



## A Foot in a Sock in a Shoe (part two)

Simon, Jennifer and Lee

by Lee Saunders

*Simon, Jennifer and Lee : a foot in a sock in a shoe* was first presented at the Body-Mind Centering® Association Conference at the Omega Institute in Rhinebeck, New York, April 29, 2002 and first published in the 2002 Summer/Fall Body Mind Centering Association Journal 'Currents'. In 2002 it won the Body Mind Centering® Association International Writing Award and was the sole nominee for the Somerville International Award for writing on the Somatic Methods. Part One was published in *Self & Society* Volume 31 No 5.

**Lee Saunders** works nationally and internationally as a choreographer/dancer, composer/singer, teacher and therapist. She has a BFA from the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, is a Teacher/Practitioner of Body Mind Centering®, and IMTA Somatic Movement Therapist and Educator.

A native of New Brunswick, Canada, Lee is known for her dedicated and scientific approach, a synthesis of discerning studies and experience in the visual, performing, martial, healing, and educational arts. She has a private practice for the facilitation of wellness through voice, movement and touch. Her clients range in age from newborns to seniors, at all levels of movement and vocal ability, including the terminally ill.

Lee and her family are developing a healing and learning center on their family farm where individuals, families and practitioners may come to learn about informed touch and informed perceptual interaction. In 2000 she received the Prix Éloizes - 'Artist of the year in Dance' for her choreography *Ka'Ligne*. In 2002 Lee's case study *Simon, Jennifer and Lee : a foot in a sock in a shoe* was nominated by the Body-Mind Centering® Association for the Somerville International Award for writing on the Somatic Methods. 800 Route 885, Intervale, NB Canada E4Z 4Y7

Tel : 506.756.9008 Fax : 506.756.2452 E-mail: [lsa@nb.sympatico.ca](mailto:lsa@nb.sympatico.ca)

### Head Hitting

Today Simon is frustrated and angry. He is squatting and hitting his head. Hard, very hard. Bang bang bang with his closed fist on the right side of his head.

How can we help him, without restraining his arm? I look for an opening and see the triangular space that is formed by his arm, shoulder and neck, when his hand hits his head. I extend my arm into the triangle and starting at his shoulder, I glide it perpendicularly along his arm directing his hand down to the earth.

He returns to hitting his head and I redirect his hand to the earth again saying 'You know Simon it's not your fault. Go ahead and be angry but don't hit yourself, it's not your fault. Hit the earth Simon, not yourself. Hit the earth, feel the earth and push.'

As Simon's hand makes contact with the earth I lightly push it on the ground to help him understand what it is I am telling him to do. The focus of my touch is through the bones.

We repeat the process several times and then Simon begins to push on his own. The resulting action travels up his arms, through his shoulders, down his spine into his center. He is being physically moved to his center, his navel and core, by the push from his hands and arms on the earth. Now, rather than a helpless, self-defeating, imploding hitting, there is an external direction and action for his frustration. His attention begins to shift to the outside world and his frustration turns into curiosity and participation. His fingers start touching the grass and rocks under his hands. The focus in his eyes changes and he is more present, thinking and looking at what is around him. He hears the sound of the tractor far off in the field. He gets up and walks away to play in the back yard.

At our next session Jennifer says, 'Last night Simon got angry and I saw him walking around the house searching for a way to hit the floor. He was trying to do what you had helped him do, but he could not do it on his own. I tried to show him but I was not sure how to do it either.'

So in our reviews, Jennifer and I practiced this move, over and over again.

### **Rebirthing**

We are on the lawn in front of the house today and Simon is angry. He is lying on his back, eyes closed, kicking, screaming, and banging his head on the ground, with his arms bent and flailing by his sides.

'Jennifer, we need to bring Simon back into his body and we must work quickly. I'd like you to squat about

one foot away from the top of Simon's head facing him. Then I would like you to place your hand on his head, like this.'

I place my head on the birthing crown of her head and apply a slight pressure that travels down through her spine to her navel. I feel the subtle response of her spine pushing back.

'Can you feel how your spine responded to the compression and pushed back?' I ask.

'Yes,' she says.

'That's great. Would you like to try?'

Jennifer positions herself and places her hand on Simon's head. He is still screaming and flailing. With my hand over hers, we take a few seconds to adjust her touch, then feel the response of Simon's spine pushing back. She says she is ready.

'Great, now I'd like you to speak to Simon, reassure him and call his name. You are his mother, you are at his birthing crown and we are going to try and help him find a way out of his frustration and bring him back to us.'

Facing Jennifer, I stand above Simon so that he is lying between my legs. His body is arched like a bridge and his navel is the keystone of the arch. Jennifer applies a slight pressure at Simon's head. I place one hand on his heart and the other on his navel. He feels like sprung steel. In response to our touch his body begins to flex towards his navel, like the petals of a flower closing for the night, or a foetus curving towards its umbilical cord.

At the moment his head, spine, and legs touch the ground I take my hand

off his navel, place it on the side of his right hip and roll him over to the left. Now he is lying on his stomach, elbows bent, hands flat on the ground and silent. He seems surprised and a bit confused.

The silence ends, Simon's voice is less angry but the frustration is still there. He tries to arch his back like before but can't because he is on his stomach. So he looks for a way out. My hand is on the base of his skull and my other on his tail. By lightly pressing and directing my hands away from each other, I offer him a lengthening of his spine and he takes it.

As Simon reaches from his head he meets Jennifer's compression and begins to push. He wants to travel and wriggles on his stomach searching for mobility. We remind him of his hands, arms, legs and feet by lightly pressing them into the ground. He follows our lead, makes a connection with the earth and begins to crawl.

He's not aggravated any more. He is traveling and his voice is subdued. We are moving as a unit. Jennifer's hands are on his head, gently reassuring him through her touch and the encouragement of her words. My hands are at the base of his skull and tail. Like a turtle, he extends his head to see the world and rises through his spine. His arms and legs come under his body to provide support and he is creeping, looking at where is his going - the swing!

We move as a unit. Jennifer maintains constant light pressure at Simon's birthing crown that he pushes against, while I move my

hands to touch him at his heart, navel, base of head and tail. His spine lengthens, he reaches further with his head and rises higher. His hands come off the ground, his feet come under his hips and he rises to a walk, then peacefully goes to the swing, leaving our hands behind.

Jennifer says, 'That was amazing! He went from a defenseless baby on his back to a baby still agitated but on his front, wriggling like a snake, then he crawled and crept. Simon has never crawled or crept before.'

Several times over the summer Simon went through this developmental movement sequence and every time he did, he evolved to walking with an inner calm, alert level of participation, and ability to separate from us with a secure and inquisitive mind. We never used forceful touch or confrontation. We merely redirected his movement by offering another choice. He took the choice every time.

### **Taking a Walk**

It is a clear warm day and we are looking for a change. We see the horses in the field and decide to go see them. Hand in hand, with Simon in the middle, he pulls us towards the arched foot bridge that connects the yard to the fields.

As we reach the high point of the arch on the bridge we are surrounded by space, above, under and around. The view is clear and descends before us. Simon begins to collapse to his foetal squat. I place one hand on his navel and the other on his sacrum to help him feel the secure structure of his

bones. Jennifer speaks to him and reassures him that everything is okay. His descent stops and he straightens his spine.

'Can you see the horses Simon?' I ask. His eyes focus in the direction of the horses. We can see them from here, six of them grazing between a pair of gnarled hundred year old apple trees on the side of a small hill. 'Would you like to go see the horses?' we ask. Simon takes the lead and we move on.

Stepping off the bridge we enter the pasture and walk towards them. We are in the horses' space. The air is dense and still. They lift their heads, turn, and come towards us. We stop. Symphony, the youngest, is six months old and still mouthing. She comes closer to us than the others, looking for something to nibble. Jennifer and I pat her and Simon lets go of our hands to mirror our movement.

Symphony's back is level with his head. She is curious and relaxed, sniffing us then nibbling the grass. Simon is making small quiet sounds of contentment as he rubs her side, then with a burst of enthusiasm he wraps one arm under her belly, the other over her back and gives her a full frontal hug, humming with delight!

Symphony's head arches high with an alert startled look in her eye and snorts. The older horses move in with concern, their heads high and nostrils flared. We are encircled by their bodies. I know we are safe. Simon moves like the horses, raises his head and releases his arms. His eyes are wide, assessing the situation, and he is making quiet sounds of concern

from the upper back of his throat. He is standing free, with Jennifer and I as his protectors.

'Easy now,' I say, 'Easy'. Then I wave my hands, shoo the horses away and they scatter like a swarm of giant flies. The tension breaks and we three stand alone, watching them as they run into the distance shrinking before our eyes.

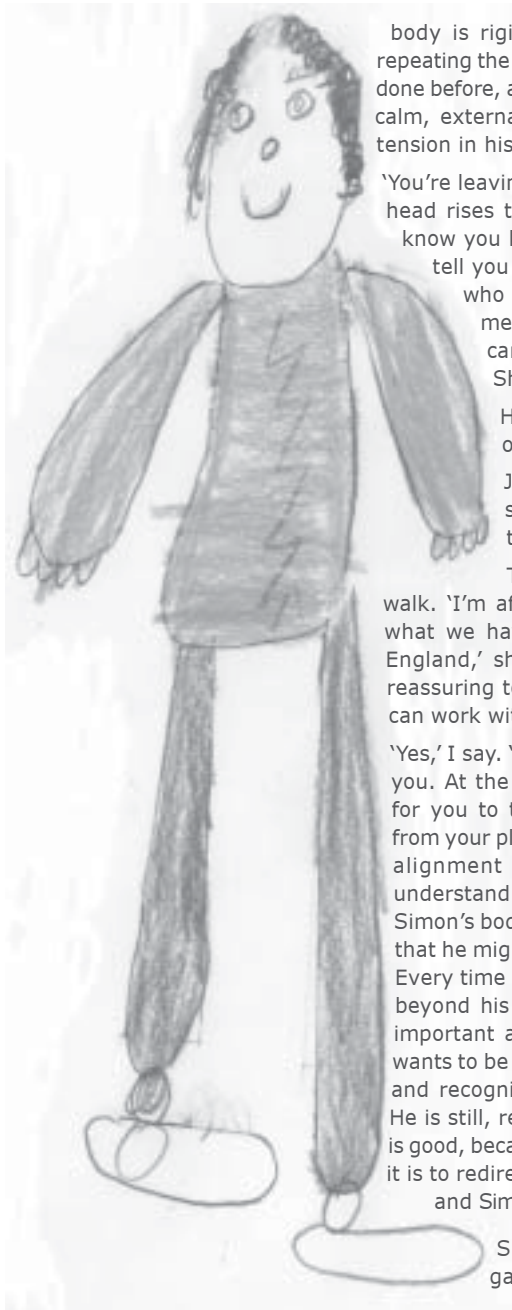
'Simon, you were great, you handled that situation very well. You gave Symphony a great big hug. She was surprised. She has never had a big hug like that before. Especially from someone the same size as her. You were strong and tall.' Simon's head is tilted to listen, with his body relaxed. 'She was surprised, you were surprised, we were all surprised! Even the other horses were surprised. Are you okay? You look okay.' Jennifer nods her head in affirmation.

I ask, 'Shall we go back to the house?' Simon takes our hands and pulls us to return. As we cross the bridge he does not collapse. It is a lovely day for a walk.

### **The Last Day**

It is the day before Jennifer and Simon leave for England and it is our last session. When they arrive, the car doors fly open, and Simon comes roaring out of the car. Jennifer follows saying 'What a time, he has been screaming and fighting all night long!'

Simon lies on the ground, he is hitting his head, moaning, crying and writhing in isolation. His eyes are closed, his hearing is shut off and his



body is rigid and tense. We work with him, repeating the developmental facilitations we have done before, and he comes out of his turmoil more calm, externally focused, and present. But the tension in his body and voice are still there.

'You're leaving tomorrow aren't you?', I say. His head rises to focus his ears and he listens. 'I know you know you are leaving, so I want to tell you that I have a colleague in England who has studied at the same place as me and if you want, you and your mom can continue work like this with her. She is a very nice person.'

His restless movement and sounds of irritation stop.

Jennifer and I look at each other with surprise, relief and satisfaction. 'Well that's clear,' she says.

Then Simon gets up and goes for a walk. 'I'm afraid I won't be able to reproduce what we have done here when we return to England,' she says. 'So like Simon, I find it reassuring to know there is someone there we can work with.'

'Yes,' I say. 'I can see it's reassuring for both of you. At the same time, I think it is important for you to trust what you know and to work from your place of strength. You understand the alignment of the body very well and you understand how a touch in a strategic place on Simon's body can offer him a movement choice that he might not be able to access on his own. Every time we offered Simon a choice to move beyond his pattern he took it. This is a very important and wonderful thing. Obviously he wants to be helped, is very willing to be helped, and recognizes when someone can help him. He is still, relatively speaking, young. And this is good, because the younger the tree, the easier it is to redirect the growth of the branches. You and Simon have a lot of personal resources.'

Simon is on the other side of the garden, headed towards the hedge

row. This is the farthest away he has ever been from us. We can see by his gait that he is engaged in what he is doing. And then he looks at us and makes a loud and beautiful call. Matching his call, I answer him back and wave, letting him know that we are here with him listening and watching, even though we are far away. He turns and continues to explore.

Jennifer says, 'Like so many parents I have searched for and exposed Simon to many forms of therapy' and have always scrutinized for the tiniest measures of visible improvement. Working together in this way with you I feel we finally found our oasis. Now I understand how Simon's every movement is a valuable source of information. I want to move back to Canada with Simon and Sarah so that we can live in the country, be with my family and work with you. It would be much better for us than living in London but before I can move I must have the permission of their fathers.'

Jennifer and I discuss this further and agree that it will be a long process, but well worth it. She calls Simon in and he returns of his own free will.

Jennifer's mom arrives to take them home and is amazed at the change in Simon's emotions. Simon gets in the back seat by himself and quietly waits for Jennifer and his grandmother. He is peaceful and still.

We say goodbye, they drive away, and I wonder when I will see them again. I feel sad to lose my direct input into their lives and find comfort in knowing they will contact my colleague in

England. Knowing that client/practitioner relationships are highly particular, I hope it works well for them.

Later that summer I see Simon's grandfather and he tells me, 'You know this summer when Jennifer and the children were here, we went down to the kitchen one morning and Simon was quietly sitting on top of the kitchen table watching the birds outside. He had never done that before. After that, Simon would often go downstairs in the morning by himself and get his breakfast. This level of independence was completely new.'

'Ah yes' I thought. 'The fruits of our efforts are good.'

### **Summer 97**

It is August 97 and Jennifer, Simon and Clara have come from London to visit their family. I am leaving town on business so we only have two days to meet. It has been two years since we last saw each other and we are excited to be working together again.

The car drives into the yard and Simon gets out as quick as a wink. He is very different from the first time we met, taller, older and obviously more independent. There is no question that he remembers the place, and me. He taps his head, looks at me with his sideways glance and makes a small sound in my direction as he goes to the swing. We follow.

He has grown so much, the swing doesn't fit! Making aggravated sounds he expresses his frustration. I show him the grown-up's swing. Simon sits on the seat, Jennifer and I take our

places, and we resume where we left off two years before. Only this time there is a big difference. Jennifer and I don't have to push because Simon pumps the swing on his own!

'Wow Simon look at you! You're so strong and straight in your seat! And look how high you can swing! This is such an improvement! You could swing well before, but look at you now. You are doing it all on your own! You and your mom have done such a great job! I am very proud of you both.'

We all smile broadly, taking pleasure in our accomplishments. The three of us work together like a foot in a sock in a shoe.

How did it go with my colleague in London?' I ask.

'We liked her and the sessions went well, but Simon was disappointed. He was expecting the same experience he had here. You know, the trees and horses and swing. I never thought to prepare him about the difference of location. And then there was the empathy between you and Simon. He didn't have the same connection with her. I have never seen him crawl into someone's lap like he did that first day with you. I thought it was a good thing that Simon could recognize the difference and express his disappointment and preference. I know I certainly have preferences when it comes to working with a therapist.

And there was the reality of the long trip across London to get there. It wasn't the short drive from Mom and Dad's house to yours, and I was ill.

So Simon and I decided to put our efforts into working on our own and doing what we did with you rather than adjusting to someone new and a different style of work. In the end I think it was a good thing to do, it gave me more confidence to integrate into our daily lives the informed touch' and informed perceptual interaction' that you had shown us.'

'Yes, I agree it is normal to prefer one way of working to another. I don't hear criticism in your decision; I hear observation, communication between you and Simon, and choice. And I hear your need to assimilate and integrate the work we did into your family and life style, before you took on anything new. Judging by how well Simon can swing, I would say you both did very well in realizing your goal.'

Simon makes pleasing sounds. It is clear that he understands. Just like before, he takes part in our conversation. As he rides the swing we continue the same alignment and vocal games that we have done before. Occasionally Jennifer tries to fill me in on where she is now in her life, but we are cut short. Each time Simon feels my attention wander he shows his aggravation through the disruption of his balance, aggravated sounds, and turning to look at me. Simon is proud of his accomplishments, he wants my acknowledgement, and he wants his time with me. Anything less is unacceptable. Happy to oblige him, Jennifer and I agree to talk later.

At our meeting the next day she tells me, 'After yesterday's session, Simon called me Mom again. He hasn't said mom mom mom in a long time. In

fact, he stopped calling me mom a few months after we stopped the sessions with you. So there's got to be a connection.

Once you started to work with Simon in the summer of '95, we never looked back. To this day he still searches for the stimulation and perception stretching that you did with him on the swing, and he actively and willingly engages me in the process. This was and still is a measurable, significant milestone for Simon and me.'

### Simon's Place

It is May 2001, and I am sitting in Jennifer's kitchen. It is a three hour drive from my home to hers. She and the children have just moved to Canada and are living in the village where her parents grew up and now live. With the help of her extended family they are all adjusting well to the quiet rural life. After the stresses and pollution of London, the move is a very good thing. Even though we have kept contact by phone, last night was the first time we saw each other since 1997.

Jennifer and I have just made a presentation on the work we did with Simon at the Provincial Learning Disabilities Association's annual conference. It was an interesting group of occupational therapists, physiotherapists, parents, foster-parents, care-takers and special ed. teachers. Our presentation went very well and we are de-briefing.

Leaning against the wall is a beautiful poster that Jennifer has made for the presentation. She calls it *Simon's Place*. It is a collage made from photos of Simon. In them he is laughing as he swings on a swing. The underside of his sneaker is visible and reads 'natural world'.

Simon passes the kitchen door and Jennifer calls him in. 'Simon, do you remember Lee? Come say hello.'

He is 12 years old now, a young man. Standing around 5'4", he has the air of a teenager with things on his mind. His hair is rumpled from an afternoon nap. I smile and wave my hand, 'Hi Simon! It's good to see you.'

He enters the kitchen, looks at me, lightly taps his head, waves his hand, makes his sound of greeting and then leaves, moving on to his original destination. His entire greeting is one continuous flow of movement.

'He remembers,' Jennifer says.

'Yes, he does.'

### Further Reading

Mills, Margaret and Cohen, Bonnie Bainbridge. *Developmental Movement Therapy*. Copyright, Mills and Cohen, School for Body Mind Centering@: 1979

Cohen, Bonnie Bainbridge. *Mechanics of Vocal Expression*. School for Body Mind Centering@, Amherst, Ma: 1985

Cohen, Bonnie Bainbridge. *Sensing, Feeling and Action*. Contact Editions, Northampton, MA: 1993.

Ueshiba, Moeishi. *The Art of Peace*. Translated by John Stevens, Shambhala Press, Boston and London: 1992

