

# Book Review

## The Healing Dance: The Life and Practice of an Expressive Arts Therapist

Author Rea, K. (2013).

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The author introduces the readers to a biographical account of her journey to becoming a therapist, which stemmed from her early traumatic experiences, battle with mental illness and disordered eating as a professional ballet dancer to engaging in expressive arts training, and then relating the therapeutic work with her client's to reveal an enriching narrative of healing and recovery through the expressive arts.

It starts with her reciting her professional ballet experiences as a young woman, the relentless diet and exercise regime to uphold the esteemed position as being one of the most acclaimed ballet dancers with the prestigious ballet company the National Ballet Company in Canada. Then later with the Innsbruck Ballet Company in Austria. Having returned home, years later she choreographed her own solo dance which was inspired by her own personal struggles with an eating disorder. The author's narrative is told at a pulsating pace of descend into chaos, childhood trauma, mental illness, disordered eating problems, binge/purge cycle, compulsive behaviours, and psychosis which eventually moves towards a sanctuary of healing and recovery.

Her path to recovery was paved through her training in the expressive arts field. It is through this phase of her life, that the narrative seems to slow as she reaches into aspects of self previously unknown. The author's core sense of self starts to emerge out of the darkness, when everything was stripped bare from her existence as a professional ballet dancer which culminated in chronic illness and a near death experience.

She surrenders to the relentless pursuit of perfection, and discovers self compassion and love instead of fear. The revelation of secrets held by the generations within her family, eventually revealed her own truth that was held in her body and she found a voice to give strength to her new truth.

The author described her calling as a therapist as a soft voice that spoke her own truth, in

conjunction with her training in the expressive arts, which has given her a map to guide her practice. She refers to this primordial experience as body-based wisdom, self in relationship to the environment, wellness and dysfunction. She describes a classification system which she positively frames as the six forms of body wisdom: action; inner body; physiology; thought and imagination; emotion and spirit. She suggests that by intimately knowing and engaging in a relational dialogue with one's inherent body of wisdom provides a conduit for creative expression in movement, dance or art form which can be liberating and life enhancing.

She also suggests that we are human beings in relation to self and the environment and that it is a reciprocal rhythmic dance, as we breathe and move together in relation to each other. She critiques the notion of wellness and dysfunction to broaden out the concepts to include a dynamic flow on a continuum that celebrates the idiosyncratic and uniqueness of each individual across the spectrum of suffering and recovery. She goes on to explore healing through the expressive arts lens linking current neuroscience research to assist her client's understanding of how engaging in creative artistic expression and experiences can forge new neural pathways and new ways of being in the world.

Although, the book focuses on the expressive arts using art as the primary medium, she does draw on a broad multimodal therapeutic lens, which includes, (albeit briefly) focusing on body based experiences-sensory awareness, and bodily felt sensations to deepen the therapeutic work towards more of an embodied state of wellness.

In reading this book, it provides a compassionate story of a wounded healer, who found her calling as an expressive arts therapist through her passion for dance.

### *Sharon Paetzold*

Sharon is a DMT, accredited Mental Health Social Worker, gestalt movement psychotherapist, certified trainer and supervisor.