

The Case of Isabel: A Demonstration of Process-Oriented Hypnosis

By Michael D. Yapko, Ph.D.

Isabel: My heart is pounding.

M: Not for long...

(Isabel smiles)

M: So, I have only one question, a general question: Is there someplace in your life, some part of your life, where you're feeling a little bit stuck and would like something to change?

I: Si (yes).

M: That's as much as I want to know. So, kind of keep that in the back of your mind as we do this process. Okay? (Isabel nods) Alright. Now, arrange yourself in whatever position is comfortable for you and I'm going to encourage you to focus internally. Whenever you feel like you're ready to begin, you can take in a few deep breaths, let your eyes close and start... "Now, at the start of a session like this, I never really know what people are capable of... I never know just when they'll discover... whatever kinds of things I want them to discover... or whatever they are interested in discovering... But these few minutes together now... are simply an invitation... (Isabel closes her eyes) That's right, go ahead and let them close... Good... I really don't know what you will discover... I really don't know what you're capable of... and I don't know that *you* know what you're capable of... I'm very aware... that over time... people change... not always, though... I'm around so many people... and sometimes I notice... that people really do accumulate... wisdom... that comes over time... And I'm also aware... that it isn't automatic... there are people who are older and wiser... and then there are people who are just older... I'm sure you've known people... public figures perhaps... people that year after year... have opportunities to learn and grow... but they just don't... they don't do what you are doing right now... you're sitting quietly... you volunteered to do this... and even though you started out feeling a little anxious... you were willing to stay with it... a quality of courage I can appreciate... And isn't that how people change?... New experiences... but more than new experiences... they stop and take the time to consider more deeply... All the things in your life, Isabel... all the things that have changed over the years... what an interesting question... when year after year... you experience more... you learn more... you read more... hear more... have more conversations... How can *anything* stay the same? ... And so I've been curious... while so many people... have wanted to know how people change... I want to know how it's possible... for anyone to stay the same... How much effort... someone has to go to... to stay the same... how much new insight... someone has to ignore... to keep things the same... But it's human nature... to have that contradiction of desire... familiarity and novelty... And I wondered... how does somebody learn... about their own strengths... about their own resources?... And I always wonder... have *you* discovered what's *right* with you... what the best parts of you are, Isabel... and ways that you can use them in new ways... novelty... instead of familiarity... And when I went to the Great Wall... this extraordinary human achievement... they had built a Starbucks... and a McDonalds... at the entrance... and here were all of these Americans... who traveled thousands and thousands of miles... to discover the novelty of China...

eating a hamburger at McDonalds...and isn't it curious... how someone has an opportunity...to do something different...and they choose to do... exactly the same...In just a moment you can describe out loud ...what you are aware of...and with each word that you say... it can deepen your comfort...so if you would now... describe your experience for me...

Isabel: The fact that I realized I'm a teacher by vocation...and I've been a good teacher...and I've given my students...the desire, the expectation to learn...and to face life and also the future...with this expectation, looking forward...

M: That's wonderful! ...More you want to say?

Isabel: Also, I felt living their experiences along with them...like I was one of them...and I explained and I told them stories like you were saying...so that they could start in looking forward...and strengthen their imagination...so that they could then face up to the future.

M: Thank you for that Isabel. I love hearing that! Not everyone can be a good teacher...It takes a special patience... it takes a special optimism ...that says people can learn...people can be more than they have been...Because at any given moment in time...you can realize....you're a really good teacher... which also means...you're a really good learner...and when you've had enough time....you can bring this experience... to a very comfortable close...take your time....there's no extra credit for hurrying....you can just allow yourself... to move at your own rate...and whenever you feel like you're ready...you can let your eyes open... and reorient completely...

(Isabel opens her eyes, smiles, and gets out of her chair to kiss and hug me)

M: Tell me about it...I don't want to ask any questions...The whole idea was to keep the experience private... but if there's anything that you're willing to share... that would be good. Anything that you want to share, or would you prefer to just let it be?

Isabel: I want to share something. I want to share this feeling. Up to this moment not ever have I known if I was a good teacher and now I feel this safety in knowing that I've led each and all of my students on a safety path, on a good path. It's a dead weight that I've been able to let go of.

M: Wow! That's great!