

# Commentary on Anais Salibian's Trauma Therapy with Rosen Method Bodywork

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Writing this commentary has taken my thoughts back 37 years to 1978. I don't know that I ever heard Marion say the word 'trauma' at the beginning of teaching her work. Only much later did she occasionally use the word trauma in her teaching, but still, it was rare. Even in her book (Rosen & Brenner, 2003), there are only a few times the word is used: once in a title: *Working with Feelings and Memories Related to Childhood Trauma*. Rather, she spoke of the physical barriers created by children in order to survive difficult, sometimes shocking or dangerous situations. "If those barriers could relax", she would teach, "we would have much more aliveness."

Students in Marion's first training in 1980 experienced clients re-living long-forgotten memories while relaxed under our caring soft hands and presence. No one called these experiences trauma, but some of the memories were. We learned that all of us had put away hurtful to deeply shocking experiences that shaped our bodies and ways of being in the world. Marion would say that in the past, we shaped our bodies so that we could survive in our environment...and maybe now (with more awareness) we didn't have to do that anymore.

Marion discovered she was very often (if not always) working with underlying childhood traumas with her clients. Long before Rosen Method had the name "Rosen Method," Marion's work, as it developed over the years, was about helping clients have more ease and more aliveness. In the process of receiving Rosen Method Bodywork (RMB) clients sometimes experienced emotions and physical sensations of tension around what had been an old experience (trauma) put away into the subconscious; put away at a time when the feelings would have been overwhelming.

Today, we know so much more about the physical and emotional effects of childhood trauma. Still, without all of this knowledge, the truth emerged in Marion's clients. She discovered that the words we use to describe our experience, the story we have in our minds, and the story we tell, does not reach the heart of the matter, the embodied memory. She was surprised to discover that simply by being present with her gentle attentive touch, by listening and being non-judgmental and accepting, people often got in touch with the embodied memory and experienced the emotions and physical tension that went beyond the story. It was then that the inner healing could begin.

Rosen Method Bodywork has always worked with the human condition; what it took for each of us to survive childhood trauma. To me, this was the miracle of Marion's work...her discovery that with kind, present touch and supportive words, clients gained trust and relaxed enough for the physical tension -- barriers, as Marion called them -- to relax and for held feelings to emerge. Therefore more aliveness could be present.

If the word “trauma” had been in the lexicon of the 1970’s and 80’s, as it is today, for overwhelming childhood experiences or profound emotional and/or physical shock, it would have been used with Rosen Method Bodywork. Marion knew these experiences to be barriers to the ease that is possible when they no longer need to be held in the body. She understood, and taught her students, that on-going, early (developmental) stress and/or shock is put deeply away in a child’s body and consciously forgotten because the nervous system cannot handle these kinds of experiences at such a young and tender age. She understood that on-going overwhelm, neglect, shock or abuse must be held in abeyance until, as adults, we are able to revisit and heal these traumas.

The practice of RMB is elegant, arising from the serious professional training process required. This process includes a personal transformation, necessary to allow one’s self to be fully present with another person. The life experiences of those receiving RMB at times include pain, loss and suffering as well as joy and a deep connection with oneself.

When one is met with caring touch, presence and kindness, when the embodied memory beyond the story is accepted with respect and non-judgment, often this allows an opening and a deepening into an old, held traumatic experience. When this occurs, the body can relax its grip and the results are profound. The deepest possibility of Rosen Method is reaching that place within where the felt experience of joy, pain or awe is inexpressible. As Anais states, one gains more physical and emotional integration, ease and self-knowing.

Marion, Anais, and all of us who have learned and experienced RMB over the last 37+ years know well what a recent article in the San Francisco Chronicle states: “Experience with trauma is so pervasive in the United States and has such profound effects on a person’s physical and mental health that screening and treatment for anything from childhood abuse to domestic violence should be a standard part of mainstream primary care, according to a UCSF-led team of researchers” (Allday, 2015).

Understanding what happens in the mind and body is complex. Anais’s timely article defines trauma and the manner in which RMB helps clients gain the physical and emotional awareness to begin to shift old patterns of holding. The section in her article on *Specific Guidelines for RMB Practitioners Working with Trauma*, is clearly written and sufficiently specific and help to define the complexity. I commend her for her excellent and thorough research. Her personal story, and those of others that she writes about, are compelling, and combined with her research, present Rosen Method Bodywork as the stand-alone healing modality that it is.

### References

Rosen, M. & Brenner, S. (2003). *Rosen Method Bodywork; Accessing the Unconscious through Touch*. North Atlantic Books.

Allday, E. (2015, May 15). How physicians can help patients cope with trauma. *San Francisco Chronicle*.