

DRAWING OUT YOUR SOUL:

TOUCH DRAWING IN GRIEF WORK

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I discovered Touch Drawing in ‘revelatory play’ in 1974. A friend asked me to help clean up in the art school print shop. In the moment before wiping, I playfully moved my fingertips on a paper towel that had been placed over an inked glass plate. As I lifted the paper towel off the inked surface, I saw the traces of my touch imprinted on the underside of the towel. A rush of creative energy flooded my system. I realized that this simple, direct process had the potential to become a new and powerful form of creative expression. I felt called to share this dynamic process with the world.



As I have introduced Touch Drawing over the years, this calling has been affirmed time and time again. When offered basic instructions and a safe, supportive environment, people take to Touch Drawing like fish to water. Effortlessly, their hands dance upon the surface of the paper, translating their feelings into form and image. As I gaze across a roomful of people doing Touch Drawing, I feel like I am witnessing a sacred act: people gazing deeply into the inner mirror of their souls.

In a medium as immediate and direct as Touch Drawing, new channels of expression are opened, enabling feelings to flow forth uncensored. The act of *creating* with these feelings provides more than a purely cathartic release. It unleashes vibrant healing forces that guide the psyche toward coherence. Whatever darkness or pain may surface is fuel for the creative fire. Each successive drawing reveals another layer of awareness. With these imprints of the soul now on paper, non-verbal messages from the psyche are available for reflection by the conscious mind. Touch Drawing is a practice of creative, psychological and spiritual integration.

These qualities make Touch Drawing a natural for grief work. I would like to share a few stories to give a sense of the power of this process. Tinky Timmons of Charlotte, NC shares her personal story as well as her experience doing Touch Drawing with others:



“When Deborah introduced me to Touch Drawing, I was going through an extremely difficult time in my life. My husband was leaving me for a younger

woman, my best friend had passed away from cancer, and I was starting the process of healing from 17 years of child abuse. It was all I could do to breathe. My first experience of Touch Drawing was a huge turning point in my journey to healing from so much grief.

Grief is so overwhelming and is a hard emotion to explain even to oneself. The reasons for grieving are as diverse as each individual and the response to grief is multi-faceted. Therefore, it is hard to find anything that works for all types of people. Touch Drawing seems to work for everyone - no matter what level of grief they may be in - what age they are - or what artistic abilities they may have. I have used Touch Drawing with cancer patients who have never even thought of drawing or painting, but just need to release something that is so devastating. When they are in the process of Touch Drawing, they are in a space of no pain, no grief, no suffering. They are watching their feelings appear out of the paper and by gazing at the paper; they seem to feel more at peace.

I have used Touch Drawing with abused children, and even though they don't know the depth of what they are doing, the process often brings tears they didn't know they had. That has been the case for myself as well. I have seen things coming out of my paper that amaze me and somehow show me how I am feeling even if I am not aware of the feeling at the time I am drawing. Often, I see a freedom and lightness there. I see an innocence of what my hands have done and realize that innocence came from a place deep within myself and it heals me in a way that no spoken word can.

I have cried while Touch Drawing, I have laughed while Touch Drawing, but most of all, I have healed while Touch Drawing. It is a powerful tool that one can use to heal from grief. It has facilitated my healing process and helped to bring me to a place of true inner peace!”

Valerie McCarney is a Hospice volunteer and an Expressive Art Therapist in Saratoga Springs, NY. She had been using Touch Drawing with several of her other clients when she was asked to do a workshop for Hospice. She shares what happened:

“There were several people in the nursing home living with advanced ALS and multiple sclerosis. They had all lived there for a couple of years and had become very close. Then within six weeks, three of them died. This was very scary and sad for the remaining patients. The staff was worried because, although the patients were all upset, they were not expressing their grief. Instead, they were in a deep trauma state.



Because of my background, Hospice asked me if I would be willing to do an art session with them. Since many can barely move, I felt that Touch Drawing would work the best. We had volunteers helping, lifting their arms and putting their hands on the papers. But once there, they could move their fingers around on the paper. I played different music and we talked about

their feelings. Once the process began the energy in the room just shifted. Some of the people started to cry and express emotions that they had been holding in. To see people who were mostly paralyzed creating beautiful pieces of artwork was just wonderful. There was a man with advanced ALS and everything he drew looked like a spinal cord. I was told later he had been a chiropractor.

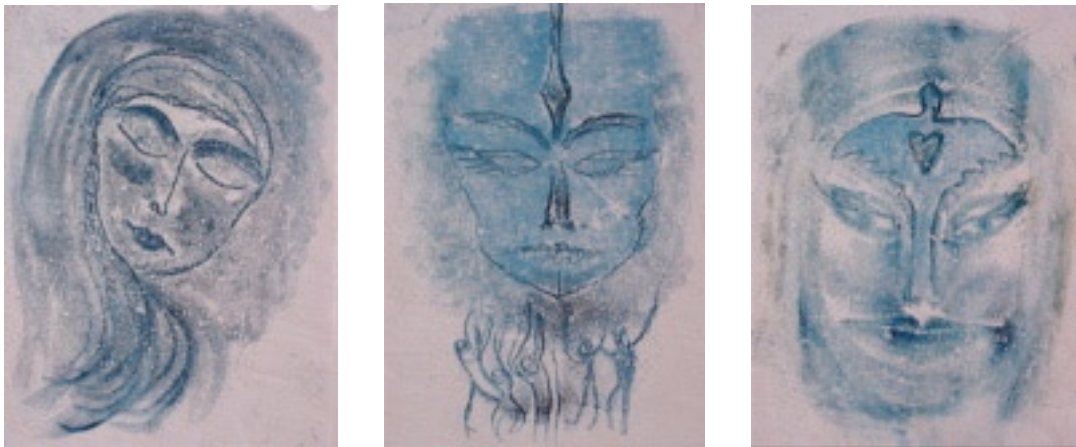
After we worked for about 45 minutes, I brought out a 'word bowl' and the patients, with the help of the volunteers, chose words that expressed their feelings. We used glue sticks to put the words on their artwork. I took home the artwork and put it on foam board and brought it back in to the nursing home for them to hang. They were all so proud. When the grief feelings came up again for them the social workers would take them down to the paintings to process, using the art and the words expressed as catalysts. It was truly healing for all of us involved.

I find that for myself having lost my mother last year and my father in the dying process right now, Touch Drawing has been a way for me to be with all the feelings of grief and anticipatory grief. It is very healing and therapeutic.”

Touch Drawing is serving Tinky and Valerie both in their work with others and in their own grief process. Without self conscious effort, feelings of grief seem to naturally find their way to the surface to be reflected upon and transformed. Janyt Piercy shares how this occurred for a participant in a workshop she was facilitating:

“One of my participants ended up doing some unexpected grief work. This woman was well into drawing and was doing faces. All of a sudden she came to me with a Touch Drawing she had just created. The woman was sobbing and showed me the drawing, explaining that the face was her dead mother's face. I held a space for her to talk and to cry as she needed to. This was a huge breakthrough for her. She was so moved by the experience that she went on to use Touch Drawing as a valuable tool in her grief process. She had felt her mother's ‘presence’ manifest in the Touch Drawing session in the appearance of the face.”

Kathleen Horne (MA, Licensed Mental Health Counselor and Expressive Arts Therapist) describes a similar experience of drawing her mother’s face, eight months after her death. She also did some reflective writing after the experience, demonstrating the power of verbal expression that has been catalyzed by the nonverbal experience of Touch Drawing:



“I could feel, as my Touch Drawing process deepened, the hovering around of grief. Suddenly, as I put my hands on the paper and began to draw, it was as though I was stroking her face as she lay in the hospital bed. The tears unleashed and I continued to draw - drawing after drawing, crying and in

awe as the series unfolded - taking me to a new place in my grieving process. My head was disengaged and my hands brought forth the wisdom. When I was done, I was done. Then this writing came:

Grief appears, with an urgent intensity.

Soft, and insistent.

Grief of the mother. Grief of the daughter.

Both aware that the loving angel of death is announcing its arrival.

A space of timeless time, a space between worlds.

I sit, you lie, in waiting.

Touch: the only means of communication.

The deep lines of life vanish from your countenance in preparation for leaving.

Ultimate perfection.

The cycle of return.

The time draws near.

As you are saying goodbye to the Dance of Life

We gather around you, speaking in tears and moans, laughter and silence.

The last Breath comes.

I let you go.

I have no choice.

I bow down before the eternal flame of Wisdom.

Your body is offered forth

Cradled, and at rest at last.

Love Holds.

Christina Wilson, (MA, CEAT) uses Touch Drawing in the bereavement program she created for Hospice of the North Coast in Carlsbad, CA. Here she describes the format of her work with groups:

“The session begins with the participants voluntarily disclosing to the group what they are struggling with in their grief (such as sorrow, anger, physical symptoms or illness, fear, anxiety). If a person wants to do this privately they can do so in their journal. Each participant lights a candle and sets an intention for their healing. The candle is moved to a safe table away from the drawing materials. The atmosphere in the room is quiet & subdued. I keep the lights low; bright enough to see everything, but not bright. I play very soft, meditative music such as the kind used for yoga.

Then we begin Touch Drawing - at first with eyes closed, then open. Participants are encouraged to begin another drawing as soon as one is finished. We continue this for about 45 minutes or more. Then, we set aside our drawing materials, clean our hands, and begin to journal about our Touch Drawing experience. Usually there are one or two images that are deeply meaningful to the participants, so I ask each participant to choose a drawing & dialogue with it in their journal. Since we use the Creative Journal method, (originated by Lucia Capacchione, Ph.D., ATR, REAT) the image speaks with the non-dominant hand in the first person. The participant can then have a conversation with the image(s). Using Touch Drawing in this way has been very helpful for the bereaved in the groups. One participant who had lost her young daughter became more deeply in touch with her anger and rage through the Touch Drawing images

that emerged. She then went on to integrate the images into other modalities of expressive arts.

To close the session, participants voluntarily share about their process and any new insights, feelings, observations they might have. They remarked that the experience of Touch Drawing is something that they feel takes them into a very centered place, very deep and calm. This is so helpful for the bereaved as they journey through the rollercoaster of grief. The candles are left burning until all participants have left, as a sign of their hope for healing, and to commemorate their loved ones who have died.



**NOTE: IN THE BOOK THERE IS A LARGE SECTION HERE WITH
INSTRUCTIONS FOR FACILITATING TOUCH DRAWING**

To close, I share a few more stories of healing grief through Touch Drawing. Margaret Wellens from Parkside, Australia attended the five-day Touch Drawing Gathering in the summer of 2006. Inspired by the beauty of a bird's song, she had this experience of releasing long-held grief:



“My first Touch Drawing experience was most significant for me because the process helped me to re-connect with a repressed grief that had been buried in my psyche for almost 60 years. When I was a child my younger sister, who was one of twins, died from pneumonia as a toddler. It was a quick death but a shock to us all. At that time, I thought everyone would cry over the loss of this joyful and innocent toddler. But to my surprise no one was allowed to cry or grieve including my mother. I was upset. In fact, my sadness was actually choking my throat. I held back my tears like the others as we were told "don't cry". Years later, I found out it was a belief and custom for the older members of the family not to cry over the death of a baby. Since that time, I learned how to repress and push this feeling into my subconscious, which later manifested as symptoms of nasal congestion and hay fever.

One afternoon, when we were drawing outside in a tranquil and beautiful environment, I heard a bird sing a most spirited song. I was fascinated by its beauty and listened intensely to each sound and its echo. After a few moments of listening deeply to the bird song, a feeling of deep sadness came all over my being and my throat was sore. I had no idea what was happening nor where this feeling was coming from. I just felt sad and wanted to cry. At that moment, I just followed my feeling and drew what I felt, allowing the inner feelings and sensations to pour forth. As I was doing

that, the past memories re-awakened and images unfolded like a movie. The expressions of fear, anxiety and hope on the faces of the love ones when my sister died came back to me in a flash. I kept drawing, creating pictures to express and to release the sad feeling until I felt calmed and peaceful in my heart.

The process of Touch Drawing helped me to re-connect with my deep feelings, releasing long held grief, and to brake down the controlling pattern in my psyche. It is a medium for healing and transformation. It is also fun and I love it!”

Carol Chappell from Norwich, Ct. shares a story that communicates of the power of holding clear intentions and then letting go and allowing the deeper realities respond.

“My first experience with Touch Drawing was a weekend workshop. My sister, Mary Ann, had died six months earlier, of ovarian cancer. I was her primary care person. She and I had just really connected as true sisters the year prior to her death. Part of my reason for wanting to experience Touch Drawing was the thought that it may help my very deep grief.

During one drawing session, at times, I would think of Mary Ann and ask for help from Spirit. When we were done, we paired up and looked at each other’s drawings. That was significant, as my partner saw them through different eyes and that gave me a deeper understanding of the meaning. It was after that review that it suddenly hit me that the last 3 drawings of the session were of Mary Ann. The first (I thought I was drawing a person

singing) was the face of grief - what I was experiencing; the second was Mary Ann's release to Spirit (there was a butterfly shape that seemed to be going upward to light); and the 3rd was the face of a youth - happy and peaceful (which is how I always see Mary Ann when I connect with her now in my meditation). I felt in awe of the communication given to me by the Spirit within.



What was so intriguing to me is that when I was doing these 3 drawings, I wasn't thinking of her consciously. The Spirit within me came through quietly with it's own message in spite of my conscious thought processes.”

Shemaya Blauer of Portland, Oregon used Touch Drawing to help her deal with the collective grief of the Holocaust.

“As a Jew one of my struggles has been how to experience and express the immense emotions that engulf me as I continue to learn about the Holocaust. In 1997 when I visited Auschwitz with my family similar fears arose as to whether I had the emotional vocabulary to walk through a concentration camp. Wandering through Auschwitz, I didn't know how to feel or how to make sense of it all. I wanted to be as open as possible to the experience yet didn't know how to do that without falling apart. A lot of the experience was really numbing, overwhelming. As we moved from one scene to another, my body fell into silence and I felt motionless.

In my hotel room a couple of hours later, Touch Drawing allowed me to move into those places where my body carried the silence and tap into that. In Touch Drawing, I was able to move back through the experience of walking through the gas chambers, past the ovens, on the grounds. I could allow my body to remember, to have that deep sense of knowing, and to create a form to hold it in. TD allowed me to move again, making those experiences mobile and alive. The pictures were not my best drawings. Though I'm attached to making something that looks good, I know that TD goes beyond that. It lets me go into my experience and have a handle to bring it to a different level.



A. ***Many Faces*** I cannot look at them even now as they are starring at

*me. Who were these innocent souls, treasured mothers and fathers,
sisters and brothers?*



*B. **Innocence** 6 million innocent lives were lost, and the world lost its
innocence too.*



C. *Too Much to Bear Enormous pain.*



D. *Symbols of Grief How do I find meaning in my grief? Where do I put*

this huge burden that I carry? Symbols of Judaism appeared in my drawing: the tree of life and the menorah seem to hold space to honor those who perished. The train tracks are reminders of the gas chambers.

After drawing these images I remember feeling as though I had released some of the shroud of emotions that covered my being. Although nothing had changed and the unbelievable magnitude of the Holocaust had occurred, I felt that touch drawing had given me a larger perspective and a different way of bearing the weight of my emotions. As I return to these drawings almost 10 years later they still reflect the unbelievable horror of the Holocaust and provide a language beyond words to express my feelings.

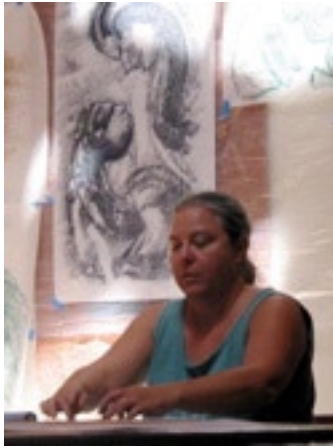
I would like to close with the story of Marsha Roach Arbogast. She is an artist and writer. Here she shares how the natural integration of personal, cultural and spiritual healing that can happen through the creative process.

“I am a bi-cultural woman, Commanche\Cherokee and Caucasian. My grief around the child abuse and loss of culture I experienced had brought me to very dark places. I began to draw and paint to bring my psychic, somatic, and spiritual experiences to a visual state. The profound sense of touch I experienced in a Touch Drawing workshop deepened a tactile journey to one of alchemy, transformation, and transcendence.

My drawings revealed both my 'Earth Daddy', my abuser, and my spiritual father in two separate pieces. The father that I found in a shamanic journey also appeared. I clearly saw that I had found safety and that I loved being

Indian, that I had power and voice. I saw the beast of my own being and went down, down, down to the old places. I cried with the visions that appeared that day, and knew them to be the strange stirrings of my bumping heart.

In Touch Drawing, I entered a state of integration, healing and wholeness. I dialogued with my drawings, made copies of them, collaged the poetry onto the pieces. My senses told me that there is no way to lose if I lose myself in my art; for when I am lost that way, I am never more found or authentic.”



As a facilitator of creative process for grief work, you have taken on sacred work. I wish you the greatest blessings in all your endeavors! I hope to hear some of your experiences using Touch Drawing. Please sign the mailing list at www.touchdrawing.com and let us know you are facilitating. We will then be able to support your work through our e-newsletter, on-line special interest groups, and Touch Drawing Facilitator updates.

Deborah Koff-Chapin is Founding Director of the Center for Touch Drawing. She is creator of SoulCards 1&2, and author of *Drawing Out Your Soul* and *The Touch Drawing Facilitator Workbook*. She has served on the board of directors of the International Expressive Art Therapy Association and is adjunct professor at California Institute of Integral Studies and Wisdom University. More information and educational materials are available through The Center for Touch Drawing (800) 989-6334 www.touchdrawing.com.

