

Shamanic Healing:

When All Else Failed for Chronic Pain

By Mara Bishop, MS, THM, CSC

As a shamanic practitioner since the mid 1990s, I've seen many difficult cases and instances of remarkable healing. One of my clients had an experience with chronic pain that illustrates the power of the work, and is an example of why I'm grateful to be in this field. Ernie Schoenfeld has a doctorate in public health. He has worked at the School of Public Health at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill for over 30 years in various positions, including Senior Associate Dean and Lecturer in the Department of Health Policy and Administration, and as Senior Advisor to Dr. William Roper, then dean of UNC School of Medicine, who is now serving as interim head of the UNC System.

About eleven years ago, Dr. Schoenfeld got up from a rowing machine with "unbelievable pain" in his left leg. He could barely stand up. Over the counter medication didn't help, so he went to his doctor who gave him some other medications. He said, "I took those for a short time and there was no effect whatsoever. The pain was so bad that I could neither lie down comfortably, nor walk without extreme agony."

Over the next several weeks, Ernie methodically sought relief from medical professionals. He was sent to several physicians including an orthopedist, who ordered an MRI that showed severe stenosis and scoliosis. The doctor suggested surgery would be difficult to perform, and was unlikely to bring lasting relief.

Dr. Schoenfeld recalls the doctor saying: "You are just going to have to learn to live with



this." So, he reports, "at the recommendation of the orthopaedic surgeon, I went to an anesthesiologist, who said a steroid shot would relieve the pain. It didn't, so I went to another physician who is licensed both in traditional western medicine and eastern medicine. He did several sessions of acupuncture. None of those helped."

He went to a holistic physician, who sent him to two physical therapists, each with a different approach. "They both worked on me for a while, and, along with everybody else, they both said, 'We can't help you.'" Ernie ultimately went to another acupuncturist and a chiropractor with similar results. He had previously been seeing a massage therapist for cervical disc compression, who (also at a loss to help with this particular issue) asked, "Have you ever thought about going to a shaman?"

He found me through an Internet search and scheduled an initial consultation in my Durham office. In the session, my work as a shamanic practitioner was to create sacred space, call on help, and pay close attention with all my senses to understand what was needed to help my client. I perceived some misplaced energy that needed to be removed.

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Ernie remembers the session this way: "The first thing you did was as I stood up, you walked around me shaking a bundle, a sage bundle, and beat the drum. Of course, if you don't see me you don't know how traditional I am. I kept thinking to myself, 'Schoenfeld, what are you doing here? This is crazy!'"

While Ernie relaxed comfortably, I performed the healing process called an extraction. The work was purely energetic. "That night after the treatment," he recalls, "was the first night I was able to lie in bed without pain. And here we are however many years later and I occasionally have a twinge or a pain, but I'm done with that pain." Ernie returned for follow up sessions where we did additional forms of shamanic work together.

As a scientist, Ernie didn't begin his search for pain relief with shamanic healing, but now he's vocal about its efficacy, even to colleagues in the UNC medical system. He and I have been invited to speak about our experience working together to an Alternative and Complementary Medicine class for graduate students at UNC.

Research provides evidence about how the ancient methods of shamanic healing work today.

For example, an NIH funded study shows that shamanic healing is effective in treating TMJ, and drumming—long used in shamanic cultures as a vehicle for healing—has been demonstrated to reduce stress, increase cancer-fighting cells in the immune system, and relieve symptoms of depression.

One modality can't contain all the answers about maintaining and restoring health. Modern medicine is miraculous, and the medicine of our ancestors contains the seeds of science. We need to be open to all paths that produce results. **h&h**

Mara Bishop is a shamanic practitioner, intuitive consultant, teacher, author, and artist. In her Personal Evolution Counseling™ practice in Durham, she combines shamanic healing, intuitive consultations, and energetic healing. She works with clients locally, nationally, and internationally. She is the author of Inner Divinity, Crafting Your Life with Sacred Intelligence, and the companion CD of guided meditations.

She holds master's degrees in Energy Medicine and Theology and a bachelor's degree in Art and Communications. She is a graduate of the Foundation for Shamanic Studies Three-Year Program in Advanced Shamanism and Shamanic Healing, Sandra Ingerman's Shamanic Teacher Training program, and advanced training with Betsy Bergstrom. Mara is the only Harner Certified Shamanic Counselor® in North Carolina.