

**A Bit About Me:**

I come from a wonderful home filled with love and support; the more of the world I see, the more I realize how rare and special that is. Five years ago I was sexually assaulted by a group of men while I was volunteering in a rural community in Latin America. My boyfriend at the time was with me and was severely beaten in the attack as well. This as you can imagine, was world shattering. Having been lucky enough through my first 26 years of life to not experience any abnormal mental condition, PTSD was a new and terrifying place to be.

Upon returning to the US I decided to take every precautionary measure I could to ensure that I was going to fully recover. I exercised every day and cleaned up my diet; I ended up losing 45 lbs to help alleviate the onset of serious body image issues that I would inevitably be vulnerable to. I took up art and journaling to allow a diverse range of outlets for the extreme emotions I was feeling. I attended a somatic experiencing conference and researched CBT, EFT and PTSD in an attempt to understand what I was going through and how I was going to recover. I also started talk psychotherapy as soon as I arrived back home.

My therapist was a critical part of my early healing process and helped me sort through my reactions. He was also extremely helpful at translating my behavior and reactions to my parents, since they had no previous experience with dealing with this kind of trauma and truly needed a guide. I had weekly sessions in person for about 9 months, and then continued with phone sessions for about 6 months when I moved across the country for a job. This therapy helped me, over about a year and a half, get to a point where I could function independently and cope with my triggers. Up until about 5 years after the incident, I was still being triggered by unknown men (especially in groups, and especially those of Hispanic decent) triggering my fear response; by sexist or chauvinistic jokes triggering my anger response; and haven't had more than 3 dates with new suiters because of an underlying distrust of men.

I found Human Givens through an online search while doing research on the most effective types of psychotherapy to treat PTSD for a project I was working on. I had never heard of Human Givens before, so I decided to investigate further. The more I read, the more intrigued I became. I have no background in psychology or psychotherapy, but I could understand everything they said - and it made sense. I ended up taking four of their online courses and still wanted to learn more. When I learned that Sue Saunders from Human Givens was to give a workshop at the LPCANC conference in North Carolina, I knew I had to attend.

During the PTSD portion of the workshop, Sue did a demonstration of the rewind technique. I was lucky enough to be chosen as the demonstration subject. I want to share my experience of the rewind and subsequent effects experienced thereafter.

**The Rewind:**

We established that my calm, relaxing safe place would be a warm beach filled with sunshine and soft rolling waves. As Sue slowly counted to 20 with my exhales, I felt myself slip into a deeply relaxed state where I was fully conscious of everything happening around me. Once I was fully relaxed, I felt my eyes begin to quickly move back and forth on their own - which I assumed was REM.

Sue's soothing voice then led me to a television set on the beach with a DVD player holding a DVD of my trauma experience. As soon as she mentioned the contents of the DVD I was immediately transported back to it - I was there - and I instantly started crying and feeling the

same life threatening distress of the trauma. I had never accessed it so quickly before. Usually it would take quite a while for me to get worked up enough to fully access those emotions. It seemed as if I was below all the layers I had built up to protect myself from what was clearly still a very real and vivid terror connected to the memory.

She brought me back to my relaxing beach to recover from the shock of feeling my naked emotions hit me so quickly. A few deep breaths later I was ready to try again. I approached with no problems this time since I was more prepared, and Sue took me through the rewind process. I saw myself watching the TV with the trauma playing forwards and backwards several times, but not actually seeing the screen. I then watched it play forwards on the screen and I went backwards through it; it was much more work than I thought it would be to imagine the sequence in reverse.

As the memory was playing faster and faster, all I saw was a blur with particular moments as snapshots within it. I felt the distress on my face lessen and my breath normalize. After seeing it fly by countless times forwards and backwards, from various angles and points of view, I began to disconnect from it. My emotions were neutral and I saw the trauma as a matter of fact, and nothing else. After I had the pleasure of destroying the DVD in any way I wanted, Sue took me through scenarios that had triggered me in the past, describing my calm and confident reactions to them in the future.

Sue then took the opportunity to remind me of positive aspects of my personality, my life accomplishments, and reinforce the idea that I have the abilities to realize my dreams.

In short, it felt like she helped me remove the negative feelings and replace them with positive life affirming feelings. After she brought me back to the room, I felt relaxed, happy and emotionally exhausted.

### **The First Night:**

Seeing that I was quite exhausted from the rewind, I thought I was going to sleep through the night, but after 4 hrs of sleep I woke up. I thought about the trauma memory that had replayed forward and backwards countless times the day before, but it felt different than it had previously. Every time I remembered that incident for the past 5 years, I felt transported back to the moment. I felt as if I was there again, and my body had reacted accordingly. This time was different. This time I thought of it as an unfortunate event in my life that had passed long ago, then went peacefully back to sleep.

When I woke up the next morning, the first thing I noticed was that my jaw wasn't tight. Every night for the past 5 years (and not before the incident) I had clenched my teeth through the night, waking with tension and aches in my jaw. I would need to start my day with jaw stretches. I didn't need to do jaw stretches that morning.

### **The First Day:**

I felt refreshed the next day, but still a bit tired. I felt lighter and calmer than usual, and people noticed. I received several comments from people I spent the previous day with, that I looked younger.

### **The Second Night:**

I slept like a baby for 9 hrs straight and woke up quite refreshed and happy, it reminded me of the feeling I get when I wake up and realize it's my birthday - happy and a bit giddy!

### **The Second Day:**

I felt noticeably more focused and calm; I think my shoulders lowered an inch or two from my ears. I felt a sense of peace that I hadn't felt for 5 years, and that realization made me very happy, which in turn made me feel more peace and calm. This allowed me to experience the present moment to a greater extent because my mind was not being consumed by fear and anger.

### **The Third Night:**

Right before I went to bed on night three, I had my first experience of a "defunked" trigger. I had a conversation that would have triggered a fight or flight reaction, and has done so many times in the past, that I didn't react to emotionally. I rationally and gracefully exited from the conversation and went to bed feeling very content and proud of myself.

### **The Third Day:**

Something amazing happened on the morning of the 3rd day. I woke up, I had a look at the mirror as I do every morning, but this time was different. For the first time, maybe ever, I looked at myself and did not have one negative thought about myself or my appearance! All the imperfections that up until three days ago made me imagine myself without them, usually spurred a negative inner dialogue. I think this was the first time I was able to see myself for who I am and what I stand for. The words "I am beautiful" are so difficult to actually feel, especially for survivors of rape, but I actually felt them that morning. I had never experienced such self acceptance. It is truly a wonderful feeling.

### **Two Weeks and Beyond:**

It has now been about 2 weeks since my rewind, and I still feel great - confident, strong and happy. I have had many experiences of noticing "defunked" triggers, and I look forward to many more non-reactions.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Sue Saunders for sharing her expertise with us at the LPCANC conference earlier this month, and for helping me find peace. I also want to thank everyone at Human Givens who has worked to develop this ground breaking technique, and everyone who works to expand access to it for those who still struggle.

## **4 Months Later**

It is now more than 4 months after my initial rewind (for a gang rape trauma I experienced 5 years ago) with Sue Saunders of the Human Givens Institute, and I feel great. This piece is a brief update on changes I have seen in myself over the last 4 months that exhibit the lasting effects of that rewind.

**Male Coworkers** - I am able to appreciate my male coworkers more without feeling threatened or enraged by their jokes or offhanded comments. The people I encounter most in any typical day are male construction workers, given that I am in the construction management field. Prior to my rewind, this posed a bit of a problem for me. I was in an almost constant state of hyper vigilance and alarm, making it difficult for me to be as productive as I could be. This led to longer hours at work and sleep deprivation to complete my tasks. I now get in at a normal 8 am and generally leave around 5 pm, which would have been very difficult for me before.

**Sleep** - Now that I am giving myself the time to actually get enough sleep, I do. My sleep is generally of good quality. I wake up rested and refreshed most of the time. Like everybody else I have the occasional stressful night worrying about a deadline at work, but after that I go right back to my normal sleep pattern. As I mentioned in the first article, after the rape I started clenching my jaw in my sleep and would wake up every morning with it being very tight. Immediately after my rewind, that stopped. I only notice it coming back on those aforementioned stressful nights, but even then it is a fraction of what it was. I don't remember the last time I had a nightmare, while they were quite frequent for the 4.5 years prior to the rewind.

**Walking Through Harlem** - I am now able to walk through parts of the city that I was unable to before. Being in certain parts of the city was highly triggering for me prior to the rewind. I would be constantly looking over my shoulder and just race to my destination in a state of fear, or avoid the areas completely. After the rewind, parts of the city have been opened up to me that I would have never visited before. I remember walking from the train in Harlem to my friend's apartment, maybe 8 blocks away from the stop, both before and after the rewind. The experiences were vastly different. Prior, as previously mentioned, I was in a state of hyper vigilance and just raced to her apartment. Post rewind, I remember strolling and actually seeing the neighborhood. I noticed little stores and restaurants that I may want to return to, making mental notes of their locations. I even exchanged a smile with a passerby, making me feel even more comfortable! I was able to actually experience the vibrance of this neighborhood that I was unable to before.

**Compliments** - Any female who has ever lived in New York knows of the street 'compliments' that are howled at you from all directions. They are sometimes offensive and crude, but sometimes are sweet. No matter the kind, I was not able to tolerate any of them prior to the rewind. They were a huge trigger for me, given my experience with rape, and truly had the power to ruin a perfectly good mood. I could go from happy-go-lucky to furious and terrified in the blink of an eye. Since my rewind, I don't notice them as much. I am able to filter them out for the most part and actually even appreciate the sweet ones every time and again. Those can even BRIGHTEN my day! That was unheard of for me before.

**Forgotten Anniversary** - For the past 4 years I have dreaded the anniversary of my attack. The stress and anxiety would start months before and worsened leading up to it. I was afraid of how I would feel, what memories it would drag up, worrying that all the great progress I made

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over the year would be lost. I even tried to relabel it one year by deeming it my 'day of power' when I would celebrate how far I had progressed. That was a bit better, but it was still a landmark on my mental calendar. This year was different. A short 3 months after my rewind, I saw a date written down and thought... hmm that date looks important for some reason - as I do if I think I forgot a friend's birthday. Then it hit me! It was 3 days before the anniversary which I had consistently dreaded for the past 4 years! I hadn't even remembered it this year! This was probably the most empowering milestone yet. It can no longer have any power over me if I don't even remember it. Of course it is an experience I will unfortunately never forget, but it no longer takes up valuable mental bandwidth on an every day basis. It feels like any other unpleasant memory and I no longer feel as if it could dictate my destiny.