echoing along the corridors of time back to childhood. I explained that the stress response, part of the body's attempt to shift from threat to adaptation, was working on his behalf, but the chronicity of his stresses, developed early in life, were now overwhelming his ability to adapt. My intention was to be more than educational, as we began to shape a new narrative together, one that might integrate his past with his current dilemma. No one had this man's back. Over time it became our shared and co-created narrative as he began to sense that perhaps I had his back now.

Having a number of tenants myself and dealing with many subcontractors, calls, and emergencies, I admired his efforts and also understood the frustrations of workers not showing up, and tenants expecting more than I wanted to give. We moved over time from his tight-faced reports and upset, to also having real connection and some fun as I joined him in this or that challenge over and over. I also closely tracked and supported his efforts to take care of himself, as well as his sense of having me on his side. He began to slowly notice the feeling and meaning of stress and working alone on others' terms while neglecting his own needs.

*“As already noted, depressive feelings emerge when the SEEKING system is chronically underactive, for instance, following repeated frustrations.”* (Panksepp & Biven, 2012, p. 108)

From early life through the struggles of his current situation, his SEEKING system was indeed hammered and downtrodden. I believe that other previous attempts to shift the “rewards and punishments” of Andrew’s work and career life, via finding more suitable work environments through career counseling, did not sink down deeply enough below the secondary (limbic) and tertiary (cortical) levels to access the power and energy of his SEEKING system.

Our narrative of “noone having his back” took on increasing importance. For one, it resonated with him and gave us a useful way to get a felt sense of the links between the past and the present (with a glimmer of a way forward). We began to sense together the difficulty we all have undoing these implicit patterns that leave us not knowing how to do something that was not done on our behalf. One story that figured in our work early on was a childhood memory of working in the fields with a mask covering his lower face to filter the dust and omnipresent grasses to which he was allergic. Only when his small exposed eyes puffed up and were nearly closed and dark red was he given permission to go back to the house. This experience was repeated many times and spoke to the physical pain and relentless neglect that defined his early life. This kind of neglect is particularly hurtful because the human brain is a social organ so we are dependent on kind, responsive connection with others throughout our lives. When these unresponsive experiences happen at the hands of a parent, the pain of this neglect and hurt goes that much deeper. At the biological level, such trauma can result in chronically high cortisol levels, over time inhibiting protein syntheses in the immune system, contributing to allergies and other conditions (Cozolino, 2014). I came to learn that Andrew’s allergies were more serious than most – even for someone in Austin, where allergies are very common.

After a substantial number of sessions, Andrew began coming in with successes and with more energy for our work. I could feel my own engaged SEEKING system finding Andrew and him responding to these offers of embodied connection. Notably and increasingly our sessions did not begin with a complaint. I do believe our building attachment offered an experience of someone “having his back,” and as he internalized our relationship, slowly translated to him standing up for himself. One session he brought in a long letter he had written to a property owner saying he would not lease their home until a major renovation occurred, towards the goal of drawing in a different kind of tenant. He estimated the amount of money and the time frame, with a buffer built in for himself. The owner balked, due to not having that much money. Andrew creatively replied that there was a way to take out a home equity loan on another property the owner had. In one week,



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he had an agreement along with the experience of pure delight that he didn't have to "shamefully" convince a tenant to move into a highly substandard property, creating a cascade of huge headaches (tension migraines?) for him, and a revolving door of tenants coming and going. The energy and delight in his success was new for both of us. We laughed together imagining the "old picture" of one disgruntled ex-tenant racing out the back door of the house as another unsuspecting one came in the front door – fortunately (or not, for Andrew) not talking to the departing one. So here we were, each slapping our knees with the energy and pleasure of a special connection, interrupting each other spontaneously – like squirrels chasing each other's tails as I often observed them doing in my backyard trees. The room felt alive, our PLAY systems engaged.

*"The more sophisticated human forms of play may be secondary-and tertiary-process variants of the primary rough-and-tumble urge that we share with other animals... As individuals mature, a great deal of human play comes to be focused on verbal interchange." (Panksepp & Biven, 2012, p. 365)*

Near the end of that session, he offhandedly mentioned that he had begun collecting 45 LP's - the ones from the 60's and 70's that hold one song yet are larger than the much later CD's which would hold so many more. I had a rush of youthful memories as he told me. I hadn't thought about them in decades. Surely the five and dime store that had them perched on that top shelf when I was young and thirsty for my own musical expression must have closed by now. He told me, "Younger people are buying them as collectors, but they have no connection to their early lives, just for the money that vintage collections might bring." But he delighted in discovering that they were still available for sale and he had been buying a few. As he left, I remembered a story he told me early on in our work about staying in his room when young listening to music by himself, a deep source of pleasure. My curiosity was aroused, and equally important, I sensed my CARE system engage.

*"There is every reason to believe that the CARE system generates positive affects in nurturing caretakers, both female and male. In addition to being fueled by oxytocin it is also fueled by endogenous opioids. Indeed, endogenous opioids play a role in all positive social interactions. Both oxytocin and endogenous opioids are soothing 'feel-good' chemicals that are known to inhibit aggression and irritability." (Panksepp & Biven, 2012, p. 292)*

The following week he came in, once again, palpably energized as he took his seat. We smiled and he began by telling me with genuine excitement of getting "a new 45." We began our squirrel chase immediately. "Who?" "The Righteous Brothers," he answered. "Cool! Which one?" He told me the name and unfortunately I didn't know the song, though I also had been taken over by the Righteous Brothers when young. I didn't want to put too much of my own enthusiasm into this before I sensed his path. It seemed he had a direction and my job was to scamper up the tree following his tail – not lead.

"I was sitting there listening to the song which I played over and over again when I was young, and watching the record spin around and around – the colors of the label and the writing were exactly the same as when I was a kid. Suddenly I flashed back to being about

seven years old and with a girl named Jan who lived down the road.” (Remember, there were very few neighbors.)

He told me that they would get together and listen to records in her room, and it was by far one of the most fun times he had when that age (SEEKING and PLAY systems no doubt active here). I was working hard to contain the full measure of my delight as I tracked him, though I could sense the unleashing of the energy of such a memory and story linking our brains together strongly (Stephens, Silbert, & Hasson, 2010).

“I remembered something I had not thought of since that time. Jan told me a secret. She opened the closet and showed me a small door in the wall, a wooden door. She said it was a door to a special room where only kids could go. It was a ‘magic room.’ I was so excited and kept staring at that door.”

I felt chills remembering my own wandering off to places in our back woods, to a caved-in barn that had been abandoned by everyone and by time itself - except our gang of guys who played imaginary games until a piercing sharp whistle called us to dinner.

“We never pried the door open.” I didn’t ask why, somehow knowing that question was not yet relevant and likely too much of an imposition. He went on as I sat quiet and open but on the edge of my ability to contain the excitement (or tragedy) that lay ahead.

Then it came.

“Of course I know now that it was not a special door into a magic room only for kids. It was likely a small trap door for access to the plumbing for the bathroom next door.”

I was wary as I anticipated, by the look on his face and the drop in his tone, that we were in for a fall for a man who had had so many such disappointments in his life. I anticipated that the older state of cynicism was about to rear its head. How would I respond to him if he lost his footing with his newly-awakening SEEKING system? Clearly I was getting ahead of us, predicting. Internally I came back to the edge of the unknown and found my curiosity again as he continued.



“But you know what? As I stared at the record and watched the colorful label spin and heard that song again – the same song we listened to over and over, I knew something - it really *was* a magic room because it brought us so much excitement and imagination. And as I tell you this story right now, well, it’s the same. I feel so much joy remembering that time with her. And telling you, I feel it again. So it doesn’t matter whether or not it was what she said it was – it gave us so much fun.”

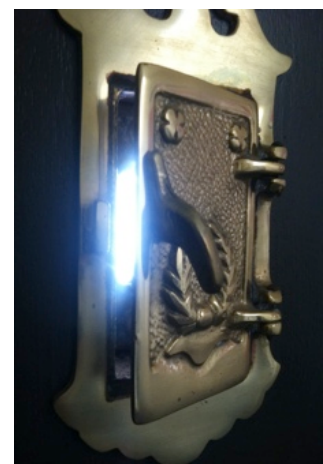
For a moment, I was thrown off by his words because they were so much a reflection of this brand new territory he was now able to explore, perhaps for the first time in his life. I was witnessing the sharp turn in his understanding linking the past and present moment. I had

not anticipated him re-experiencing the old implicit felt sense of that moment with Jan, followed by his developing brain's ability to hold the deeper meaning beyond the potential disappointment. I was inspired to see how his mind could artfully and genuinely make sense of the paradox – it was not magic, yet it was magic. Our ability to hold such complexity is the gift of an integrating brain. To me, Andrew was demonstrating a reawakening of a complex moment from a much younger age as his higher brain linked with the subcortical powers – bottom up integration in living color. This neural event was palpable as we sensed the coursing energy within and between us, activated from below, moving upward to his, and then our, reengagement with lower primitive and powerful emotional resources. SEEKING, PLAY, and CARE were alive and well in the space between us.

*“The most wonderful evolutionary tool to achieve full socialization of the brain is the rough-and-tumble PLAY system of the mammalian brain. Social PLAY allows youngsters to learn about social dynamics in affectively positive ways, leading them to CARE about others while they SEEK to understand the world. An enormous number of behavioral and mental functions may be refined during youthful play.” (Panksepp, 2007)*

We have been exploring some of the many living processes through which we might view Andrew's story. SCT suggests that the deep internal life force holds a component of survival that will generate protective roles when under threat, which are highly adaptive at that time (Agazarian, 2014). Though survival was better insured by their development, implicitly reengaging these roles later in life costs further growth and transformation, as the roles become closed systems not able to allow in new information and experience. When we are joined and heard by another, our system has the opportunity to reopen and take in new information, including the living presence of the other person as we internalize them and their responsiveness to us.

Reflecting back on Porges' perspective on safety, Andrew and I had developed an interpersonal system that could be understood as being something like a “magic room” offering safety, security and the vitality of two SEEKING systems moving gradually toward full PLAY and deepening CARE. We might imagine that Andrew's neuroception of safety was increasing during our ongoing work as our connection deepened and became more secure. Because I deemphasized evaluation and problem solving of his various upsetting encounters and instead prioritized interpersonal engagement, we had the possibility of moving into new territory together rather than activating old protections. What we learn most from Porges is that nonjudgmental acceptance and openness to the other person as he or she is in the moment leads to the possibility of the other person deepening into the wisdom of his or her natural healing process. It is possible that as Andrew's social engagement system reengaged, different levels and networks of his brain were reconnecting leading to increases in neuroplastic change, fostering new ways to engage his world of complex relationships.



At the core of it all was my initial felt sense of Andrew's diminished access to his SEEKING system, brought on by the ongoing neglect he experienced in childhood. His continually frustrated attempts to engage with others along with the poverty of his social environment in general gradually blunted his SEEKING system. Eventually, all that was left was a felt sense of frustration and a bleak view of life's possibilities as this core wound shaped the perceptions of his limbic and cortical regions. However, these vital inborn energies are always available for reshaping and renewal in the context of a receptive relationship. This is what Andrew and I found together.

*"The ways in which motherly, and fatherly, CARE help nurture the brain are of great importance for understanding how altruism, compassion, and empathy became possible." (Panksepp & Biven, 2012, p. 309)*

I respect and deeply value all these perspectives and orientations, and find that they make their way into my work at moments when they will support transformation. With another patient, a different mix of approaches or emphases would likely lead the way. However, I have increasing confidence that one thing would remain - my deep commitment to my relationship with Andrew as well as others I feel honored to work with. That commitment is what guides us in gaining implicit knowledge and sharing healing experiences not easily available through cognitive-only centered processes. In the space between us, something emerges that no one could have anticipated.

This, to me, is the essence of transformation, an unfolding process that is not the property of either one of us separately but is the result of our interaction, as the freed-up life force moves between us equally and collaboratively regardless of which chair one is sitting in. I refer to this natural process of therapy as the emergence of the authentic selves. Offering curiosity about whom a person is, being available both emotionally and interpersonally, and staying open to being changed in the relationship are foundational for me.

*"It has long been known that the most effective psychotherapy occurs when clinicians know how to approach clients with unconditional acceptance, empathic sensitivity, and full concern for their emotion lives. In a word, effective psychotherapists share their ability for CARE."*  
(Panksepp & Biven, 2012, p. 310)

#### Updates:

Andrew's path ahead, like all of ours, is a long journey, though for him the moment-to-moment turns of daily life now include more proactive care of his body, less accumulated stress, and more fun and connection with others. As he and I moved through this past year, three updates stand out for me. The first two have to do with successes that Andrew initiated of his own accord. As his birthday approached, he quietly undid a life-long pattern of not attending to himself or any needs. ("What's the big deal about a birthday?") This

time he researched musical instruments and sent a link in an email to Joan that what he most wanted for his birthday was a guitar. In his childhood, he had been drawn to an old guitar in his home, but had not pursued an ongoing study of music, mostly because of a lack of encouragement. As I heard that Joan hadn't said much about the email he sent her, I silently crossed my fingers that she was attuned to the significance of his request, a reactivation of a *seeking* from long ago. He came in a few weeks later with a picture of a brand new guitar and the special time he was already having relearning chords. He was genuinely moved by her responsiveness that resulted in him receiving what he really wanted.

The second situation related to work. Andrew had covered for his boss while he was on extended travel, creatively managing a very successful conclusion to a complex real estate sale. In my view, his boss had taken the low road in terms of compensation, thus discounting Andrew's enormous contribution to the success of a deal that had previously fallen apart a number of times due to his boss not paying close attention to critical details. With no discussion between us, Andrew brought in a letter that he had written and sent to his boss the previous week. As he began the session by reading it, I was moved, proud and inspired all in one breath. His strength, honesty and ability to both stand up for himself while articulating the context of the long history they had was artful and right to the heart. Though he did not ask for more compensation, what he did do gracefully was "get his own back," which was the "compensation" he himself most needed. He hadn't waited until his eyes were blurry and aching to be given permission to take care of himself. A previous painful implicit memory was being reshaped, changing his former narrative and resulting in a sense of security and trust in himself and his social world.



And finally, recently I moved my office of 20 plus years to another office in the same suite. Most everything in the office is different than the previous one, with art created by friends. A large unpolished ocean jasper gemstone from Madagascar resides on the lower shelf of a wooden side table. Andrew came in, looked around with approval of all the changes and then his eyes found the stone. He turned to me and graciously suggested I might want to

put a hidden light on it to make the facets glow while highlighting the numerous embedded gems. I didn't know exactly what that might look like practically and in a few short moments he explained to me what, where and how. I spent that weekend excitedly assembling my new spotlight. It is one of the features of my new office that consistently receives enthusiastic attention. He came in the following week and I could see his eyes immediately and magnetically move to the shelf. He stared at it quietly for a few moments. He looked at me and, smiling, said it was beautiful and had a sparkle. I agreed. Top down meets bottom up meets back and forth. I opened to the CARE he was offering. The conversation continues. Magical.

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