

# Ruby's Heart

## The Power of 7 +/- 2 Chunks and Trance

by *Deb Stevenson*

One of the simplest and most powerful concepts in NLP is that of the 7 +/- 2 chunks of information that can be held in consciousness at any given moment. It amazes me when I think that all you have to do is change what the 7 +/- 2 chunks are, and in so doing you can enhance or diminish your personal power. That continuum of power can range from the nearly super-human to the incapacitated. This concept, combined with my equal fascination for the "hidden resource" within any given problem, compels me to share the story of my friend and co-worker Ruby, a story so poignant and awe-inspiring that I immediately knew I wanted to put it to paper. It's a story about finding super-human strength in the face of fear, and about the ability of friendship to heal not only yourself, but others as well with the power of your own stories. It's also a personal story about tolerance and being open to the light within another person. So, with her permission...here's "Ruby's Heart"...

I've known Ruby for about ten years and, until recently, never really had the chance to find out much about her personal life or history. We work in the education department

on the island of Yap in Micronesia and our discussions have been limited to work-related issues and passing greetings. About a month ago, we were both asked to attend a professional development seminar and counselor focus group for the Pacific Island Region. For the first time we'd not only be working side-by-side, but we'd be roommates as well, at least for nearly a fortnight.

It didn't take me long to realize that this fortnight would be a challenge. The more I talked with her before our trip, the more I realized that fear seemed to be meta to almost everything she does. Her work is very specialized and when she's asked to challenge herself or go outside the realm of her known range, she either refuses to do the work with a variety of "I can't's" or just flat out states that she can't manage it. In short, her lack of confidence in her abilities has been a major hindrance to her professional growth, to say the least (I've heard many a raised voice behind the boss's door).

This wasn't really an issue I had to bother with, until we were asked to work together on this project. One of the first things she said when we first met to discuss the

seminar was "I'm only willing to go if you're there: I can't do it without you." She was even signing up for the same workshops I was, for fear she couldn't learn it all without my presence as a backup.

Her unwillingness to be at choice and in control of her own work is no surprise given her background. In Yap, it is still common for women to be "sold" or traded to a man for a piece of stone money, a traditional transaction in which the women don't always choose their own partners. Ruby was married this way, and after a first marriage with an abusive and neglectful husband, who left her with four children, her father decided to marry her to another man. Although her second husband is a much kinder, more compatible mate, she still did not have complete choice in the matter. She complied, and her words to her father when he announced the betrothal were: "My life is worth more than that piece of stone: I'll come back if I want to." Well, at least she had the sass to state her opinion about the "transaction."

So here was my dilemma. Ruby and I are about to embark on a seminar, on the island of Palau, as

roommates and partners in crime. Although I enjoy company as much as the next person, I am an introvert at heart and the constant “talking story” that I was being bombarded with at the airport (we hadn’t even left yet!) was starting to grate on my nerves. To make matters worse, she was seated next to an island priest who has more or less been excommunicated from his profession because of his penchant for getting drunk and picking up women. All this was happening while I feigned sleep across the aisle. (Hey — I know how to exert *my* assertiveness!) Poor Ruby—trapped in a window seat with a drunken, lascivious priest for 45 minutes while the rest of the plane was nearly empty. I asked myself, “Is this what it’s going to be like for the next nine days?!” I’m an introvert trapped with an unassertive

extrovert for a roommate; how am I going to last the next two weeks with this insecure woman? Even more than that, how was I going to form a team with her, this would-be assistant of mine, without losing respect for her? At this point I’m starting to wonder, how can I get this woman into my office for a therapy or hypnosis session, if not for her sanity then for mine?

My initial, intolerant feelings towards Ruby aside, it was pretty clear from the beginning of the seminar that it was going to be a waste of time: all of the workshops that had anything to do with our job assignments were being cancelled and all we had to do that week was bide our time, hoping that the ones we did attend were at least of personal interest (all right—who out there is

*really* feeling sorry for me? Trapped on a beautiful tropical island, considered the Jewel of the Pacific, on a per diem, all expenses paid—get real, Deb!). Anyway, the moment the phrase—“waste of time” left my mouth I knew I was in for something special: those words are always a flag for me, an anchor to be open to something interesting on the horizon. I realized that the true reason for me being here probably had something to do with networking (a.k.a. “talking story”) and that if I only kept my eyes and ears, and possibly my mouth from time to time, open, something delightfully unexpected would appear.

Now, I’m the first to admit I don’t have the most patience in the world. When I finally recognize my own weakness and remind myself to put on my NLP glasses, the presuppositions kick

in and all is peaceful in my map of the world. At this point my NLP glasses thankfully reasserted themselves and I changed my focus: remembering the wise presupposition "A person has all the resources she needs to succeed," I said to myself that at some point I'd like to help Ruby let go of her fears, for her sake. I knew that before the week was up, as roommates, we would get to know each other well enough that some of her resources would come to light, and that once again, by keeping my eyes and ears open, something magical would present itself. After all, Ruby is from an island full of coconut trees, where every tree is seen as an unending gift of resources for the mind, body and spirit. It was the perfect metaphor to use as a jumping off point, should the opportunity arise.

By the second night, that resource had presented itself. In the course of normal conversation, over pepperoni pizza in our hotel room (a rare treat on the islands), an amazing story came forth...

Last December Ruby accompanied her husband on a trip to the Philippines. He was having open heart surgery to replace the aortic valve that was damaged during a bout of rheumatic fever as a child. Ruby had accompanied him to the same hospital just a year before, for very different reasons, and she nearly had a nervous breakdown from the experience. Last year, it was a windpipe obstruction from a mass of "betelnut chew" that had lodged in his throat like cement, and he could barely breathe. Mind you, it was no minor

hop to the Philippines for emergency medical treatment: it's a three-hour flight that takes hours to arrange, IF the hospital administrators on Yap agree to the expense.

And so, as expected, Ruby was in fear of her husband's life. After the surgery, she went halfway down the hallway to the recovery room several times and turned back, in fear. She couldn't locate the elevator to go to the recovery room, and she finally took the stairway, only to absent-mindedly miss the floor he was on. In short, her fear incapacitated and disempowered her to the point she could barely function. Even though the operation was a success, she was still focusing on the fear of his death.

Meanwhile, as for the trip for open heart surgery, she had every reassurance from the doctors that her husband would survive: everything (blood sugar, cholesterol, etc.) was declared fine and they could fix the only problem: the damaged valve. This reassurance was the key to release Ruby's fear: she believed he would not die, or more pointedly, that the surgery would be a success and he would survive to live his life more vivaciously.

After the surgery she wanted to be with him in the Intensive Care Unit. As is normally the case, family is not allowed to stay with the patients for long periods in the ICU, however, she managed to convince a nurse, and the doctor, who made her swear she would monitor his condition constantly and report any potentially alarming changes.

She stayed with her husband in the ICU for three full days. As she described it, he had tubes everywhere: in the nose, mouth, neck, arm, groin, and a catheter to boot. Machines were beeping and flitting with all manner of feedback. Her focus for those three days was on watching all those machines, and when the EKG showed an alarming change, she calmly informed the doctor of the erratic beat and he followed up with the appropriate treatment. When Ruby spoke of those three days, I couldn't help but be in awe, not only of her reported calm, but also of her ability to "just stay awake" for that amount of time (I myself am cranky at best if I don't get my requisite eight hours). I was blown away and nearly speechless—How did Ruby do it? Not only did she ignore her fatigue, but she didn't eat a bite during that entire time: she gave all her food away because "there was no time to eat" (I would have passed out after missing one meal). She was entirely on her feet for that period with no rest, she missed Christmas without a clue, Her birthday passed without a thought, she didn't think of her children, or her work, or even pause to notice the two unfortunate patients who died in the next beds: that hubbub of activity was not anywhere near her conscious awareness. All of her 7 +/- 2 was being faithfully and consistently focused on her husband's recovery: she was in a trance, a tunnel of sorts where all she was aware of was her husband's progress and the beeping and signals of the machines that were keeping him alive and calling her attention to his condition.

Afterwards, when the three days had passed and he was out of the

woods, Ruby didn't crash or run for food, as I would suspect: life went on as if she had spent the last three days in a spa. Not only was there no physical exhaustion or hunger, but she felt refreshed and pleasingly alive.

After telling her incredible story, I couldn't help but seize the opportunity to anchor this as a resource for courage and strength for the future: contrasting this awe-some experience with their first medical trip, I didn't hesitate to point out the contrasts in her attitude about the two medical visits, and the key to being successful in the second was where she put her focus: on his *life* rather than the possibility of his death. I didn't skip a beat in telling her that I was in awe of her abilities to focus, and on her strength and courage, and

in her willingness to blank out what was unnecessary or a hindrance, including her thoughts of fear. In truth, by helping her husband heal his heart, she opened up an incredible resource for her to heal her own.

Ruby had accomplished things that I always considered weaknesses of my own. This woman, whom I had just a day before considered a personal source of my own irritation, had become a role-model for me: "See what you can accomplish when you focus on the positive, on your outcome?," I repeated over and over again. We were successfully futurepacing this memory, *for both of us*, as a resource for strength and courage in the face of adversity (and it wasn't even an official therapy session—now—*this is the power of talking story!*).

The day following our night of magical storytelling, we were chatting with the other participants in our group. Someone mentioned her anxiety about a project, and Ruby stated offhandedly "it's just a matter of focus—just keep your eye on your outcome."

She looked over at me, and we winked at each other knowingly. Ruby had integrated the lesson, the knowledge, and her own greatness well enough to be able to pass it onto others.

"See what you can do when you change your focus?" I said again, more to myself than to Ruby. I reminded

myself it was a poignant lesson for us both. In the course of one conversation, she had become not only a respected friend, but a living example of one of my favorite quotes for resourcefulness: "Your fear is the doorway to your Greatness" (author unknown), and a reminder that compassion, in place of irritation, can open the door to friendship and learning. Thank you, Ruby, for being patient with me.

REFERENCE:

Overdurf, John & Julie Silverthorn, *Hypnosis II & III Intensive: Training Trances, Unconscious Healing & Beyond Training*, November 2001, Lancaster, Pennsylvania. Thanks, J&J!

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