

George T. Lynn, M.A., L.M.H.C.

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GeorgeLynn@Childspirit.com

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Living With the Wounds And Blessings of Tourette Syndrome

"To see the angel in the malady requires an eye for the invisible, a certain blinding of one eye and opening of the other to elsewhere."

Dr. James Hillman

The French word "blesser" for "to wound" is the root of the word "blessed." Throughout human history people have told stories about how heroes were wounded and how dealing with the wound was the source of the growth in their capabilities and contributions. From the ancient Greek stories of Hercules, the Biblical story of Jonah and the whale, through the Arthurian legends, to the modern genre of movies such as "Schindler's List" and the "Star Wars," the hero could not have achieved greatness without the wound.

A person may be wounded as a result of physical injury, psychological trauma, social deprivation (such as growing up in poverty) or possession of a physical disorder. Dr. Alfred Adler, one of Freud's inner circle, was the first psychiatrist to suggest that genius may be a response to a wound. His study of famous artists and musicians revealed that 70 percent of the art students who he studied had optical anomalies and that there were degenerative traces in the ears of many famous musicians to include Mozart, Beethoven, and Bruckner.

A wounding may crush the spirit of a person or it may be the crack that gives home and nurturing to the emergence of his spirit in such a way that the world is greatly benefited. The life of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart is especially interesting in this regard. If Mozart had lived today, he may have been diagnosed with Tourette Syndrome with comorbid depression, Attention Deficit Disorder, and possible psychotic ideation. He had a vocal tic, his writings showed evidence of coprographia, he "heard" musical themes in his head (the psychotic ideation), he was impulsive, and he lacked life skills. For as much money as he made, he could not keep any of it and died a pauper. Add to this the wounding of growing up with a severe and unforgiving "stage father" and you have the makings of someone who our mythical neurologist would probably say, was profoundly impaired and a likely candidate for psychiatric hospitalization. If Prozac had been available in the 18th Century, would Mozart may have taken it to deal with his affective issues? If Tenex and Risperdal were available, would he have taken these for his tics and auditory hallucinations? Chances are the answer is yes. His writings tell us that at times he was miserably unhappy.

But he would not have stayed on "meds" for long if these medications did anything to limit his ability to compose music. His music seemed to be driven as much by his neurology as by his unequalled skill in composition. There is a wild and joyful feeling to it that was appealing to all musical tastes in his time. Being wild in this way was part of Mozart's genius, his gift, and his destiny. And it was part of the way his brain functioned.

The quality of wildness seen in Mozart's persona is seen in many children with Tourette Syndrome. They stand out and may appear to "glow" with energy as a result of it. Many are

drawn to the outdoors and are natural ecologists. Perhaps this is a result of the play of the limbic brain-known as the "animal" brain-in TS. John Hilkevich, co-author of the book *Don't Think About Monkeys* describes his sensitivity as person with TS to the natural ecology:

"Out of my pain came visions of interconnectedness with the earth and sky and a profound feeling in both my body and soul of being animated by the same Spirit whom the universe cannot contain. With the same intensity of a Tourettic tension, I can feel in my body the hop of a rabbit or the surrender of a hawk in flight to the winds. I physically and emotionally feel the life force gushing from the wound of an injured animal or leaking from a plucked tomato, and so I pray my gratitude as I take life, with mixed feelings, to feed my own. How thin and transparent are the boundaries of life and death."

Dr. Oliver Sacks has written in depth about the interplay of the limbic system in TS, and referred to the rage seen in Tourette Syndrome in his book *An Anthropologist on Mars*, as "the blind fury of the neocortex." Frightening as this description is, it speaks to the presence of great energy and animation in the condition. This energy may be very disturbing to people, especially to teachers who require uniform response and obedience to their instructions. In many ways, it is the requirement to attend school that most brings out the woundedness of TS. A child who cannot sit still and attend, who may be troubled by tics, or mood swing, or obsessionality, is not a good candidate for success in this setting.

But Mozart's wounds are the wounds of our children, and it is through these wounds that our kids will realize their genius. To help the Tourettic child, we must befriend his wounds and his wild side and move with him to help him express the gifts that these characteristics bring to his personality.

The three wounds of Tourette Syndrome The wildness of TS is expressed in three powerful wounds of the condition. These characteristics are wounds because they cause the child to experience loneliness, failure, isolation, and, at times, physical and psychic pain. A change in perception of these wounds by caregivers to depathologize them opens the door to their enlistment into the child's healing process. We are confronted with the formidable task of helping the child's limbic brain sit as an equal partner with his cortical brain and to the extent that we are able to do this, he will experience a sense of wholeness and expression of his greatly animated intelligence.

1. Enormous counterwill

The first wound is counterwill. Dr. Gordon Neufield, a Vancouver developmental psychologist, has coined the term "counterwill" to denote the automatic resistance of children with an incompletely developed sense of self. Counterwill is a reflexive and unthinking opposition to the will of the other. Neufield considers the existence of counterwill to be an intrinsic aspect of being human. In his view, it is as much a part of us as our immune systems and plays a similar protective function: it gives us the ability to automatically resist control of others so that we can have the time to build our own sense of self and respond with our own personal resources. Dr. Gabor Mate, a Vancouver physician, who writes about counterwill in his book *Scattered Minds, A New Look At The Origins and Healing of Attention Deficit Disorder*, contends that counterwill is so pronounced in ADHD because of the sensory openness of ADHD child to stimulation. Many children diagnosed with TS also show a powerful co morbidity with ADHD and it is this reason that they may be so intensely reactive to attempts to discipline them or gain compliance with directives.

My experience confirms Dr. Mate's thesis that to manage counterwill, caregivers must become attuned to the child: they must become so highly trusted by him that they are able to

help him develop a sense of self. As his sense of self-support and personal confidence grows, his counterwill diminishes and cooperation increases.

2. Perseverant Intensity

The second great wound of Tourette Syndrome is seen in its intensity and perseverance. Every action is supercharged. Everything is done at maximum intensity. This sense of hyperarousal is expressed in the tics, Obsessive Compulsive Disorder, and mood disorders that often accompany TS. It is as if all stimulation, be it from affective, cognitive, or behavioral domains, is received with great signal strength and expressed just as strongly. Dr. Sacks points out that many Touretters only experience relief from this intensity when they are in a state of relaxed, intense, focus. Medication can calm this hyperaroused state but the sensitivity of Tourettic children to meds often means that they become zombie-like on the medication. Medication may diminish the disturbing presentation of the Tourettic child by dampening the "blind force of his subcortex," but it also hides the gifts related to hyperarousal seen in his physical quickness, emotional intensity, and auditory intelligence.

If hyperarousal is seen as a gift, organic ways to use the energy become apparent. Activities which draw on this energy and which permit the child to achieve excellence include exercise programs, track and field training (Touretters are not good candidates for team sports), participation in martial arts, and involvement in music. Other natural vocations include the arts, especially sculpture, and the performing arts. Sculpture is a natural because it utilizes the high tactile sensitivity and deep interest in experience that characterizes TS. The performing arts are highly suitable venues for the Touretter to use his ability to portray the raw energy of people, to include the "animal" aspects of human character in the screen play.

The obsessional pursuit of perfection in sports and great bursts of speed that TS children are capable of, makes them candidates for success in these activities. Involvement in music or any activity that requires powerful auditory intelligence is also a natural fit for them. It is no surprise that many of them like to drum. Drumming is repetitive, earthy (it brings up the earth energy, what the Spanish poets call the "duende," (the gnome), and it is physically exciting.

3. Love of Extreme Experience and the Taboo The presence of coprolalia, echolalia, coprographia, copropraxia, and scatological reference are partially diagnostic of Tourette Syndrome. The exercise of these behaviors is shocking to many people and contributes to the disturbing reputation of the disorder. In my psychotherapy practice, I have also seen several cases of cross-dressing in pre-pubescent TS children. These manifestations of the condition were probably the reason that people with TS were thought to be possessed by the devil in ancient times. Tourettic children seem to enjoy fracturing taboos and changing form. And many of these children love extreme experience. They like their food very hot and spicy. They like to go from a very hot Jacuzzi to a snow bank. They like to run in the cold of the night. Everything is done to the extreme. Again we see the voice of the limbic brain in the personality. Expressed directly in TS, these behaviors are evidence of the presence of the animality in all of us that our cortical brains would just as soon deny. They are the signature of wildness in Tourette Syndrome that give an earthy, real-life quality to the condition. They show the joy of young animals in just being alive and the disdain for being caged or controlled by culture.

Medication may be partially useful in controlling these behaviors, but, once again, there is a price to pay in terms of the loss of energy, spirit, and soulfulness with its use. What price the gift?

There is an axiom in psychology that all behavior, as weird as it may seem, fulfills a function for the person. I hypothesize that these taboo behaviors fulfill the need of the Tourette

child's limbic brain to experience the limits of sensation and corporeality. Performance of coprolalia, for example, brings the child head-to-head with cultural mores and creates a great and interesting disturbance. Though the child's cortical brain may recoil in horror and embarrassment from what he just said, his limbic brain jumps with delight at it. This is not to say that the "copros" are intentional, any more than more than other behavior associated with the limbic system, such as OCD, are intentional. It is to say that a very powerful aspect of human nature is being activated and we ignore or suppress this aspect at peril to the child's health.. The blessing that these behaviors hold for the human race are seen in the message that they bring to all of us: that we are (to quote Kierkegaard), "worm food." And that it is in acceptance of our animality that we will avoid the horrors of civilization to include war and the tireless rape of the environment.

On an individual level, I have seen that these impulses are assuaged by helping the child follow natural power in the creative arts and sciences. Be it the power of water, or electricity, or computers, or Shakespeare, these kids love to ask the "what if" questions that frame the joy of experimenting and finding out. They should be encouraged in these pursuits for it may be their gift in unconventional perspective, that one day creates a solution for a social or environmental problem that cannot be conceived by more conventional minds. TS makes people disturbing. But human systems need disturbance in the same way that the earth needs great storms to move things around. This power to move things is ultimately the genius of TS. I don't think Mozart would have chosen the great pain that he experienced in life if he could have made the choice as a boy. Who wants the kind of trouble he experienced? But it was his destiny to feed the spirit of the world in this particular way.

The story of Mozart's life informs us that he may have lived longer and given us still greater gifts if his father had loved him and accepted him unconditionally. It is this unconditional acceptance of all aspects of the child with TS, to include all his unruliness, irreverence, and wild behavior, that creates the soil in which his gifts will flower to their potential magnificence.

About the author: George Lynn, M.A., L.M.H.C., is a psychotherapist from Bellevue, Washington who has pioneered the use of counseling interventions to help children and adults with attention differences: ADD, Tourette Syndrome, Asperger's Syndrome, and the mood disorders. He is author of the popular guide for raising children with extreme behavior issues, *Survival Strategies for Parenting Your ADD Child: Dealing With Obsessions, Compulsions, Depression, Explosive Behavior, and Rage* (Underwood Books, 1996). He may be contacted at GeorgeLynn@childspirit.com or through his website: www.childspirit.com.