

Berkeley Creek Productions Presents

Making Memories

The Recovered Memory Movement

The story of a woman subjected to dangerous therapy practices and why it happened. It is called Recovery Memory Therapy and begins when patients, usually women, seek help from psychotherapists for any number of emotional problems. Gradually they are led to believe that the cause of their trouble is sexual abuse. Abuse, so traumatic that all memories of the events have been repressed. To unblock these purported memories, patients enter into long term therapy with devastating consequences for themselves, their families and society.

I'm Lee Coleman and I'm a psychiatristalso I trained in child psychiatry so I work with both adults and children. I went to school at the University of Chicago for my medical training and my psychiatry training was at the University of Colorado Medical Center in Denver. Almost from the very early days when I began to practice psychiatry in 1969 I began to see things that concerned me particularly when psychiatry would get involved in issues having to do with state power, state authority and the law.

My name is Laura Pasley and in 1991 I initiated a lawsuit against a therapist for inducing false memories, therapeutic negligence and fraud, then working with men and women for the last two years who have been in the same situation that I was in. They went into a therapist situation where they went in with a problem of some kind and came out believing in recovered memories that they obtained in therapy and the therapeutic process. The last year, I've taken in over 300 calls and dealt with women and parents and families all over this country and several others.

My name is Patrick Clancy. I've been an attorney in California since 1974. In 1979 I started handling false accusation cases of child molestation. There was a great increase in the number of cases caused by the new child advocacy movement. About 1985, 1986 there was a new wave of cases. These were cases covered by the recovered memory movement. They were women who were going into therapy and coming out of memory saying that they had recovered memories of having been abused as a child.

Laura Pasley's Story

December 20, 1985 I went to therapy for bulimia. I went in there after reading a book about a therapist who was an eating disorder therapist. I had a real severe problem with bulimia and had been that way since I was ten. In 1981 I found out it had a name so growing up I thought I was abnormal or something was severely wrong with me 'cause I didn't know of anybody else who did that – you know, binging and purging. I got to a point in times in my life when I was binging and purging sometimes 15 or 20 times a day. I would go at night from restaurant to restaurant and eat and then throw up. My weight would fluctuate but I kept it usually about 130 pounds. I weighed 132 pounds when I went to the therapist. We began the first day by him telling me I had a death wish....that...His exact words were, "To have a death wish to the magnitude that you have, you had to have, you had to have buried something so traumatic and so horrible that it would take years of hard work and hypnosis to uncover the trauma..... You know, uncover the damage, and uncover what caused it."

I've talked to a number of my clients who are now suing their therapists who session after session would come in and the stated purpose of the session was to explore their memories of childhood sexual molestation. Now they didn't say, "You were molested by your father on such and such a date," but they set the ground rules and the ground rules were "We're looking for sexual molestation that you have repressed."

He told me that day that 80 to 90 percent of bulimics or eating disorders had, either had some kind of sexual abuse or incest in their background. I told him that, right off the bat, that I had been sexually molested as a

child. It was an event that I had suppressed off and on throughout my life but I basically remembered it happening. I was at a swimming pool and I was nine years old and it was molestation. But he told me that wasn't deep enough and it wasn't repressed, so we had to go deeper. Totally discounted it and he was only the second person I'd told in my whole life and so, you know, I felt kind of negated.

And so the first stage was to convince the people of the fact that they had repressed memories. In the patients that I have represented they even fought the therapist saying, "No, no no. No I didn't," and the therapist would keep insisting, "This is the explanation of your problem. This is the source of the problem." They would not let go and treat the presenting problem. They had to go and handle their repressed memories. Then the next thinking they would do is start working on them in terms of recovering the memory

So the next office visit was spent in the whole hour he kept asking me when I was going to accept the fact that my brother had tried to kill me, because the image that had come into my head was of a boy holding a pillow over the face of an infant. So the age correlation would have been the same as my older brother, who he knew I always had problems with. I kept arguing with him. You know, this couldn't have happened this didn't happen you know, it's just a dream. 'Cause it felt like a dream, only I was awake. He said it was a flashback and until I accepted the fact that my brother had done it; had tried to do this to me, that I wouldn't get on the road to getting well; that we had to find the trauma that caused this. So after I'd left there, I was real upset and I called a pastor friend of mine. You know, I was real shook. I got home and the pastor's secretary called and she read the Bible to me and just kind of quieted me down. But at that point I began you know, looking – perceiving my family differently. They became people who had the potential to hurt me, the potential to be evil when I had never known that before. We had problems in our family but I had never perceived them as evil people. After that, the images just kept getting bigger and bigger each time – every single session. He had me then coming twice a week. I had gone from once to twice a week. And the images started getting worse and worse. My older brother had begun in the images molesting me you know, at different times and then it escalated to my mother. I had one particular flash back where I was sexually abused with a coat hanger by my mother. And at that point, he began telling me how evil my mother was. And that my dad never protected me from her. And so by this time I had visions of my entire family of being capable of some pretty evil things. Every session was a trauma search.

I think it's from every point an outrage from a scientific point of view, from a legal point of view, from an ethical point of view, from a mental health point of view. First of all, there is no such things as, "recovered memory" as it's being described by the movement of therapists who have created this. There is no evidence to believe and much evidence to not believe the idea that a person could be repeatedly traumatized. We're not talking about an occasional; a one event.....at a very young age. We're talking about claims of rape, violent sexual assault, sometimes even violent killings or maimings, sometimes involving events of truly horrendous nature such as group ritual mutilations animal mutilations and all kinds of things like that. But even in cases that don't get that far, we're talking about allegations involving repeated bodily violations in the age range of, you know, eight, nine years old up to fifteen and sixteen years old and then the claim that, "I didn't know about this until my therapy helped me recover it."

In the whole four year period, it started out with those type and ended with my therapist/me...imagining watched my granddad hang someone. And I had been raped by my granddad, and my brother and a neighbor. All of these things were appearing in flashbacks. There were times when I would be ...like homicidal and suicidal. I would walk; I would be pacing in my bedroom, back and forth. And I would, like, have two cigarettes lit at the same time; chain smoking, you know, pacing back and forth. When I would have a flashback at home, I would call him and he would walk me out of it or have me beat on the bed. He told me that was to exhibit my rage in an appropriate way rather than to take it out on myself.

What happens then is, they are supposed to "rework the trauma". They are supposed to "empower themselves", the idea that "You were a victim. You were small and weak. Somebody more powerful than

you took advantage of you. What you have to do now is take back your power." The way you do that depends on the therapist's preferences. They may have, if it's a child, they may have a sand tray with little dolls and puppets in which you'll beat on the doll or the puppet of the perpetrator. They may have sticks or padded clubs on which you'll beat on pillows or make drawings of the perpetrator or the alleged perpetrator. You might put a mannequin in a chair and say to this person what you think of them. If there is a criminal action going on against this person, you may be strongly encouraged about how we're going to put this person in prison for life. We're really gonna get him, and so forth and so on. So the idea, "Now you are in charge. You are in control and you are going to even the score." So there's a lot of encouragement of anger, of acting out your anger in a variety of ways, whether it's file a lawsuit against this person. "Let's get him locked up in prison." "Let's take their children away from them because they did this to you; they're probably doing it to somebody else." It's a vicious process. I, the term I've come up with is "hate sessions". And I've seen it both with children and with adults; sessions in which more and more hate is considered to be therapeutic.

I endured hours of rage reduction, where we took clay balls and he would scream in my ear about my mother being so evil. And this would last an hour, an hour and a half of steady throwing clay balls into the wall. There were bataka bats on the chairs, tear phone books, you know, everything was to get the rage out.

And what comes next is to get the person, say, "Well, I know this a lot, but let's continue the work. I'll see you next week, but in the meantime, I'd like you to start keeping a journal. I'd like you to start keeping track of your dreams, keeping track of your thoughts. Give yourself some time every day to just tune in to your body and see if you get any images or sensations that might come up in any part of your body. Sometimes people can have body memories where they actually begin through their body to remember in a way that we didn't know about 'till a few years ago – abusive experiences. And keep track of those things and when you come back we'll, we'll see what you have.

I burned my journals a long time ago, but during litigation, they slapped a journal on my table that evidently my therapist had, that I didn't know he had. And when I opened it up with a clear head and saw the disgusting things that were written there, I was, like, I couldn't believe that I wrote that. And they kept pressuring me – the other lawyers kept pressuring me, saying, "Is this your handwriting? Is this what you wrote?" Part of it was my handwriting, but part of it looked nothing like my handwriting. It was like, you know, scribbling and different handwriting and I know I wrote it, you know, I remember this. Then I was tellin' 'em this is what I was telling is Tran's writing. He would say things and give me a pen and then, just write. And so a lot of it was rape scenes you know, in the end, my granddad and scenes with my mom and my brother.

So the impact on the patient is that they begin to put more and more of their energy into their new society. Their new society is the therapist and the peers that they have gained, either through a group therapy or other contacts. Maybe they've gone to a conference they've heard about. They sooner or later meet other people in the recovered memory movement. This becomes their new world and they basically put all their chips down on that. This means that for them to ever really question whether they have been a victim of manipulation by the therapist is extremely difficult. Imagine the embarrassment and the humiliation for you to recognize that you've falsely accused your parents of some horrendous things. Most people are not willing and will go then the rest of their life believing this and cut off from their families. From the point of view of the parents who are accused, it's devastating. You've gone through your life....most people that I talked to are more than willing to admit, "Yes, I made some mistakes." Sometimes the families have not always been perfect because that the fact that their son or daughter is in therapy is a sign that there were problems in the family. They don't make any bones about that. They admit, "Yes, I was not as good a father as I wish I had been. There was this going on, there was that going on, but I never in my wildest imagination ever even think of the kinds of things that she had accused me of". And so here you are in your later years and it's the kind of thing that where if somebody's accused of molesting a child, you can't ever really escape

it. Anybody who hears about it always wonders, "Was it true? Could it be true?" This humiliation, this degradation. Your own sex life goes to hell. You've lost a daughter and what about if you have other sons and daughters? What happens is they are forced to take sides as well because the accusing person will often go to their brother or sister and tell them, you know, "Aren't you having any memories yet? Because you were part of it. I remember that you were abused when I was." I've had cases where, you know, they say "You also abused me because dad made you. Don't you remember that?" What happens then is that sometimes the brother or sister will gradually get on board and start saying the same thing. Other times, no, they will hold firm and simply say, "This is nonsense." But it can happen then that the parents can lose more than one child. I've seen it happen that the father can be accused in this way, and the mother, forced to make a choice between the daughter and her husband will make a choice to the daughter even though she has no and ever saw anything that would suggest these events could have taken place because she wants that relationship with the daughter, so she will then side with her. The impact is overwhelming on everybody. It's just basically like taking a bomb and dropping it in the middle of your life.

I've had cases where a person was remarried and a daughter from an earlier marriage made an accusation after going through therapy having a "recovered memory" of being molested. She then notified the authorities and they went in and grabbed his children from his second marriage and took them out of the house. So that what happens is with no warning, they're facing a major civil law suit. They're facing losing family members. Normally, their wife has been told "If you stay with him, I'll never speak to you again. You have to believe me." So a wedge is being driven between the wife and the husband. The family basically explodes all at one time. There's no slow build up to this because the buildup, as I found out later, has already occurred before the parent is notified. It's occurred during the therapy. It's unleashed in its full wrath on the parent with no warning.

There is a group of therapists who basically feel that they are promoting the protection of women every time they can get a patient to say, a female patient say that they were sexually abused. The reality is of course turns out to be a new form of abuse of women if it turns out they have not been abused and are manipulated into believing that they have been.

For four years, the memories never quit coming and my life was getting more and more out of control. And every time I would tell him that, you know, things were getting worse for me, or my finances were bad or my daughter was having a hard time, or I was about to lose my house, he would just tell me that you had to get worse before you got better. And so all I ever did was.....I just kept getting worse.

The way that a person can end up being treated as a sexual abuse victim and manipulated into believing that they are such a victim despite the fact that they never have been sexually abused, never thought they were sexually abused, never came to therapy for that reason, starts with the orientation of the therapist. It has nothing to do with the patient. And this I've seen over and over again in my study of actual cases, studying the therapy records. It has nothing to do with the patient. You can have any type of mental problem; from a very serious one to a relatively minor one – depression, anxiety, phobias, sexual problems, drug problems and that is that the therapist has an agenda: the therapist is all dressed up and ready to go on the subject of sexual abuse.

When I had a flashback or a memory come up, it was just as if it was happening to me. And so, even if those things didn't really happen, they did in my head. And so, it was just as painful as if had really happened. And then, you add to that you trusted somebody so deeply with something so personal in your life and then they screwed over you or duped you, you know. It's like, you never know who to trust anymore. You know? I had to take the whole six year period and then put it on a back burner and start with what I knew to be true when I began with them. And that's whenever I started piecing things together and then I had to go to therapy to deal with what I should have dealt with six years prior to that. So when I got through I was broke. I was worse off emotionally than I'd ever been in my life. And my daughter was twelve years old, and I had missed six years of her childhood and she was angry. The lawsuit helped me compensate financially for what they took

from me, you know but there's nothing that can bring your years back and that's what this therapy does to these women and men. It takes their lives; it takes years off your life.

Why This Happened

Laura is not alone. In 1992, the False Memory Syndrome Foundation was founded by parents who were accused by their adult children of sexual abuse. Today the foundation has over 14,000 members and its board of directors includes some of the most prestigious researchers and leaders in the field of mental health. Recently, medical and professional organizations worldwide have issued warnings about the reliability of sexual abuse claims based on this new form of therapy. Let's take a look at why these organizations are concerned and what has created this epidemic of false accusation. There definitely is an epidemic of accusations of sexual abuse coming from adults who claim that they have suddenly unblocked or recovered previously repressed memories which they're usually accusing a father but it can be another male figure with a female being the accuser. That's the most common pattern; not the only one. And it's something that I've seen in my own work as a psychiatrist for the last seven or eight years where, initially, people assume that this is a legitimate thing but in fact, people who have been seriously abused in the kind of major ongoing ways that are being claimed, don't forget such things. They may choose not to talk about it. They may feel that it's something they cannot tell other people about. No one doubts that but the evidence is overwhelming from both laboratory work as well as clinical work that people don't forget those kind of major traumas. If anything they may have a problem with it being intruding on them too much. What is going on instead is that these are people who've been caught up in a network of manipulation and suggestion, most often through therapy and mental health professionals although it can even happen outside of therapy through the many TV programs and books and articles and word of mouth which is now spreading which is giving people the idea that you may have been sexually abused even though you have no memory of it. But in addition to this to this epidemic of false allegations from adults, this is really only a second development of something that I've seen even going back even further even ten years and that is, essentially, the same process only the victims of the manipulation are children; three, four, five year olds, up to, you know, adolescents who also are getting caught up in a network of manipulation where investigators from Child Protection and police and therapists who, acting under misguided ideas that the child has been molested interview children in a way that implant ideas into their minds and give them the idea that if you say you've been abused, then you're telling the truth but if you deny that you've been abused, you're not telling the truth. Continuing pressure like that, children have been manipulated. So what's happened is, that we've created these epidemics of false accusations of sexual abuse where children and adults are being manipulated, we've hurt a tremendous number of children and adults and at the same time, thrown a lot of uncertainty in the cases of the people who really have been abused, because we do know that does happen. So, we've got a situation where bad techniques in mental health have been transmitted to the investigative community and the techniques are being used on children and adults and a great deal of harm has come about. Pat, I'm wondering if you've seen this in your practice of law.

Yeah, starting about seven or eight years ago, I started having clients come in who were being accused by their daughters of sexually abusing them 25, 30 years ago and at first we were able to defend, using the statute of limitations against that type of case. The Statute of Limitations is to prevent old stale claims where the evidence has been lost for being brought in to the court. However, at that time, it became politically correct to allow these law suits and so the Legislature extended the Statute of Limitations to essentially life. So now we have all of these cases clogging our courts of events that have happened 30, 40 years ago. I literally have had a woman who is, like 65 years old, calling up, wanting to know if I would handle a case suing her 90 year old father for a molest that happened when she was four years old. That's the type of thing that I've seen.

If it happened. Laura, you've had some experiences yourself.

Yeah, as a matter of fact, in 1985, sometime around the McMartin issue, is when my ordeal began. I think that's where this psycho sequential abuse started; feeding in to memories and things like that, but I've seen just an overload for the last almost ten years. Bein' involved in it firsthand, until 1991, and then ever since then, I've been diggin' and researchin' tryin' to find out how the source of this all came. And I don't think it's just mental patients, I think it's anybody with a problem. I had been sexually abused at nine by a stranger at a swimming pool, and when I told this therapist that's in this kind of field; his answer to me was that that wasn't deep enough. I need to go deeper, you know, it wasn't repressed. So, we spent the whole time I was in therapy chasing traumas. Since I got out, the last couple years after speakin' out on this issue, I've talked to 100s of men and women, who have come out and their lives are just destroyed. They went into therapy; semi-normal people; functional people and then come out as drug addicts, alcoholics and people who believe their families are Satanists. So you know, they've had their lives destroyed.

I believe it was Roland Summit who came out in the "Child Abuse Movement" saying, "It's axiomatic; there's no such thing as a 'false accusation of child molestation.'" Then as I started looking into these clients in the literature in the "Recovered Memory" movement I again saw Roland Summit and he was now saying there was no such thing as a false accusation when a woman has, quote a "Recovered Memory". Did you find the same type of thing?

Well, this has been one of the most disappointing things for me in the last ten years of working in this area is that gradually the evidence has piled up and has become overwhelming that children are being manipulated into making false allegations, so that we have some cases where the allegations are true and some where they are false and where the evidence is mounting that adults are being manipulated into creating a mental image which they then are being manipulated into believing is a memory of sexual abuseis so-called blocked memories....that despite the evidence is mounting, from both laboratory studies and studies of cases, people who have invented these unwise methods; biased methods are unwilling to accept the data which shows that they've made a mistake.

It's almost like a "Cult Therapy". You know, you've got to conform to their belief system and you're indoctrinated with their belief system. And you doubt them or you say, "Well, this doesn't seem real," or "This isn't real," or "This memory doesn't feel like other memories I've had." Then they'd say, "Well, you don't want to get well?" or "You don't want to get past your problem?" or "You're in denial," or "You're protecting your family." So, you know, it's a constant indoctrination of their belief system into yours.

Some people ask, "Well, how could somebody who doesn't appear like they've never gone off the deep end, or gone crazy or become psychotic; how could they become to really believe that?" But I think in line with what Laura's saying, it's really important to keep in mind what kind of tremendous pressures are being put on these people. It's not only the feedback from the therapist that you want to trust, who's telling you, "You know, you're just not admitting to yourself all that has happened. You need to keep working on unblocking the memories" but a lot of these people are being put into group therapies and their peers in the group apply tremendous pressure; like, "Everyone else is getting memories, when are you going to get the memories?" There's a lot of pressure to cut off your family. So what can happen is, this individual basically has now joined a new community and a new family. They've been encouraged to cut off their old family. For them to then face up to what has happened to them, as Laura's had the courage to do and some others, but most I think, have not is a very, very difficult thing for them to do. We need to keep reminding ourselves that all of us are vulnerable to suggestion.

I've noticed the real power of the therapist. I've seen cases where there are recovered memories of abuse by their father, recovered memories of satanic ritual abuse, even in a few cases recovered memories of abuse that happened in prior lives, recovered memories in a few cases of being abducted by space aliens. And what I've found is that people who believe the therapists who believe in space alien abductions, all their patients seem to have repressed memories of space alien abductions. And the therapists that believe in satanic rituals, all their patients seem to have repressed memories of satanic rituals. And those who believe in

repressed memories of the father abusing the child, all their patients seem to have repressed memories of being abused as a child.

That's just one of the many types of evidence that we have of that the claim of suddenly discovering a new phenomenon of blocked or repressed memory of sexual abuse is not legitimate. It's not that the therapists are knowingly or consciously indoctrinating people in the sense that know that what they're going to get this person to say isn't true. There's really a lot of rewards in feedback for the therapists that get on this bandwagon. They really think of themselves as crusaders. They feel that they are helping to wipe out a social problem, which we all agree there is a lot of abuse of children, of women. And they are then trained in methods which there's no doubt is presented in the training that they get. They are trained to believe that this is the way to do it, this is the new way. As far as then what happens so that the therapist really has their heart in it and I think that makes it that much more effective. I think then what happens is that when a patient comes in whether they present with depression, anxiety, eating disorder, sexual problem, maybe a drug problem the therapist can present to the patient that, "You know, I've seen these kind of symptoms and we are finding out that these are typical of people who have had abuse experiences in their life," and "Has that happened to you?" If the patient does not have recollections of those kind of experiences, then next the therapist in all good conscience, 'cause they believe it, can say, "Well you know sometimes you may have had these things happen, but it doesn't mean you're aware of it now because you may have blocked it out; you may have pushed it so far back and the real key to helping yourself is to work with me enough so that we get to the bottom; we get to those things that you may not remember, but have actually happened." Next what happens is that if you do comply with this and you see the positive reaction that you get from the therapist and if you're put in to a group setting, the other people in the group you get a lot of rewards from this, the message next is, "Well, what else? What else happened to you?" And I've studied many cases where people get to the point where their instincts begin to tell 'em, "Enough is enough." And then the therapists start giving them feedback, "I don't think you've gotten to the bottom of things. Why are you going into denial? Why are you resisting?" And the pressure is on for the patient to continue. And that is how the allegations build and build and build.

I left that therapy group a Xanax addict and had to wean myself off of it and in fact had overdosed on numerous occasions with it and ended up in an emergency room. So, it kept escalating; I spent two visits in a psychiatric ward.

You know we talked about how seductive this whole movement is for therapists; all the feedback they get. Imagine the goodies that the patients get because basically the message is "Whatever problems you have, whatever mistakes you've made in your life, are the responsibility of somebody who has abused you and the more we can recover abuse the more we can put the blame for your problems and your mistakes on those people and they will be the focus of all your anger." It really is a kind of a big copout. Of course our past experiences are important and why we are what we are, but there also comes a time when you've gotta shift your focus to say, "Hey, whatever is ultimately back there, I am responsible for my behavior, I'm gonna have to pay; I'm going to have to be responsible. Other people are going to hold me responsible." But this therapy takes you just the other way. We end up training people to blame everybody else for their problems and it's so terribly destructive to patients; it really violates the first tenet of doctors and therapists; which is "First, do no harm." These kinds of techniques are positively damaging people rather than helping them.

Well also it, we talk about the damage to the patient. There was also an incredible amount of damage done to my daughter using the same techniques. I would be at my home having what he termed flashbacks, and he would have, I called him, I would always call him, and he would have me take a broom and beat on the bed, you know, over and over and over. And the opinion that this might be scary for my six year old daughter, he said, "No, this would teach her to be, to exhibit her anger in a healthy appropriate way." And she endured hours of you know, screaming in pillows and throwing because he said it was healthy.

Seems to me that this whole process starts with the original diagnosis of a repressed memory. In the popular literature that I've looked at including, "The Courage to Heal" which is the bible of the Recovered Memory Movement, and Bloom, they have a laundry list of symptoms that are supposed to tell you whether or not you have repressed memories of abuse.

You could be a victim of sexual abuse if you:

Are overprotective of children

Are unable to protect children

Are super alert

Are spaced out

Are promiscuous

Have gastrointestinal problems

Suffer from gynecological disorders

Suffer from headaches

Are a risk taker

Are unable to take risks

Are an alcoholic

Abstain from drinking

Avoid mirrors

Like to wear baggy clothes

Have recurring dreams

Are afraid of dentists

So the fact that this is pure manipulation on the part of the therapist.....there aren't any symptoms which will tell you what is the cause.

But I've also seen more invasive methods used in some cases; hypnosis, age regression, guided imagery, and the use of sodium amytal interviews.

If somebody makes a claim during hypnosis, during an amytal interview, or using some of these other methods that you've described, age regression, and so forth, they and the therapist may have a belief that, "Oh, now we know it's true because you didn't just tell me, you said it, quote under hypnosis. You said it under an amytal interview." They may put greater faith in it than if they just recounted it in an ordinary interview. So actually, these techniques are worse than if nothing was done because you were encouraging false information and giving it a false credibility. And as a matter of fact back to your area, the courts have even recognized as you know, that interviews done under these circumstances are particularly suspect and in some cases have actually blocked and prevented those kind of interviews from being done. So, I think the courts have recognized what in the mental health field we know that these techniques should not be used if your goal is to have accurate historical information.

Well, so far we've been talking about the effect on the patient. One of the things that I'd like to talk about is the effect upon the person who's being accused. I know Laura here, who is in essence an accuser, at one time. I've had many people come in who are being sued and the patterns I'm seeing are repetitive; it's always the same way. Usually they get a phone call from their daughter saying, "I can't see you anymore. I'm in therapy, I need time alone; please honor my request." And, they become isolated. Then weeks or months may pass and they're invited to a group therapy session/ family therapy session is the way that's represented. They go there and they're told, "She has something to tell you. You shouldn't talk back to her or anything; that will delay her recovery. Just listen to what she has to say." They sit down and for the first time the father hears that he's being accused of some horrendous act and he's being told not to deny it because that'll hurt her therapy; not to say anything. In many cases, the wife is being asked, "Do you believe me? And if you don't believe me, I never want to see you again." So, out of the clear blue the entire family is being shattered.

One individual's mother after she left a message on the daughter's..... the accusing daughter's telephone recorder and then promptly drove her car off a bridge and killed herself....There's parents that are dying over it. Suicides, and not only suicides, but stress from the heart attacks.

Taking Back Your Life

We've seen what false accusations can lead to. The next step is to knowing what to do about it.

So the first thing I think parents need to be helped to understand is this is not a problem of mental disorder causing these statements to be made. It's the influence of the therapist which is the cause. Many times the parents want to believe it's a mental disorder because it kind of excuses their son or daughter as though, "Well, they're not doing this to me; illness is doing it to me." But the fact is that it is the son or daughter that is doing it. Ultimately, it is the therapist that is behind it but the son or daughter has allowed themselves to be victimized.

I think the next thing that I see is that parents who feel that the way to respond is to try to placate the son or daughter; to apologize even though they say, "This didn't happen, but if I've done something to make you this angry, I'm sorry and isn't there anyway we can reconcile?" In my experience, that encourages the hostility to get even. More, it's taken as an admission of guilt. It's taken as a sign that the attacks will escalate until you will finally admit that it happened. And what I recommend to parents is that they take the opposite approach; that they take a very strong approach in which they say "Not only is this not true, but wherever this is coming from, you are the one that is going to have to rethink what you are doing before our communication is gonna change. The ball is in your court and wherever you got these ideas from, you're gonna need to look at that but I'm not going to degrade myself; not gonna sell my dignity in order for us to have a relationship.

I've seen parents who tell me that they're almost willing to go ahead and say, "Well, I did this, just to have a relationship with their daughters and their grandchildren. And in particular they're missin' out on the grandchildren. They say, you know, "If I just admit this happened; say this happened then it'll all be over with." But it's not all over with; it's just beginning at that point and they don't realize the consequences of saying that.

If you admit to something that never happened, then basically, you will live the rest of your life as a humiliated, degraded person. I don't think that anybody should ever do that and I don't think it will ever heal a relationship.

Lee, I'm dealing with retractors all over the country and Canada. I talk to them one on one and one of the biggest concerns that we have is what to do with them. If I were to send one of them to you, what would you do with them? What would you do with what's happened here?

I think the first thing that I would do is spend as much time as we needed for them to tell me everything that happened. In other words what was the kind of problems which that lead them in to therapy? What was the therapy process like? How did they come to believe these things? What do they think now about it? Make sure that they had a chance to really explain the whole thing to me. I would then say that I would like to study their records, get them to sign a release form so that I could obtain all the therapy records from whatever therapy whether it's in a hospital or a clinic or both. And read all that material and then ask them, "Okay, now that you come to me because you think that something's not right about this. Do you feel you still need therapy?" Put it in their lap, that is, give them the responsibility and the power. "Do you feel you need therapy? Forgetting about what any therapist has ever told you, any articles ever said, your own judgment, your own feelings. Do you need therapy and if so, what would you want to work on?"

I've seen a lot of positive movements recently in stopping this epidemic. In the area of science, we have the top memory researchers in the country are now focusing on the issues of repression and on the issues of child sexual molestation. And they're very prolific in their publications. Before it was politically incorrect to ever say that any accusation of molest was false, but now the media has been educated through these studies, through the FMS Foundation; through specific cases and now they're giving a more balanced approach. That translates into a change the jury panels. When we're having cases, the jury panels now are highly skeptical of the issues of recovered memory. I've seen that change within the last two years. The one place I do not see change is in the politicians.

In parallel to your saying that the politicians have not yet recognized the problem, the other thing that hasn't happened is that the people who are making the problem happen; the police officer who investigates an allegation, the social worker from Child Protection who investigates, the therapist who does recovered memory therapy or who does therapy with a child under the assumption that they've been molested; these people are not budging. They are digging their heels in. What has to happen is that we have to retrain those people. We have to take 'em back to the drawing board and get them to realize they've been misled and begin to handle their cases in a very different way.

Well I'm aware of why they're being mis-trained. I managed to get my hands on the training manuals for the police in the State of California back over the last eight years and when I looked through them I found not even one sentence about false allegations. And with all this research going on memory, on suggestibility, I couldn't understand why. And then I took a look at the front of the manuals to see who wrote them and it was a combination of child advocates and police officers. So in essence the manuals that are being used by the police officers had been censored of all the scientific research that has gone on over the last eight years.

That's interesting that you should bring that up because I just recently read an article about a study that came out from the National Child Abuse and Neglect Association. And they investigated over 12,000 claims of group satanic ritual abuse and found no evidence for any of it to be true. They had put 11,000 police officers, therapists, doctors, everybody trying to determine if there were any truth in any of these allegations and found not one single case. And that's just recently been published.

I believe the final chapter of the Recovered Memory Movement is being rewritten at this very time. What is happening is now is that retractors and third parties are starting to sue these therapists for malpractice. The other thing that I've seen is the American Medical Association, the California Association of MFCCs and the American Psychological Association have all recently come out with warnings; some of them very direct, saying they're gonna get sued for malpractice, others saying "Recovered memory is fraught with danger"; warning their members that they're gonna get hurt if they practice in this area and to be very careful.

Well, since I settled my lawsuit in '93, the media has given a more balanced view of things. Used to, it was always on the survivor's side, the cult side, you know, that type thing. Now they wanna see what's going on in the therapist's office; they've gone in to therapists' office and they're givin' a real balanced view. Some of them just present both sides but still when they do that, I mean it's so illogical what's goin' on in there in

some cases the normal person reading this is just appalled. And I've noticed even a change in my office where, when I began this, it was like, nobody talked about it. You know, they knew I was doing something but they really didn't talk about it so the attitude to me of the American Public period is changing. They're startin' to be more skeptical, they're startin' to think about this stuff and realize that it can induce, that therapy can induce false memories of abuse and I think they're asking questions more. Science & Pseudo-Science How to Tell Them Apart

Not only in therapists' offices, do sensational descriptions of recovered abuse pass for historically accurate accounts of the past, talk shows have given a forum to Hollywood personalities to describe their revelations of abuse; pitting retractors against survivors in heated confrontations. And the tenets of the recovered memory movement have been popularized in self-help books; 750,00 copies of the current, "To Heal" alone have been sold.

One of my first introductions to the Recovered Memory Movement was sitting down and reading this 400, 500 page book, entitled "The Courage to Heal". What I found was there's a chapter that has a list of symptoms. If you have these symptoms, it explains that you have repressed memories of child and sexual molestation. The problem was that this laundry list of symptoms basically fit every human being in the country, but only gave one explanation. If you were depressed, if you were overly happy, if you were protective, if you weren't protective; it just went on and on and on and on. The next chapter sat there and said, "Well, it doesn't matter if you don't have any memories of being abused. We'll help you remember. And they actually had exercises and things to do to help you remember your abuse. Then after you worked through that chapter teaching you how to remember your abuse, then the next chapter went on teaching you how to believe your abuse. You weren't certain if this was real or not real; it told you to believe.

The evidence is very clear that the things that we knew before are just that much more important to pay attention to; in other words, we now have documented how easy it is to get somebody to come to say things that we can prove didn't happen. And it doesn't have to be a little child. It can be any age. People like Steven Ceci of Cornell have summarized hundreds of studies; both his own and others, showing that all people can be manipulated into saying and apparently believing things that didn't happen. Elizabeth Loftus is another important person who has demonstrated in some specific examples of making suggestions which everybody knew were not true.

"...our representation of the past...is not fixed and immutable, but a living thing that changes shape, expands, shrinks and expands again, an amoeba like creature with powers to make us laugh and cry and clench our fists. Enormous powers – powers even to make us believe in something that never happened."

-Elizabeth Loftus Witness for the Defense

My own study of cases over and over again I've seen examples of statements made by adults or children, which factually could be proven could not possibly have taken place; it's not just a matter of opinion but were either physically impossible or factually proven, couldn't have happened. So the evidence has just become that much stronger from the research that memory is a fragile thing. It doesn't mean that the person is lying. And I would say probably the most important thing to keep in mind here is if in an individual situation we must try to make a judgment as to whether or not what somebody says is memory is reliable. We must study not just what they say now, and certainly not just how they say it, a lot of people think you can study their demeanor, their facial expression body language, because if they actually believe that they're gonna look like somebody who's telling something that really happened. You must take a historical approach, that is, you must study the possible influences on the person that may have influenced what they are now saying.

No research had to be done when the Recovered Memory Movement started. The research was already there; about how memory worked, about how memory was malleable, about how hypnosis leads to

suggestibility, about how age regression causes inaccuracies. It had already been researched. What the Recovered Memory Movement did is they ignored all the scientific research that was already available and they continued to ignore it.

New Directions

A person who's being accused of a sexual molestation based upon a recovered memory during therapy is much better off today than they would have been just five or six years ago. The research is getting out to the public through an organization called False Memory Syndrome Foundation.

The False Memory Syndrome Foundation has been able to generate a tremendous increase in awareness on this problem in a very short period of time simply by people who were accused, banding together saying, "This is nonsense; it didn't happen. Where is all this coming from?" generating information, gathering together people to meet to talk about it, producing literature. And I think it's very revealing that it was a lay grassroots organization which has done that; not a mental health society.

Laura Pasley is one of these lay people. She now works with men and women who have endured Recovered Memory Therapy and with families who have been falsely accused of sexual abuse by their adult children.

The month after I settled the suit, I stepped up on a podium in Dallas for the first time. I had never spoken before anybody in my life, and I talked to a crowd of parents then. From that came other things. Then I started taking calls for the Foundation from retractors or women questioning their therapy you know, just so they'd have somebody that had been through it. My first caller was a nineteen year old girl whose mother wouldn't have anything to do with her even though she retracted. She'd made accusations; that family wouldn't have anything to do with her. So I told her, "We'll get 'em back." You know, and that was the first lesson I learned; you don't make promises you can't keep because there are some families so destroyed they don't get each other back. You know, they're gone, and they're lost and so I struggle with that one. And then I got my second one and the Christmas, she had been three or four months to get her to call home; to call her mom but she went home. And so I had these girls that I was dealin' with; I was just sharin' my story with, and you know, supporting them a little bit and they were goin' home.

The daughter and it's usually a daughter, although I've had some that were sons and I've had some that were nephews suing their uncles based upon a period of recovered memory. I would recommend that they talk to the child well the adult now; send them all the information; send them the studies, send them the research. I've been amazed that some of the people when they have actually been able to read what was going on, had enough rationale to come out of it.

I think people want to understand. I think that you know, the girls especially in the therapy that are questioning want somebody that can tell them what happened you know because you feel so dumb when you come out. I mean, how could you let yourself get sucked into something like this if you weren't stupid? And Beth Loftus told me, she said "Laura, this only happens to the brightest, sharpest women." And I told her, "Beth, I think I'll use that line. I'll hang on to it." And I did; I just kept telling myself that, you know, I wasn't dumb; I was just vulnerable and I was needy. And I got into some hands of some people who just took advantage of that.

There's absolutely no question that children get abused, especially females. There's no question that women have been abused since the beginning because men have taken advantage of their greater physical power, their greater political power, their greater economic power. The tragedy is that by the excesses of the Child Protection Movement we have now created an epidemic of false allegations which makes it that much harder to put our resources and our energy into truly protecting real victims. I think the many thousands of the adult women who know they were abused as children don't need any phony therapy techniques to convince them that they were abused are being abused by this process because now, when an adult raises

a question or an allegation they were being abused, others really don't know and legitimately shouldn't know whether they should accept it as true or not.

We have got to quit with the slogans, "Believe the child" or "Believe the woman" We have got to adopt the position that we must look for the truth.