

Interview with Christel Trøstrup – transcript

Introduction

In this interview series I talk with Christel Trøstrup, a narrative psychotherapist who believes in the power of walking and talking in nature as a healing process. She believes that to be in dialogue with someone you need to be honest and being in nature helps bring about that honest dialogue. She says walking and talking is easiest when you are one-to-one and when you have a specific goal or question in mind.

Elizabeth Ingrams (EI): Christel I am so happy to welcome to you to my Narrative Life Coaching Interview Series. I am going to introduce Christel first. Christel is a narrative psychotherapist originally working in the healthcare system. Having recently completed a PhD she has now branched out into Narrative Walking.

Christel Trøstrup (CT): I am a Dane so you may hear some diverse English words. We were talking about narrative and when you are interested in narrative there are many ways. So you could pick one narrative or another. When you are interested in narrative you have it with you all your life. Even though I am a narrative psychotherapist with a PhD I believe that I have been interested in narratives all my life, so I am just lucky that it has also been a part of my work life as well.

EI: When you say you have been interested in narrative your whole life, what aspect of narrative have you been focused on?

CT: I am originally a nurse and when people become ill they often have stories that break, they live with stories that have been broken. Arthur Frank talks about this in *The Wounded Storyteller*. Most people think that life is a long line [linear] and that everything is going to be 'ok'. But when people get ill some of their narratives are wrecks as well. I am interested in stories that have been broken and stories that are silenced. This is the case in the health care system. The thing is, the way we treat people when they are ill, doesn't necessarily make them better. That's why I believe that some of the narrative work we do as therapists and in research, is very healing for these people. That's a way of grasping the whole 'I am ill' situation.

EI: What do you offer through your programme?

CT: My programme is called Narrative Walking. I really agree about having time off and needing a break. The people who come to me have met with some kind of stressful event and then they need a break in order to reflect on their values, their job and their family or so on. It's usually quite big things that are connected to their values which are connected way. What do I offer? I call it Narrative Walking. Narrative Walking is a two-dimensional kind of therapy. When I walk with my clients, it could be someone who is ill or a leader or it could be someone who needs a dialogue partner. There are two dimensions to it – it could be in the woods or in a nice area, a natural area. Where we use the nature and its metaphors to get the dialogue going. The other dimension is that Narrative Walking is not only in the natural environment but it is also walking in the person's inner landscape. It is my strong

opinion that when we walk together in the mind, we challenge some of the positionings the person usually uses. In narrative therapy we believe we are not about to find the answer to the problem. The healing relies on observing their problem from several positions. That is my role in the therapy. I do believe I help the person take a whole lot of positions. Like an inner landscape. When as a therapist, I get to the point where I think, 'I know what you're thinking,' I always ask another question. It is not about finding a solution in narrative walking therapy that is the case it is about giving new options, new positions, new ways of observing the problem.

EI: You said this is not just about an outer journey but also an inner journey. We understand it intuitively that taking a walk is a refresher, but what do you think it is about walking and talking, the combination of the two things – how do the spatial journey and the inner journey connect?

CT: I want to share some research knowledge. I read a meta-analysis with 21 or so studies. They conclude that in order to feel joy it is crucial that you are connected to nature. Nature-connectedness is combined with, or in alliance with, feeling joy. It is not, you know, *either* the human thoughts that help us or the being in nature, it is the combination between the two. It is the process, being in nature being in yourself, that helps us while we are walking and talking. The phenomenological experience is not just being in nature or within myself, it is the connectedness which helps me get more joyful.

EI: I love that. So, it is the lived experience of being in nature which changes our thoughts and changes how we interact with others. What kinds of walks have you taken, how long do you walk for and where do you walk?

CT: I have walked with a bunch of people but always with one person at a time because I believe that being true in a dialogue, it is best if you are just two. I have walked a bit with couples and their issues, but I believe that walking and talking is easiest if you are just one-on-one. The combination of the narrative therapy and being in the natural environment that interests me, it's about common people and their issues. I haven't been on mount Everest but I don't think that's necessary. I do believe that we have nature very close to us every day. I am not interested in constructing things or making something special and we can use whatever is outside. Let's go outside and see what's there and we will get stimulated. We'll get inside ourselves and in nature and we'll recharge and we'll change. Because that's why it's there. It sounds simple. I have not walked for days right now but perhaps I'll do so after this interview.

EI: So they are short walks in nature. When you are doing the walking, there is the aspect of having a dialogue one-on-one and that can be very powerful in itself. What are some of the transformations that you have experienced when people walk with you?

CT: Do you mean my transformation?

EI: What are the transformations people have reported to you?

CT: I have walked with cancer-afflicted couples and they often have this doubt: 'Is there anyone who wants to listen to my story?' And showing that I am open minded and so I show them, 'I do want to listen and I do care and I do have questions. And you are the expert.' It's important to show it. It's the same as the Beatles song ['Girl']: 'Is there anybody going to listen to my story.' The feedback is that 'Oh - it's like I can tell you everything.' I really believe that for therapists and dialogue partners, our primary goal and obligation is to listen. So people don't think it's hard to let us into their inner problems and challenges. We won't say, 'Why did you do that?' We will say 'Why don't you listen?' I have been practicing this for 15 years. I am still practicing. It is hard but it's crucial in order to get the benefits from narrative therapy. I get feedback that they are happy about the metaphors [offered by nature]. I walk in all seasons –winter, spring, summer, autumn. The benefits from walking in nature are not related to the season we walk in. So I do walk when it is winter with my clients. The seasons change. That is a metaphor we use. There is hope in naked branches and all leaves on the ground and bare branches. We know we will get spring again, there will be leaves again. So I am not afraid of winter, that's how life is. It feels natural. It is amazing and people get enlightened by it. People also say they discover their own uniqueness and the possibilities and way of coping and seeing themselves in new lights.

EI: It sounds like an incredibly empowering approach and philosophy. I am so inspired and would like to walk with you. But what three things would you like people to take away from your approach?

CT: The first one would be to take your time with yourself. You can do a Narrative Walking by yourself. Ask yourself some questions to bring with you on the walk. And just be with nature, it supports you. And take your time with your listener as well. The other thing would be to have faith in nature as a framework for your own reflection and your own healing and recharging your change. Have faith in it, because we know it works. It will guide you and set a frame that will heal you. Thirdly, if you want to benefit from walking in nature and using narratives, be specific about your purpose. What is my goal today? What do I want to think? What do I need today? It could be something simple such as 'should I go to that party?' Or it might be an existential question, which we all have.

EI. Thank you so much Christel. Thank you joining me for my first interview series. I am sure it will be the beginning of more conversations we could have. I feel very inspired and I look forward to maybe walking and talking with you again. I know that your approach has so much to offer people. If people want to find out more about narrative therapy through walking where can they go to?

CT: My website is <https://friborgen.dk> It will be in English soon.

EI: Thank you so much for joining us!