

# Meeting with Marjory: A Rosen Method Memory

by Kerstin Zettmar

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I looked into a pair of frightened blue eyes after opening the door to the waiting area.

"Hi, I'm Marjory. Am I too early?"

"No, you are right on time. Come on in!"

A forced smile flashed across her round almost girlish face and well-manicured fingers stroked back a strand of gray hair as she stepped into my treatment room carefully examining the massage table, the pink curtains, the lit candles.

"As I said on the phone, my doctor suggested I'd come to see you. She is such a great chiropractor, but she had a feeling that there may be something else going on with my back besides a misalignment."

"For how long have you had the pain?" I wondered.

"Oh, it comes and goes, but lately it has been really bad," Marjory grimaced and touched her lower back.

"Any idea of what may have started it?"

"Not really. I have always had back problems. At least since I was a teenager, which wasn't exactly yesterday. I'm 52 now, " she offered.

I took note of her slightly slumped posture, her rounded shoulders, and sturdy build. It was a quick glance, but Marjory saw me look at her body.

"I don't have to take my clothes off, do I?" There was a slight panic in her voice.

"Well, it depends," I said. Usually, for a massage, I have the client disrobe to their underwear and I use draping with sheets or towels for modesty, but if you are very uncomfortable with that we could try something else."

"Like what?"

"The Rosen Method. It is a form of bodywork I'm certified in, but it is not a therapeutic massage. It can be done with the client fully clothed, if necessary since it doesn't involve the use of oils or lotions. The intent is quite a bit different too, however."

"What do you mean?"

"Rather than using massage techniques to try to make tense muscles relax, I use a form of contacting, listening touch and together we look for what may be the underlying root causes for the muscle tension. It could be different emotions and memories being held back there or a certain stance in life that once served a purpose, but now causes pain."

" I'm not sure I understand, but I guess we could give it a try if you think it may help my back. Not that I think I'm holding anything back. I am a very honest person," Marjory said.

" That is great," I smiled at her. "Honesty is the key here and usually we are not really aware of what it is that we are holding tight so in that sense we are working with the subconscious," I explained.

Before starting I asked Marjory the routine questions I have for a new potential Rosen client: Was there any abuse or trauma in her history? How did she cope with stress or pain? Was she on any medication? Did she have a therapist or would she be willing to see one if anything showed up that might require that? How was her support system? Had she been free of or in recovery from a drug or alcohol addiction for at least one year? Had she ever been suicidal or tried to commit suicide? Anything else she wanted me to know about her that may be important to our work.

Marjory gave brief and precise answers to my questions. She remembered a happy and stable childhood. She had never married but had a few good friends. She had a good life, a good job as a nurse, a lot to be grateful about, and she had never had a drop of alcohol in her life.

A moment later Marjory was laying face down on my padded massage table, her hands gripping the top like she was holding on to a life raft and her legs pressed tightly together. Through her white T-shirt my hands gently probed her back muscles. Her lower back was arched and the muscles along her spine felt hard as steel.

"Are you in pain right now, Marjory," I asked?

"Yes, it really hurts where your hands are."

"Can you describe the pain?"

"It aches. And then sometimes there is this sharp, stabbing pain."

"Did you ever get backstabbed?" I tried.

"Oh, no. I'm very careful in whom I put my trust. I don't associate with people who would do that sort of thing. I never have."

With that comment, her back tightened up even more and her face scrunched up for a moment as the pain moved through her body. I waited for it to pass and then I asked:

"So what are your friends like?"

"Oh, they are really good people. I only have a few, two really, but they are both willing to break their backs for me anytime I need them."

"They break their backs for you?" I could feel my eyebrows fly up towards my hairline.

"Yes," Marjory said. "They are very good friends."

"So, a good friend is someone willing to break their back for you," I repeated.

"Of course!" There was more than a hint of impatience in Marjory's voice.

"Why else would I have them for friends? I break my back for people ALL THE TIME!!!!"

Another jab of pain surged through Marjory's back and I was wondering to myself if she heard herself and was able to make any connections to her physical symptoms.

"So what is it like for you, Marjory, to break your back for people all the time? It sounds rather painful to me."

"No, it's ok. I like it."

"I see. What do you like about it?"

"I like feeling that I'm a good and generous person."

I sat with that statement for a while. Something in me trusted that Marjory had the best intentions of being good and giving. I also heard the resentment in her voice about giving so much and her back seemed to have a thing or two to say about it as well.

Her girlish face now turned to one side, looked even younger than before. There was a slight tremble in her lower lip. I felt as if I was sitting with a very sad little girl.

"You know, Marjory," I said. "I trust that the good would come out of you even if you stopped breaking your back, even if you relaxed a bit more. You don't have to try so hard to be good. You already are. Just in being you."

Her back muscles began to soften under my hands, I could feel her breath deepen and a tear traced the bridge of her nose. We sat like that in silence for a while. Then Marjory sighed.

"Thank you," she said.

"For what?"

"For seeing the goodness in me." She held her breath a moment before adding, "My mother never did in spite of how hard I tried."

Half a century of grief welled up and as the tears washed over Marjory's face the steel in her lower back melted.

As a Rosen Method practitioner, I am constantly in awe. As in the session with Marjory, I'm deeply touched when I'm invited to share a client's uncovered truth. It is such a privilege to be in that space with another human being. Most often however it takes time to build a safe container. A client learns to trust me gradually, session after session, as there are small shifts and changes in body and awareness. We are not looking for drama in this work, but for authenticity. I know for myself that I need to feel safe in order to fully be authentic and to express all of me including the parts that once were rejected or judged. Even after nine years of working with the Rosen Method, I am still amazed at the relationship between self-awareness, self-acceptance and relaxation and ease in the body.

People seek out the Rosen Method for a variety of reasons besides physical pain or discomfort. There may be a feeling of disconnection, isolation or problems in relationships that precipitate the first phone call to make an appointment. At times there is a simple curiosity about whom the client might be if he or she stopped pretending, performing or working so hard at pleasing others. After a certain passage at mid-life, there may be a question about identity and a hunger to know the real self.

Men and women of all walks of life-- businessmen, former nuns, students, military officers, artists, housewives, office

clerks, former drug addicts-- all walk through my door with one wish in common. They yearn to know themselves better and find a way to self-acceptance. My job as a Rosen Practitioner is to create a safe space for my clients to be themselves and to help them uncover what is there at the core. I have faith that if we go deep enough what we will find is love.

(Note: client's name and identifying details altered)

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