

Me, Therapy???

By Karen

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I share my reflections on therapy in hopes that if you are afraid of seeking out a psychologist/psychiatrist or if you have the stereotype that I did, that only nutty people see a therapist, that you will be reassured and encouraged to take that step of finding healing.

Let's face it, some of us grew up watching Bob Newhart as a therapist and always seeing pictures of offices with a person laying on a couch with an obviously bored therapist sitting in a chair not even looking at the person. Why would a person who has experienced abuse at the hands of a pastor during counseling even consider going to therapy? Before I would have told you I have no idea. Now, I would tell you because it is worth it!!!

Why did I seek out a psychologist? I did not know what else to do. I knew I needed help, I was desperate for someone to "fix" what was inside me and pastors were not safe, family was not an option, and there is no way I would tell anyone who knew me. In the beginning, I thought the therapist could "fix" me. After all, my doctor can fix a cough, can fix a fever, ..., looking back, it made sense. I thought I'd see a therapist for a few weeks or months and everything would be fixed. It shows how little I knew about therapy, how little I knew about how the abuse had affected me, how little I knew about how I was raised had set me up, and how much I was still willing to give a person power in my life by expecting them to "fix" me.

When you do not know any psychologists, how do you choose one? I looked at the yellow pages, but how do you know? I read about psychologists on the Internet and read good and horror stories. I was just starting a new job and was not going to ask any of my colleagues or my boss – they might wonder why they hired me and I did not share deep things with many people. So, how do you start? I had previously talked with a lady in a church, so had talked some about the abuse. But she was not a professional, so it was more like talking with a friend and while it started me talking, it really did not give me the tools I needed or the healing I needed. Something in me knew I wanted and needed more than a friend, something in me said I needed a psychologist. Of course, I wanted a psychologist because I thought that person could "fix" this stuff in me that I did not understand.

How did I find my psychologist? How do you choose? I had looked in the yellow pages and there were too many. So, I next looked online. I could see some pictures, read some reviews, So, I emailed some women psychologists who said they specialize in helping victims of abuse. Some did not respond, some responded with answers that just sounded flaky, and some responded that they would be glad to answer my questions if I would make an appointment, and by the way, \$\$ is my fee. I'm not into flaky and the emphasis on \$\$ turned me off. So, I waited a few more weeks, but something in me just knew I needed help. The only way I know to explain that is that God was leading me to find healing. There really is not another explanation since for me to seek out a psychologist is breaking all the family rules.

I finally contacted a person who knew my story, who had been a pastor I considered trustworthy, and who knew me. He gave me a name. I contacted that person and he suggested that since we were colleagues it would be unethical for me to be his patient, but gave me two names – one male and one female. In answer to my question, he suggested that maybe my wondering if a male psychologist could help me more was a nudge from God. Why a male when I had been abused by a male pastor and a male relative? I do not know and it seems like a crazy illogical decision, except it was the best decision I have ever made and none of the female psychologists seemed like someone I would want to work with. I emailed him and asked him some questions. He emailed back answers. That happened a few times and he never pressured me to make an appointment. He was very gentle in his responses and never pressured me to give him more information. It just seemed right. So, I made an appointment.

Before the first appointment, he sent me an email asking if I knew how to get to the office. I am so glad he did, I might not have found his office. But further affirmation of seeing him was he told me exactly what to expect, to walk in the door, go in the waiting room, and he would come. He took away that anxiety! So, I went.

I do not remember a lot about that first visit except he opened the door of the waiting room, and stood back to let me pass. He introduced himself, with a deep southern drawl. He asked a few questions but did not press me for information or answers. He asked why I thought I needed to see a psychologist and I whispered something about a pastor touching me. I am pretty sure he did not hear me, but he did not push for me to say it again. Was I comfortable? No way! I was scared to death! At the same time I knew deep inside me this was a right decision. I know, does not make sense – still does not make sense except it was God leading me. He gave me some papers to fill out and asked if I wanted to come again. I nodded yes, he said some days and times until I nodded yes. He got up, opened the door and stood way out of the way for me; I stuck my hand out to shake his hand and sort of shook his hand before leaving as fast as I could. His standing out of the way when opening the door was important for me. You see, my abuser had purposely stood in doorways to make me squeeze past him and he would use that as a chance to touch me or block my way out of a room. So, this psychologist standing out of the way made a big impression on me.

I remember the second visit he told me that psychologists do not have “twinkle dust” where they can just “poof, do something magical and fix” a person. That discouraged me a bit, yet he said we would work together for me to get to the other side of things and we would work together on how the past was affecting me now. That rang true with me and intrigued me. He also said that for the 50 minutes each week the therapy was all about me, that I could choose what we talked about or did not talk about, that I was in control of the time in his office. Wow! That was new! He also said that if I did not want to tell him the details of the pastor I did not have to, that he was more interested in helping me lead a healthy life now. The individual I had previously talked with had told me over and over I had to tell my story over and over in order to find healing and that had terrified me. He was saying I did not have to tell him.

This process intrigued me, and I wanted to see what he meant. At the same time Jan was encouraging me to keep going, and even telling me things to watch for to make sure this man was safe. So, we decided on an afternoon a week - same day, same time each week. For the first six months at least, we had the same routine. I had somehow figured out he had a sense of humor I liked. It was similar to mine, so I started looking for comics about psychologists and therapy to take with me. Looking back, I am amazed he had the patience for my insecurities and fear! I am blessed that he did. The routine was that he would open the door, I'd walk in the office; sit on the end of the couch closest to the door – never really relaxing. I'd hand him a pack of paper and he'd start with the comics. Some he laughed at loudly, some he chuckled, some he gave a look which is quite funny because the cartoon is just plain corny. I found security in his honest laughter at the cartoons; I found security in that he did not fake laughter. He would then read the rest of what I had written. He would ask a few questions, I would whisper a response and I think he became good at reading my lips because I doubt he could hear my whisper since sometimes I could not even hear my whisper! He would say things that reassured me I was not crazy, that I was in a good process, and that we would work together on this. I still take comics and each week I am searching online to find ones that will make him laugh and I am always looking for those corny ones because I love seeing that look on his face. Lately I take comics along a theme to let him know what I want to talk about.

One of those first visits I gave him my story. The way he accepted it was as if I was giving him an honor. He did not just toss it on his desk. He held it gently and told me thank you for trusting him with it. He took about three weeks to read my story and I will always remember the session he said he had finished reading it. There was anger in his eyes as he said that the pastor was wrong, that the pastor had betrayed me, and that he was sorry I had experienced that “grievous wrong.” There was even something reassuring with him taking three weeks to read my story because he said he wanted to read it carefully and make sure he understood all of it. I remember being amazed that he, a man, believed me.

During that first year I asked him multiple times what made him safe. I wanted to know why I should trust him. I will never forget his answers – he talked about boundaries and how I had grown up without boundaries and he would help me learn boundaries. We talked about boundaries between the two of us. He even promised me there would never be any touching between us and told me if he ever crossed that boundary I should immediately tell. Wow! He was encouraging me to report him if he crossed that boundary! My family had a code of silence, and my abuser had threatened me and isolated me to keep me silent. My own mother had told me to keep quiet after a relative trapped me and was touching me. This psychologist, this man who was in authority, was telling me I should report him if he crossed an ethical boundary. He also told me that in learning boundaries I could talk about anything, and I could push on those boundaries as much as I wanted but the boundaries would always be in place and strong. I started feeling safe in that office. At the same time, I was weekly telling Jan about therapy and occasionally asking her if he was still safe. She just kept reassuring me there were no red flags and having her input helped me more than anything those months. I do not tell her the details anymore; just sometimes tell her about therapy – I do not need her reassurance of the safety and progress.

After about a year I moved to the other end of the couch, the one furthest from the door – that was a big step for me. Now I always sit there and am actually comfortable there. I still grab the pillows sometimes for security, and sometimes just use them to lean on. One of these days I am going to kick my shoes off and curl my legs up on the couch!

I remember the first time the tears leaked out of my eyes in his office. I was doing everything I could to stop them, but they just started down my cheeks. Scared me to death since I grew up without showing emotions, and when I had dared show emotions with that pastor he has used them as an excuse to “comfort” me. But this psychologist did not even act as if anything was wrong or different. In fact, he said having tears was natural, especially when talking about what I was feeling then. Since then we have even joked that I should donate my tear ducts to the local fire station since there are times the tears will not stop. He has helped me understand my emotions, has helped me learn that God created me with emotions so they are normal, and he has validated my emotions. My emotions still overwhelm me at times, and when I tell him that he just gets that caring look in his eyes and says “yes, that is ok, but you are learning they are ok and how to deal with them.” Now, it is just safe and seems normal to have tears in his office. Not every time, but it has become ok to express anger, frustration, disappointment, happiness, sadness, and ... all of those emotions in his office. I am also learning when and how to express those outside of his office.

Somewhere in these years it has become safe to talk about the abuse from that pastor, and to talk about family issues, work issues, and life issues. He has become my coach, my teacher, at times my pastor, ... an incredible gift in my life. Somewhere in these years I started talking. I still take a script most of the time, but sometimes just hand it to him and we talk without him reading it. Sometimes I even dare to try and talk without it written on paper. Somewhere in these years it has become safe to talk about everything: PMS, dieting, guys, work, family, feelings, ..., and when I have dared to share those secrets no one has ever heard, he is not shocked and reassures me that I am ok and we will work through all of it. Somewhere in these years I went from never addressing him by name to asking him if I could call him Dr. G., to calling him G because he is important in my life and he has become part of my life. Somewhere I have told him I listen to his voicemail greeting sometimes when I just need comfort because his voice comforts me and he is ok with that.

Somewhere in these years I have become deeply connected to this man. That scared me at first and now I find it comforting and I also realize I needed to know this deep relationship in order to heal the betrayed relationships. Somewhere in these years I have come to love this man yet know that is one-sided as he is my psychologist and will keep that boundary strong. Somewhere in these years I have come to realize I think he is “damn cute” and that no longer scares me. Somewhere in these years I have realized that while there is still a wish in me that he could hug me, I really do not want that hug since that would be a betrayal of the boundaries. Somewhere I have realized I get jealous when I think about other people seeing him because I think of him as “my G.” Somehow I have let him know those feelings and he has both affirmed that they are normal and that he will keep the boundaries strong. Somewhere in these years I realized he really couldn’t “fix” me; that he really does not have “twinkle dust.”

Somewhere in these years the abuse of the past has lost its controlling hold on me and just recently I started losing the weight I gained as an affect of the abuse as just one sign of this healing from that

controlling hold. Somewhere in these years the abuses of the past have lost their power in me as I spend more and more time living in the present and learning to live a healthier life in the present: emotionally, spiritually, physically, and mentally. Just recently I have come to know God as a loving God, not the God I was raised to know and not the God an abusive pastor talked about.

Why therapy? Because the journey is worth the results. The journey is not easy. There have been times I emailed G and said I did not want to come. He understood and encouraged me to come while Jan would make me promise to go. There have been times I have told him that “growing up sucks” and that this was too hard. There are times when I have emailed him all the emotions and memories hitting and told him it felt like crap inside. He validates my feelings and helps me work through those feelings. But looking back, I am glad I started and continued on this journey. Jan has been there to encourage me, to listen, and to assure me of the worth of this journey. G has been true to his word to work through issues with me, he has kept the boundaries strong, and he is a gift from God in my life. So, if you are asking yourself why go to therapy? Because the results are worth all of it. I am still on this journey. I am not sure for how long. I do know I still need G’s coaching to continue becoming a healthy adult. I still have lots of questions to ask him, I still have many things to learn. I still look forward to that time each week when we laugh, where it is safe to have emotions, where it is safe to ask anything and talk about anything, and where I can be who I am and who I am becoming.

