

Laurie's Journey *Interview with Serge*

Serge: I am with Laurie Schwartz. Hi Laurie.

Laurie: Hi Serge.

Serge: So Laurie, you started your professional life with Rubenfeld Synergy?

Laurie: Yes. I did start with Rubenfeld although that happened right when I came back from Africa and I was searching for what to do with my life. I didn't want to be a music teacher anymore and so I entered into Jungian analysis and Gestalt therapy in 1978 and then went into Ilana Rubenfeld's training. That was the beginning of really learning how to be sensitive to my body and to the world of consciousness, of mindfulness really.

Serge: Yeah so from the beginning there was a sense that the psychological work you were going to do was going to be related to body. And you went on to study massage therapy?

Laurie: Well Ilana, those people who know Ilana, really synthesized Gestalt therapy with Feldenkrais work and Alexander work and it's called Rubenfeld Synergy and in order to be licensed to touch, because all the sessions were really done on the table, I proceeded to go to the Swedish Institute to get a Massage License and that got me interested in the relationship of emotions to Meridians to evolution. So I did about a few years of just doing various body-psychotherapies like Jin Shin Jyutsu, Shiatsu, and also a lot of hands on work with Ilana and working through the body with emotions.

Serge: Yeah. And you've studied also other modalities of touch? Touch for health?

Laurie: Well, My husband, Stuart Friedman, I met at Omega Institute and he was teaching Touch For Health and it so happened that every Sunday when we would do Feldenkrais exercises in Ilana's living room, people would really emote and I thought, "What is these movements that we're doing in Feldenkrais that's triggering all these emotions?" So Touch For Health was really Kinesiology testing every muscle and meridian, connecting it to the emotional body. So that was, again, I guess my interest in understanding the relationship between emotions and sensations, between movements and personal connections, between people. Of course, Ilana's training, I think one of the gifts I got from it, beside the fact that it was a beautiful community and we played a lot, is that we spent a least 3 or 4 months just learning how to be mindful before we even touched somebody. The whole message in Ilana's training was you have to be so connected to the world of sensation before you put your hands on someone. Very different from massage training.

Serge: Yeah, yeah. So, you know, that journey of your own learning mindfulness and this whole thing that you've been doing has been also experiencing these different methods. So what's your experience in that area?

Laurie: Well in the Rubenfeld training we have sessions before every training weekend and I was the youngest one in the training and there was a lot of opening and relaxing and letting emotions come through. It was a very organic, intuitive way she spoke and she taught, but I was also in Jungian analysis and training in Gestalt at the same time. The most profound thing for me in retrospect was that I had a dream the first night before analysis that my therapist and I were embracing each other and our bodies were connecting and we were both naked. Jung says it

takes about 20 years to understand the first dream and that dream to me, really I'm coming full circle now, it had to do with the wounded feminine with the attachment piece to my body as earth, to a mother figure, to being alive and having intimacy. So when Rubinfeld Synergy ended I did not feel confident to be a therapist; I didn't feel I had enough skill and my husband introduced me to Hakomi Therapy. We did a trade and so that got me very excited, the Hakomi Method.

Serge: Ok, so the Hakomi Method was a way to deepen the body orientation but also to bring something more.

Laurie: The training was so well organized. I felt it was, both trainings were experiential but in Hakomi we learned really practical tools of how to stay in the present moment and how to make contact with someone, how to help them deepen in mindfulness, how to go down into core organizing memories and beliefs, how to work with transformation and the unmet need and then how to bring the person back out into the relationship. So I felt like the Hakomi Method gave me such a good structure and confidence because I could know what I was doing moment-to-moment. It wasn't all purely intuitive.

Serge: Right. So really a sense of mindfulness no longer being some kind of a mystical concept, but really a sense, a moment-by-moment attention and a how to and a sense of being able to master it. To be able to do something about it.

Laurie: Exactly. I mean I sitting there sort of like a lost person. We put the thing on board Mindfulness – sensations, thoughts, feelings, memories, images, beliefs, impulses – I was like, “How do you do that?” I remember the moment when I was dumbfounded before I actually could realize that mindfulness could be applied to everything in the psyche – to a dream, to a feeling. So from that perspective it really is the bridge, I think, to wholeness.

Serge: Yeah, yeah. You're experience as a therapist and as somebody who experiences these therapies – what was it like for you to experience Hakomi compared to what you had been accustomed to before?

Laurie: You know my Jungian analyst said to me when I came back from Boulder, I lived there for a year, he said, “You're so much more relaxed.” He said, “You're so much more present.” He said, “You're really here.” I thought, wow he couldn't tell me I wasn't here, but he was able to tell me that he saw the changes in me when I came back to work with him after the Hakomi training.

Serge: So maybe we'll continue the sense of this journey without go too much deeper in each specific thing; but you're still very involved with Hakomi and the Hakomi community and the teaching, but you've also gone on to study other modalities.

Laurie: Right, you know, in the Hakomi Method we work with stasis consciousness. Hakomi actually means where do you stand in relation to the many realms. So there's the spiritual realm, the emotional realm, the physical realm and yet a lot of Hakomi is done with eyes closed to give the person a lot of intra-psychic intimacy with themselves. But because I think I had some blind spots with my own issue of aggression a friend of mine introduced me to Lou Ormont in modern group analysis, which is sort of like maybe a fifth cousin to Hakomi. The belief in modern analysis started by Spotnitz and Lou Ormont is that aggression is really important for all emotions. So in that training and in those groups you're triggered to get angry and frustrated. So it was sort of like very different from Hakomi, based on mindfulness and nourishment and

staying in the present moment and letting the aggression come up. So I spent a few years in modern analysis and I think probably it was the bridge into Somatic Experiencing.

Serge: So I want to maybe just slow down a little bit because what you were saying there is that you went to modern analysis because there was this emphasis on helping you connect with aggression. In a sense, in a way that what you're experiencing in these different methods is that each one has a different emphasis and journey has been a way to go and develop some different aspects of your personality.

Laurie: Exactly. I think, you know, I think I'm sort of the wounded healer. I'm, sort of, the trauma therapist who's been through everything on her own. So what I really provide for people is from the inside out experience. I think I'm an experiential learner and therefore I had unmet needs to be able to be direct with aggression and some fear about it and for whatever reason I wasn't able to address them in my Hakomi training, not that it's not available. So I needed, for wholeness I needed to be able to work with my aggression with people and not be afraid of it. It provided really a lot more safety with direct emotional communication. Lou's message is not to be so mindful, but to be relational in the present moment and to clear out the history by the new experience. There's a lot of similarities between Hakomi and modern analysis. They all want you to come into the present moment. They both want to help you be relational and give and receive love and all emotions. They all have that belief that all emotions are healthy. I think modern analysis, the absence of mindfulness, um, direct emotional expression and aggression was there. Yet, what was missing in modern analysis was mindfulness of sensation.

Serge: Right, right. So in other words it's a question of where you put the focus.

Laurie: Yeah.

Serge: You know, that there is...you really are somebody who's very interested in mindfulness, but at the same time with that came a certain lack of focus on aggression and you enjoyed developing the aggression there.

Laurie: Well, I think when you come from a background and your ancestors went through war or there was mental illness in your family and ways that you actually push it down, it really causes depression and there's a lot of shame around anger in many, many families and fear of being judged. Really the aggression and the expression in modern group analysis actually was a catalyst for joy.

Serge: Yeah.

Laurie: I think there's an edge because many people couldn't stay in their bodies, so therefore aggression that's not relations to one's own inner self-regulation can also be traumatic for people. Again, I loved modern group analysis and I also saw how people who were frozen and scared and frightened could not access their feelings because they weren't in their body.

Serge: Yeah, Yeah.

Laurie: So with each method there's something that was a gift for me and I guess I kept travelling because there was something that I needed and I just kept learning and I had the time and the energy to keep integrating these things into my practice.

Serge: So you know as you talk about it this way I get a sense of, in a way, the therapist or the teacher is going to be like an aspect with which your personality can resonate. So definitely you've been looking for, say, the mindfulness part and finding somebody with whom you could

resonate and amplify your ability to be mindful, but then there is also a need to be with somebody with whom you can relate, and resonate, and amplify the other aspect, which would be aggression.

Laurie: Yeah, I mean, the way I see it is that every emotion is like a musical note and some of us are introverted and we really have a deep inner life, a dream life, and some of us really love the world of sensation and I love the world of mindfulness and sensation. Yet, the extroverted aspect to life is really expression and relationship and more fire energy, which allows for emotions to go back and forth. I think, for me I think they're both important to me – both the expression and the ability to go in and track myself, and feel, and have choice.

Serge: Yeah. And so going back in a way to the ability to go inside and track, you went on to study Somatic Experiencing.

Laurie: Well that came actually because several of my client's in my Hakomi practice in New York, when they went into the child, which is a state of consciousness we call in Hakomi where we contact the inner child, a lot of them would fall asleep or they would go frozen and I couldn't stay and talk to them. They weren't able to stay in mindfulness and I thought, "Well what I am going to do now?" I really want to stay connected to these people and so I had met Peter Levine at one of the Hakomi conferences, knew he was a trauma expert, so I actually had the luxury of going and spending a few weeks with Peter and watching him work with my client. He took him out of freeze states and death states and I really watched how Peter helped his consciousness come back into his nervous system and helped him feel safe.

Serge: So it started with a very concrete problem of having clients in what you may not even have conceived as a freeze state at the time but simply noticing that lack of, experiencing that lack of reaction.

Laurie: Right. Mindfulness wasn't available so they would fall asleep. Was I going to do Jin Shun or bodywork while they were sleeping? I was confused so I needed help.

Serge: Yeah and so what came up from there is not just a practical help with a theoretical framework about trauma, about the nervous system.

Laurie: Yeah well Peter talks a lot about trauma being in the body, not in the event and in Somatic Experiencing Peter also says you're learning the language of sensation. It's like a brand new language. So helping somebody be in the present moment in sensation, which we do in Hakomi but in the Somatic Experiencing approach we did much more intricate work with coming out of the freeze responses, working through fight and flight, and helping the nervous system come back into resiliency. Because the message in trauma is at the moment you are in overwhelm your consciousness freezes and you can't move forward in time. That's why people can be fifty or sixty and still have something unresolved in childhood. It was just amazing to see the patterns; the repetition patterns that could change when you could take someone back to the event where the trauma began and go very slowly through the event mindfully. So in somatic experiencing we just stitch. I mean it's like a first cousin to Hakomi. We stay with contact, we stay with feelings, but as soon as we switch to sensation and a person says, I'm feeling heat, I'm feeling dizzy, I'm feeling cold, we slow things down. The other big thing in somatic experiencing was the concept of resourcing. We never talk about a trauma or take somebody back to repeat the trauma until we know that they are grounded, and contained, and resourced, and feeling

empowered. I really loved that and it goes very well with Hakomi. We're not here to create more developmental trauma, we're here to resolve it.

Serge: Yeah, it's not that there is an antagonism between both but there is a difference of emphasis about the resourcing being very much apart of the model of the approach.

Laurie: Yeah and I hadn't addressed my traumas really in all my therapies – Gestalt, Jungian Analysis - trauma never came up and all of a sudden I'm like oh I was breach, I was celiac, I was colic, I had casts on my legs as an infant, car accidents. It was like this whole universe opened up when you came into the world of sensation and started to go back to unresolved traumatic memories.

Serge: So again we come to that point of how as you study that different approach it also gives you an exposure to these layers of yourself that you had not necessarily explored to the same extent in other methods, in other ways.

Laurie: Right, and yet I come back to that dream, that first dream with my analyst, and there I was in my body and she was in her body and we were just holding each other. And I come back to, it's almost like, I feel like I'm coming full circle because, I think it was Martin Buber who said trauma is a wound at the order of being. Therefore a baby comes into the universe in the state of being and, in my feeling, the child isn't thinking, they're picking up the vibrations from their mother's womb, from their ancestors. So if you're ancestors didn't feel safe or your mother was anxious you actually don't come in feeling whole and resilient. So the need, I think, for me was to really restore my nervous system into resiliency because I didn't come in that way. That's why I have so much passion now around the attachment work.

Serge: Yeah the perinatal work and the attachment work.

Laurie: Yeah. Again, it's like it was my journey; sort of like peeling the layers of onion. You know from, going from my ancestors, to my developmental experience, to my family, and then deeper and deeper. When you meditate and you're looking for, I guess more wholeness, you start to study what comes up in mindfulness; you get more curious. So it was, I think, during the SE training somebody mentioned Ray Castelino and perinatal birth work and so we took a workshop and it was like five days of really, really slowing down. It was even slower than Hakomi and it gave a lot of time to track impulses in the nervous system and of course learn, I guess we call it imprinting. What was the imprint that was really in the nervous system that, in many ways, is unconscious? I would say it's even before the development of character structure.

Serge: Yeah. So again that slowing down for the tracking, but what you were talking about before was also your interest in attachment so you pursued that as well.

Laurie: Again yeah because I think my need was how do you stay in the present moment and love somebody and love yourself? How do you stay in the present moment and let your emotions go through you and not react to the person you're in relationship with? How do we do that? I don't see very many people where we can stay with good boundaries and be intimate with ourselves emotionally and then really open the flood to want to know and discover what's going on in someone else. So I think there's a passion for me around connection, both emotional and spiritual and therefore I've needed to come back into a relationship with my body where I'm feeling really alive and in flow. I think that's what babies experience but they don't know it. So to come back into the attachment place it's almost like you're coming back to the kingdom of spirit and soul and energy with the aliveness of the infant and the curiosity of the infant but with

the consciousness of the neocortex, you know of the adult. For me, that's the integration of the spiritual and the emotional.

Serge: Yeah, so back to the flow of the baby by the consciousness of the neocortex, the adult.

Laurie: Yeah and I think what I haven't said and I think Jung has said it and I think it's in all of these processes – we're dealing with issues around polarity a lot. We're dealing with issues around good and bad and love and hate and whether it's a symptom in the body that we want to get rid of that becomes the enemy... You know somatic experiencing teaches us that in the symptom is the cure so you learn how to allow the symptom to come and connect with flow and what we call the healing vortex. Emotionally, if we're going to want to really feel we have to get, some people call it the transcendent function. It's the middle pillar. It's the place where we're not taking sides – either with ourselves or with another person.

Serge: So the place of not taking sides, is that similar to mindfulness?

Laurie: Yeah. I think mindfulness is the ability to stay grounded, and centered, and aware of what's happening and not be at the effect. Have a choice. I think a lot of us are spontaneous and think it's great to have spontaneous feelings like children have spontaneous feelings like children have in play, but when it can be hurtful or traumatizing then that's where the wound comes from. So those of us that didn't know that, say, we were lovable or we could have our needs met growing up, might have never said we could ask for a need and therefore maybe we got angry and we couldn't express it. So, again, we have to come back to can I love all the parts of me? Can I accept all the parts of me? So it's not even just about mindfulness, I think it's also about loving presence and having (24:17), and the willingness to connect with all human experience. I think that's my bias. My bias is to feel the dark and the light and get to the place where we're neither polarized in the darkness or the light. Hellinger calls that the greater soul. It's like beyond duality, beyond good and evil. It's a challenge but seems to be that is something I've wanted.

Serge: Yeah, no, definitely in your journey and studying all of these different ways to resonate with different parts of yourself and one of them that you studied was biodynamic.

Laurie: Right. As a result of doing the Perinatal Birth Training we were required to go into a Biodynamic Craniosacral workshop. So I went there and sort of came full circle. I started to experience states of fluidity and states of peace and a real deep resource; very different than going back and forth between a symptom and a resource - like the fluid body in biodynamic craniosacral. And if you read Michael Shea's literature he talks a lot about the embryo and the origin story, which says that there is a place that's purely healthy and it's before trauma enters in.

Serge: So you say that's a state of fluidity, of flow, which is different from the back and forth, the pendulating? Talk a little more about that.

Laurie: Well, you know, in all spiritual traditions we talk about the breath of life coming into the body. God breathes life into Adam. Adam, Adama, means earth. So the biodynamic approach, for me, has an integration of the spiritual realm with also the physiological realm. Although I'm not a scientist, you know, and I haven't been wired up but there is a spiritual component. It's like bringing mindfulness to the fluid body and when you can get to that state of peacefulness, it's almost like everything can flow into the ocean. So it creates a sense of a container, a very deep resource of love and, I think, from the infant-mother wound when a client is sitting who's in that resonance and they're really in a place of that feeling of fluid love; call it love, call it peace. It's almost as if their cells sense it. It's almost like transmitting unconscious

templates to one another. I mean the client is on their own journey and they're in their own organicity and they're in their own journey but I noticed when I've gone to those places, my clients also have different experiences. So it's almost like where I traveled I attract certain people that need to travel that journey. I think we all do that. People who come into our practice, you know, it's no mystery that who comes in and how they're teaching us and how we're learning and how that happens over time.

Serge: Yeah I think it was Jung who said whatever I'm working on, whatever I'm exploring in myself I seem to find patients who are experiencing it.

Laurie: I said to somebody the other week, "How come some of us have had to do so many trainings and we just can't stay in one system." She said it's because not everyone needs to do Perinatal training or cranial training. We needed it to find wholeness.

Serge: So maybe that's a good place to say, you know, having had all these experiences and being very much, you know, having found beauty and wisdom and all of these what happens when you're in a session or in sessions with people?

Laurie: Well in my training, you know, every human being is completely unique so when someone comes in the first thing I'll do is ask them what their intention is and I might take some history. Most people will be referred to me for body psychotherapy because they know I do Hakomi. So they're already coming in with an expectation that they want an experiential therapy and of course the first thing is trust and safety and letting them experience me and ask me questions. As soon as someone feels that you're really tuning into them, and you're making contact, and you're helping them turn inward, and they have permission to be free the process has a life of its own. Most of my clients come from trauma, either depression or a lot of different categories of trauma. So in every case I really want to see what their relationship is with their body. Can they feel grounded? Can they feel sensation? I might have to teach them mindfulness and in the work we slow things down and it's almost, you know, like I never know from beginning to end what's going to happen in the session because we stay in the present moment and we see what's coming up next for the client. What's their intention? What am I tracking? Because we also look at the nonverbal cues – if the head's moving, if the arm's moving, if we see a feeling coming through. I feel like we're in this constant state of birth and connection and when somebody comes back into the fluid body and they go, "I'm home again and I feel whole" and they can actually feel the love for the part of the child that was wounded and also feel themselves as the parent. There's a unity that starts to happen, which I guess what I would say to you after all this training I discovered that I needed to be in recovery for codependency because in my family of origin there was mental illness and war. That was a shock to me but I am so grateful for having read Pia Mellody's books and now helping people come out of codependency into self-nourishment, into self-love, into boundaries in their body. Ultimately, we come in alone and we go out alone and it's really how do you experience love? How do you give and receive it?

Serge: So we come in alone, we leave alone, but there's also the connection in between.

Laurie: Right. And if we don't feel the connection with ourselves the in-between connections can be tumultuous. I mean that's really what therapy's all about isn't it? It's about the missing pieces of contact between our parents and us. In some ways it's sort of like we're in this journey of consciousness that...

Serge: Yeah, journey of consciousness and also journey of for the missing pieces.

Laurie: And when you realize, like the American Indians say, you harvest the gift of the wound. When you get to the place that not feeling lovable teaches you what love is. It's almost like we can't take it for granted because as we go through the journey of healing trauma we expand to so much more compassion for other people, but I'm learning what I need from the absence of not having had it. Some people get angry about that and other people look at it as an opportunity to discover the whole universe.

Serge: Right, right. So, in a way, your journeys, your meetings with different people in trainings is a journey to learn the things, to find the things that you know you didn't have, but also maybe in a way finding a place, finding the things that you didn't know you didn't have.

Laurie: Right. The mystery of the unconscious – well it comes through a dream or someone putting a hand on your shoulder and all of a sudden your shoulder relaxes and you didn't even know your shoulder was tense. Because there's so many parts to the unconscious so really making the unconscious conscious is such an interesting process. In Hakomi we talk about, you know, repetitive habit patterns and that's a lot of what character structures are so when you slow down there's this whole universe to discover, whether you're discovering it through sensation or feeling or relationship but really you're getting to know who you are. As I change on the inside then how I perceive the world on the outside changes. I remember, I have a confession to make I guess – when I went to Israel I walked into Herzog Hospital to help in a trauma training and my toes froze and my eyes got tight and I was able to feel that, I was that sensitive. I was like this is really interesting, I'm walking in to help and yet my body is having a fear response. So that became something to be curious about. What was it that was frozen in my toes and my eyes that I needed to come back and allow it to discharge so that I could feel safe again.

Serge: Yeah, Yeah. So maybe that's a good place to wrap this up. As we end, that sense of that interaction between curiosity, desire to learn, observing what is and thinking of it as an opportunity to learn and expand and grow through curiosity.

Laurie: Yeah, curiosity is a real gift and I think when you are traumatized it's hard to be curious, but when you have that attitude of curiosity then you can use any method and start to let it work for you and serve you on the journey back into life and wholeness. If you're in a relationship, it's better to be curious about why your partner got annoyed at you then to react to it and to be able to be mindful and stay resilient and go, "Alright tell me what happened that triggered you." I would have to be curious about all your feelings and my own if I really wanted intimacy or else we wouldn't have it.

Serge: Right, Right. So is this a good place to end?

Laurie: Yeah, yeah.

Serge: Thank you Laurie.

Laurie: Thanks Serge.