



AFTERWORDS

A Newsletter from SIERRA TUCSON®

Fall 2006

The Making of ACOAs & Codependents: A Brain/Body Phenomenon

By Tian Dayton, Ph.D., TEP



The surprising part of living with addiction, for many of us in the late 1970s/early 1980s, was the discovery we made that even when we left home, we carried home inside of us. That whatever had happened to us growing up was not left behind but followed us into our adult relationships. And that our emotional and psychological development had wrapped itself around an alcoholic core. This is the awareness that began the Adult Children of Alcoholics (ACOA) movement and, following it, codependency.

Most of us would agree that living with addiction is a traumatizing experience for all concerned. But we are still wrapping our minds around why trauma in childhood can have such pervasive and long-term effects on our personalities and the way we live our lives. Recent research in neuroscience is helping us to decode this mystery. Trauma, whether it be a one-time, catastrophic event or the cumulative trauma that is part of most any alcoholic family, affects both the limbic and the nervous systems. The effects of living with intense fear, pain, and resentment can seep into our brain/body, causing emotional deregulation. When we experience childhood abuse, it can actually affect our hardwiring throughout life.

We arrive in life only partly hardwired by nature. It is nurture that finishes the job. Each tiny interaction between parent and caretaker actually lays down the neural wiring that becomes part of our brain/body network. This is how our early experiences inscribe themselves onto our nervous systems. It is how our environment shapes our emotional being and our limbic system. The limbic system is responsible for such wide-ranging functions as appetite and sleep cycles, mood, and emotional tone. Problems in the limbic system can cause long-term effects in our ability to self-regulate and maintain emotional and psychological balance.

Early Attachment and Self-Regulation

Our nervous systems are not self-contained; they link with those of the people close to us in a silent rhythm that helps regulate our physiology. Children require ongoing neural synchrony from parents in order for their natural capacity for self-directedness to emerge. In other words, it is through successful relationships that we achieve a healthy sense of autonomy. Thomas Lewis, M.D., one author of A General Theory of Love, describes limbic or emotional regulation as a mutually synchronizing hormonal exchange between mother and child that serves to regulate vital rhythms. He explains that human physiology does not direct all of its own functions; it is interdependent. It must be steadied and stabilized by the physical presence of another to maintain both physical and emotional health. "Limbic regulation mandates interdependence for social mammals of all ages," says Lewis, "but young mammals are in special need of its guidance: their neural systems are not only immature but also growing and changing. One of the physiologic processes that limbic regulation directs, in other words, is the development of the brain itself, and that means attachment determines the ultimate nature of a child's mind." Children internalize the ability to self-regulate through being in relationship with a parent who, slowly and over time, teaches and models self-regulation.

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The Link Between the ACOA/Codependent and Childhood Trauma

Alongside the ACOA movement and intertwined with it is the codependency movement. Codependency was a term that emerged, initially, in Twelve Step rooms. The codependent, or the co-addict, like the ACOA, was that person who got sick through *living with* the distorted, unregulated, and out-of-balance thinking, feeling, and behaviors that surround addiction.

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Simple Acts of Kindness

By Grace Hopkins, Sierra Tucson Intake Coordinator

She presented a severe case of eating disorder and trauma—a small, frail human life with a giant will to live, looking for a safe place to recover. Sierra Tucson was the only place she felt she could get help. God set a plan in motion and situated each player in a strategic place to see it through. As the Intake Coordinator who took the first call, her story left an unsettling in my soul that would linger until she was admitted into our facility, and I would only be completely at peace upon her discharge. That concern and compassion, of course, was the silent voice of God.

At first, it appeared that Sierra Tucson would not be able to meet this individual's needs, as she had no financial means. Although extremely disappointed, she did not give up hope but continued to seek treatment here. Through diligent work on the part of many, including her private therapist, Sierra Tucson staff, and her insurance company representative, funding was obtained. Sierra Tucson admitted this patient with conviction that we could help her. She thought that coming to Sierra Tucson was a miracle; she told me that she believed in angels and we were all angels to her.

During the initial assessment and conversations with her therapist, it was revealed that she was in need of extensive dental care. Her eating disorder had played havoc on her teeth, and she needed dentures. I set out to advocate for her with hopes of finding someone who could help provide dental work at no cost to her. I asked Frances Peery, one of the owners of Sahuaro Dental Lab, if she would be willing to help a perfect stranger. Without hesitation, she said that the lab would provide whatever our patient needed pro bono. So we had the promise of the upper and lower partial, but we needed to find a dentist willing to give his

services without cost, as well. Frances asked several dentists but was not able to find one willing to help. I then approached Sierra Tucson's Medical Director, Dr. Michael E. Scott, to see if he knew of a dentist who might help. He put me in touch with Todd Haft, D.D.S., who also graciously said "Yes" to helping a perfect stranger. These acts of kindness resulted in a full upper and lower partial at no cost to the patient.

Frances sent a message when the dentures were delivered: "Please accept this as a gift of love." Our patient responded by saying, "It will be easier to hold my head up now." Through tears, she expressed her gratitude for everything, and she no longer needed to hold her hand over her mouth to hide a smile. She reported that she was going home a stronger lady. When she left Sierra Tucson, she told me that she truly felt different and would continue to move forward in her recovery. With heartfelt hugs, we said our goodbyes. She waved and smiled a great big smile, showing her pretty teeth, as she backed down the hallway.

As I left the facility that day, I looked up at the white billowing clouds against a clear blue sky and heard the silent voice of God once more. I felt the peace that comes from a power greater than myself saying, "Be still now."

Opportunities to extend kindness are all around us, and it is good to remember that we may be a designated player in another one of God's great plans that will begin again with a simple act of kindness.

Best Regards,

Grace Hopkins



Dr. Todd Haft receiving award from Jeannette Maré-Packard



Frances Peery receiving award from Jeannette Maré-Packard



Dr. Todd Haft, of Northridge Dental, and Frances Peery, of Sahuaro Dental Laboratory, were presented with a "Ben's Belling" Award by Jeannette Maré-Packard in honor of making our community a better, kinder place to live. The Ben's Bells project began in March 2003, one year after Ben Maré Packard died of croup, just before his third birthday. His family hopes it will remind people to be kind and to help ease one another's pain.



Alumni World Tour



Sierra Tucson's alumni and family members are invited to join our Alumni Coordinator at the following events!

These 2006 dates are subject to change, but alterations to the schedule are announced in the "Beyond the Miracle" Alumni eNews.

This is not a complete list of events, but it shows alumni events attended by Tim McLeod (or other Sierra Tucson staff, as indicated).

- | | |
|-----------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| September 22-24 | Tucson, Arizona - Sierra Tucson Alumni Reunion ~ S.T.A.R. 19 |
| September 25 | Detroit, Michigan - Alumni dinner hosted by Sierra Tucson Clinical Outreach Coordinator Carla Chludzinski |
| October 1 | Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania - Night of Comedy with 12-Step Comedian Mark Lundholm |
| October 16 | Portland, Maine - Alumni Dinner |
| October 17 | Syracuse, New York - Attend Alumni Support Group |
| October 23 | Columbus, Ohio - Night of Comedy with 12-Step Comedian Mark Lundholm |
| October 30 | Chicago, Illinois - Night of Comedy with 12-Step Comedian Mark Lundholm |
| November 4 | New York, New York - Alumni Workshop |
| November 5 | Philadelphia, Pennsylvania - Alumni Dinner |
| November 6 | Washington, DC - Alumni Dinner |
| November 11 | Tucson, Arizona - Join Sierra Tucson Alumni Support Group for Dinner |
| November 14 | Scottsdale, Arizona - Attend Alumni Support Group |
| November 15 | Denver, Colorado - Alumni Dinner hosted by Sierra Tucson Clinical Outreach Coordinator Lisa Jane Vargas |
| November 28 | St. Louis, Missouri - Alumni Dinner |

ACOA's & Codependents *(continued from Page 1)*

Fear is a driving factor in terms of survival. Human beings have built-in defensive strategies that are designed to keep us out of harm's way, commonly known as fight/flight/freeze responses. When we're frightened, stress chemicals such as adrenaline spurt through our bodies, so that we'll have the energy necessary to flee for safety or stand and fight. These get mobilized when we sense danger, whether we're facing a saber-toothed tiger, an oncoming truck, or an irate parent.

But this isn't all that happens. There are a few other interesting body/mind phenomena that occur when we're feeling frozen with fear that affect the way we make sense of and remember frightening events. For example, when *the survival part of our brain, often referred to as the "animal brain" becomes aroused, the language part of the brain partially shuts down* (van der Kolk 2002). Our cortex, the part of our brain responsible for logical thinking and long-range planning, freezes up when we're in fight/flight mode. We lose some of our left brain functioning or the ability to organize our thoughts, integrate them into a coherent context, and communicate them to others.

What doesn't freeze up, however, is the emotional scanning system in our right brains. This means that, even when frightened, we retain our ability to scan our environment and those in it for signs of threat or danger (van der Kolk 2002). In alcoholic homes, this may consist of attempting to read the emotions and define the intentions of those around us. Both ACOAs and codependents may learn a lesson that can lead to problems later in life—that they can fend off trouble by remaining hypervigilant, reading the moods of those around them.

Family Dynamics that Can Lead to Emotional Deregulation

Alcoholic homes are often unpredictable, characterized by broad swings from one extreme to the other. This lack of balance becomes, over time, highly stressful to the brain/body. The kind of trauma we experience within the alcoholic family occurs slowly and over time; it is cumulative. For this reason, it affects emotional and psychological development.

Repair is an important deterrent to relationship problems having lasting and repeating effects. But repair in alcoholic systems is not necessarily forthcoming, and if there is repair, it does not necessarily last. Repair allows our shame/pain response, for example, to become part of personal growth. We see that something went wrong and we learn ways of setting it right, of mending what was broken or restoring a lost sense of connection. This process, which occurs in the context of a relationship, actually creates new learning, and, hence, new neural wiring in the child. When we cannot repair, our feelings of shame, pain, fear, and confusion go underground and can affect the way we function in intimate relationships.

The ability to escape perceived or real danger is one of the factors that determines whether or not one develops PTSD. For the child in an alcoholic home, escape is often not possible. For this reason, ACOA issues often times surface in adulthood as a *post*-traumatic stress reaction. That is, the symptoms that stem from childhood pain and abuse surface after the fact in adulthood. When ACOAs attempt to have their own families, the intensity and vulnerability of intimacy may trigger unresolved childhood pain.

Recovery

I am constantly hearing clients say things like, "Why isn't this over yet?" or "I know I should be past this." But we don't leave our bodies behind when we grow up. We bring them right with us into adulthood. We live in them, sleep in them, eat in them, and love in them. Our bodies contain a sort of neurological map that informs and guides us, a flesh-and-bones root system from which we flower into life. Changing neural wiring that has been laid down over a period of years doesn't happen overnight.

It is not only insight that produces healing. We need to log the hours in healing activities and relationships that will help us to rewire and rebalance our nervous systems. And that takes time. A lot of it. That's what a new recovery network and a new design for living is all about. We create the life that will give us a new body to live in, a new neural network that allows us to tolerate painful or uncomfortable feelings without blowing up, freezing/withdrawing, acting out, or picking up. Mammals have the capacity to limbically balance each other. That's why Twelve-Step meetings can have such a calming effect; we're limbically resonating with other people's nervous systems and bringing our own into balance.

Sometimes in recovery we get black and white, a dynamic we learned in our alcoholic families. We cycle back and forth between extremes. Instead of fixating relentlessly on others, we fixate relentlessly on ourselves, for example. If focusing on others is the new "bad," then focusing on ourselves must be the new "good." But intimacy often asks us to learn to balance our needs with those of others, so that each person can have a sense of autonomy alongside a sense of connection. The recent research on attachment is showing us that we develop autonomy a day at a time and through successful attachment experiences that teach us slowly, over time, what it feels like to be an autonomous individual *while* in connection with another person. Being in healthy connection with others allows us a kind of freedom to move into our own being, knowing that we have a secure base—a safe harbor—from which to move in and out. ★

REFERENCES

- T. Dayton, [Trauma and Addiction](#), Health Communications, Inc., Deerfield Beach, FL, 2000.
Thomas Lewis, M.D., Fari Amini, M.D., and Richard Lannon, M.D., [A General Theory of Love](#), Vintage, A Division of Random House, Inc., New York, 2000
Bessel A. van der Kolk, [In Terror's Grip: Healing the Ravages of Trauma](#), *Cerebrum*, The Dana Foundation, NY, 2002

For more information on this subject, visit www.TianDayton.com (Articles: "NACOA, The Set Up: Living with Addiction" and "The Black and White World of the Addicted Family").

Tian Dayton, Ph.D., TEP ~ Dr. Dayton is a fellow of the American Society of Group Psychotherapy and Psychodrama (ASGPP), and winner of their Scholar's Award. She is Executive Editor of the Psychodrama Academic Journal and sits on the Professional Standards Committee. She is Director of The New York Psychodrama Training Institute at Caron, with a private practice in Manhattan. She is the author of [The Living Stage: A Step-by-Step Guide to Psychodrama, Sociometry and Group Psychotherapy](#), [Trauma and Addiction](#), [Daily Affirmations for Forgiving and Moving On](#), [Modern Mothering](#), and ten other titles. Her work is featured in the film, "The Process." Dr. Dayton has been a guest expert on NBC, MSNBC, CNN, Montel, Geraldo, John Walsh, Rikki Lake, and numerous other radio and TV shows. For further information, visit www.TianDayton.com.





Opportunity for Appreciation

We want to recognize Sierra Tucson's staff who have worked so hard and given so much to serve our patients and alumni. This is an opportunity for all alumni (former patients, family members, or Quality of Life Workshop participants) to show appreciation to specific staff members who have made a difference in your life.

Please share with Tim McLeod, Alumni Coordinator, which staff members made the biggest impact during your Sierra Tucson experience. It could have been your Intake coordinator, Family Program therapist, unit therapist, evening/weekend therapist, Continuing Care coordinator who helped you put together your discharge plan, a nurse, driver, someone in housekeeping, etc. If you have trouble remembering someone's name or have any questions, feel free to call or e-mail Tim.

You may list up to three staff members, but please include a few sentences about why each person stood out for you. With this information, the top three staff members with the most votes will be selected and surprised with a gift at our staff holiday party in December. Importantly, ALL nominees will receive any comments of appreciation you share about them. **Your comments must be received by December 1, 2006.** If you have any questions, please call or e-mail Tim McLeod.

Tim McLeod

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E-mail: AlumniCoordinator@SierraTucson.com

Alumni Chat Room

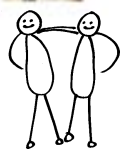
Sierra Tucson's Alumni Chat Room is now available seven days a week to connect with and support other Sierra Tucson alumni! The Chat Room is open daily from 7 a.m. - 11 p.m. Mountain Standard Time/MST (Sierra Tucson time).

The Chat Room's password is listed in the "Beyond the Miracle" Alumni eNews, or you can request it through e-mail at AlumniCoordinator@SierraTucson.com.

Find the Alumni Chat at www.SierraTucson.com
(Click on "Alumni Resources," then "Chat.")



Click here to join Sierra Tucson's Alumni Chat, 7 a.m. - 11 p.m. MST



Beyond the Miracle



If you are not receiving Sierra Tucson's e-mail bulletin, "Beyond the Miracle," then you are missing out on some great encouragement and biweekly updates of events available to alumni.

To sign up, just go to

www.SierraTucson.com

and click on the "Alumni eNews" button!

If you use a spam filter, please add STARRT@DesertSerenity.com to your approved e-mail list to ensure that you receive our eNews.





Alumni Support Groups

Scottsdale, AZ

When: 2nd & 4th Tuesday each month
Time: 6:00 - 7:00 p.m.
Place: Valley Presbyterian Church
6947 E. McDonald Drive
Paradise Valley, AZ 85253 (480-991-4267)
Contact: Robby C. 602-799-8732
(robert@orchidsound.com)

Tucson, AZ

When: 2nd Sunday each month for dinner
Time: 6:30 p.m.
Contact: Julie C. 520-975-9987
(gecko632@yahoo.com)

Los Angeles, CA - *This meeting is open to anyone who has gone through treatment!*

When: 2nd & 4th Wednesday each month
Time: 6:00 - 7:30 p.m.
Place: 1901 Avenue of the Stars, Suite 500
Century City, CA 90067 (310-201-0005)
Contact: Bryan F. 310-201-0005
Stefani U. 310-458-3768

Marin County/San Francisco, CA

When: 2nd Thursday each month
Time: 7:00 - 8:00 p.m.
Place: Bayside Marin Recovery Bookstore
684 Point San Pedro Road
San Rafael, CA 94901
(Loch Lomand Marina next to
Bruno's Market)
Contact: Brian C. 415-850-1840
(sugfoot@aol.com)

Newport Beach, CA

When: 3rd Wednesday each month
Time: 7:00 p.m.
Place: 3404 Via Lido Drive
Newport Beach, CA 92663
Contact: Jana T. 949-680-5882

San Jose, CA

When: Once each month
(Please inquire about dates,
location, and time.)
Contact: Carol H. 408-529-9030
(carolj127@yahoo.com)

West Palm Beach, FL

When: Once each month
(Please inquire about dates,
location, and time.)
Contact: Glen K. 561-543-0364
(kukorone02@yahoo.com)

Kansas City, MO

When: Once each month
(Please inquire about dates,
location, and time.)
Contact: Lana E. 816-561-4346
(qponnie@sbcglobal.net)

Charlotte, NC

When: Once each month
(Please inquire about dates,
location, and time.)
Contact: Scott G. 704-560-2130
(scottgnc@yahoo.com)

New York, NY

When: 2nd & 4th Wednesday each month
Time: 7:00 - 8:30 p.m.
Place: Caron Foundation
New York City Recovery Building
244 East 58th Street
(Between 2nd & 3rd Avenues)
New York, NY 10022
(For directions, please call
212-371-3220, Ext. 4201)
Contact: Scott C. 516-647-7999

Syracuse, NY

When: 3rd Monday each month
Time: 6:30 - 7:30 p.m.
Place: Manlius Pebble Hill School
5300 Jamesville Road
Dewitt, NY 13214
(Meeting is in Library
in the Amons Building)
Contact: Patty R. 315-638-8181

Columbus, OH

When: Once each month
(Please inquire about dates,
location, and time.)
Contact: JoCarol R. 614-457-6076
(reinerjo@aol.com)

Nashville, TN - *This meeting is open to anyone who has gone through treatment!*

When: 3rd Thursday each month
Time: 7:00 - 8:00 p.m.
Place: Woodmont Hills Family of God Church,
Room 201
3710 Franklin Road
Nashville, TN 37204 (615-297-8551)
Contact: Miles A. 615-430-0476

Dallas, TX

When: Once each month
(Please inquire about dates,
location, and time.)
Contact: Cynthia S. 214-458-2012
(cynthia@promotesuccesspr.com)





From the Editor

By Tim McLeod
Alumni Coordinator

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Hello, my Recovery Friends,

As always, it is a pleasure to share with you in this issue of the "Afterwords" Newsletter. Great and exciting things continue to happen here at Sierra Tucson. As you read in the last newsletter, the dining room expansion has been completed; now new carpet is being installed, walls are being painted, and new chairs are being added. So, hopefully, you attended S.T.A.R. 19 to see all of the renovations.

I remember the day I left Sierra Tucson as a patient back in October of 1999. A fire was lit in my heart to help others who are on or seeking the path of recovery. That flame has not remained the same; it has intensified over the years. I am always seeking out new ways to help support the recovery community. Not just at Sierra Tucson, but locally. What I do for my job does not count for service work in my local community. They are two completely different avenues. Both are done from the heart, but the type of service is totally different. Healers in the therapeutic community who are also in recovery know what I am talking about. At work, I wear the "Alumni Coordinator" hat, and in the recovery community, I wear the Step-working, sponsorship, therapy-going, meeting attendee, recovery friend hat. Again, both are led by the heart.

So I ask you, are you giving back, now that your heart has been opened? Do you know that you have already given back to society by doing the work of coming to Sierra Tucson as a patient or family member? You do not go through treatment or the Family Program process and not leave with a more caring heart to those in the world who struggle with mental illness or addiction.

Giving back can be done in a million different ways, for all of us have been blessed with certain gifts.

Giving back is as simple as your willingness to listen to someone. We all long to be heard. When you see an employee, friend, coworker, family member, etc., ask them how they are doing. Then listen. The latter is more important than the question. If they are hurting, let them know that you can relate to what it is like to walk in their shoes. Telling someone that you care about them and believe in them will give encouragement. My friends, this is called "bringin' the love." This is intimacy.

Giving back is sponsoring someone in a recovery program. You don't need years and years of sobriety and abstinence to be a sponsor. All you need is a willingness to pass down your courage, strength, and hope to another person in the program, just as your sponsor passed these down to you. I ran across a wonderful website on sponsorship, which also gives information about finding a sponsor. Check it out when you have a moment: www.sponsorsaide.50megs.com/index.htm.

Most of us have been blessed financially. When I say blessed financially, I am not just speaking of the individual worth millions. I am saying, if you have been blessed with an automobile and someone you know needs a ride to a meeting, you can offer to give them a ride. There are also others who choose to give back by paving the way for someone financially so they can go to treatment.

Some of you have been blessed with time, so you are able to volunteer in your community. I have a dear friend who donates her time once a week to a local treatment center in Kansas City. She shows up and does whatever is asked, and she frequently tells me how much this one day a week has helped her own recovery program.

Another way to give back is by sharing with a potential patient who has a desire to speak to a former patient about their experience at Sierra Tucson. If you are willing to be a contact for a potential patient and it has been six months since you discharged from Sierra Tucson, please e-mail this information to me:

- Your name
- A phone number we can give the potential patient to contact you
- When you attended Sierra Tucson
- What you came to treatment to work on
- A short paragraph of what you do today to take care of yourself (meetings, therapy, yoga, etc.)

In conclusion, I want to share the payoff of giving back. I had a coworker back in 1999 who was around when I chose to go to treatment. She was always there to listen and was a huge gift to my recovery when I returned home from Sierra Tucson. We had grown apart over the last few years because we no longer work together and she lives a few hundred miles away. But we would e-mail back and forth and talk on the phone when we'd get the opportunity. Recently, she called and was very upset, and I could tell she was really struggling. We spoke several times a week for several weeks, and I listened and encouraged, I listened and encouraged—just as she did for me seven years ago. We spoke again just the other day, and she asked me, "Why are you so willing to help me?" I told her, "Because you paid it forward."

My friends, you never know when you choose to give from a grateful heart, with no strings attached, how the blessings will come back to you in the future.

Huge blessings,

Tim McLeod



S.T.A.R.R.T.

39580 S. Lago del Oro Parkway
Tucson, AZ 85739

Return Service Requested



Recipe by Chef John Hall

“Tossed Salad with Citrus Dressing, Thai Rice Soup, and Ahi Steaks with Spicy Asian Dipping Sauce... try this menu for a delightful fall meal.”
~ John Hall



Citrus Dressing

- 1 cup orange juice
- 1/4 cup lime juice
- 1/4 cup soy sauce
- 1/4 cup salad oil
- 2 TBL. red curry paste

Combine the above ingredients in a blender until smooth. Toss with a green salad.

1 oz. = 1 fat

Thai Rice Soup

- 8 cups vegetable broth
- 1 TBL. Thai curry paste
- 1 cup rice, raw
- 2 cups diced onion
- 1 cup diced celery
- 1 cup diced carrots
- 2 bananas (very ripe)
- 1 can coconut milk

Combine first 7 ingredients and simmer 20 minutes. Place in a blender and blend soup. Add 1 can coconut milk and blend/stir.

1 cup = 1 starch, 1 fat

Spicy Asian Dipping Sauce

- 1 lime (juice of)
- 1 lemon (juice of)
- 1/4 cup soy sauce
- 1 TBL. chopped garlic
- 1 TBL. fresh mint, chopped (optional)
- 1 TBL. minced jalapeno pepper
- 1 TBL. sesame oil
- 2 green onions, sliced

In a bowl, mix all of the above ingredients and chill for at least 6 hours. Can be served with grilled fish (Ahi Steaks are a suggestion), beef, pork, or poultry.

Seared Ahi Steak, 1 oz. = 1 protein

Spicy Asian Dipping Sauce, 3 TBL. = free