



Wild & Sublime® Podcast, Season 2 Episode 20
“From Pro Domme to Psychotherapist”
April 29, 2021

What can kink teach us about community, energy work, and trauma? In this erotic biography episode, somatic psychotherapist Elmo Painter talks about her history as a professional dominatrix, and how working with the body and energy then directly informs her therapeutic practice today. Karen shares about her own energy work in sound healing and her background in Tantra.

Host: Karen Yates

Guests: Elmo Painter

[Wild & Sublime theme music]

Elmo Painter

I'm a priestess, in many ways. I'm a shadow priestess. And helping people really learn to love those dark, intense, or previously unwanted places, or misunderstood places, or forbidden, or — you know, whatever is causing somebody to be like, "I don't know about that, this has to stay hidden." I've always had a gift for shining a light on it and saying, "Actually, look how beautiful that is. Look how we can play with that."

Karen Yates

Welcome to Wild & Sublime, a sexy spin on infotainment®, no matter your preferences, orientation, or relationship style, based on the popular live Chicago show. Each week, I'll chat about sex and relationships with citizens from the world of sex positivity. You'll hear meaningful conversation, dialogues that go deeper, and information that can help you become more free in your sexual expression. I'm sex educator Karen Yates.

Today we talk with somatic psychotherapist Elmo Painter about her history as a professional dominatrix, and how working with the body and energy then directly informs her therapeutic practice today. Keep listening.

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So I thought I would give folks a brief update on my arm and how it's doing, after I slipped on ice and broke two bones seven weeks ago. I saw my surgeon yesterday — Sebastian Ko, highly recommend him — who is awesome. And he cleared me to begin driving and lifting heavy things, but not to cycle or do exercise until early June. Womp womp... To tell you the truth, I did not expect something different than that. I did not expect to be jumping on my bike right now. But anyway, it's all good. And my dog Sigrún, who also had surgery on her knee — this was a very intense winter. Nevermind the COVID! Yeah, anyway, she is back in action now. So things are a lot more upbeat over here.

So, today. I really enjoyed this following interview with psychotherapist Elmo Painter. Elmo first appeared on the show in July of 2019, where she related that she used to be a pro Domme. At the time, I thought, huh. And I filed it away in my producer brain, like I will. And I was finally able to invite her on the podcast today for a one-on-one interview. Here she will be discussing in depth her journey from her youth in the kink scene in San Francisco to her somatic work addressing trauma and grief in her therapeutic practice now. I was especially excited to find out that Elmo is well versed in the applications of energy on the body to help move us out of unwanted states in order to heal. This is one of my favorite topics, one that I have not spoken about very much on this show to this point. I'm sure that will change. And we discuss how she initially came to understand energy through kink, and I was able to share some of my own experiences as well in Tantra and the work that I currently do. I hope you enjoy this wide-ranging interview with the multifaceted psychotherapist Elmo Painter.

Elmo Painter, welcome.

Elmo Painter

Hi, Karen. Thanks for having me.

Karen Yates

It's really nice to have you on the podcast. Elmo has been on the show several times. And I'm super excited to have you back on the show to talk about your journey. Your journey from pro Domme to psychotherapist. Where would you like to start your story?

Elmo Painter

I mean, we can start 20 years ago. That's kind of where this all began. So I went to dominatrix school. I went to the Academy of S.M. Arts in San Francisco in 2004.

Karen Yates

That's Cléo DuBois' school.

Elmo Painter

Cléo DuBois' school. And before that I had been, you know, high school and early college, had been experimenting, and scaring boyfriends, and, you know...

Karen Yates

Okay, what does THAT mean?

Elmo Painter

[laughs] You know, I would kind of bring ideas to people and boyfriends, or partners, like, hey, let's try this. Like, maybe we do this really kinky thing while I'm reading a book? Or, you know, I'll be over here doing this, and you come in, and — you know, I had all these ideas. And they were like, what, why, what? So, I was a little bit ahead of my age group, as far as being a creative, sexual, and sensual person. And I watched a film called "Exit to Eden" with Dan Aykroyd and Rosie O'Donnell. Have you ever seen that?

Karen Yates

No.

Elmo Painter

So it's a movie that has just kind of left mainstream. But it's a movie about a BDSM island. Rosie O'Donnell and Dan Aykroyd play detectives who have to go to this BDSM Island. It's an amazing film. And there was a woman who runs the whole island named Mistress Lisa. She's really warm, and people just want to do what she says, because they just want to do what she says. They want to please her, because she's just gorgeous and amazing. And she's not mean to anyone, she's just really curious. And, you know, confident. And I just loved everything about her. And this was the early 90s that this movie came out. So here's little itty bitty Elmo, at probably age 14, watching

this movie, like, "This is it for me! This is what's up. I am super interested in everything that's going on in this film."

Karen Yates

So in this film, did people just turn into submissives the minute they met her?

Elmo Painter

No, They were people who kind of work on the island and work under her, really joyfully work under her. And then there are guests who come to the islands, couples, Doms, subs, and hilarity ensues. And romance. And it's, it's a really sweet film. If you can find it, I highly recommend it.

Karen Yates

Okay, so you saw this film, and it spoke to you on a very deep level. So when you were suggesting these scenes to the young men you were dating at the time, did any of them say hey, that sounds cool! Was there resistance?

Elmo Painter

It was mostly resistance. I went to high school in Ohio suburbia. Not a whole lot of adventurous folks. I was also a very out bisexual person, because that was the only word we had back then. And that was even really new for a lot of people. And a lot of people were like, Whoa, you're bisexual? What's that all about? Because also, again, it was the mid '90s. And not a whole lot of people really understood... You know, a lot of people were like, okay, bisexual means this specifically, 50% women and men. Before we really understood how broad that spectrum is, and before we had words like queer and pansexual, in our day to day language. I experimented with some queerness really early on, but nothing ongoing, I think. Yeah, I was a little bit more adventurous than my peer group, I think.

Karen Yates

Yeah, yeah. So you left high school, and then what happened?

Elmo Painter

So then I went to college. And kind of toward the end of college — well, I met more kinky folks in college, more queer folks. I went to a very liberal, queer-friendly college called Antioch, in Yellow Springs, Ohio. And lots of kinky folks there. Like, more than I had met before. And somebody kind of pointed me in the direction of Cleo's school. And I contacted Cleo. Like, I was 22 at the time, and I was the youngest person that she'd ever considered letting into her course.

Karen Yates

What did you say to her? Like, what was your pitch?

Elmo Painter

I don't even remember. I don't remember our conversation. It was almost 20 years ago. She's very intuitive, like very, very energy based, very intuitive, very spiritual. And she sensed something in me that I'm so grateful that she sensed, because she was wary of my age. But here I am, you know, almost 40, and talking about her and talking about these experiences and how it's shaped my life and my career. So she let me into the course, and I moved to San Francisco and I studied under her for — the course was about four days, eight-hour days. So it was a really long module. And then she and I kept in touch, and I ended up volunteering for her school a lot. So I ended up being a volunteer submissive for a lot of her classes and a lot of her other workshops. So she kind of took me under her wing, and I met all these amazing people in the San Francisco kink community. I learned a lot of the history. There's a lot of eldership and lineage in that community, and that is very much a part of my spirituality and my sense of kind of sensuality. It's such a magical place, and a magical community.

Karen Yates

Yeah. Can you talk a little bit about the idea of sensual elders? I'm picking my words carefully, because I want to be clear that S&M is not necessarily sex.

Elmo Painter

Yeah.

Karen Yates

But sort of these psychosexual elders, energetic elders. Can you dig a little bit more into what you were being not only exposed to by Cleo — who is, I went on to their site yesterday, a wonderfully — not *imposing* French woman, but sort of like, I don't know, just a lot of power.

Elmo Painter

Yeah, oh yeah!

Karen Yates

Really cool. I'll put the link to Cleo's school in the show notes. But talk a little bit about the milieu of that time for you. What were some of the big, mind-blowing moments for you?

Elmo Painter

Yeah, so one of the big things that I realized in the kink community out there was that I noticed how well people knew themselves. People knew their limits, they knew their boundaries, they knew what they liked, what they didn't like. They knew what they wanted, they knew how to talk about what they wanted. They knew how to temper certain things — you know, they were really attuned. There was a lot of attunement in this community, to each other, to self and other, and a lot of spiritual energy. The way that Cleo taught me was, she taught me to move energy. And Eve Minax, too. Cleo Dubois, Eve Minax, and Sibyl Holiday were the three teachers of this course. And I'm still in touch with all three of them. And then Selina Raven is someone who came on board a couple years later, and I ended up living with her. And she is very close, and she became kind of my Domme mom. And now she's gonna be a bridesmaid in my wedding this fall.

Karen Yates

Wonderful.

Elmo Painter

I officiated her wedding about six or seven years ago.

Karen Yates

So for folks that don't understand — and we can now open up the conversation, because I come from a Tantra background, which also is about moving energy in the body. And now I subsequently do a different — augmenting that with another type of energy work. But let's talk about — what did you mean when you said "moving energy"?

Elmo Painter

Yeah, so... Oh, wow. So, kind of elevator pitch. Energy. Everything is made of energy. We as humans, with emotions, with neurons, with blood pumping, with breath, we are made of waves, we're made of electricity, we're made of energy. And when we can raise this energy in ourselves, arousal, excitement — even, you know, on a different kind of end, anxiety, fear, activation — a lot of this stuff, is like emotional energy. And then sensual energy, spiritual energy, intention. This is kind of the vibration that I was taught to use. And when Cleo was training us on how to flog, for example — flog, paddle, using instruments and implements — the toy is an extension of yourself. And you're moving that energy through this implement to your bottom, to your masochist. The bottom being a submissive or a masochist, or the person who is receiving. And

that person would then burst with energy, because there's this sensation, there's this beautiful trust that's there. There is this letting go, and it's delicious. And so, as a Domme, I would just [slurping noise] just drink it in. My bottom is drinking in my energy, I'm drinking in their energy. And it's this gorgeous exchange. And it really doesn't go — you know, you guys can't see, but I'm making a circular motion with my hands.

Karen Yates
Yes.

Elmo Painter
It really is this reciprocal—

Karen Yates
It's a loop.

Elmo Painter
—exchange of energy.

Karen Yates
And I also would like to point out to folks, at least in my own experience, especially when you're using implements — like, right now I work with a type of frequency work called Biofield Tuning, where I use tuning forks in the field, the biofield of the body, to help repattern trauma, and also move energy. It's like, you were working with tools that were actually helping focus your energy. And that was, you know, moving — the tool itself doesn't have power. It's the fact that your consciousness — you're directing the energy through these tools, right?

Elmo Painter
Yeah. And the tool can be your body, too. Your hands. Your presence—

Karen Yates
Absolutely.

Elmo Painter
Your breath.

Karen Yates
Yes.

Elmo Painter

All of these are all also ways of moving energy.

Karen Yates

Yeah. Hmm, where do I want to go? So here you are, in this really juicy, energetic pool of people in San Francisco. You've taken the intensive with Cleo. She's become your mentor. You know a lot of people now, you're learning how to move energy. Is this when you started taking clients on as a pro Domme?

Elmo Painter

Yeah. So I took a few clients on in the first couple years, and I had kind of a day job. And then a few years later, I was taking on more clients, and doing a lot of modeling. And I worked at a feminist peep show called The Lusty Lady. It was all worker owned and unionized. So I was full time in that world. So what I was noticing — there are so many different kinds of pro Dommess. There are ice queens. There are Dommess who are more into specializing in different things. I was very warm, and playful, and silly. And I still am, in every way. And also like, evil, like really silly and evil, and full of mischief. My Domme name was Isabelle Caprice.

Karen Yates

Oh, nice.

Elmo Painter

Yeah. And there were Dommess who were more in it for different reasons, too. Because I went into this training thinking, Oh, I'm gonna learn how to fuck up men and look amazing doing it and make all this money. And then, you know, Cleo took me to school, quite literally, about what this word really means to her, and at what it can mean and what it has come to mean for me over the last almost 20 years, in that it's healing work. I am a priestess. In many ways. I'm a shadow priestess. And helping people really learn to love those dark, intense or unwanted places, previously unwanted places, or misunderstood places, or forbidden or, you know, whatever is causing somebody to be like, I don't know about that, this has to stay hidden. I've always had a gift for shining a light on it and saying actually, look how beautiful that is. Look how we can play with that. I mean, shadow work is a huge part of what I love to do as a therapist, and as a kinky person, and a spiritual person.

Karen Yates

Yeah, I think people don't understand. — and I can say this, even in my own journey, even now. You know, there's such a resistance to going there. But that's where the power is.

Elmo Painter

Yeah.

Karen Yates

Because that's where the self knowledge is. And once the embracing of it happens, or you're embracing a facet that you have attempted to push away, or want to chuck out the window — it's like, no, this is actually a gem that you can polish. You can take the dirt off of it, you can polish, and then you can take it.

Elmo Painter

Yeah.

Karen Yates

And use it. And that's where the freedom is.

Elmo Painter

Yeah.

Karen Yates

Yeah.

Elmo Painter

So I was doing that in my sessions with clients, which leads pretty much directly into my path as a therapist. And, you know, here we are.

Karen Yates

So how did that — yeah, so you were having these clients, and you were doing healing work. You knew the work you were doing as a pro Domme was, of course, healing. That's how it was set up. That's how you had been trained. This is your new awareness. And when did you start thinking — hmmm. Did you have a sense of — how can I put it? Ambivalence about being a pro Domme? What started causing the shift of not wanting to do it anymore?

Elmo Painter

Yeah. So I think burnout was pretty high for me back then. And burnout amongst all kinds of sex workers is — it sneaks up on you.

Karen Yates

Let's open this up. Because I don't think people really understand this. How do you think burnout happens? I would love to hear your take on this. Because this is a phenomenon.

Elmo Painter

Anyone in helping professions, especially more intimate helping professions, where there's a lot of energy, there's a lot of intimate space that's held. Therapists, sex workers, nurses, these are all intimate spaces, when people are vulnerable. And burnout can happen really fast, or it can happen really slowly over time, and it can build up until you're like, "I don't want anyone to talk to me." And then you're like, oh, okay, maybe I take a break now. So yeah, I would kind of walk down the street, and somebody would talk to me — like, a man would talk to me in a not-harassing way, and I would still be like, "Fuck this motherfucker." And I was like, Okay. [laughter]

Karen Yates

Signal!

Elmo Painter

Yeah. So there, there was that. And also, I have an 11 year old son now. So, I got pregnant, and there's a legality issue. There was a lot more at risk for me legally. And so I moved away from it because of that. Because a spanking is just as illegal as penetrative sex. It's contact with certain areas. And it's — I mean, we could have a whole other show about how fucked up all these laws are. But—

Karen Yates

Right, it's sort of the same thing of like, if you're laying hands on a body, like a massage therapist, there needs to be a license. There needs to be like, oversight.

Elmo Painter

Yeah. Yeah. So there were some legal ramifications that were possible, that I wasn't willing to risk anymore. So yeah, I went back to school. I finished my undergrad a number of years later. I moved to Chicago, I finished my undergrad to become a therapist, to get my master's degree.

Karen Yates

Were you already having insights when you were working with clients as a pro Domme? Were you already having insights like, "Wow, I'm really good at this"? Or like, wow, the psychology of this scene is really — was it already starting to get planted in your head that this was a direction you wanted to pursue?

Elmo Painter

Yes, absolutely. Especially with things like role play and age play, because people were coming in and wanting age play. And, you know, I was realizing, we're really doing deep healing work here. Like, reworking memories, and reworking relationships, and developmental wounds that have happened. I didn't have this therapist language back then. But that's kind of, you know, what I was sensing what was going on. And I got a lot of really great feedback from people. And repeat clients, of course, are the best feedback. And feedback from people in the trainings and workshops that I was doing with Cleo, who were just like, "Oh, my God, your energy and the way you hold space, and all these things are just phenomenal, and really powerful." And I was like, Okay, I'm gonna do something else with this.

Karen Yates

Can I jump in a second?

Elmo Painter

Please.

Karen Yates

You know, I kind of want to maybe create a little bridge for people to understand, with an experience I can relate personally. When I was at Tantra school, we had to do a lot of work with each other. And one night I was with two other people. And I was the receiver. And I put an intention out, I think, at the beginning of the Tantra scene, and they were both going to be the givers. I don't know if it was toward wholeness, or it was definitely a movement, a desire to move toward integration and wholeness. And what ended up happening was, this whole scene started erupting, completely consensually, where the two givers were my parents, and kind of loving me back into wholeness. It was one of the most powerful healing experiences of my life. I literally felt energy come back to me. A packet of energy came back to me that had been missing, lost, discarded. And this amazing integration happening. It was astonishing. And so I feel like I just want to relate that to the listener, that this is not, you know, it's not in the head. It's in the body. Right?

Elmo Painter

Right. That's beautiful. Thank you for telling that story. I think another moment for me was when a friend of mine — he hadn't cried in years. And he asked me to do a scene with him, like a paddling and piercing scene with him. But I don't even think we got to the piercing part. So that he could kind of get out of his head and cry. And we did that, and I'm paddling him, and I'm just holding space for him. And he was able to cry for, you know, a long time. And the aftercare was really soft and gentle and beautiful. And there was kind of another piece of it for me, where I was like, "Okay, I want to be a therapist, but it has to be in the body. Because this is where it is. This is where the healing happens, is in the body."

Karen Yates

Yeah, and you're a somatic psychotherapist, right?

Elmo Painter

Yeah.

Karen Yates

I have a background in somatic sex education now. And it's all body related, in how the trauma gets lodged in the body. And that's what's being released, or that's what's being addressed to and repatterned.

[to podcast audience] We'll return to our interview with Elmo Painter in a moment. [music] Wild & Sublime is also sponsored in part by our Sublime Supporter, Chicago-based Full Color Life Therapy, therapy for all of you, at fullcolorlifetherapy.com. If you would like to be a Sublime Supporter, showcasing you and your business and supporting us at the same time, contact us at info@wildandsublime.com.

[music ends] We now return to our interview. Elmo and I discuss her therapeutic practice, and how she incorporates Somatic Experiencing to address trauma. We also talk about what to do if a trauma response comes up in a kink scene or in a sexual encounter, as well as ancestral work and its effect on the body.

[to Elmo] So when you went and got your masters, eventually, in psychotherapy — yes, was that what the master's was in?

Elmo Painter

Yeah, counseling psychology.

Karen Yates

So did you already know at that point, I'm interested in somatic work, based on my work in kink?

Elmo Painter

Yeah. I actually started my Somatic Experiencing training while I was in grad school. So I did the first two years of that. I was in grad school for three years. And the last two years I was also in somatic experiencing training at the same time.

Karen Yates

So explain Somatic Experiencing.

Elmo Painter

Yeah, so, Somatic Experiencing is a method that was created by Dr. Peter Levine. And it's a lot of different things. There's mindfulness and movement. And we track sensation in the body, and track releases in the body. And there's a really slow build up, and it's done in a way that is not overwhelming. And it's not retraumatizing to the person, because it is so slow and powerful. Don't be fooled by how slow it is, because oh, my God, does it work. It's like, I've seen some really amazing things happen. But I highly recommend doing a good Google about somatic experiencing. It can also help people get in touch with their intuition, which is what I do a lot, because I have a lot of survivors of abuse, and people who have forgotten how to utilize their "No." And their "Yes." And so Somatic Experiencing can help you find that that's those sensations in your body, those gut feelings, that intuition that says, "Yeah, I want this. Yeah." Or the "No, this is not okay with me."

Karen Yates

Yeah, it's so interesting you're saying this. Because on the weekends, I do group Biofield Tuning sessions remotely. And a lot of times, we're working on the energy centers of the body around the solar plexus, which is kind of the gut knowledge. It's the emotional communication, which, you know, they're beginning to realize there's the second brain in the gut.

Elmo Painter

Yeah!

Karen Yates

That gives us all of this information somatically. Right? And it's so interesting to me, because that's where a lot of the issues are, and it's about an overriding. An overriding of the system based on the trauma of the past.

Elmo Painter

Yeah.

Karen Yates

And the shielding or the just, I'm going to squish down my own needs, or my own signals, to accommodate, you know, to appease. All of these other ways of coping that we develop when we're in situations where we can't be ourselves, because that's not the way it was set up.

Elmo Painter

Yes. Specifically, especially the fight and flight responses—

Karen Yates

Yes.

Elmo Painter

Because we're animals. I mean, I think that one of the biggest lessons in somatic experiencing is that a lot of this is based on animals, a lot of the research and, you know, observations of scientists like Robert Sapolsky and Peter Levine, and you know, Bessel van der Kolk. For all of his flaws, he still has done some really amazing work. So, animals in the wilds will fight. They'll annihilate, even. So fight, annihilate, or run to escape. And us humans, we're so socialized. And we need to be, you know, socialized to not fight, to not punch, to not maim, to not run away, especially when we're kids. Like if something is happening to us, when we're children, we're often too small to fight. And if we run away, we're on our own. So we learn to shut down, we learn to freeze. And also, I want to name the freeze response as a brilliant, brilliant evolutionary response. Because it helps make us small, so that the predator passes us by.

Karen Yates

The little bunny freezing.

Elmo Painter

Yeah, yeah. Right, it makes us a little bit boring. So it saves us. Boring to a predator. So it saves us in these, you know, these dangerous moments, these threatening moments.

Karen Yates

And can I say, when I heard you interviewed on "The Wounded Healer," you were talking about the freeze response that happens in kink scenes. Of course, the freeze response is one of the main trauma responses under stress. Can you talk a little bit about the freeze response within a scene, and how people can kind of work with that response if they're having it?

Elmo Painter

Yeah, so during a scene, or just during sex, or you know, during kind of any intimate moments. It's a really good way to check in, if you see the person that you're playing with, if you kind of sense them start to check out, or dissociate, or, you know, something, if their eyes are looking a little bit distant, saying something like, "Are you still with me?" Because sometimes in a scene when we have safe words, right? We've got safe words in place, hopefully. But sometimes, if we start to freeze in scene, that information kind of also freezes. Like, it's hard to access that part of our brain, that cognitive part of our brain when we're in freeze. So a way that you can kind of check in with somebody, especially someone who sometimes does check out during sex, or sometimes does check out during a scene, or if they just happen to be dissociating right now in this scene, is to say, "Are you still with me? Do you remember your safe word? Yes? Okay, what is it?" You know, so really, really helping them kind of check in. And you can be playful with that, too. You know, "You remember your safe word? Tell Daddy what it is." Right? So you don't have to bring everybody out if that's not happening. So it takes some attunement to be able to check in with your partner or partners, you know, to see where everybody's at, and everybody is still engaged in a way that is yummy for them.

Karen Yates

Yeah. Let's talk about your practice now, as a psychotherapist. What does it look like in general, like, you know, weaving in all of these threads? What's alive for you right now, in practice? What has maybe dissipated? Or what do you really jazzed about now?

Elmo Painter

Oh, wow. So I'm really jazzed about a lot of things. I mean, Somatic Experiencing is something that I'm just wildly passionate about.

Karen Yates

When you're working with a client, what does that look like, exactly?

Elmo Painter

Somebody comes in with symptoms of trauma, symptoms of PTSD, anxiety, any kind of — I mean, the nervous system presents itself in so many different ways. So the DSM is sort of just a bunch of names for different ways of having a jacked-up nervous system. So—

Karen Yates

The DSM being the diagnostic manual for clinicians. Schizophrenic, depressive, clinical depression, la la la.

Elmo Painter

Yeah. There's a lot of different ways of working with patterns, emotional patterns, patterns of trauma, triggers, dissociation, things like that. So I start with having the person name the sensations in their body. And sometimes I say, what's going on in your body? And they're like, well, this thing happened today. And I'm like, Okay, what happened in your body? Sometimes you have to really broken record that until they're like, Oh, my stomach — it feels like there's a lot of tension In my stomach, and I have like kind of butterflies in my chest, or bees, or it feels like there's a tightrope going in the front of my chest. Visuals are really great. So we do this thing called SIBAM — sensation, image, behavior, affect, meaning. Sensation being, what does it feel like? Image, what does it look like? Does it have a color? Is there a kind of an image or texture there? It looks like there are elves kind of skiing on a slope in my stomach! You know, things like that. Nothing is too weird. I've heard so many things, and I've loved every single one of them. And then behavior, what does your body want to do? What does your body want to do? My body wants to stab— like, this person who hurt me, I just want to stab them, and just smash their head with a hammer. And I'm like, Great, let's do that — with our imagination, and with our body. So helping them really move through that motion of defense. And getting that defense online, and getting that anger online, and getting that defensive response to release the energy that's pent up. Because what our nervous system does after a threatening situation is that it has that conversation that we have whenever we walk away from something and we're like, "Oh, I should have said that!" Damn, I should have said that. That's what our body does. That's what trauma is. Our body is like "I wanted to do this, I really wanted to punch, I really wanted to like, push this person and get away, I really wanted to run." So a lot of times, tightness in the hips is something that you wanted to run from, or something that you wanted to kick. There are patterns of tension in the body that kind of represent what the body wanted to do, that it keeps trying to do. And with somatic experiencing, we get to help the person slow down and move through those motions, and really discharge that, and really help the nervous system feel as if it got to do what it wanted to do in that moment.

Karen Yates

Yeah, lovely. You know, I'm thinking, to talk briefly about the polyvagal theory, which is the main nerve that runs from the brainstem, down through our spine that affects you know, the ability — and it's called polyvagal because it has these branches. One attaches to the throat, the ability to communicate and say things; another to the breath, you know, so a lot of times you'll have very tight breathing, right? Upper chest breathing, right. And then to the intestinal area. Sometimes IBS will present itself. But all of this is like, you know, when trauma occurs, the nervous system becomes incredibly dysregulated. And so somatic experiencing is bringing it back by these methods you're talking about, bringing the nervous system back to a regulated place.

Elmo Painter

Right.

Karen Yates

So you're really jazzed about Somatic Experiencing. And what else?

Elmo Painter

I do a lot of visualizations with people. And whether or not they know it, energy work, and spiritual work. Something else I really love to do is ancestral trauma healing.

Karen Yates

So talk about that.

Elmo Painter

Yeah. Generational or ancestral healing is, we rewind the clock a bit, to parents or grandparents, and visualize kind of what kind of environment they grew up in. Maybe there was a situation where they were hurt, or maybe there's a situation that they couldn't escape from. And we essentially give them the resources that they needed, which then has a trickle-down effect to our nervous system today. It gets pretty woo. And I am super woo, so I'm way into it.

Karen Yates

Um, you're talking to another super woo. I mean, it's interesting—

Elmo Painter

Oh, yeah, I know!

Karen Yates

[Laughs] "Oh I know!" Love that. I mean, how I experience it when I'm doing energy work is, I'm accessing — a lot of times, the physical pattern enters my body of the caved chest, right? So, caved chest is protective. When we cave in, when we have a concave physical patterning, we're protecting our emotions, our heart. I'll experience the ancestral patterning in my body, and what physically is happening, and what has gotten passed on to the client,. And then changing that, ancestrally, like you just said, it changes the now.

Elmo Painter

Yeah.

Karen Yates

Because, well, everything is happening simultaneously... [laughs] I'll just put that out there... and leave it! [laughing]

Elmo Painter

[laughing] We don't have time to explain that one!

Karen Yates

Time is a construct. MOVING ON! Yeah, so ancestral work, of course. And I think there is a lot of research being done on the genetic alterations that happen generationally, with trauma, that trauma does get passed down in the DNA.

Elmo Painter

Yeah, they can read it.

Karen Yates

So not quite as woo as as we might think. Right? So, working ancestrally, energetically. And what brings you the most joy these days in your practice?

Elmo Painter

You mentioned the sense of the caved-in chest. And I get a lot of folks who have kind of, there's a block, or a wall or something, you know, that's somewhere around here. And I'm like, okay, maybe can we sit with that? And a lot of times, people are like, I don't want this to be here. I don't want it to be here. And so I say, okay, maybe let's just kind of sit with it. Maybe we allow that to be there. And I say, what is that saying to you? And they're saying, well, it's saying no, don't come in here. And I'm like, Okay, let's respect that, let's honor that. There's a "no" in your body. And we're gonna honor

that. And we're just gonna kind of sit outside of it. And feeling into where would be a good place for us to sit that feels safe, to that part of you that's saying no. And then a few minutes later, that wall loosens up a little bit, or maybe it doesn't. And the person gets to have this whole different relationship with these vulnerable parts. People learn to stop fighting themselves. A lot of our anxiety, a lot of our insecurities, a lot of our shame, they're there because we're fighting ourselves. And when we can just get curious, instead of resisting what's going on in our bodies, it's life-changing.

Karen Yates

Oh, yeah. I think for me — I don't think; I know — one of the greatest shifts in my life was understanding the allowance. The allowance leads to freedom. Because for the first, I don't know, four decades of my life, I was fighting. I was trying to override these aspects of myself by brute force, and that's where the overwork comes from. That's the not good enough, I need to strive — the striving, the forcing, the forcing of energy. I'm exhausted, but I'm just gonna keep going.

Elmo Painter

Yeah.

Karen Yates

That's a lack of allowance, for what is.

Elmo Painter

Yeah, then you get that, "Why can't I just get over this?"

Karen Yates

Right.

Elmo Painter

You can't get over that because you haven't let yourself really feel it.

Karen Yates

Yeah. And just be with it, without any effort to just sit. I think, I mean, I know this for myself, and I've seen other people, that I think people think this allowance piece is going to be like, days, weeks, months, years, that we just need to sit like an inert rock. But actually, it's a really tiny moment. You know what I mean?

Elmo Painter

Yeah. Yeah.

Karen Yates

It's very short. It's a very short moment.

Elmo Painter

Yeah. And then also finding the balance between feeling it and coming out of it, instead of getting caught in the vortex of it. Because that's another thing — because I have a lot of folks who are really perfectionists and over workers like you and me, and are like, I have to get this, I have to move through this! I got to feel this and really sit with it, and just, raaa! And I'm like, Okay, sit with it for 10 minutes a day. Don't get caught up in it. Sit with it for 10 minutes, really feel it, and then do something that makes you happy. Something that makes you laugh, make some art, dance, go outside, have sex, play with your pet, you know, do something else. Go for a walk. The work doesn't have to be all encompassing. The work can be like, okay, I can devote this amount of time. And I do this with my — I'm also a certified grief counselor. So with my grief clients, you know, how do you go about life when you're grieving? You have to just kind of pull it together and do what you need to do. So I say like, give yourself permission to grieve a half hour to an hour, and then do the rest of life for the rest of the day. But like, really allow that, really allow yourself to sit with it. And this is later on. This is not like, the first few weeks to a month of grieving, when it is just hitting you super hard. Because it's just gonna hit super hard. So yeah, having that space to allow that to be felt, and then coming out of it. And that's another aspect of Somatic Experiencing, called pendulation, where we go into something uncomfortable, and then we come out to something that's yummy and pleasant. We start with the pleasant, so that it's felt in the body, and then we go a little bit into kind of a "ugh" feeling. And then we come back out to the pleasant. And we kind of go back and forth, to learn how to do that, to learn how to come out of the vortex.

Karen Yates

Mmhmm. Yeah. Breaking the loops, the loops of traumatized thinking. It takes time, but it is completely possible. I just feel like I need to say that for folks. Because it's been possible for me. And I just need to express that, that sometimes....There were certain aspects of myself, I thought, well, this is just a given. This is who I am. This is baked in. And then one day I realized, oh, whoa! this is not baked in. This is actually not me. And that was amazing. This is not me. I'm better than this. I am more powerful than this. This is just an aspect that I'm tripping over, and it's not part of my true identity.

Elmo Painter

Right. You know your blue sky. Our true self is the blue sky. There are clouds, there are storms. There are other things that come and go that cover the blue sky momentarily. But behind those clouds, behind those storms, is still the blue sky. It never goes away.

Karen Yates

I love that. Thank you so much, Elmo. It was a real pleasure to chat with you today.

Elmo Painter

Thank you so much for having me. This was so lovely!

Karen Yates

For more information on Elmo pPainter and how to contact her, and links to other episodes that she's been on, as well as information on Cleo DuBois School of the SM Arts, go to the show notes. If you're interested in working with me, in person or remotely, using Biofield Tuning, an energy medicine that uses sound waves to repattern distortions in the human biomagnetic field, or to learn about my weekly group Biofield Tuning sessions on Zoom, go to Karen-Yates.com. The link to my site is in the show notes as well. Well, that's it for this week's episode. Have a very pleasurable week.

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