

Layers of Health

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Host Nina Wallinder

Guest Deborah Koff-Chapin



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Deborah: My husband snapped a picture of me sitting at my Center for Touch Drawing desk and I just put it on my blog. So anyone who goes to touchdrawing.com—I've got a very rich website. If you go down the left column of buttons, way down towards the bottom, you'll see blog. Just click on that, it'll take you to my most current blog posting and that's where I am.

Nina: Oh, that's fantastic.

Deborah: I thought it'd be nice to have a visual.

Nina: Yes, exactly. Because, of course, Deborah is an artist, very visual and tactile as well.

Deborah: Absolutely.

Nina: But maybe we'll jump in right now. So, hello, listeners. My name is Nina Wallinder. Have you ever thought of art as a creative way of expressing the depths of your being? Today we're on LayersOfHealth.com and we talking with Deborah Koff-Chapin. Hi, Deborah.

Deborah: Hi, Nina. And hi, everybody else. I think there are some friends on the line because various friends have come up to me in the island and said, "Oh, I'm going to listen. Oh, that's so great you're doing that." But I can't hear you right now, so hi.

Nina: Yes, hello.

Deborah: Whoever is out there.

Nina: Exactly.

Deborah: Right. Absolutely.

Nina: So, for those who don't know you, I'll give them a brief introduction. So, on Deborah's last day at the Cooper Union in 1974, Deborah discovered touch drawing in a moment of creative—say that again.

Deborah: The olden days. It's starting to feel like the olden days. Keep going, sorry.

Nina: No problem. When touching a paper towel that had been placed on a freshly inked printing plate, she found that the pressure formed marks on the underside. So, lines that came directly from her fingertips. And laughing—you we're laughing about this discovery in a state of ecstatic revelation, is what it says here. What was that like for you?

Deborah: Well, it's interesting to articulate more finally about this because there was a lot that led up to this moment. Sometimes when people hear this story, at first they think, "Oh, it's just sort of this little thing, this funny little thing that happened." But a deeper part of me was searching and this was like an answer from the universe that came. So there was enormous energy. It was way more than just a nice idea that, oh, my fingers can make marks on the paper. So along with that

touching the paper, came like an energetic plugging end to something bigger. So a whole field or sphere of energy opened up when I moved my fingertips on that paper. So the laughter was kind of hysterical energy. And I was crawling around on the floor and picking up more paper towels and then putting my fingers down on the paper and then laughing hysterically again. And it was just these little squiggles coming out of my fingertips. It was so unimpressive in terms of art; it's the opposite of everything.

Nina: Quite unimpressive—I love that.

Deborah: But the purity of that direct human soul connection, so I got something way more than just the technique. It was like an opening to some larger, timeless realm of humanity. You could call it the soul of humanity. I felt connected to something bigger and I felt this sense of ancient humans in caves and how they have handprints on the walls. This all happened in an instant—oh, ancient human beings putting their hands on the walls. My hands are just touching and these lines are coming out. And some future human beings who are expressing really directly through their hands, I think this is meant for future human beings to express. All that sort of larger thing came into me. And I guess the only way I could handle it was by laughing.

Nina: It was a real primordial expression. It sounds almost the essential, like with the essence, that description about outside of time. I had that in my notes and I was going to ask you about that too, but you talked about, just a second ago, the past but also the future.

Deborah: Absolutely.

Nina: So you knew right from the beginning that this was to be shared.

Deborah: I knew it immediately that it was not just my little art technique. And especially that time in New York City where I was studying, the big thing for artists was to get some kind of signature thing that was your thing, that your name would be associated with. A lot of it was just abstracts things or conceptual things. This was so much of an opposite feeling that this was not mine, although it was my sort of a responsibility. But it was not only mine to do, but it was my calling. I didn't have any language. I was 21, 22 years old, I didn't have words to describe that but a sense that I now had a responsibility to share this process. Because people in the future wanted to do it; needed to do it. And somehow, it had been plopped in my lap.

Nina: I love that with the process too because I was really reflecting on how you've left the entire process almost open ended and like there are no instructions. You produced a set of cards. There are no guides with them. It's not like you lay this out in this sort of order. It really has left it for people almost to be able to tap into their own creativity.

Deborah: Yes. Now, it's not that I don't give instructions, but I don't try and control where people go with it. So I really am trying to help people get a sense of what the process is. So we're going to be talking about two different things here. There's a touch drawing process and how I encourage people to use the process. And

then there are the soul cards, which were drawings that I created with the process that are accessible to people to work with. I do have a similar attitude around everything that I do.

Nina: Yes.

Deborah: I want to help people, so it's not like I provide nothing. The soul cards do have a little instruction manual but it doesn't tell you what they mean. It helps you to have the experience, direct experience of working with these images. And with touch drawing, the same thing. I present the process as deeply as I know how to present it and then I say, "Go with it where you can go with it." Different people may have different focuses, different areas of expertise. Say, someone who works in hospice, and it's been very powerful for people using touch drawing in grief work. I say, I'm not an expert in this area. Take the process, develop it, and bring it into your field. And then send the stories back and send the reports back so you can inspire other people to also work with it in this way. So it's really been sort of a lifetime cultivation. I'm so glad I had no idea in that first moment what a big organizational effort it would be.

Nina: Oh, yes.

Deborah: I just thought, like Johnny Appleseed, I'll just show people touch drawing and everyone will start doing it. And you know, it's not as simple as that. And yet in another way, that is what's happening. But that's an enormous cultivation for a lifetime, really.

Nina: You mentioned hospice, but really people have taken it into their fields and it is being used really therapeutically, the touch drawing process. I read notes on Parkinson's and disabilities. Can you maybe go into it a little bit more of what their experiences are?

Deborah: Yes. There are so many different specific areas. For example, you brought up the Parkinson's. There is a group in Florida where a woman, Kathleen Horn, has been teaching touch drawing as part of her arts and healing certificate program. So she's teaching a lot of people the process. And out of that, she and her partner went and also presented touch drawing as a program for people with Parkinson's and their caregivers. So they created these series of workshops. The caregivers would have their own room. So maybe a wife or a grown adult child and they would have their own room to do touch drawing. And then the people with Parkinson's would go into their room to do touch drawing.

It served a really different purpose for the two different groups. The caregivers had time for themselves to express their feelings through the process to share deeply and their challenges and their struggles and found it really renewing like a creative support group. And the people with Parkinson's have found a real sense of creative inspiration. I think there is research specifically about Parkinson's and the brain chemistry and how creativity—the brain chemistry creativity actually helps them with their tremors physiologically.

Nina: That's fantastic.

Deborah: Also, I have two stories on my website, two different people from down there who

have really taken off creatively as artists, even though they don't have the control and they can't even hold the tool. There's a man who's had a lifelong career as an artist and he wants to remain creative. He's so inspiring as a person with a debilitating condition, that he still can have a creative life. And he's just on fire with touch drawing. And he's loaded about 50 beautiful drawings up on our online community.

Nina: That's amazing.

Deborah: So what I do is try and create these resources that help people communicate, inspire one another. And that's why I call it the Center for Touch Drawing. I keep a center and yet the edges of it can go in all different directions. And I try and hold this center as a contact point, a place for inspiration, and to keep the depths there. If I hold it as deeply as I can, I know that people will apply it, will do it at various ranges of depths depending on their situation. And I just do the best I can to keep it deepening in the core place.

Nina: Okay. So when I had mentioned "no instructions" but there is structure in that there's a community for people to be able to take that and express themselves.

Deborah: Right.

Nina: Okay. So, there's the Parkinson's, are people with disabilities and you wouldn't think of it as almost like another way of communication, but that is, I guess, in essence, what art really is. But used therapeutically, the benefits almost seem exponential.

Deborah: If I really sat down, I can get overwhelmed, which is I think, people thank me. Often, I get appreciation for not being very controlling. You don't need a certain certification or pay a certain money to share the process. I thank them for sharing the process because I couldn't do this all by myself. There's no way, I'd be completely overwhelmed. So I have the sense that it's living and it's growing and I don't really know all the places it's going. And that's how life is. And so I think I have a very organic, almost biological, model that there are seeds out there. They're evolving. There's little branches growing in different people's lives. As long as some people are getting back in touch, as long as there's some sense of interaction, I don't feel like I need to know everything that's going on. And that it's just having it's own organic evolutionary development in all these different fields. And it's alive. So I feel like these core sense of, when I die, this process needs to live without me. These seeds need to be planted and living well enough that they don't need me anymore. And that's hopefully how plants and seeds work. They just keep growing and spreading.

Nina: It's almost like parenting. That was the thought that occurred to me when you said that.

Deborah: Very much like parenting. Yes. This means the relationship keeps going forever.

Nina: Yes. I love it that people, like the hospitals have picked it up. And the therapists have picked it up. And it really has gone beyond just a pretty picture. That never really was what it was in the first place.

Deborah: Yes. I have a wonderful group of people that I work with through Kaiser Institute and networks of people they're associated with. They are consultants to hospitals. So I've actually thought the process. They have an intuition training for people like hospital executives, CEOs, MDs who are studying how to become more intuitive. And I have taught touch drawing many times with this group. It would be the last group of people, I would think, would be even interested. And it's been very powerful for them to experience how accessible this is. And through that network, we've had people bringing touch drawing into sort of spiritual wellness retreats for hospital staff. They're developing these retreats now. This is not about patients. This is, say, the nurses and the workers. And they're creating these daylong retreats and part of the retreat day, they spend doing touch drawing. I'm finding it's more accessible than even I would have thought. I'm surprised.

Nina: I think that is just so cutting-edge. Like that is almost cutting-edge to the point of being controversial, to be having your health professionals taking intuition classes. But, really, it seems like that goes back to this essential self or the depth of the soul and being able to connect with others. And the touch drawing technique really seems to—I was looking at a part in your site where there were pictures of people almost like being witness to somebody else's process. You were watching someone else draw or you gave that description of separating out the two groups—caregivers or people who actually have the need for the care. I don't know how to form my question around that. It just seems so profound to me that it can facilitate a process of really having an inner awareness. And that is something that everybody can do. Everybody can do touch drawing, can they not?

Deborah: They can. And so people understand it, I'm aware that the problem with an audio interview is you can describe touch drawing because people might be saying, "What are they talking about? They're talking about something profound but I don't get what they're talking about." So I'd like to walk you through the experience, if you imagine doing a touch drawing yourself.

Nina: Oh, I would love that.

Deborah: When people see it demonstrated—because there's also a demonstration video on my website. And later on you can go see me do one online, but let me describe the experience and pretend you're doing it.

Okay, so you're sitting in a table and you've got a smooth piece of plastic, you know like a board. It could be any smooth non-absorbent surface. But all those basically instructions are on the website and also a lot of educational media to help you do the process. So you have some water mixable paint here. And I won't get into the tech details, I want to just give you the feeling here. And you've got a roller. So you dab some paint onto this board and you pick up your little print making roller and you roll it smooth. Imagine that you're rolling these dabs of paint smooth and that nice feeling of rolling and the sound of the roller. And now the board is nice and smooth. And you've got a big stack of tissue paper sitting next to you—light weight, white paper. And you pick up one piece of paper and put it on that wet paint. Now, all you do is touch with both your hands, your fingertips, your fingernails. Let your hands dance on the paper. You're not

actually putting your hands on the paint at all. Just move your fingertips on the paper. And this just might take a few seconds. So if you finished moving your fingertips, kind of one sense of motion, pick up the corner of that paper, lift it, and you will see your drawing on the other side.

But because it's tissue paper, you're actually seeing a little bit through. So it's like the lines are coming right out of your fingertips. And you can draw with one hand, you can draw with two hands. Even when you just draw with one hand, use just your pointer finger, you allow your fingernails, your fingertips, your palm to move an expression on the paper.

And this sense, in that first feeling of like, "Ahh, I can just pour my feelings out." So when I guide people, I begin with a playful feeling and touching, which helps people get over that fear of "what am I going to draw?" You're not trying to draw a perfect picture. "What am I going to draw? Uh-oh, I have to think of something." And then people stop in front of this blank sheet of paper. You just begin by moving. It's really like a dance. And you're playing and you're getting a sense of, all the ways you can touch the paper. Just even that first simple touch is unique for every single person who touches the board. The way you move on the paper is different from everybody else. And that only took a few seconds. So you put that piece of paper that you just moved on down next to you. You pick another sheet of paper, you put it down on the board, and you move your fingertips again. And you lift it, you glance at it, you take your roller, you roll the paint smooth, you put another sheet down.

So if you were to sit and draw for, say, maybe an hour—people sometimes sit down and draw for an hour—you could easily do 20 or 30 drawings.

Nina: Wow!

Deborah: So this is the power of it, is the series.

Nina: Yes.

Deborah: The power is not the single drawing, it's the transformational process. You're free to not worry about making a perfect picture because there's so many. And then you're free to just let whatever feelings you have go out on the paper. So if you find you're frustrated, if you find that you feel like you're blocked, all those things that make people not want to draw and just walk out of the room, I say, "Draw that feeling." That's all, very simple. If you just draw what you're feeling in the moment, even if the feeling is about not being able to draw. So if you feel blocked, you draw a block, draw a big block on the paper. You can do that. Or you can even scratch a paper up until the point that it tears. That's just one drawing in a whole series.

So it's the saying yes to every single feeling that comes up. This is where it is sort of, I would say, transformational process that you could easily call therapeutic. It's that you're saying yes and kind words of spiritual practice. It's an integrative healing spiritual creative practice. They're really all the same thing. It's like living in the now. What are you feeling right now?

Nina: Yes.

Deborah: Oh, I'm feeling this kind of a knot in the pit of my stomach. Well, what does that look like? You know, you just, "Grr, I feel bad, it feels like bad." And you just let that feeling out onto the paper and then you're not identified with it. It doesn't become the thing that you are. And then you walk out of the room because it felt like you couldn't draw. "Oh, that's when I felt that." And so you begin to have this practice of the witness by saying completely yes to every feeling you've got. One after another, you're also getting more identified with your self, your basic being beyond those feelings. You've become less identified with each sensation, each moment of what you're feeling. But you're actually saying yes to every moment of what you're feeling and diving right into it.

Nina: I think that's such a key point. So this idea of being identified with your feelings and being able to be the witness, to be able to affirm them and yet let them go. I think so many people just feel bad or feel good, but they can't quite put their finger on it. I think it's such a powerful process to give it a visual. Would you say that that would be a key part of this?

Deborah: Yes. You're externalizing it.

Nina: Okay.

Deborah: And it's not verbal. You don't need to give any feeling a name as you're doing it. So it's actually more than visual, it's somatic. It's a felt sense, even more than a visual process. It becomes visual, but in the doing of it, you're feeling things and you're giving form to your feelings. That's why I can compare it to dance, where you're moving your feelings. And imagery definitely begins to develop. It's not like you just scribble the whole time, although it's perfectly wonderful and fine to just move and dance and have it never form into pictorial images. It's all good. It's all fine. But you can begin to actually externalize your own body's self-sense into images of your body's most feeling place. If you focus on your body, how do you feel your body is right now?

And we gradually can move into sort of dream and imagine all imageries. People who "can't draw," with the comfort level and the relaxation of it being okay to scribble, also comes surprising ability to actually give form to your feelings and your inner imageries, even in the first time someone draws.

So, yes. I wouldn't keep slipping all these materials all over the world. See the response. That's what keeps me going is watching people light up. It's like they're getting more aligned with their own soul through this process. That's the deep healing is the alignment of the different levels of yourself just through saying yes to everything.

Nina: Yes. That's so profound. And I think maybe people's perception of their artistic ability really comes from maybe self-judgment or deciding that it needs to look like a Rembrandt or something. They have an idea that of what it's supposed to be, but touch drawing is so accepting.

Deborah: Absolutely. It really is. And then the beauty of it is you're completely unthinking about product as you do it. Or even if have that little product in the back of your

mind, you know you turn the volume down or don't let it run the show. But afterwards, you do have this record of your psyche's movement. You do have these drawings. So it's not purely an inner process. It is externalized and you can reflect on it. You can write from them. If you're someone who really does get something out of turning your feelings into words, you can do journal writing and dialoguing with all of these non-verbal arisen presences from your being. You can sit with a friend and have them witness your drawings and witness one another's drawings. And you are really feeling someone else's feelings. It's a very intimate thing to share a series of your touch drawings with someone else and witness deeply their inner journey. So the after having of the images has all kinds of value and ways that that can go.

Nina: So do you always feel what you're feeling? Do you maybe focus on anything or do you just let let's see what happens? What about wanting to produce an expression of something in particular? Do you focus on it like that or do you just leave it be?

Deborah: It's definitely a both end of—you know, when I just sit down to draw, I tend to just go to the board and feel what I feel. But it's very possible to put a specific intention into the drawing process. I want to focus on this issue in my life and you sort of set a sacred intention. And then let go and draw and see what happens. And then there are many other ways and applications of the process. I love to go out in nature and draw. So it might be an attunement to nature sitting out in the beach and sort of taking in the birds and alive and the trees and just being with everything and then just seeing how that inspires my inner imagery by being out and connecting with nature or a sacred space somewhere or working with another person. I call these inner portraits. And I teach these in longer workshops and this is actually what we did in that intuition training with the hospital executives, where you sit with another person. This is a way for them to really get their intuition affirmed. I will sit with another person and as I teach it, you sit with another person. You do a little guided meditation where you offer that the drawings you do will not be for yourself; they will be for your partner. It's as an intuitive process. And then we do a meditation where we gaze into one another's faces and set the whole thing up and then let go and draw. And people find that and I find that myself to be a really different experience.

Nina: Can you do a series like that as well?

Deborah: Would I do a series like that?

Nina: When you're doing or teaching these inner portraits, would that be a series of drawings as well or would—

Deborah: Absolutely. It's not a single drawing. Right. You'll sit for maybe an hour and a half and draw in this space where the two of you are facing each other. Or I do it privately one on one with people. And you just trust it. Whatever comes to you and I set the whole thing up this way. You know, trust it. Whatever comes, if it seems silly and stupid, just draw it anyway. Don't worry. And again, it's that multiple sheets of paper that you get relaxed. And what happens is people find easier than drawing for themselves.

Nina: Really?

Deborah: Because when you're drawing for yourself, you're kind of worked in on your own stuff. When you're drawing for someone else, it is—I use this word. It would be a whole conversation kind of like channeling. You're just sort of receiving. And so they're coming through you. And they're not your personal stuff. And people are blown away and so am I. I had no idea how accessible our intuition was till I started teaching inner portraits. And people sat down and they would look at the drawings that they've done for one another and someone would say, "Well, I don't know what this looks, this is kind of stupid." Actually an octopus came to mind. And it turns out, the octopus is the person's power animal or something.

Nina: Oh, really?

Deborah: I mean, the stories, the examples—it's hard for me to keep track of all of this. But very, very specific things of people, almost universally in a series of drawings will do something that blows their partner away on how personal and particular it is for them and the person doing the drawing had no idea what it was. So it really can be used as an intuitive practice as well.

Nina: That's really neat. I'm surprised that they can identify it or identify themselves in it. So even I'm thinking just—

Deborah: Here's one that I'm remembering specifically. My Touch Drawing Gathering, we do this every year. And there was one woman—and we really get more time there, we really share the stories of what's happened in the inner portraits. And one woman was drawing—you know, someone in her wedding gown. And then she drew these stupid flowers and it felt like, "Why am I drawing stupid flowers? I don't like flowers." And she did her commentary to herself as she was drawing for her partner. And how come the person's not getting married to anybody? It's just like a bride without a groom. It just doesn't make any sense. It was a stupid drawing. Oh well, threw that one on the pile. And then we're looking through and the partner she was drawing for said, "That's me. This past summer I went out to the mountains, I was in a meadow with flowers and I married myself." That's an example.

Nina: That is so beautiful.

Deborah: Yes.

Nina: And that's so fascinating that it would come through so crystal clear.

Deborah: The creative process is actually a soul process. We separated that and turned it into art. But we're tapping a creative source, which is the source. The source is creative. And I think when we let go of the verbal mind and we get into some deeper alignment and then we've opened this intention and our two souls are for that time period in sort of a bubble together and we've really cleared this safe and sacred space, which I always emphasize, it's coming from this place that's beyond the mental mind. And so there is something deeper at work. So we're able to access these deeper soul levels through, I think, many creative processes can do that. But I think this particular creative process of touch drawing is very

accessible form of that. It's just so direct, focused in that zone.

Nina: I think I read on your website that someone actually referred to it as a moving meditation and I thought that was a really profound description too.

Deborah: Absolutely, yes.

Nina: Can I ask you about the soul cards?

Deborah: Sure.

Nina: Someone did put in a question here about are the soul cards a reflection of your soul or are you tapping into more the universal soul?

Deborah: That's a good question. That's where I think we go. So this journey with touch drawing that I had had has precisely that where in the beginning it felt personal. Like my personal stuff. And the longer I've done it the more and more it's felt like tapping these archetypal human states. But the doorways through who I am as a human being. I always start with just this human person here and that's my doorway. And the deeper I can go into this human person, the more I can access that larger fold of humanity that's universal that we all come from or we particularize out of that. And so the soul cards were not intended ever to be a deck. So I didn't say let me make a deck. What are the different things that should be in a deck? I have profound respect for the Tarot because it's a true wisdom system, ancient wisdom system. I do not pretend that the soul cards are Tarot. They really are a set of images that was drawn from the human soul. And to a certain degree it was sort of subjective which images I chose. I had been drawing for years and years and years. And one friend occasionally would say to me, when are you going to do a deck? And I thought why should I do a deck? What do you mean a deck? I don't want to jump on the deck bandwagon. That's when they started to be more decks like the early '90s. But one day I took a set of photographs. I said, well, let me see how this might work. I took out piles of drawings that I had been doing over the years, ones that I had had other layers of color added to that I knew would work a little bit better because there's other ways that I work with color which is a little too complex to go into here. But I took photographs and maybe a couple of hundred drawings. I just thought, this could be interesting. I had a big pile of drawings and photograph, little prints that was in the days of cameras and prints. Like I said, the olden days, in 1994. And I didn't even do anything with it. I went three weeks, I hadn't even shown it to my husband. There was a synchronous story behind the soul cards. I was working with a theater, an improvisational theater group at that time and buried way deep in the site somewhere is the story of the soul cards written by this person also. But we were flying off to a job. He didn't even want me to be there because he thought what's this artist doing as part of our theater group? So we barely met each other. For some reason before this trip I had thrown these photographs in

my bag, I don't know why. We end up sitting next to each other and he's like, I didn't know it, thank goodness, thinking, I'm going to be talking to them about how I don't think this artist should be part of the group. And he's sitting next to me and I'm being all friendly with him. And then I get this impulse because I've heard he was a psychic. And so I say, well, maybe he'd be interested in these and I pull this pile of photographs out of my bag and I plop them in front of him on the plane and his jaw drops and he says, "This is what I've been looking for."

Nina: Really.

Deborah: His whole head turned around just that day. He had come from another island. He was in Orcas, Rio Madrio and he did use Tarot when he did sessions with people. He was feeling like that was not working for hm. He wanted to access his own intuition directly and that was starting to feel like a blockage in the way he had given his Tarot deck away that day, on the ferry, to someone else on the way to the airport. I plopped this pile of photographs on his lap, his jaw drops, this is what I've been looking for and I say, well, I don't know, I don't know if they'll work as a deck. Take them home. Give them a try. Let me know if they work. And he proceeded to just be on fire we're doing sessions. These images evoked his—they're like a portal for him to his own intuition.

Nina: That's fantastic.

Deborah: And he found—first he was doing the readings over the phone and so the people wouldn't even see the card. He would just talk on the phone but it helped this doorway, this access point for him. He pulled out a card, and he would talk and what he'd see and the image. Then he was almost hesitant to show them to people when he did readings in person. He felt like hiding them. He started showing them and what he said happened was people would look at the image and they would start talking. They wouldn't need him as much. They were waiting for him to interpret the card. They would say, "Oh, that relates to this! Oh, I recognize that feeling," and they would have more of an empowering dialog. And then the image would stay with them. They could retain it in their psyche and it would be sort of something they would carry away with them into their life to sort of hold the essence of the reading. So he came back over the course in a year and said you got to do the deck, you got to do the deck. And I did the deck. Independently, enormous, enormous process getting it printed enormous investment—it's like having a child.

Nina: I was going to say how many—I think there are over 60,000 in print now.

Deborah: I think we're up into 70,000 now between soul cards 1 and 2. I'm sort of losing count but I've reprinted both of them several times and they're sort of all over the world and they just put us scatter around and I run into people all the time who use them. That's the beautiful thing. They actually use them. It's not just sitting

on their shelves.

Nina: Yes. Well, that's exactly how I found you. Actually, I'd gotten them before and really there is something special about them. Like I would pick them up and I would put them down. I would pick them up and I would put them down, trying to decide whether I'd buy them. But every time I touched them my hands would tingle. I learned a lesson to those little cues and I think that's part of learning how to tap in or learning how to be true to yourself—

Deborah: Right. That's it. That's a felt sense. That's exactly it. Here was something that you sensed and you're at a more subtle level inside of you and you're actually listening to it.

Nina: This is such an important thing I think in our society because we tend to reference to the television or the magazines, whatever else is out there, everybody else's opinion of what we need to be. And yet. I think that there's a real lack there that can be so that the soul cards could be one, to or for them or learning how to do the drawing themselves because it's really about them. It's not about—

Deborah: Absolutely. There's no one telling you what anything means so it's a way to practice trusting your own soul. Both of them. That's the core similarity between the core essence of soul cards and touch drawing.

Nina: There was another story on your website that really piqued my interest too and it was somebody using them therapeutically again but more as a tool to have her clients be able to identify that a transformation had taken place. So she would get them to interpret the cards before and then again afterwards.

Deborah: Yes. That's the woman who uses them in her shamanic healing work. And so she'll have them choose a card and talk about it and they might see some people just see them as kind of dark and heavy. And then after the shamanic session they look at same, exact image and they perceive it differently. What an incredible kind of essential teaching that is. You can look at the same thing and when you're in a different state, literally perceive it differently.

Nina: Because what we're talking about is really subtle. And if you're not paying attention you might miss it. And yet your own perception, you can't deny that it looks different to you and to be able to describe it to somebody else again, I think that that is so healing. I think that that is really it puts it in sharp release for people that something is actually happening and how powerful they are.

Deborah: Exactly. Absolutely. When people do touch drawing intuitively for one another again, that's what blows their thoughts off is that they can actually see something right out there that they wouldn't have known that they're intuitive. But you can't deny like that story that I married myself. So it helps people take those subtle

things more seriously when you get it affirmed like that. And the more you pay attention to the subtle, the more it starts coming into focus and not being as subtle. It's just because we need to give it more attention.

Nina: How does the color factor in for you?

Deborah: The color—that's a whole interesting exploration. The basic, basic touch drawing process has nothing to do with color. You're not manipulating color. So you can put any color paint on the board that you want but I always encourage people in the beginning to be simple. When they look at my drawings they see all these different aspects of color. There are so many ways you can work with color. But if you get caught up in that when you're first starting you may not do the essential part of the process. So color is feeling. I say color is feeling so you may roll green on the board and you're kind of feeling out nature or you start feeling fiery and angry and you add some red to your board. You kind of follow your feelings. You can have multiple boards, where you put different colors on each one. You can mix different colors on the board once you're more comfortable with the process. But in the beginning if you use it that simply like I feel this or I kind of going to go for this color. Then after they're done, you can work with—it's like a cosmic coloring book because if you work very, very simply with your drawings just black, anything, brown, one color—once they're dry, you can—well, with a tissue paper we have wonderful process of mounting them and you can use any paper in the world and the paper I use is a little heavier. You can actually go through all of your images with pastels, colored pencils, mount them, paint on top of them. You can work with these raw primal images from your psyche and develop them and bring them out. So there's nothing wrong with art. We almost go to the opposite direction when we get into process and we say, but don't think about the art. But now, you can like bring this out and work on them and you could take a touch drawing image, image that you find in touch drawing and create a sculpture of it. So you can definitely use this to deepen, if you're an "artist" whatever that means, to deepen your sources for your art. So that's definitely part of it as well. I don't say that it's not art. It's just many things all at once.

Nina: It seems unlimited that way.

Deborah: Exactly. Yes.

Nina: Would that be a reflection then of that place that we're tapping into in order to be able to create them, the limitlessness of the soul. Would that be a parallel?

Deborah: It probably is. Yes. I mean the limit of creation or that there's constant new forms happening in creation, constant new forms growing in human the outpouring of what human beings are. So the more we can be tapped into the spectrum from the one to the fullness of creation I feel that we're really getting

into alignment with our wholeness.

Nina: How often do you get to do this yourself because you're globetrotting and teaching other people how to do this? Do you spend a lot of time still doing the touch drawing yourself?

Deborah: That is my personal challenge. I just spend a phenomenal amount of time attending to details, organizational details. I have some office help but it's not enough. There's no way they could do it all. So that's my challenge to stay in touch with my own personal creativity. I think there are different layers of it. Part of it is that I'm sort of moving into some different phase and I've sort of detached from making myself always have to draw. I think that's an important part of my own development. And now I think I'm sort of back looking at, okay, now, what can I do that feels really alive in my drawings? So I feel like I've been sort of in a deepening in my own being and now I'm looking for how do I really bring this back into my drawing. Over the life time of someone who lives a creative life, you got to sort of not try and control—you know, there's a fine line between discipline and keeping at it and also letting go so something new can come in. But I still have like hundreds of drawings that I can't even keep up with even though I feel like I'm not working. That's the funny thing. Some of the things that I love to do and I have been keeping up with are drawing in—and I hadn't mentioned this earlier—another way I do drawing is I do it as a way of listening. There are events, lectures, concerts, most of the time, when I go someplace I bring my drawing things and I find a little corner and sometimes it's official and it's my job and sometimes it's just because I want to do it. I try to be someplace out of the way and not to distract people and I sit and draw while I listen. And I will create a visual impression. Some people might take notes but I'm taking visual notes but it's like soul notes. It's not like the mind mapping kind of visual notes. I'm listening and I am actually also tapping in intuitive level. Sometimes I start drawing something I don't know why and then the speaker is actually talking about that. I have drawn for hundreds at this point over the years of great authors and spiritual teachers. If you go to my website into the gallery and look at interpretive touch drawing—I have so much on the website. People need to slow down and look carefully because some of these teeny little branches are enormous places but the interpretive touch drawing, I have been putting up some and definitely not all of that work but I was blessed to be able to draw the Dalai Lama and Desmond Tutu was in Seattle a year or so ago. And you can see the drawings I did there. These are the raw touch drawings, not worked on in any way. But sometimes I work with them a little bit and I add more color to them later on. That's a wonderful way to listen. I've been to conferences where I would not be able to stand sitting through all those lectures. I don't know how people sit through one speaker after another. I'm sitting there and drawing the whole time. Someday I'd love to have a whole—like have a set up that we can have an area that's not distracting where there's a whole group of people

drawing during presentations and experiencing that. You're being creative with what you're hearing. You're passing it all through your body and you're listening in a really different way.

Nina: I bet that you remember better. I really do. I think that that would be a fantastic way of sharing with people.

Nina: Oh, it is. It really is. Yes.

Nina: You had some Tibetan monks that you showed how to do the touch drawing too. What was your impression of their experience since obviously we don't have them to talk to right now?

Deborah: It was a very short thing. They lined up and they each did a drawing. Because Tibetan monks they visualize so much, they're such strong visualizers. Their first touch drawing, each one of them was some specific Tibetan image. They have all these inner images that they have formed and sort of a language within their—kind of a spiritual language and it was a whole series. I should find those and put them online sometime. I have them somewhere in my drawers. So they had a very immediate experience of accessing their own imagery and externalizing it. I think it would be interesting for people like that to go also into void and just see what happen that's sort of not the images that they know. So there's also Zen Roshi from Japan who has a center. He will be moving to the island of Harada Roshi who has expressed a lot of interest in touch drawing. When he actually moves here and has a little more time I think I want to bring my drawing board over and have him give it a try.

Nina: I had a question too about helping people out—because we're talking about this in a really positive sort of form and we talked about ways of reflecting say a disability positively or how that is helping people. But people go through some really hard and traumatic times and you did some work with the tragedy of 9/11. There are some people with serious depression who worked with this. So can you maybe go into a little bit about that and like the despair or the distress and what happens with that.

Deborah: There is something about creating with your pain that brings a different energy in. And I think it's contacting your creative source. There are so many stories of grief rising while someone is doing touch drawing. Again, you will find a lot of these on the website. The stories that I get anyway. There are many more stories than the ones I know but the story in the website about depression, she was in clinical depression. She had learned touch drawing the summer before. She went and drew and went into her darkness. She drew very powerful images of depression. And, first of all, when you're creating something, is like a lot of the great art of humanity came out of some difficult time in the artist's life. What an incredible way to redeem your difficult time than to actually create something of

beauty. And something that people can relate to. So just creating this soulful record of your difficulty shifts your relationship to it. And this woman who worked and through her depression she just kept drawing and drawing and drawing. And she found she contacted the earth and nature and it became a very important part of her healing that through touch drawing she connected with nature—spirits, owls and turtles and her totem started coming through her drawings and the kind of helped her journey so that she went into and through her depression and into the earth and out of her depression.

Nina: Wow.

Deborah: And the grief so many I contributed a large piece to a book I'm using, *Expressive Arts in Grief Work*. And I collected stories from people about how they worked with their grief. And again, I think when you contact this creativity, it's not just art, it's this creative force. It begins to move you back into your core and it just moves your life to the next place it needs to be. And there's a deep joy in contacting your sorrow and creating with it.

Nina: I'm wondering if part of the therapeutic process would be the flow or the creative flow because I think when people feel depressed that they often feel immobilized or like the feeling is so great that they feel stuck. And even just—

Deborah: That's a really good point. The movement. Because movement and the fact that you don't just do that one drawing, you do that one drawing of being depressed you might say, oh god, that's me, I'm depressed. But you do a drawing of depressed draw and depressed, draw and depressed—gradually, it shifts. It just starts changing. Within one series there will some kind of transformation and change and it's the freedom—again, as I said, right in the beginning to express whatever you feel gets outside of you and gets things moving again. You can't quite stay the same. When you say yes to it and you express it, you take a—it's a little stepping stone to the next place. So that flow from image to image to image and the freedom to say this is what I feel—I feel horrible. I'm stretching my page up and knowing that's okay and that's part of the process. Your last drawing, an angel might come through. I mean these things happen. These things just happen where someone will say, "Oh god, I don't feel like I did that." You know, some deeper part of the soul or some inner guide or however way you want to language reality. You can language and interpret it however you want but something deeper and bigger, you're making space for it.

Nina: And it looks as though it really can be a tool that people can access. So you don't have to be in total despair or you don't have to trying to stay focused or interpret nature through yourself. Say if you wanted to address that through trying to find your ideal job or trying to transcend an unemployment situation. I think that this would be a really practical thing to be able to—

- Deborah: I think so. Absolutely. Release the difficult feelings and open to the possibilities. That's when I said a little earlier, I referred to having an intention when you draw and really setting the space. I want to work with this issue. You just kind of put that you go into your being. You put that out. You ask for help from whatever is your place that you receive help and then you sit down and draw. And maybe some surprising image that doesn't make any sense will come through or maybe some little idea will come in while you're in this open space of drawing. You're opening to a creative source so you can set very specific intention and then open up and draw and just see what happens in that session. And you might come up with a whole series and each of you enjoy and then you hang that drawing on your refrigerator and you're seeing that actual impression of you enjoy and that's helping you carry that presence into your life. Absolutely. It's not only about pain.
- Nina: And I'm wondering if a group experience is different than an independent experience or how it's different I should say?
- Deborah: That's a good question. It's great to have other people to draw. It actually can help. It's wonderful to do it alone but many people are helped by having other people. There's a bigger energy say in a workshop setting or if you just want to try it on your own, find one, two, three friends and do it together. And then you're holding each other to it, I think you stay with it longer because you're all in the space, your little excuses—when will I get up and go do something else. Oh-oh, we're staying with us. You keep each other in the process. And then you witness each other and you have that relational, sort of support group experience. So that is a thing I suggest people to do after a workshop or I also have media on the website where people could just learn how to do touch drawing on their own. Like turn on the CD, get your materials and sit down and draw. But find a friend. Find one, two, or three, a small group and you make the appointment and you'll keep the appointment with them much more likely than the appointment with yourself. They're coming over, you're going to draw tonight whether you're tired or not and then you're glad you did it.
- Nina: And another thing that I've used on your site too is you can go on and send your friends like an e-card. You can choose an image.
- Deborah: You can choose any of the 120 soul card images. The two decks are up there plus another gallery. So I'd say there are about 250 images or something that you can choose from in the e-cards now. I use them when there's a friend who want to celebrate or congratulate a friend or someone is sick. I just want to tell a friend I'm thinking about them in a special way. I'll go and I'll look through the cards all the images and I'll say, this feels like the right image. Again, it's non-verbal. There's no categories of like, birthday image! There's just images. You think of the person, you scan through the images, you think of the situation and this one pops up and you can design the colors that you want. Very simple. It's not very technical and write a little note and it all comes as a link and they click on it and

the image with your note with a color backgrounds that you chose comes up. And you can write a poem to them or whatever and design it along with this card.

Nina: That's lovely. And that's all free?

Deborah: That's all free.

Nina: I am thrilled. I'm going to be getting one of your kits.

Deborah: Oh yey! That's the best thing that can come from this. Okay, I'll give you one little pointer here. And I write it, I emphasize it everywhere. If people have trouble doing touch drawing on their own, generally it's because they put too much paint on the board. Just a smooth thin layer of paint. And then you won't spend as much money on paint either. But yes, you just roll out your paint, not too much, put the paper down so it actually needs a little pressure. It doesn't just soak the paint up right away. That's merely one little pointer all. I'll tell you when to try the first time.

Nina: Thank you. Thank you so much. All right. Thank you, Deborah, for being on the show. I sure appreciate all your wisdom and sharing your creativity with us and describing the process, describing how it is people can embrace this in their own life and tap into their own sense of intuition. It's been a blessing to have you here today. Thank you so much.

Deborah: Oh, it's been wonderful to talk to you and your whole series. You're doing a great thing with your work. So thank you, Nina.

Nina: And everybody, thank you, and we will talk to you soon. Take care.

Deborah: Bye-bye. Thanks everyone for listening.

Nina: I usually go through a biography on the speakers before we begin the interview portion and I found that shortly into this portion of the call that Deborah was so excited and I just decided to go with it. We basically skipped over all that information and so I'd like to give it to you now.

Although the experience of discovering touch drawing had the appearance of simply being play, under the surface was something profound and powerful. Deborah knew this process was not for her personal use alone and felt as if she was receiving a gift from outside of time, at technique of expressive expression that was aligned with the evolution of human consciousness. Deborah followed through on this call and to share the process of touch drawing with others, Deborah founded the Center for Touch Drawing, a networking point for the dissemination of touch drawing into various fields, spanning artistic, therapeutic educational, and spiritual practices. She has presented workshops and slide shows at numerous conferences and educational institutions. Deborah is an

adjunct professor at the California Institute of Integral Studies and the University of Creation Spirituality. Also she has served in the board of directors for the International Expressive Arts Therapy Association. Deborah is the author of *Drawing Out Your Soul* and the *Touch Drawing Facilitator Workbook*. She has produced educational media, including video, audio CDs, touch drawing material kits. Each summer since 1997 she has convened the annual touch drawing gathering which attracts an international community of touch drawing practitioners and facilitators. Over the years, Deborah's own images have developed into a transpersonal level expression. In 1995 she created a vessel for their path into the world in the form of soul cards which are now sold worldwide and are used by therapists, workshop leaders, creative writing groups, families and a broad range of individuals.

Deborah lives with her husband, architect Ross Chapin on an island in Puget Sound on the west coast of the United States. Together, they co-founded a multi-modal sacred arts circle which has been ongoing since its inception in 1983. Ross and Deborah have one daughter, Aleah, who is a budding artist in her own right. To find out more about Deborah, her information, her products, to join her online community or sign up for the newsletter, feel free to investigate her website at www.touchdrawing.com.

Thank you and my name is Nina Wallinder and we are on layersofhealth.com honoring the integrated layers of body, mind and spirit. Thank you for joining me.