

As if I didn't have a heart attack

- how Solution Focused helped me recover

Late 2018 Karin Pharès and I were asked for a chapter to this conference book. We instantly decided to write each other mails in a collaborative dialogical way, *as if* we were together although absent. We would write about our practice, and how we used “as if” in questions, formulation, statements e.g. By New Year we weren't actually yet started, but ideas on topics were popping up, and thus the spirit of the common project was emerging. However, Friday the 11th of January my life were to change, as I woke up before dawn with pain in my thorax *as if* I had a belt strapped around the chest.

This article, or short story also came to change and the content shifted to, how the Solution Focused approach and way of thinking helped me in the weeks to follow, and worked towards my rehabilitation. Thus you'll not find new research results or examples of practice, but rather a personal story about my recovery.

As if I wasn't a hospitalized patient

During a couple of hours at the hospital it became clear to me, that the doctors expected me to have had a heart attack. I was transferred from emergency reception to a department for heart diseases. And my husband came, bringing more of my own cloth, books and crosswords. I was determined not to be seen *as if* I was a patient, so during my hospitalization I kept wearing my own t-shirt, pants, socks, shoes e.g. I could look at my self as a ordinary person, maybe just pretending visiting the department, I felt more comfortable and relaxed which helped me coping with the hole situation. And my granddaughter visit me, she's 2 ½ years old and not only did she spread joy and fun in the hole department, but it became easier for her to be present with me, her grand mom in her usual cloth.

Acting as if I was at a restaurant

During the days, five days, meals were served, i.e. it was a buffet and you had to get it yourself. The second I changed my behaviour – I shifted from picking up the meat and eating at my shared room towards picking up the food, placing my

self at a table and acting *as if* were dinning at a restaurant. I set the table, made myself comfortable, and began talking to the other 'guests'. Just did, what I knew I was good at, small talked about the food, about the weather, about anything else but being at the hospital. It reinforced my view in not being a patient, not being sick, and thus worked forward my rehabilitation. It's much easier to recover from an illness, that you not quite have had, but a slide perturbing.

As if I didn't have a reduced heart pumping function

To act like this was one of the most difficult steps for me to take, because I could feel my heart all the time, - and with electrodes all over the body, I was observed all time and was able to see my heartbeat on the screens. And there was a paradox: not paying attention to my heart and pretending I couldn't feel it meant what! – that, I was dead, or had a heart stop coming up? It took long time for me to find a way to deal with this; getting control over my heartbeat and breath in a way, that my strong pumping heart became silent, not to hear, and *at the same time* having full awareness, that my heart was pumping the way it should, it the best way it could. Being able to do this would lead to relaxation and better sleep, - and who will not sleep better? I would. Nowadays I have no interest in talking about 'reduced heart pumping function', make no sense for me. My heart is for a short period of my life, working a bit different that it normally does, but I know it will fully recover.

Coping with facts

Working from a Solution Focused approach we often ask clients about how they cope with a certain situation. Discovering *I did coped* and exploring *how* I did it, is helpful and brings forward a list of skills, resources and strength. And I did that too.

Making Lists

Day two I received a text-message from Karin in the morning, which encouraged me to make a list of *Good things I've already done for my self*:

- Took a shower
- Had breakfast with egg and bacon
- Listen to pod-cast
- Asked my husband to bring my knitting

Making the list made me realize, that I *was able and capable* to take action towards my healing and rehabilitation, although I at the moment I made it, didn't know what exactly has happen to me.

Doing things I already knew was helpful

Working with clients it can be helpful to discover exceptions from the problem along with past success' as we as SF-practitioners assume, that no problem are present all the time. I already knew some of my previous success, and it was easy to recall them, but was I able to use them – that I didn't know for sure, but I surprised myself, I was more capable and skilful that I was aware of.

Counting

For many decades I've been counting ☺ whenever I was in a stressful situation, like being at the dentist. I've counted lots of dots in his lamps ;-) Thus *I already knew* counting was a helpful strategy. When transferred from one hospital to another in ambulance with all equipment's being activated, I began to count the screws in the ceiling of the ambulance. What else to do? 68 screws, - totally new information for the nurse sitting next to me checking my heartbeat – we both had a laugh.

Knitting

It's such a resource for me to knit. I know the mental and healthy effect of knitting and other kinds of handcrafting. It reduces stress, lowers the heart beat by focusing on simple actions. I kind of empty my head in order to master the project, or the recipe. Having the knitting at the hospital, listening to podcast, *made me forget where I was*, and the circumstance for being there – just for few moments, but they were there.

Word puzzling

My mobile definitely is my extended mind as it contains tasks, memories, information, so I can deal with an active daily life. It tells me, what to do, when to do, with whom to do, and I would be very stocked if I lost it. But however alarming that might be, the mobile phone was also helpful. I downloaded games like Sudoku and crosswords, which led to evolving a new thing to do. When I was done counting the screws in the ambulance, I had to find something new to

do, and my eyes paid attention to a label with the text “sensor”. I began creating and spelling new word from the original: sen, rose, roses, ens, etc. I found 14 new words, and had to both remember and count the words already found while creating new words, - this got my full attention and I was able to *shift focus*.

Back at home

After five days I was back at home. I had to make decisions; I had to find rest in my own company and being comfortable alone in the house. I've used all my skills, and discovered new ones like being more deterrent and insisting in *I'm the best to know, what's best for me*. Friends and families with good intension, but not always good ideas had to 'step down' and 'follow my directions'. This I want to do, this I don't want, - this I'll like to do or this I might want to do - in time. Today, six weeks after I came back home I most of the time doesn't think about my heart, it just beat, slowly in peace. I've decided to talk about my heart attack in a way as if, *it was just bad luck* - the doctors don't know, why this is happening, they rarely see it, and it will most likely heal it self. It is bad luck. Thus I will fully recover, I will strengthens my heart and the pumping function, because I've made a choice. It was bad luck, and *bad luck isn't going to be my partner the rest of my life. I will recover - I'm recovering* - and when you read this, I've might already recovered. I will look for signs of recovering, starting now by making a list.....