

M I S S I O N

It's hard to know where to start talking about Liam. I suppose I should describe the community I live in first and my own situation when I first met him. I live in South Galway, near the Clare border in Ireland. It's a rural area with great community spirit, and I feel that this had a lot to do with Liam's journey away from autism. His mother Lisa had researched craniosacral therapy on the net and felt it had, "a scientific basis, and a reason why it should work". She heard about my work from Rose, a friend of hers who was a Montessori teacher. I had treated Rose's daughter who had not slept more than twenty minutes at a time in the fifteen months she had been on this planet and, as she was now sleeping eight hours a night after having CST, Rose was doing more advertising for CST than I could ever do. Rose had also tried to have Liam be present in her classes with the other children, quite content to let him do his own thing, but he became too violent and she had to ask his mother to take him out again as he was a danger to the other children. That was July 1998 but she never forgot about him and encouraged Liam's mother to phone me.

This was August 1998, and I had qualified two months before and felt very inexperienced to be dealing with a child who the clinical psychologists for the Health Board described as the worst case of autism they had ever come across.

His mother phoned me and started to describe her life with Liam. It seemed that she was practically a prisoner; going to the bank or shop was an ordeal and poor Lisa was often bruised by kicks and distressed by the tantrums of her son who she loved so much. She was constantly alert to the danger that he could bolt from her side at any moment on to the road. With lots of family support this woman remained actively positive and kept seeking ways to help her son. Liam had tantrums of frustration which, because he was a big boy, could be quite hard to handle and he would often kick with full force. He had a high-pitched scream, which his mother described as unnatural and which often made her think he was in pain. He was non-verbal according to a specialist's report compiled in July 1998, though he had started to babble by the time I first saw him. He appeared to be totally frustrated at not being able to communicate and would push and pull his parents and then point to what he wanted. He did not make eye contact or interact with anyone. He did not sit at the table and eat his meals, he would get one chip and walk away and finish it and come back for another one and so on, and would just eat fruit or yoghurt throughout the day. He was not toilet trained. He never got colds or was sick in any way.

Liam's birth was very traumatic for him and his mother. Lisa had miscarried twice and so on her third pregnancy she had a suture put in. Sam, her first child, was born after 24 weeks. When she was pregnant with Liam, they put a suture in and ordered complete bed rest, which she had until 36 weeks. At 38 weeks they removed the suture, and told her to get up and walk, labour started. Liam was born extremely quickly. After

the labour Lisa was, in her own words, shaking like hell and had no idea why. That was 12th September 1994.

I have never met Lisa. It was her husband, Shane, who drove the 17 miles of twisty country roads to bring Liam to me. The first time I saw Liam, he would not let me anywhere near him. He circled the treatment table for about twenty minutes babbling away to himself and to his toy, Thomas the Tank Engine. So his father and I talked and I explained a bit about CST. We arranged an appointment for the following week in the hope that Liam would be asleep in the car. Because of the frustration and aggressive behaviour that Liam was expressing, we thought we would try out some treatments while he was asleep. It seemed to be the only way we could start to help him. Though he was asleep, I made sure to talk to him and gently explain what I was doing and always ask his permission to put my hands on him and even to change hand positions, "Liam, may I put my hand on your forehead", "Liam I'm just going to move my hand over a little bit", "Liam your daddy is right here with you". Also after each release and at the end of each session I would always commend him: "Your'e doing really well Liam, I'll see you tomorrow". I never felt silly talking to him, I knew he was conscious of having the treatment.

I treated Liam in the back of the car from then on. In early sessions he was in his child seat. My first observation was that his cranial base was very compressed. The system felt almost static, inert; his thoracic diaphragm felt thick and tight; everything felt stuck and like glue. It struck me straight away that the child must be in pain, a headache/hangover type pain. As if he had a clogged up foggy head.

I worked on him once a week for the first month. He calmed down a lot and after four sessions the high-pitched scream had stopped. I never got to work on Liam for more than twenty minutes at this first stage, his system just did not allow it. I knew this because of what I was feeling in my hands and observing visually. His system felt to me like it was pulling away, shrinking inward, not wanting any more coaxing and he would start to wake and squirm around. The way in which his body communicated this to me was so definite that I had absolutely no doubt it was time for me to stop.

I asked his dad, Shane, if it would be possible to bring him twice a week, and he did for the next ten months. We treated Liam twice a week for about twenty minutes at a time in the back of the car! The workspace was cramped. On his fifth visit, he was awake again and I had the distinct impression that he was deliberately awake. He wanted to see me and see what was going on. He was aware he was having treatment and was just sussing it all out.

His sixth treatment was the following day and he relaxed so much that his system opened right up and let me in to work. It was as if we had come to an understanding, he had given me permission to work on him.

IMPOSSIBLE?

A journey out of autism

After this, on Friday and Saturday evenings, he would wait in his pyjamas holding his quilt ready to go, and get irritated if he felt his father was delaying in taking him for his car ride. Shane would always say to him: "Come on Liam, let's go and see Denise, she will do more work for you" and things like that. He knew who I was, he had seen me and knew the road to my house and he was anticipating and wanting his treatments even though he slept soundly the whole way through them.

Liam's first words were 'Orange juice'. This was after five weeks of CST. The other words followed, as if a door had opened and he was slowly making his way through it.

I found huge restrictions in several places within his cranium, notably the falx. It felt like there was no anterior/posterior flexion at all, the frontal bone was practically stuck and there was no sense of forward motion, no 'nose-diving'. The sphenoid was also very restricted in the flexion and extension phases and had a distinct pattern where the greater wings were moving inferiorly, with slight right torsion. His thoracic area was contracted in a typical red light reflex position. (The red light reflex position is related to the fight or flight stress response: shoulders hunched forward, sunken chest cavity, head down, knees pulled up to the chest. The body releases adrenaline into the bloodstream and takes blood from the extremities and rushes it to the vital organs in the thorax in response to a stressful or threatening situation. People don't always come out of this position when the threat passes.) Liam at this time was going through a very rapid growing spurt. I don't know if this had anything to do with the treatment but he seemed to outgrow the child seat in four weeks and the back seat of the car within five months. He would arrive sprawled out over the back seat and I would just adapt and work around him and deal with the pins and needles in my own legs afterwards.

Now he was out of the child seat I could work on his sacrum, this was in



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October 1998. The sacrum had a very strong pulsation with a very fast rhythm as if the membrane was restricted and the fluid was bouncing all over the place with nowhere to stretch to. The lumbar region also felt very congested and the kidney and adrenals seemed blocked/congested and in need of a good stretch. I felt his adrenal glands must have been working overtime because he was faced with traumatic situations everyday, with the screaming and kicking and the frustration of not being able to let out what was in his obviously intelligent mind. There were two treatments where the sphenoid started to come out of the stuck pattern and allowed more of a stretch on the tentorium. On both occasions Liam got a head cold. This was significant as he had never had so much as a sniffle before this. His parents rang me to see if they should bring him to see me. I advised against it as

I felt his body was clearing out some rubbish and was doing a pretty good job on its own.

As I worked on the lumbar-sacral region, the temporal region started to respond better. This progress was reflected in the other bones of the cranium, the frontal and ethmoid areas became somewhat clearer and the falx began to flex and extend in a more even rhythm. Liam's mood had improved greatly, he was now a calm child his words were coming along slowly and his eating habits were improving. He was starting to eat at the table with his family. Liam started back to playschool at this time and Rose just let him be in the classroom and join in whenever he wanted to. He started to interact with other children at the school, and on the sixth of November Liam took Rose by the hand, walked up to a number chart on the wall, pointed to and spoke all the numbers from one to ten. Rose, his parents and myself were in floods of tears when we heard this!

Next time Liam visited me, I got quite a shock because his system felt very traumatised to me. I asked his father what had happened and I heard the most horrific story of how the speech and language therapists on a pilot scheme in the local hospital had dragged Liam away from his mother into another room, locked the door and tried to make him sit down at a desk! They were then amazed because he spent the whole time kicking the door. His parents were furious at this treatment and never took him back again. The ensuing psychology report was where Liam is described as being 'severely autistic'.

Sitting in the back of the car and feeling the shock in little Liam's body and the anger in his father at the barbaric treatment his son had gone through, made me more determined than ever to try to solve this puzzle. That's how I feel about it. There is a picture puzzle, a different one for each child I work with but it's a jigsaw puzzle that I have got to keep working on and taking every clue the child throws out to me and see what can I do next. If I can't work out one bit, I move on to another. I had to do all I could to help this child so I listened very carefully with my hands. I got to work on his sphenoid for about ninety seconds that night, before he became uncomfortable with it, but I really felt that this was an important key. The next night Liam was back to his old self and we worked more on his sphenoid. It released beautifully, moving further away from the habitual pattern it had been in and towards a more even motion.

When he came on the 12th of December, he was wide awake. He came in, shook my hand and looked me right in the eye. (*Autistic children rarely, if ever, make eye contact Ed.*) We played with a ball for a while and then he played with my watch, while I placed my hand on his upper back and spoke soothingly to him. The treatment lasted about five minutes and it was enough. He was quite calm and happy and content, sitting cuddled up on his daddy's lap. It was back to the car for the other treatments and he slept like a log for all the rest of them.

After this, it really felt to me like I was doing balancing and reorganising work for Liam. Nothing was really stuck anymore but everything in his system needed balancing. I worked with the cranial rhythm after that, getting a nice, even fluid motion and rate. Helping the membrane stretch, still-points, observing and guiding, there were no more clues to find, just the pieces to arrange and look at, and the picture was very beautiful.

His father told me about how he came home from work one day and, as he walked in the door, saw Liam in his mother's

arms; Liam looked up and said "Hi daddy". This was the first time in his life he had called him daddy. Suddenly one day Liam noticed he had a brother (Sam), and went over and started to play with him. Poor Sam nearly fell over with shock but was absolutely fantastic with Liam. After ten months of CST twice a week, I had done everything I could for Liam. He started mainstream school in October 1999. His mother had fought with the system so that they provided a classroom assistant. He was five at the time but was showing the aptitude of about a three year old. Lisa says "Once the craniosacral therapy opened up his head to learning he learned fast and yet still had time to catch up. It was as if his brain had not been able to take anything in with all the frustration and high-pitched screaming".

"Was there meant to be something wrong with that child?"

Lisa takes great pride in telling all the medical people that see Liam (especially those who had seen him before the improvement and wonder at his progress) that the only intervention he had was craniosacral therapy. She waited till seven months into the treatment when Liam was happy and calm and talking and learning before she said anything to them, because she felt they would laugh at her. Now when they start to question the diagnosis of 'severely autistic', Lisa gets a great kick out of showing them the huge pile of reports and papers that were written about her son and bringing out their own diagnosis clearly printed on Health Board stationery of 'severely autistic'.

I phoned her before I wrote this to see how he was doing. She had just got back from a meeting with the school where they were questioning his need for a classroom assistant at all because Liam is such a star pupil in every way! Before the summer holidays, Lisa and the teachers were a little anxious about his social interaction because in the playground he was still very much a loner. But having lots of cousins and family around over the summer seems to have solved this and Liam now seeks out children to play with.

Lisa says he is a different child, happy, creative, logical and full of humour and she feels very fortunate to have so much joy in her life. Liam expressed a wish to do a reading at church so, at a family wedding recently, they arranged for him to read a prayer. The whole family was talking about it afterwards and asking the question: "Was there meant to be something wrong with that child?"

I would have to say that 'We' treated Liam. I did my part each week in giving him his craniosacral therapy. And his Trojan parents did their part in getting him to his appointments every week and never missing one, and in understanding and loving him unconditionally at home! They showed love and commitment that really must be recognised and I felt privileged working alongside them in helping their son.

Another great thing about this case is that it has led me to treat other autistic children, and the Health Board has taken notice of this. They are paying me to do one day a week in a respite house for children with autism. The fact that the Health Board has even recognised a complementary therapy is a giant leap in Ireland, (*this would be a giant leap anywhere Ed.*) so I'll let you know how I get on. Hopefully we will have many more successful cases like Liam's. □