

Local litigator becomes hypnotherapist

By Elizabeth Cohen

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Not so long ago, Jim Lee had clients whose lives had been upended by faulty products, car accidents or machinery gone haywire. As a lawyer for 29 years with the Binghamton firm of Hinman, Howard & Kattell, Lee also represented corporations that were facing lawsuits against their products by folks who claimed they were unsafe.

"I represented the estate of a man who was pinned under his car due to a faulty jack," said the 54-year-old Binghamton resident who grew up in Wellsville, the youngest child of seven. "And I represented a gentleman who had his hand crushed in a punch press."

Today, Lee's clients seek him out for a very different kind of help altogether: They come to be hypnotized.

Serious therapy

If the image that just leapt to mind is of a circus sideshow in which a man transforms willing audience members into clucking chickens or barking dogs, you are seriously behind the times, said Rosalind Holden, one of Lee's clients who visited him on a recent morning for a hypnosis session. Holden, a Binghamton mother of three, sought Lee's help to deal with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder after leaving an abusive marriage.

"I have always been into nutrition and homeopathy; I do meditation, yoga and have had shiatsu," she said. When it came time to treat her severe PTSD, hypnotherapy seemed to her an obvious way to go. After much emotional trauma, she came to Lee for hypnosis not just to help relieve her trauma, but to help her 9-year-old son, Tristan, as well.

A tool to relax

Lee had sought hypnosis to treat his anxiety almost a decade ago. "I had been feeling some nonspecific anxiety," he said. "Outwardly, everything in my life was going well. I was happy, my two children and wife were all well. I had no complaints."

But he became very agitated, or, in his words, "I had a generalized anxiety I couldn't explain."

He sought various kinds of help, but it was hypnosis that served him in the end. In fact, it knocked out his anxiety altogether, and, he says, opened his subconscious mind to a host of eye-opening and life-transforming experiences. "I was fascinated that hypnosis could be so powerful and effective," he said.

Intrigued, he read up on the subject in books by the leading authors in the field, including Brian Weiss and Michael Newton. But his appetite for all things hypnosis was not satiated. "I just wanted to learn as much as I could about this experience that helped me so much," he said.

Took classes, became certified

Lee's growing passion soon led him to Paul Aurand, a certified instructor in New York who took him on as a student. "I started taking his classes and once I knew enough to be proficient, I began to practice on friends and relatives to get the clinical hours I needed to become certified."

Weekdays were all about law and trial preparation. On evenings and weekends, he was becoming deeply involved in hypnosis and its practice.

"I began to witness what I thought were miracles," he said. "I worked with clients who suffered pain and discomfort from rheumatoid arthritis, fibromyalgia and dystrophies. And I was able to help them tremendously by alleviating their symptoms."

The way this happened, Lee said, has a lot to do with the very process of hypnosis. "Hypnosis is really just a very relaxed state of being," he said. "Once in a hypnotic state you still have control of your mind."

One of the things Lee helps his clients do is utilize that enhanced relaxed subconscious state to "seek out" their ailments and their root causes and help them selves.

"I saw a woman get rid of an immense amount of pain in one session," he said. "Another came in with a cane and left without needing it."

These were not cures, he is quick to say, but treatments that proved to help tremendously -- and without the cost and onus of taking drugs or having costly and painful surgeries.

Still practicing law

Meanwhile, Lee was still practicing law, and taking on big cases. And he was exhausting himself by trying to do both. It was becoming clear that his heart was in hypnotherapy, and yet he continued to work as a trial lawyer. "It was getting more and more difficult to practice law full time," he said, "and I became aware that I was going to have to choose."

His last legal case was defending a young man who was in a car accident in Owego and suffered a severe arm injury. "He was one of those kids who was a star baseball player and couldn't throw any more," Lee said. Furthermore, since his accident the young man was confused and having memory problems. "He would have to Mapquest a simple drive to a store near home," he added.

"I devoted my energies to helping him with his case," said Lee. But at a certain point, "I think I might have wondered if I could help him with hypnotherapy. I had seen, at that point, the mind do amazing things to help people."

That was when Lee realized he needed to cross over to a new career: "My sole passion was doing hypnosis."

By then, he had completed his studies and had achieved his certification from The International Association of Counselors and Therapists, which certifies hypnotherapists based on knowledge, experience and skill level. He decided to take the leap.

"I went in to speak with one of the partners at my firm and I told him how passionate I had become about hypnotherapy," he said. "And he said he was happy for me. He understood. Everyone, in fact, was very supportive. My kids said they were proud of me. It was just the right thing for me to do."

Helps tremendously

Holden, who came to see Lee for several sessions spread out over a period of two years, calls her hypnosis therapy with Lee "a wonderful journey."

"I was having difficulty with anxiety and sleeping, among other serious problems," she said. "Jim uses visual imagery to help me while I am hypnotized, like of walking down a staircase and counting the stairs, and somehow, I feel I am letting go physically and my mind is relaxing. My body feels light. I am aware of his voice but I am also in a sort of dream state."

And then, she said, she finally was able to let go of her pain. "I spent a lot of time crying. And I mean a lot of crying. And I felt a release right from the heart, my solar plexus area."

The result for Holden, like many of Lee's hypnotherapy clients, is, she said, a new "sense of clarity. I felt like a burden had been lifted, and I was so much happier."

Hypnotherapy did what no other treatment could do for her, Holden said: "My healing had begun."

Since then she said she has been able to put her "life back in order and move forward."

Fulfilling work

Seeing cases like Holden's, in which he has helped a person in such a significant way, makes this the work Lee loves today. "When I was a lawyer I thought about winning cases, and there was a lot of stress around the fear that I would lose," he said. "Sometimes I thought about retirement, when I would stop practicing. This I now know: I will never stop practicing hypnotherapy. From this profession I will never retire."

But does he miss practicing law?

"That was something I did and I did it well. It was financially rewarding. I won a number of cases; others were settled to the satisfaction of my clients. I am glad I did it, but this is what I want to do now," he said. "I just got to the point where I was passionate about this. The act of helping people and seeing them able to conquer all sorts of things; to give

someone relief from their stresses and cares, their physical tensions, and help them to really relax is a privilege I feel I have now."

Lee said he has overheard his children -- now young adults -- telling their friends with pride that he is a hypnotherapist. "I don't think they ever told anyone that I was a lawyer," he said. "That speaks volumes to me."

HISTORY OF HYPNOSIS

Hypnotherapy, which derives from the Greek word "hypnos" -- meaning sleep -- took on additional meaning in the 1700s when an Austrian physician named Franz Anton Mesmer used hypnotic techniques to help people suffering from a broad variety of ailments, ranging from paralysis to headaches. In 1958, after the use of hypnosis became more common, it was recognized as a viable therapy with medical applications by the American Medical Association. It is used today to treat many problems, from chronic pain to addictions and anxiety.

ABOUT JIM LEE

The former lawyer offers smoking cessation sessions in a course taught through Broome Community College in the Town of Dickinson. He also helps clients deal with weight loss or phobias, and helps them address chronic pain, among other issues. For addictions to drugs and alcohol, Jim Lee said he prefers to coordinate efforts with the individual's physician and work as a team rather than independently.

For more details:

CALL

(607) 725-4233

E-mail

jim@hypnosisforhealing.info

To learn more about Lee and hypnosis, go to www.hypnosisforhealing.info

To learn more about hypnotherapy, go to www.umm.edu/altmed/articles/hypnotherapy.

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