

SURF
Out of Your Character

A Wellness Practice for Actors

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This book is dedicated to actors who strive to create kind content through their wellbeing.

May you always return home and love what you find there.

Introduction

As an actor, I have been taught dozens of methods on how to get into a character. Oddly enough, I was never taught how to get *out* of character. I had to find that method on my own. My process taught me to gracefully release myself from the roles I perform as a professional actor, as well as the roles I create in my own life.

Throughout many years of training and working in the biz, I have played dozens of roles from sitcom to stage. I have explored the minds of many different characters, walking in the shoes of many different people to understand them, and to become them. Successful actors are able to lose themselves in the professional roles they play; eventually, I realized that I had lost myself within the roles I was playing in my personal life as well. Have you ever looked around at your life and wondered, *How did I get here?* In acting, the entire point of your career is the moment you see yourself, and the world, from the point of view of your character. That is how you know you are *in* character.

I had never thought about consciously getting *out* of character as an actor. I knew it would eventually happen, but I didn't have a method. I would just continue with the next job or class and the role would slowly leave my consciousness, replaced by another one. Or so I thought.

Although the story would end as the curtain closed or the lights came on or the director said, "That's a wrap!" it didn't mean that the *character* left.

As an actor, I've been trained to create different characters, but how is it possible to continue to do that well if I am unconsciously carrying around old characters I previously created? How can I move on to a new relationship in my own life if I am still acting like I am in the old one?

This is the necessity out of which my SURF process was born. Later in this book, I will explain what this process is and how to use it, but first I want to explain how and why I reached this conclusion in the first place.

SURFing Out of Your Character

I had sunk into a mild depression for a few years. My father had passed away from a cancer I had thought he could beat, and I was angry at myself. I had always been Daddy's little girl, and now Daddy was gone. I couldn't save him.

I decided to try and return to acting to attempt to find myself again and get out of the pit of depression. I had taken a decade off to raise kids and invent products, and I no longer felt like myself. I felt like a character. I thought I would try and rediscover myself by returning to what I used to love: acting.

I rented a room to eliminate any distractions and focused on re-learning and remembering my professional training. While going through my movement lessons, something amazing started to happen—I started to feel like myself again. That depression I felt after the loss of my father began to lift as I began to separate myself from the role of “Daddy’s little girl” that I was still playing.

I realized that I had lost myself—like any great actor—in the role of Daddy’s little girl, and the process I was inventing in that rented room was a way to get out of that character. It was mind-blowing to me. As an actor, I was trained in the process of becoming someone else, seeing through their eyes, or heightening dormant parts of myself—but I was not ever really taught how to consciously undo it all. The other side of the equation was missing and I had just found the answer: SURF.

After stumbling upon the process, SURF took me 5 years to understand and develop into a method I could explain and teach—and have others teach and even implement themselves. The method is simple and easy; you can do it alone or with other people. SURF is the gamification of letting go—a light, kind, graceful way to exit a story. In the end, this is a way to truly move on and become a new version of yourself.

The Psyche

Moving from the impetus of love, I decided that I was not willing to return to my previously healed relationships and recreate drama. This method of sense memory or emotional recall is often taught in acting—using your own pain to connect to a character—and has proven harmful to my psyche. I don’t believe the psyche understands the passage of time because it is literal. The psyche assumes if you are still upset, the story is still live and in the present. So the psyche assumes it is in the midst of the drama, even if you are merely activating that trauma for the purpose of motivating your roles.

The psyche doesn’t know you are joking or pretending. As an actor, I have learned how to essentially convince my psyche that I believe something I do not personally believe. Through repetition of movement, thought, and word, I can reprogram myself to think like another person—because the psyche doesn’t understand sarcasm.

The psyche takes everything you do or say at face value. When you see something over and over again, you will assume you want what you see, regardless of what it is. That is why advertising works. You become overwhelmed with suggestions to the point of seduction. That is how the power of suggestion works. Even if you think you are looking at something out of disgust, your psyche is getting the concept that the thing you actually despise is tolerable. And thus, your psyche lowers your defenses and stops fighting. In my real-life role as a fitness instructor, this concept applies to stretching before, during, or after a workout. After thirty seconds in a held, static stretch, your sensory neurons will stop fighting you. Really, this concept applies to behaviors in general. If you repeat actions, thoughts, and words, you are able to be

manipulated by the psyche as a neutral, supple being. This vulnerability is scary, but it's a place we need to explore to truly be able to enter ourselves and exit our roles.

I knew that if I was ever going to take on another role, whether professionally or personally, I had to be willing to move on from the pain from which I'd healed during the years of developing my SURF process. I have learned it is possible to create from a place of love—even if I find myself using old stories, they come from a place of love, with the pain as an accepted, integrated part of my truth—and this has made me a much more versatile actor. Most importantly, I have enjoyed my journey.

Roles I Got Stuck In

Just because you know you get stuck in character, I have found, doesn't mean you can prevent it from happening. I am the type of actor who becomes the role. It is not anything I can stop from happening...I can only create in the present.

When I work on a role I make a playlist for the character and I also make a playlist for Susie, filled with songs that are positive and powerful, like my future self. I also have songs that bring me back to feelings that connect me to my husband and remind me of my devotion to him. As I take on another role, the focus of my passion shifts to something else and I tend to get scared I may never return. I always do, but my husband understands this.

I hadn't always known my husband even *knew* about me becoming the roles. I used to return home from a show at night, take my keys in my hand and as I opened the door I had to say to myself, "OK, deep breath. Action." Like I was in a play, pretending to be a wife and a mom because my character had taken over and was steering... Susie was just a vessel. But one night my husband asked me in the kitchen, "When is Susie coming back?" At the time, I was portraying a woman that was great at cleaning and cooking but not that sexual.

I remember looking at him like, *What?!* I had thought I was being so clever and playing the role of Susie when I was home. Apparently not.

As a frame of reference for the rest of the content in this book, the following is a list of roles that I have gotten stuck in, and a little explanation of each. As I said, I can't prevent this from happening, even though I am aware of it. This is why the process of getting *out* of character is so important. Also, I choose characters that I enjoy now.

Middle-Eastern Arms Dealer

I had just shot a woman on a boat, with a handgun my character had in her purse, and then had sex with a guy in a hallway. I wrapped the scene, left the set and went directly to meet my young children and husband Steve at an art festival. Afterwards, I stopped at a health store on my way home to get some baby food. The man behind me mentioned that I could actually make those

baby foods myself. I instantly reached into my bag to grab my gun. (Luckily I didn't have one—thank goodness!)

In that moment I was not a mother of young children...I was still an arms dealer with a gun.

Laraine Newman

As a heroin addict, I imagined that one of the other characters in the play was my supplier of the drugs. I substituted the heroin for chewing gum that this one actor gave me, thinking it was an innocent substitution, but it actually began my addiction. I became addicted to the gum and in turn the supplier of the gum. I literally would get full-fledged shakes and sweats...it was insane and very scary to experience. Even thinking of the taste of that gum gave me a sense memory experience.

This proved to me in no unclear way that if I could believe I was addicted to gum, that your psyche doesn't have a sense of humor—it has no idea if you are joking or sarcastic or acting. It believes you.

Helen of Troy

In 1999 I performed in a piece about the women of Troy. In order to get into character I decided to only eat five Balance Bars a day (about 1,000 calories). Plus I would teach my spin classes and to top it off I would run 45 minutes every day.

At my lowest, I weighed 148 pounds. I remember seeing that number in the locker room where I weighed myself. I remember my determination about dropping those pounds...and I remember how fantastic I felt in the dressing room. I was so skinny and powerful and above any question. My version of beautiful.

Helen of Troy is a woman who is abandoned by one man, taken in by another, and then fought over...by the two of them. My life began to morph into the story. I had broken up with a guy I dated for about two years, because I had met up with my now-husband, ex-boyfriend Steve at a wedding. During this time in my life, I was technically single...but both men were still in my life.

On the opening night of my performance as Helen of Troy, both men were in the audience—my ex-boyfriend who had brought me a dozen roses and my other ex-boyfriend who flew in from Miami to be with me. I was indeed being fought over. It was the first and only time that happened to me in my life, but I am sure that was because the energy of Helen was within me.

Helen of Troy was powerful and determined, and I never thought about getting out of her character...her confidence and determination had been ingrained in me.

At the opening night party, a director who also wanted me in his play (yet another man fighting over me!) said he was a "little" concerned about my breasts. I had lost so much weight that my

chest was very, very flat. So, being Helen of Troy, I decided I would not be held back, and I ventured into another physical shift.

I went under the knife. I woke up and immediately wanted the implants out but was advised to give it time...I did...18 years later I took them out, and with them went Helen of Troy.

Bettie Page

She fascinated me ever since my husband brought home a coffee table book about Bunny Yeager, a local Miami icon. “Local,” meaning she lived near me but I had never met her. She had photographed nude women in the 1950s and had taken photos of the pin-up girl Bettie Page while she was in Miami one year.

I learned about self-portraits from Bunny’s coffee table book—how to see yourself, own all of it, and then just focus on what captures the light. I became fascinated by the idea of seeing oneself as it related to my movement and theater work and getting out of character.

I decided to work on a piece about Bunny Yeager, and rented a space. I ended up meeting an actress just down from NYC at a play reading. I started to work with her and slowly we began working on a play about Bettie and Bunny. We wanted to know *why* the two women who helped each other launch their career in a cover shot on *Playboy* stopped speaking to each other.

We wrote a play about becoming these two women and I became super sexual and magnetized a ton of energy toward me—so much so that I could be wearing sweatpants and walking with my family, and men would cross the street and start harassing me. Or another time I was on my way to a callback for a commercial and I took issue with a man on a Vespa telling me to smile. My tongue was unhinged and he responded by trying to run me over. I ended up getting to the callback but I was out of sorts. I basically went off on the women in the audition room because they were not sensitive to my feelings about the man that tried to *kill* me. Then, as I walked down the stairs, the same book of Bunny’s was on the shelf of the wall—with the cover of Bettie Page looking at me! I was distraught.

I was over it all. I called my agent and quit acting...I told my partner I couldn’t perform our play unless it was only for women. I searched for places in Miami to only be around women...I erased every male from my Facebook friends list. I was so sensitive to the male gaze I found their energy in every way terrifying; and when my acting partner wouldn’t agree to having only women in the room when we performed our play, I ended our partnership and we never really spoke again. Just like Bunny and Bettie.

Along this journey I found the real reason Bunny and Bettie never spoke. One night a man tried to break into Bettie’s home and she had been up all night; the next morning, Bunny came to pick her up for a photo shoot they had scheduled. Bettie tried to cancel, but Bunny had already paid for everything at the location and so she threatened Bettie with having to cover the losses if she

didn't do the shoot. There seemed to be, like in my relationship with my partner, no sensitivity about her state of mind. Bettie ended up doing the photo shoot and those images are still sold today some 70 years later. Even the original coffee book that inspired me contained them; and on the very front page of that book was a release, signed by Bettie, saying that Bunny owned the images and would pay Bettie \$25 per session.

I was still NOT going through with the play at the time. Not working with a woman I felt had no sensitivity to my abuse or trauma was a karmic shift. Two weeks later, Harvey Weinstein was accused and the entire #metoo movement began. An important aspect of this movement is not only getting justice for those who have been harassed and assaulted by putting the abusers behind bars, but also having victims' stories heard and believed.

I feel this retelling of stories of our past is also part of healing our future. If we keep recounting the past with the same ending...then nothing can change because the amount of people who will see that story will be programmed to believe it—and in believing it they will become part of it subconsciously. Telling old stories in new ways may be called revisionist...but telling old stories in the same way might be called insanity.

Angry Politician

I once was offered this role after I had quit acting. The theater would be immersive—some of the issues with immersive theater are less boundaries and many more chances to get caught in the role. The pieces performed in this play looped each night almost 9 times.

Imagine saying something over and over again...9 times a night for a total of 100 times—like any mantra. Imagine that the people are not in the audience but on a chair next to you...lines are blurred, and self and character are eventually indetectable. People who meet you on set think you *are* the role because that's when they see you...what else could you be?

Being aware that I get into character and had spent so much time getting over being angry, I kindly declined. Then they had another offer.

Mrs. Wade

The next offer, the character of a 1950s host. I took it and approached her entire piece from the position of *love*. It was a huge success, and to this day I have people around town recognizing me. Once I went to a famous South Beach restaurant and the woman showing us to our table kept looking at me, with *love* in her eyes. But she wasn't really looking at me, Susie, that way; she was actually looking at my character, Mrs. Wade, a loving, kind woman.

I realized that being in this role of a woman who preferred women even opened up my own admiration for them. Not being gay, I was very fascinated about the feeling I would have toward the women I (Mrs. Wade) was dancing with in my scene, or even seeing in everyday life. This was indeed a whole new world.

Gallerist

The next role I took was of a gallerist. Originally the script was one way, but then in rehearsal it shifted and I became so mad...it was about someone I kind of knew and I was surprised at the reason I was so angry. When I finally met up with the woman and her sister, I realized that the anger and pain I was transmuting was still active in their personal lives. Not in the woman I portrayed as much as her sister. I was telling their story, I was healing their wounds in real time—and when they told me this, I was not at all surprised.

As actors, we do that—we hold a story for people so that they can hopefully let it go...if we can shift it for them. After repeating it nearly 100 times, I ended that piece with a gesture of closure.

Melania Trump

I was excited to work on this amazing new play in this character, and although it scared and even excited me I knew I could implement my skills to do it safely. I knew how to create a playlist—how to, step by step, get into her mind and body and at the same time leave a trail of breadcrumbs so I could return to myself. I knew how to pace myself and not go too far too soon. I knew how to trust my process. I knew how to explain my process to the director.

When I was requested to stay in character the entire rehearsal, I informed the director that was not going to work for me. When I asked the director to trust I would get there, they did. As we workshopped the script—first online due to COVID-19 and then in person in a private space—I would go in and out of character while I was working...kind of marking and acting on and off. But as time went on, the director wanted to see all of it—full out. I informed him that we were still workshopping and when we went into rehearsal I would do that, but for the time being I was just marking.

At first, the piece was—in my eyes—a comedy and about something foreign to me. But as I researched I became more and more sympathetic to the role of Melania through interviews I watched, books I read, and observations I made about her body language. I became keenly aware that this was a dark play, she was parched with loneliness, and I was tiptoeing toward her.

The director was enjoying the moments that I found in the role, but they wanted more...more and more moments. One day, the director began to align my life—my husband, my family, my kids...my stories—to Melania's, and this is where the train left the tracks.

After that rehearsal I was devastated with sadness; all my personal relationships started to sour before my eyes. I was placed in a very compromising situation. I had been working for almost two months with the director and I was knee-deep in the process. But the sadness of the character wouldn't leave.

After that rehearsal the director got a call: someone who had come into the theater the previous week to say hi and watch a little rehearsal, the one that couldn't help himself from falling asleep and who also had just returned from the Northeast, had tested positive for COVID-19.

I played it cool—not like me, but like Melania—as we left rehearsal after this bomb was dropped. But I began to think, *Wow. I am acting in a play about Trump getting COVID-19 and now I could have it and wouldn't that be nuts if...*

My mind began to spin, but I held it together, I convinced myself I was being delusional and when the director said he tested negative, I put my worries aside. But the damage had begun during the last rehearsal when the director connected my life to Melania's; the scabs and scars I had spent years healing started to ooze with emotional pus.

I began to toy with the idea of not doing the show.

Then I had another rehearsal—this time via Zoom—and the director was totally satisfied with my performance. He was intrigued with my “work” and was not asking me to stay entirely in character anymore. At that point, we were still about a month out from even thinking about beginning official rehearsals of the play. I had a month of family vacation planned and I was *in* character; as much as I had paced and breadcrumbed my exit, I was stuck. I felt it—and I became depressed. I knew in my heart that things were not going well—the election was coming up and the Trump family was in the spotlight, COVID-19 cases were rising in Florida, my director still had the ability to activate my people-pleasing personality, and I didn't have the skill to deflect it anymore, in my own rehearsal space.

Then I started to get headaches. I went to get a COVID-19 test and test for antibodies because everyone felt I was being dramatic. My test for the virus was negative, so we continued with our vacation to see my husband's entire family in NC. Then my friend in Miami, who I had seen a few weeks before, said she was feeling awful and got tested, and she said I should too. I began to panic. Steve was starting in with the symptoms I had had—the fatigue and the headache—and suddenly I realized I was Melania...in a situation with my husband getting COVID-19...just like the play. I was a mess.

I returned to Miami, I retook the antibodies test, and this time it came back positive. Steve, my husband, was seemingly at the end of his symptoms; he took the COVID-19 test and he came back negative. My entire family I went to visit took that test and all tested negative. It was a godsend. My mother-in-law is a mystic and her prayers were definitely working.

I had already pushed the play back from the end of August to mid-September but it was simply a buffer. I was losing my love for the piece, losing the joy for the story; it was hitting home and I was having more and more doubts about being a political instigator at the time of election.

As we were driving home from NC we saw a billboard of Trump on the side of the road, which started to mess with me. I smiled warmly—or rather, Melania smiled warmly...

I used to tell my students that their beliefs need to be malleable so that if you had to play a person who was the absolute opposite of you, you could play that role with love...but I wonder now, how far is too far? I was able to see Melania, to feel her, but at what cost?

I carefully weighed my options, began to return to my book I was writing, this one you are reading right now, and found I had nothing to say. I tried to SURF but was unable to move.. So I broke up with my character. I said, “Ho’oponopono. Melania, please forgive me, I’m sorry, I love you, thank you”—and with that, a feeling of relief washed over me.

I called the director. Quickly and honestly, I said, “I have been thinking, and I have a solution for you. I am not able to do this play, mentally, but I have a wonderful actress who can.” After a brief back-and-forth, I hung up the phone and skipped into my home...free and inspired, and very, very proud of myself for choosing wellness over notoriety.

As you can see, it’s very easy for me to get stuck in the roles of the characters I play on stage or screen, and in life. I am an empath. This is why SURFing out of my character is so necessary in both my personal life and in my professional life.

Are You in Character?

Are you currently thinking, *How did I get here? I miss myself.*

Or, are you charged in your relationships? Does the mere thought of a person or a situation cause you to feel upset right now, as you are reading or listening to this?

Then you may be in character.

By understanding how an actor knows they are *not* in character, you will be able to also learn if you *are*.

In a play, if the lead actor decided to change something about their character at the start of the show, then the story won’t hold up. Perhaps the actor decided that their character maybe wasn’t as upset or sad or happy, then the actor is not truly invested and the character will find it harder to resonate.

I did this once in a dress rehearsal; after the play, the director was devastated that his entire rehearsal process was for nothing. “We have no play. There is no point!” he cried. I explained to him that I was conducting an experiment on letting go, and I informed him I would never do it again...at least not while on stage during a show.

To understand the consequences of letting go of a character in a story, let's imagine a relationship that you have. Is there a relationship where you feel upset with a person, even when you are not even in the room with them? Imagine that person. Now, intentionally change your mind. Decide right now—for just a split second and for the process of this test—to soften your feelings about them and release your judgment and anger as much as you can. Decide that you are not upset—right here and now—and believe that.

Now try and replay in your mind the last time you saw them or spoke to them. With your new unattached feelings, walk through the scene. Is it still as exciting and dramatic as you remembered? Or, like my experience letting go of my character in the play, does it fall short and end up to be less dramatic and less entertaining?

If so, then you are holding onto a story that—in this moment at this exact time—doesn't exist, but you have convinced your psyche that the *story* is actually alive. Regardless of time or endings, you have chosen to be motivated by the pain and thus you are somehow still playing that record. The ego is locked in, which is ideal for the play, and I suspect that those feelings are rooted in stories you may not even truly remember right now. But you feel them because you have perpetuated them, like any great actor, over and over again until your ego *became* them.

You are stuck in these stories and I hope you will allow me to help you to get unstuck. This freedom will allow you to change your life and, in turn, the lives around you.

Kill your ego and free yourself to find a new role.

The Holes in the Truth

You are lying to yourself.

Actually, we all are, so choose the better lie—the one that makes you feel the best.

How do I know we are all not fully telling ourselves and others the whole truth?

SURF helps us to find the holes in the truth. In what areas of your life are you not telling the whole truth, whether to others or to yourself? Where is there space for adjustment? What is a better, kinder, perspective of each story? If I have been motivated by a less-than-perfect truth this far, am I willing to be motivated by a *kinder* less-than-perfect truth moving forward?

Take this simple but eye-opening test to discover the answers to these questions for yourself before we move on.

Take the Test

1. Take a deep breath. **Remember** what you did this morning. From the moment you opened your eyes till your first drink of water, coffee, or tea. Do you remember? Good.
2. Now, using your two pointer fingers like little puppets, **play** out your morning on a table or any surface in front of you—like you were doing a tiny puppet show for yourself.

For example: “I woke up, stretched...then I went to the bathroom,” etc.

3. Now that you have told the story with your mind and your fingers, stand up and **physically** go through the motions of that same story, just in the space directly in front of you. Repeating the same story again, now walk your entire body through it as best you can, using the actual spaces of your bedroom, bathroom, etc.
4. Notice any details you found when using your entire body?

Did you find that you forgot things in the first two versions (just your memory or just the puppet show)? Did the details of the sunlight or the sounds come to you when you used your whole body? Did those details help you remember something you forgot in the first two versions of the morning that happened less than 24 hours ago?

Can you accept that even when trying to accurately remember something that happened this very morning...you struggle? Can you accept that perhaps you also are misremembering things about the past—things further back than this morning? Our body stores past pains and injuries even when they are over, until we reset the story, release the charge.

Your entire body seeks balance and truth, and your entire body—when asked and given permission—will not lie to you. Your body and your soul don't lie. Your ego and your mind do. The goal in this work is to find the missing details of the other versions of our “truth” stories that are kinder and less ego-based, and which allow us to detach from the pain, the drama, and our ego.

Some past character or characters are currently influencing your story right now. My promise is if you dare to follow my simple SURF method, you will be released from those past feelings and thoughts, and learn how to find yourself again. Learn how to let go of past stories and any future ones you undoubtedly get stuck in. Make sure you have the skillset to choose your next role from a place of love.

Can you convince yourself to follow the bliss and retell a story that serves a lighter, brighter, kinder future self?

If the answer is yes, then let's play.

What is the SURF Method?

You're likely eager for me to get into the SURF method and explain how it works. We'll get there! Before I explain the details and help you put SURF into practice, I want to help you understand your brain a bit better and how it holds onto roles and belief systems.

Cognitive Dissonance

To get the most out of the SURF method, we must first define and understand cognitive dissonance.

cog·ni·tive dis·so·nance: the state of having inconsistent thoughts, beliefs, or attitudes, especially as relating to behavioral decisions and attitude change.

Why is there a fight when we are given new information about something? Why can't we just abort the false information and move ahead with the new information?

Well, to illustrate this point, I like to picture cognitive dissonance (CD) as Rock 'em Sock 'em Robots. You know, the childhood game where two players use joysticks to control two plastic robots in a ring and fight it out. The two robots are two seemingly opposing ideas that clash in the ring, but seem equally matched.

Most of us feel that our beliefs are our identity.

We imagine that if we choose to believe something different than our current beliefs, we will cease to be who we are. We struggle with letting go of beliefs because our ego knows it will die when we change our minds. The ego—wrong or right—is not interested in dying and starting over. It has worked so hard to create this role for us, and it will fight tooth and nail to survive.

So what do you do when two equally powerful ideas are having it out with each other like plastic robots in the ring? You ask yourself, "Which idea is right?" Right?!

Wrong!

A better set of questions is, “Which idea is less angry? Causes less drama? Allows your body to truly release? Which one is calm?”

The idea that holds on too strongly and causes pain and anger is a false, dead story. An old story trying to hold on by overcompensating with razzle dazzle. The less dramatic idea is a young, creative, new thought. It tends to feel like air—ethereal, unformed, and impressionable.

If you follow that new idea, you will die—but you also will truly evolve as a person and release old stories from your body (or at least the attachment you have to them).

But the ego, that old story, is just so tasty and exciting and overdone. Even when you think you are trying to make a dramatic exit, you are just perpetuating it instead—giving it energy, and strengthening it by giving it your attention, by slamming the door.

It’s a scientific fact that energy never dies; but it can be transmuted. And that, my loves, is what we need to learn. We need to learn how to not slam the door, but rather walk softly to it, open it a tiny bit, slither through and blow kisses over our shoulder as we sneak softly out of the room.

Transmutation of anger is the sexiest thing I have ever felt or seen! Transmuting your anger allows you to leave a charged situation with an energy-filled bank account—which can be converted instantly into whatever you want. It’s a mystical power to strive for. This isn’t to say that the issue that angered you should be ignored. It should be acknowledged, yes, but then it needs to be fully released. Put it down and walk kindly away from it.

But how?

I have found that music is an extremely helpful way to transmute anger. If you can find a song that fully represents the feeling you are grabbing to release, play that song and allow yourself to move through the music till the very end of the song. The music will resolve, like any song does, and eventually your story will too. Repeat this exercise as needed till you feel a release...like a chiropractic adjustment. It is a sneaky way to begin to trick your psyche—many of us probably already use music to get ourselves *into* moods, but in this case we can also use music to get out of one.

Search for music that would appear in the score to your life’s movie, at this point in the story. Then film yourself while you explore the disagreement within you. You can watch the video back and you can see the ugly, mean, hurtful and painful parts of the disagreement. You’ll see the ego battling what is kind and loving and peaceful within your soul.

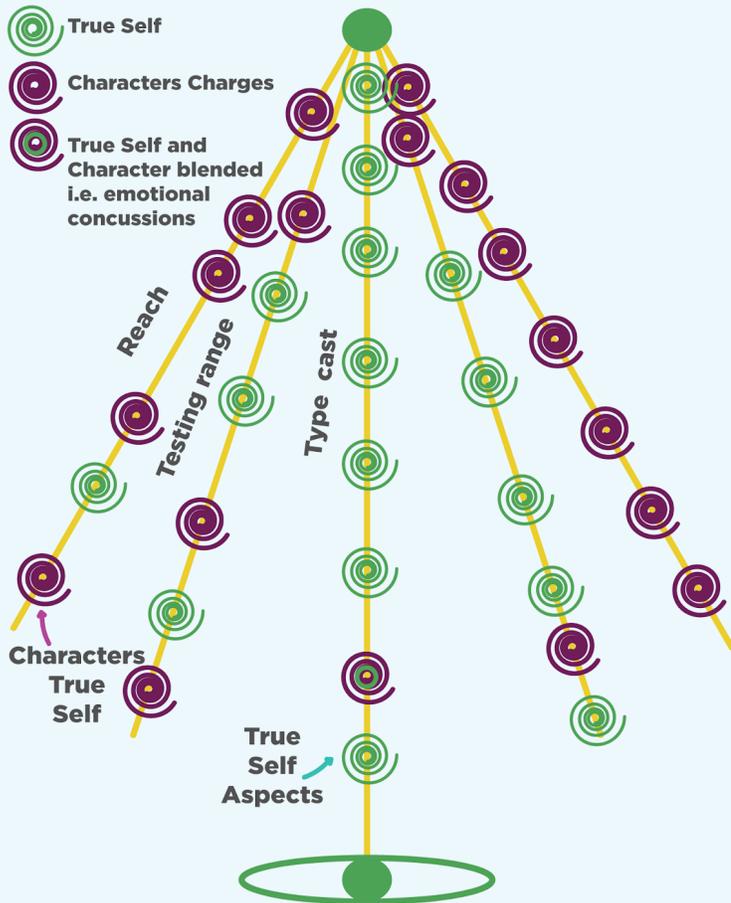
Ask yourself honestly...are you here to win the fight? Or are you here to end it?

SURF Method Explained or Why SURF?

SURF sidesteps the ego through playful movement, music, and self-examination in order to gain understanding of the authentic self.

As a performer, I have devoted myself to years of intensive training that taught me how to embody any type of character I wanted to portray. Some of the training was based around the technique of recall, which involves tapping into one's personal life experiences and then repurposing them for affective authenticity. This style of training is successful, yet I also find it capable of causing psychological concussions. Even if you are not tapping in on purpose or even if you are playing characters close to your true self, you are still possibly compounding traumas unbeknownst to you. There is no way to know. These concussions are caused by stitching your own personal experiences into the material of a character so seamlessly that you struggle to remember where you end and your character begins.

In my intensive training, I was never taught how to tear apart the seams, to separate, to get out of the character and back into myself. These physiological concussions can have toxic repercussions for performers as well as the culture that they help mold. The ability to travel deftly through alternative belief systems and physical worlds is powerful and playful, but it can also be dangerous.



Studies have found that the frontal brain activity decreases when actors are playing a character - leaving room to get into a character

The further our character is from our true self, the further the actor must reach away from self, the more vulnerable risk they are of losing true self.

Also, the more our character aligns with our own stories, the harder it is to untangle them.

If our traumas are healed it may be easier, but the character can reopen a wound as well

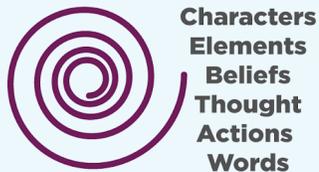
Regardless if the character is not like you or similar, the risk and the need for returning home is important.

Choose roles kindly.

Characters can pull you off your true self. If they pull you too far you can have issues with cognitive dissonance and suffer an emotional concussion.

Heal your emotional concussions through the SURF wellness practice before taking on a new character.

Know Thyself 1st



I know a few actors that found they have gotten too far into a role, which can be VERY dangerous. Their roles were uber dark and their ability to get out of them was not ever dealt with. An actor who is in character actually exhibits similar effects as a person partaking in alcohol. Alcohol decreases some of the activity of the prefrontal cortex—the part of the brain that helps you to think clearly and rationally, and is involved in your decision-making abilities. When you drink, alcohol makes it harder for the prefrontal cortex to work as it should, disrupting decision-making and rational thought. In this way, alcohol prompts you to act without thinking about your actions.¹

In the same way, acting is associated with deactivation of regions in the front and midline of the brain that are involved in thinking about the self. “This might suggest that acting, as a neurocognitive phenomenon, is a suppression of self processing,” according to researchers.²

Not only is this damaging to the actor, in fact, for an actor to say that they get stuck in a character would be a red flag on them as a professional. I find this lack of understanding in the business a big issue, both in the roles themselves and the acting schools. Actors aren’t able to fully admit getting stuck in a role; all of our training is about getting *into* character. But like anything else (a marriage, a business, etc.) characters usually require as much skill and work to exit—sometimes more.

When a performer channels their personal pain into a character, they are often triggering internalized trauma, sometimes unconsciously, that they will be forced to contend with long after the show is over. These concerns motivated me to promote wellbeing in performance art by creating my own concept of training called SURF:

- Story
- Understanding
- Recasting
- Flow

SURF is a therapeutic process that releases the ego through unconscious movement led by an authentic, healed self.

This technique aims to keep performance at the forefront of character development by allowing actors to diffuse, rather than perpetuate, their traumas in order to drive the performances forward with free emotional rein. I have been teaching this process since 2014. And you can create work from a healed place. I know. In my play *Jewbana*, I apply this technique by re-examining my own behaviors through the eyes of those who have been most affected by my actions. I developed the play by asking key figures in my life to share their honest judgments of me and then produced those narratives on stage with full, unflinching credence. Examining my narrative through these different lenses allowed me to develop deeper empathy and

¹ <https://www.alcohol.org/effects/inhibitions/>

² <https://aeon.co/ideas/acting-changes-the-brain-its-how-actors-get-lost-in-a-role>

compassion for myself. Through this process, I was able to create a healthy distance from my trauma that allowed me to uproot my internalized pain and safely channel it into my performances.

This therapeutic approach empowered me to discard psychological baggage and distill my selfhood from the personal mythologies and pains that my performances had cannibalized. The result is an autobiographical comedic drama with a 360-degree view of my feminine journey, replete with culture clash, complex family dynamics, motherhood, and other investigations into my fraught lineage and identity.

Putting the Method into Practice

Before we dive deeper into the SURF method and ways to implement it, here are some helpful links that may be useful as you get started:

- Warmup Playlists
<https://music.apple.com/us/playlist/healing-2020-with-halo-hi/pl.u-leyl0kYfjMLLK1>
<https://www.epidemicsound.com/playlist/tbobxq1tjckjoxobk596p2cyapy98w0y/>
- Morning Daily Meditation
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AL70-RZpnao&list=UUqhlPnpKxrHqJUoafxxRDng&index=7&t=10s>

The SURF Warmup (begin playlist)

Begin seated on your mat, close your eyes and take a few deep breaths to ground yourself to this moment.

Say out loud the Ho'oponopono prayer: (pronounced as you like)

*Ho'oponopono (name of person you have a large charge with)
Please forgive me
I'm sorry
I love you,
Thank you*

Next, focus on your breathing until your breath is calm and your body is relaxed. Imagine a white light beaming down from the sky and entering your body through the top of your head. It begins to travel down your spine and through the base of your spine and down, down, down, grounding you to the center of the earth. To a warm place where your true self is. Imagine this place and know it as home. Feel that you are attached to this place through the beam as it connects you to the center of the earth. You are grounded.

As you breathe deeper, imagine your shoulder blades have tiny wings on them. With each inhale they expand and with each exhale they softly close. What material are your wings made of? What color? How large are they? Can you imagine these wings growing larger with each breath?

Feel you are grounded to the earth. Know you have wings to expand and guide.
Breathe.

Focus on your energy:

- Rub your hands together to feel your energy tingling between your palms.
- Slowly pull your palms apart as far as you can without losing the connection (the tingles).
- If you lose the connection, try again, slowly and less far apart.
- Now, what color is the energy ball that you imagine is between your palms? Red? Orange? Yellow? If you don't know, just choose a color.
- How big is the energy ball? Can you put into one hand, or transfer it between your palms? Does it change color when you change hands?
- Condense the energy ball between the thumb and middle fingers of each hand. Place these fingers on the center of your forehead and tap three times.

Say out loud, "I accept that I feel _____."

As you say this, slowly move your fingers away from your forehead like you are pulling the energy out.

Next, place your fingers on your temples on each side and say, "I feel _____", accepting your first self-awareness. Again pull the energy out.

Next, place your fingers on each side of your jawbone and say, "This is _____." Tap three times on your throat, and move your fingers slowly away, again making a protective web around yourself with your color energy. Try to resolve your thought.

For example:

I accept the fact that I am feeling sad

This is sad

I am sad

Feeling sad is fine.

The idea is not to pretend to be feeling anything other than how you feel—accept it. Don't abort a feeling because it is unpopular or uncomfortable.

Next, take your arms out and over your head, gathering your energy color from the space around you with your fingertips.

Let your palms fall on your body, along your central spinal line of your body. As your hands come close to your body, imagine your palms have the key to unlock that part of your spinal energy with these words:

“I want for you what you want for you.”

Repeat this again three times, gathering up with your hands the energy you are working with. Allow your palms to fall on the central line of your body.

The fourth time you repeat these words, start to paint your entire body with the color of your energy, starting with your hair.

- Massage your whole body softly and kindly with your colorful energy, all the while saying out loud, “I want for you what you want for you.” You can do this by placing your fingertips on your body or if you feel your energy, trace your body with your palms.
- Move your colored energy all the way slowly down your body with your hands, massaging:
 - Face (lips, ears, tongue)
 - Neck
 - Back
 - Shoulders
 - Arms
 - Hands
 - Chest
 - Waist (hug yourself)
 - Hips
 - Legs
 - Toes
 - Place your pointer fingers between your toes, pressing firmly on the sensory neurons between your toes to wake them up. This should feel slightly uncomfortable.

Next, bring your arms up again and cross your arms in front of you in a protective swoop, making a barrier of your energy and your connection to the world.

Heart Opening

Sit down with your legs bent and open in front of yourself, with your arms behind your chest. Lift one arm up and then the other arm up and over your head, to the side and to the front and

around to the other side. When your arms are in front of you it is like you are reaching over a beach ball; when your arms are behind you, your chest is open and your back is arched. Repeat 3x each side very slowly. Noticing the way the floor feels and all the elements your fingers touch. Notice the textures of things.

Then end with your arms behind you and take a deep breath as though you could breathe in air from many parts of your body. The bottom of your feet, your groin, your ears, your chest, your mouth and the top of your head. Breathe in the deepest breath you ever have, and as you exhale roll yourself down to the floor.

Lay on your back.

Hip Opener

Imagine you're the Tin Man and need to oil your hip joints to get moving. Let's warm up your hips and get the creative juices flowing.

With your freshly opened heart, lying on your back, bend your knees and keep your feet on the floor, hips width apart. Press through your feet and lift your hips upward, as high as they can go. If you need to place your hands on your lower back for support, do so. Circle your hips clockwise three times and then counterclockwise three times; then widen your feet and push your hips upward again and circle them again, loosening up your back and hips. Three times to the left and three times to the right.

Roll back down to the ground with your back on the mat. Then gently roll onto your belly.

Keeping your entire body in contact with the floor, lift your hips. Feel the release in your lower back. Be gentle and then roll your hips in a circle. Pressing through the floor and around to the sides and up again. It is a small sexy movement that helps unlock creative energy and helps us connect with the floor in a deeper way.

Slide slowly to your hands and knees. Imagine you are a kitty cat, waking up after a long nap. How would that kitty cat move its body? Explore smaller movements in your head, shoulders, and hips, until you find your own kitty cat moves that softly stretch and tap into your creative sensuality. Purrfect :)

Remaining on your knees, slowly release your hands from the floor and find your hip swirls again. Using your whole body, fall forward and to the side and back, and to the other side. Allow your body to relax and explore speeds. Circle yourself three times to the right and three to the left. Find your breath as you fall forward; exhale and inhale as you reach your arms back and your hips forward, swirling. Then slowly end the movement.

Gently roll your body up to a standing position, one vertebrae at a time, slowly raising your head last. Keep your hands on your body, and reintroduce yourself to the swirling hips as you finally stand.

Repeat the actions you did while on your knees. Use your hips and swirl your body in three circles, falling back and dropping forward. Allow your breath to release as you move forward. Let out a nice loud sigh and repeat three times on each side.

Find a wall to lean against. Place your back on the wall and circle your hips. See how far your hips can circle to each side. Are your hips nice and oiled? Great!

End of Warmup

To protect your newly-accessed sensual, creative energy, you can cross your arms in front of you as a symbol of protection. Take your arms over your head and cross them in front of your body, making a protective shield. (Note: you can do this whenever you feel the need for protection from any energy.)

Laban Movement Scales

Explore each of these Laban movements (for more information on the Laban Movement Scales, including a helpful chart, see the Appendix).

- press
- flick
- dab
- glide
- float
- punch
- slash
- heavy/light

Discover how your body expresses each word. For example, express the word “press” with your body for one minute. Experiment with the speed, direction, weight, and flow of the word. Improvise and be playful, using your space and music as your inspiration. Commit fully to the process.

Repeat for the other 7 movements.

Great job! Now you should be nice and warm. Open-hearted, open-hipped and open-minded. I'm sure you're eager to get started!

Before we get started with the SURF process, however, we need to find the characters that are holding us back. For the well-being of our instruments (ourselves), let's start getting out of characters we play in our own life.

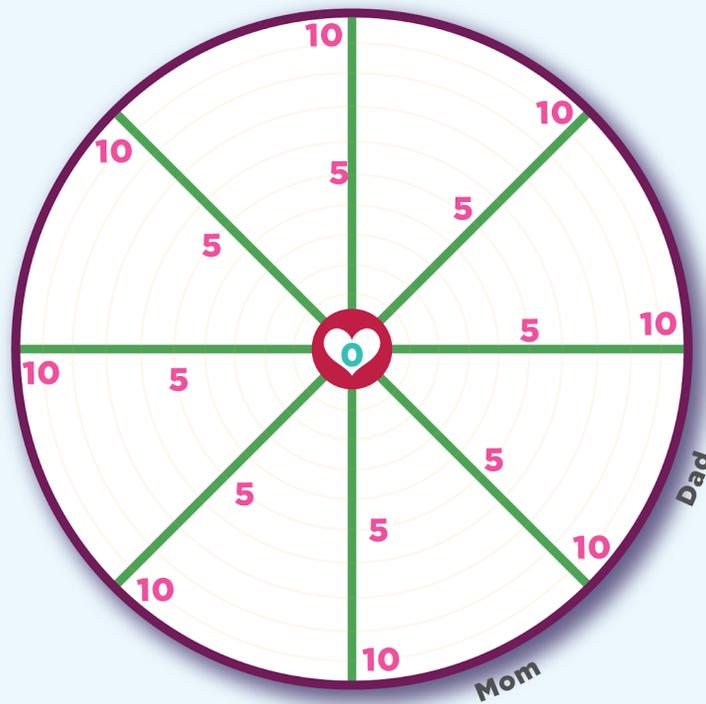
The graphs on the next few pages will help you to visualize the relationships you have, and the way those relationships affect you. It's important to understand your connections to people, and the roles you play within those relationships, before undergoing the process to SURF out of those characters.

What Charge Do Your Relationships Have?

The core of who we are is connected to those closest to us. Our environment. Our nurture... This graph gives each major family relationship a piece of the pie. Even if they are not present in the physical form. Please add in your parents, siblings, your spouse, and any other people who are in your inner inner circle.

Note: people who have passed away may still hold a piece of your pie, so don't let anything limit you here. We are just looking for who is most influencing you...

This graph shows the score of how affected I was by these relationship stories—mostly all 10—meaning they affected my sense of self in a very huge way.



10 = Greatest Charge
 0 = ♥ Neutral

Your Relationship Charge Graph

Title the pieces of the pie with the name of your closest relationships. Usually family and lovers. Grade the relationship by placing a DOT at the number that best represents the charge you hold towards this relationship. 10 being the grade for the strongest and most attached charge (positive or negative) and 0 being the lightest charge. Once you have graded each relationship, focus on the ones with the strongest charge and use the SURF practice to release them.

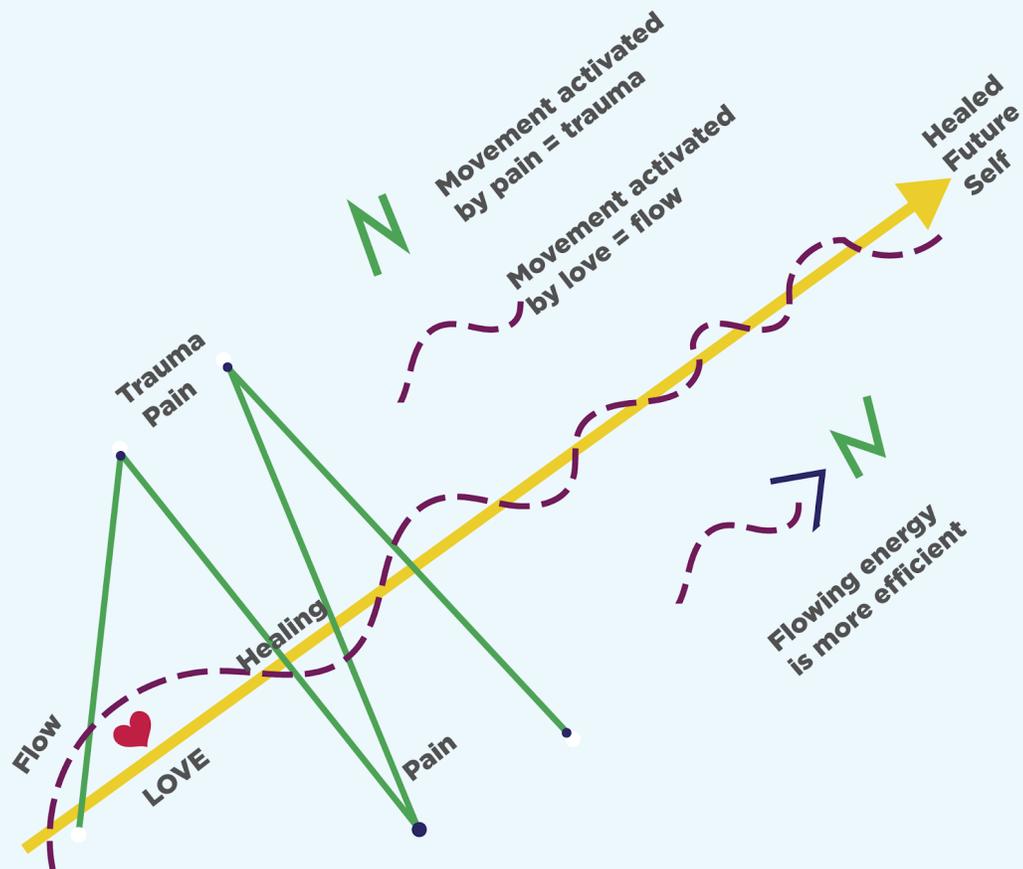
What Charge Do Your Relationships Have? (Feel free to use this graph for your own relationships.)

Let's go a step further. If you had to give your character in these relationship stories a quality...what would it be? Here is a chart that may help. The stronger and higher the charge, the more you are NOT in the light. Your energy is NOT being used efficiently and, like any great actor, we know that efficiency is everything. We can move toward that use of energy by getting out of that character and recasting ourselves into a more efficient one. Why not? Traveling in dark energy is hard, and uses more energy to get further in your truth.

Traveling in light energy feels like almost nothing, and allows you to use less energy to go further in your light.

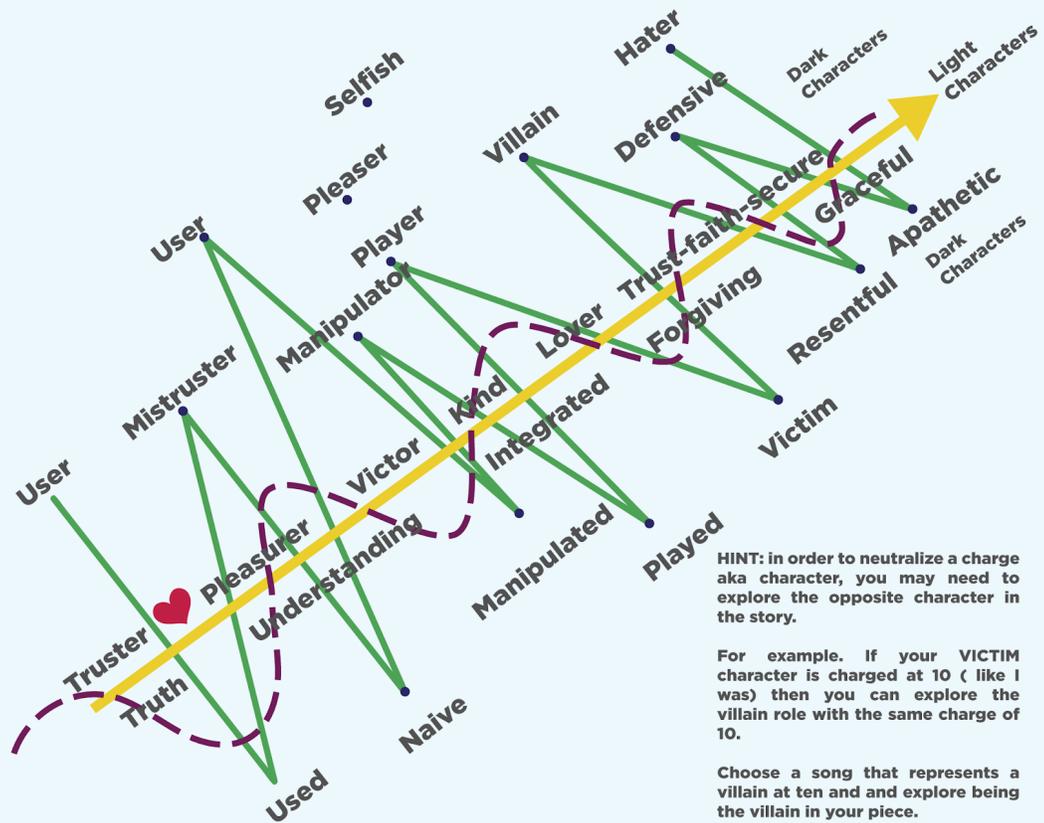
Roles and emotions that are dark pull you off your light; roles and emotions that are dramatic and intense feel valid and eye-catching, but perhaps they are perpetuating more pain as we ping-pong from one dark role to another.

Energy cannot be destroyed or created, but it can be used better. We can conserve energy in our lives by letting ourselves function closer to the light. This keeps us moving towards our better selves in an easier way. If we travel often to the dark, we exhaust ourselves and have trouble moving forward.



Energy cannot be created or destroyed but it can be transmuted. Being motivated by pain and trauma, we can waste energy, making it difficult to heal and move forward. We can be more efficient with our energy by transmuting dark to light through SURF and letting ourselves flow closer to love. The goal is a healed True Self.

Playing dark roles in acting and in life are the same. They are challenging and exciting, and perhaps worthy of a nomination...perhaps that's why actors gravitate to them. Why do we yearn to explore the things furthest from us? All I am saying is that you can have an exploration without pain; and if you have the palate for joy, you can even create and enjoy it.



Surfing the Waves

HINT: in order to neutralize a charge aka character, you may need to explore the opposite character in the story.

For example. If your VICTIM character is charged at 10 (like I was) then you can explore the villain role with the same charge of 10.

Choose a song that represents a villain at ten and and explore being the villain in your piece.

Seeing the other perspective of your story releases your hold on your point of view just enough to wiggle out of your victim character and into the villain and then settling on in this case victor. (neither villain nor victim)
This can be used with all dark character energies.

Dark characters that are not healed yield other dark characters. Healed characters FLOW in lightness.

The SURF Practice

Story

Using your answers on the above graphs, pick a relationship story with a charge greater than 5. Try and give that character in your relationship story a name. Villain, Victim, Used, etc. Now pick that character's song, any song. Just think about that person. That song. That one that just came to you in an inspired "aha!" moment. Search for that song on YouTube or iTunes or Spotify.

Ideally, you will find a song that makes you feel like that relationship makes you feel. The exact same way. If your relationship Story were a film, this song would be the background music when this person enters. Don't get stuck on it...if you can't come up with one, one will eventually come up on its own. Maybe it is a song you can't stand, the one that makes you change the radio station...it most likely isn't a song you like. The ego is funny—it can run but it can't hide from music. Music is the key to the soul.

Once you have your song, or multiple songs, start a playlist labeled SURF. The songs on this playlist will be used to undo your charges and they will also be used to check in on the status of those relationships as you move through your SURF practice.

Now that you have a song picked out, you will want to be able to play the song as you record yourself with video. Basically, it will work best if you have two devices. I use my computer, Alexa, or iPad to play the music and my phone to record the video. Luckily, many of us have multiple devices such as these, but if not, I am sure you can get creative and figure something out, or borrow a device from someone. Sometimes I use a mirror—but be careful, a mirror tends to bring out the performer in all of us. That will either make you overly expressive as a performer, or if you are shy, limit your expression.

Your goal is to feel super safe, super vulnerable, and super heard. I have rented rooms for this work, waited until my house is clear of everyone, asked for privacy in a room in my home or, even when I felt brave enough (and you will), I have done a piece outside. If you so wish, the ability to share yourself as a performance artist through movement is possible at the park or on a nature walk. This movement can become normal and easy, like riding a bike.

Once you have your song and your devices, all you have to do is pick a nonhuman partner (an inanimate partner): a chair, the floor, or the wall, a tree.

Now, set up your camera so that it can capture a large amount of your movement space.

Press 'record' on your video camera and then 'play' on your song. Approach your chosen architecture. Imagine the song pouring over you like warm water. Close your eyes and just listen. When your body feels the need to move, allow it to, with your eyes open or still closed. This is not a performance or even an interpretation of the song's lyrics or musicality. In fact, if you can, listen for the underlying sounds of the song, the notes or rhythms that are not as obvious; this will keep you grounded in the piece. Allow your body these three or five minutes of music to lead you softly through the entire song.

When the song ends, sit still. Be quiet. Allow yourself to ask your body how you are feeling. Try and understand what it is saying to you. You will honor the story by sitting and feeling without moving out of this state of mind too quickly. You're letting the story know you fully understand it.

Make a note of this feeling or tell the camera about your state of mind and your emotional feelings. When you're ready, turn off your recording device.

Next comes the question of how (and if) one wants to change the story.

Song Notes:

1. If you need to repeat the song for any reason, do that. Begin again from the position in space where you ended your piece. If your story/charge is strong, it may take a couple times moving through the song to really tell the whole story.

If for some reason another song comes on, go with that song. It came on for a reason. If you cannot in any way feel connected to the song you chose, no worries. It wasn't a song or a healing that you needed. That story connected to the song is not hurt or is not ready to be dealt with. Either way, wait for another time or try another song and see what happens.

2. When you have completed this step and you are in a loving mindset—maybe later today or another day, in the very near future—take time to look back at your recorded piece. But before you do, make sure you look with eyes of Understanding.

Understanding

This can be done after your solo song, or you can do this another day. If you do it another day, start again with meditation and the warmup to ensure that you are open and available for the movements your body wants to explore.

View your recorded video of yourself and prepare to analyse yourself the exact way you analyse the characters you play professionally.

Understand your character

1. What is your character's relationship with the inanimate object you chose?
2. How did they handle it? (kindly, aggressively, avoiding, etc.)
3. What place did it start or end up in? (behind, beside, close, far, down, or standing, etc.)
4. What type of movement from the warmup did they use to tell their story? (wring, press, dab, glide, float, flick, or punch, etc.)
5. What was the intensity/weight of their movements? (heavy, light)
6. What was the pace? (fast, slow)
7. On a scale of 1 to 10, how graceful was their piece?

If your charge was above 5 repeat the song exercise alone again. Same song, with the same inanimate object, and record yourself again—try to begin where you ended the last piece. Repeat this exercise until the song's charge is less than 3. It can take a few weeks...but the goal is to work out the emotions, change your perspective and discharge the story and allow yourself to move out of the character. All you are looking for is a little opening of a new perspective—it doesn't have to be huge.

If you are having a hard time changing the way you are moving through the song, you can try a different song or use the same song and introduce partner work.

Partner Work

Something about this story is challenging you and a kind person may help you. This person doesn't need to know anything about the story in order to participate in the partner work. They only need to be your mirror and follow your lead.

Mirroring occurs while you review the self-filmed work, and also during the duet or partner work. Mirroring is a process that seduces people through empathy and allows them to truly feel heard, and thus less charged in trying to defend or explain themselves.

Mirroring is the first step in understanding how to exit a drama. Sometimes people stop shy of this place. They get just close enough, but not all the way in...or too far in and then they get burnt. The goal is to mirror the fire so that the heat is felt but doesn't consume you; and then, in that movement where habit would often close you down or you would double down, you retreat...facing them...smiling, slowly...gracefully slipping out of your character.

Ideally you and your partner have both done the warmup together. Partner duet work can be performed in person or online—both work well. I have used Zoom and Google to do this work virtually. Just make sure both partners can hear the song without a timing delay, and that you have adequate recording devices if you are not physically together.

Exercise: Set up a camera to capture both people and a decent amount of the space. Ask your partner to mirror you, to do exactly what you are doing within the song. Start the song and begin your mirrored conversation. You can keep your eyes closed at first, but eventually you will want to try to open your eyes and acknowledge your partner. When you feel really comfortable, through an unspoken understanding, allow your partner to kindly take the lead. Allow them to move respectfully through your story and see if you can follow them. Their slight alteration to your earlier movements will be beneficial for you to follow, and eventually the two of you might be switching on and off with who is leading.

If you needed a partner and were able to follow them when the time was right—wonderful. Your story is already starting to be understood and you are beginning to release the charge. If you have found it difficult to follow another person during your song, repeat the exercise with the partner again. If you are in a class, more than one person can mirror you if the subject matter is very intense and heavy. The more people mirroring you, the lighter the responsibility on you to tell the story. Ideally, you will feel the energy lift and a window of changed perception will be available.

Now go back to the Understand your character questions asked at the beginning of this chapter. Have any of those responses been altered?

NOTE:

- If you have a story that causes a charge inside of you, it is a kink, an ego enhancer—it builds up parts of you. The point is to feel the charge and learn how to transmute the energy into healing and acceptance, or letting go/detaching from flow.
- Make sure to always allow the song to play out instead of stopping mid-song. Even if you are not moving, which is always an option, allow the song to finish. Think of it as a surgery: you have to close the wound in the end, no matter how much you were able to get done. Allowing the song to end is closure for now. An open wound is never beneficial. Take the time to close the exercise with a few calming breaths.

Wherever you have gotten, congratulations! You are starting to explore your internal, subconscious feelings and memories.

If the song was super easy to move through gracefully, there may be a couple reasons for this. Either it isn't the correct song for that story, or that isn't the story you need to work on—it may not be as much of an issue as you thought.

An issue, a story that is holding you, will literally make you feel restrained when moving through it. That is how you know you have the right combination of song and story. If you are able to “glide” over it, the song isn't a great fit or maybe it is showing you how you are designed with the story itself. This is where you as an actor are the only one who knows. You know.

Recast

This is where you begin to work on your future self, transforming from *hurt* to *healed*. Look for a song that makes you feel the way you want to feel. A positive feeling of your future self. If you are working on building a character in life or in your career, start from a place of LOVE. I promise you it's possible.

In fact, the whole point of putting myself through this process was to see if that was possible. I wanted to find out if I could act if I wasn't in pain, and if I could build interesting and engaging characters if I didn't focus on their flaws.

Make a new playlist for this portion of the process, separate from your previous SURF playlist of charged relationship story songs. In this playlist, the Recasting playlist, choose songs that inspire and challenge you, and make you envy how they feel. You want to be these songs.

After doing the warmup, ensuring you are available for new thoughts and concepts, set up your equipment as before and choose the inanimate object you want to work with. Start recording, play a song from your new playlist, and then allow the song to pour over you. When you feel truly connected to the music, begin to allow it to guide you.

Again, be sure to let the song finish.

When you're ready, again view your recorded video, analyzing yourself as you would analyze a character you need to understand in order to portray.

1. What is your character's relationship with the inanimate object you chose?
2. How did they handle it? (kindly, aggressively, avoiding, etc.)
3. What place did it start or end up in? (behind, beside, close, far, down, or standing, etc.)
4. What type of movement from the warmup did they use to tell their story? (wring, press, dab, glide, float, flick, or punch, etc.)
5. What was the intensity/weight of their movements? (heavy, light)
6. What was the pace? (fast, slow)
7. On a scale of 1 to 10, how graceful was their piece?

If the song easily allowed your character to feel light and flowing, this time it wasn't a recasting for your future self. It is you. Now, search again and go bolder. Think of something further from your present you. Something lighter, kinder, freer, sillier.

If the song made it difficult for you to maintain lightness and truth, bingo! That is the song you want to work on.

Your goal is to be able to perform the entire piece gracefully, without feeling forced. Eventually you (your new you) will be able to move to this song often and whenever you play it. The relationship you have with this song will magnetize the future feeling you are yearning for, and bring it toward you. Think of it as a Vision Dance for your future.

Flow

Flow occurs when the original song that tapped into a charged relationship story no longer charges you as much. Once you've recast yourself you are flowing—and the longer you keep flow the stronger you are. Eventually, the process of letting go becomes easier and quicker.

To find out if you are in flow:

- Return to the original playlist (the one title SURF that has your story song[s]).
- Choose 'shuffle' and check in.
- Use whatever song pops up from that playlist,
- Repeat the exercise with the same setup and the same object. Play the song and then note how you feel, then watch the video. Analyze yourself as you would analyze a character for a role. You should be pretty well versed on those steps by now, but here they are again in case you need reference (there are a few additional questions at the end of this list):

1. What is your character's relationship with the inanimate object they chose?
2. How did they handle it? (kindly, aggressively, avoiding, etc.)
3. What place did it start or end up in? (behind, beside, close, far, down, or standing, etc.)
4. What type of movement from the warmup did they use to tell your story? (wring, press, dab, glide, float, flick, or punch, etc.)
5. What was the intensity/weight of their movements? (heavy, light)
6. What was the pace? (fast, slow)
7. On a scale of 1 to 10, how charged was their piece?
8. How has their movement changed?
9. Have they lightened up their hold on the story?
10. Have they recast themselves as another part of the story?
11. Are they still the victim or villain?
12. Are they still hurting?
13. Are they the victor?
14. Are they at peace with this relationship and this story?
15. Do you believe that letting go of a story as I promised is possible?
16. Are you dead? Is your alter ego from this story dead?
17. Do you feel open and liberated to explore other perspectives of other stories? If so, go ahead. Whenever you feel the emotions building up, try and find a quiet place. Quicky and kindly warm up and then do your exercise.

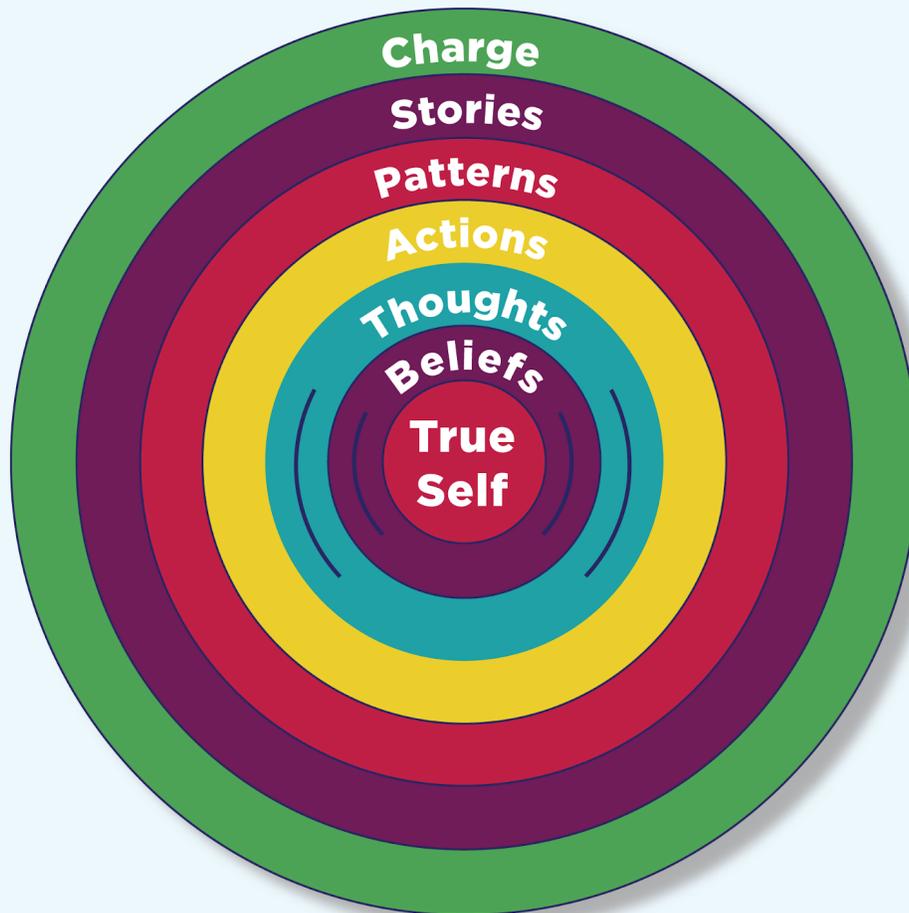
18. Record, analyze, and clock your feelings. Your body will let you know what it is feeling—and the more you give permission for your body to guide you, the more you will be aligned with how you truly feel and what you truly want.

Creating and Dismantling Character

The center of this graph is the true self. From there, we form beliefs; and those beliefs give us the way we move. From those moves we create patterns in our days and then in our weeks, and so on. Those patterns repeated over and over create a story. When that story is repeated past a certain point of usefulness, past when the play or incident is over, it creates pain.

To undo the character we are playing, we reverse this process. We find the pain, the character that has a strong charge, in order to understand the story that is holding us, that we are in; from there, we can look at patterns we are having and the moves that create that pattern and begin to softly change those patterns through movement. Then the belief system is softly challenged and changed from a molecular level, which shifts the belief system and then in turn changes the character.

These moves and patterns are identified in the pieces we do. By filming ourselves, we begin to understand our character's moves, patterns, and beliefs.

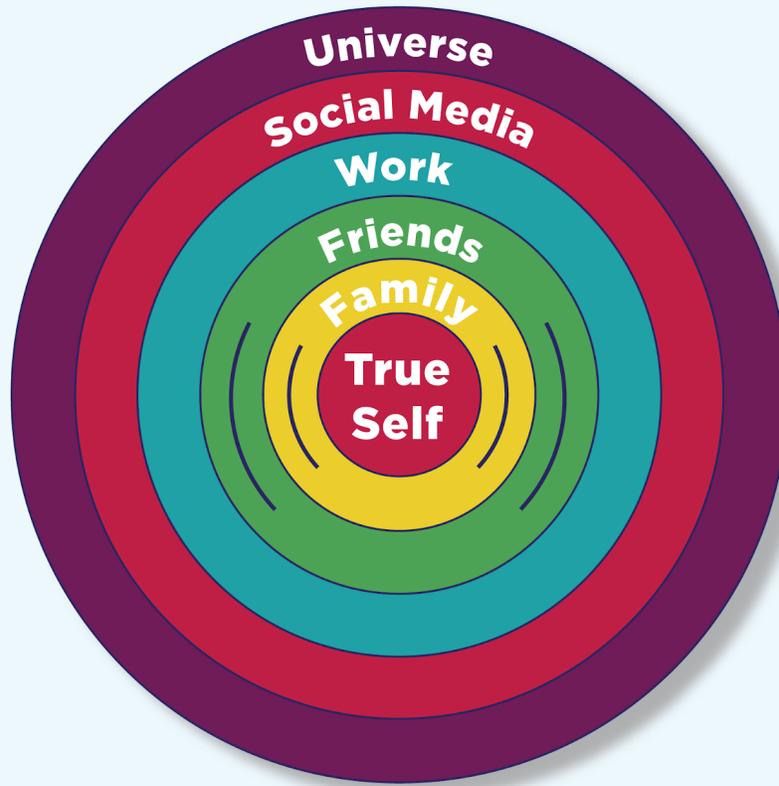


Elements of a Character

Circles of Self

A character has several circles; if we focus on the circles of family and self, the other ones will shift to align. But sometimes it is also wonderful to start with the universe, to send out a message to the furthest reach you have...and I do that through movement pieces.

Healing the center circles allows healing to occur in a ripple effect throughout the character. Ideally, we want to be our true nature in all of these circles, in order to be able to function on our light energy.



Circles of Influence

I have explored creating a life and art from my center, my light. I have found this work is not overtly sexy or eye-catching. It is more subtle and exploratory in nature. Less performance-based, "look at me!" ego, and more "this is us and I love you, we are worthy."

I used to feel that if I wasn't dramatic or using dark energy to feel intensely, it wasn't valid, but I have found in my work over the past decade that my tastes have changed. My desire to feel softness and kindness has emerged and my draw to expressing pain and anger in my work slowly died out.

I have gotten close enough to be the flame, experience the fire, and have the ability to transmute that strong energy through kindness to myself and exit the pain-perpetuating journey. I have exited toxic relationships with my heart open and my feet softly stepping away, in hopes of creating the least amount of ripple.

How to Apply the SURF Method

My first (inner) circle of relationships helped create my character. In order to shift my story, I had to change the roles I played in these stories. I used my SURF process to do that with my family and close relationships. When working with military vets battling PTSD, I found that healing the trauma of their relationships with their family was imperative to helping them heal as a whole. Our first stories are our core, and by adjusting the characters we are playing in those relationships we can shift our whole story. I needed to shift the stories in my personal life in order to shift the way I transitioned in and out of character as an actor.

S: STORY - SELF - SONG

U: UNDERSTANDING - UNDOING - UNLOCKING

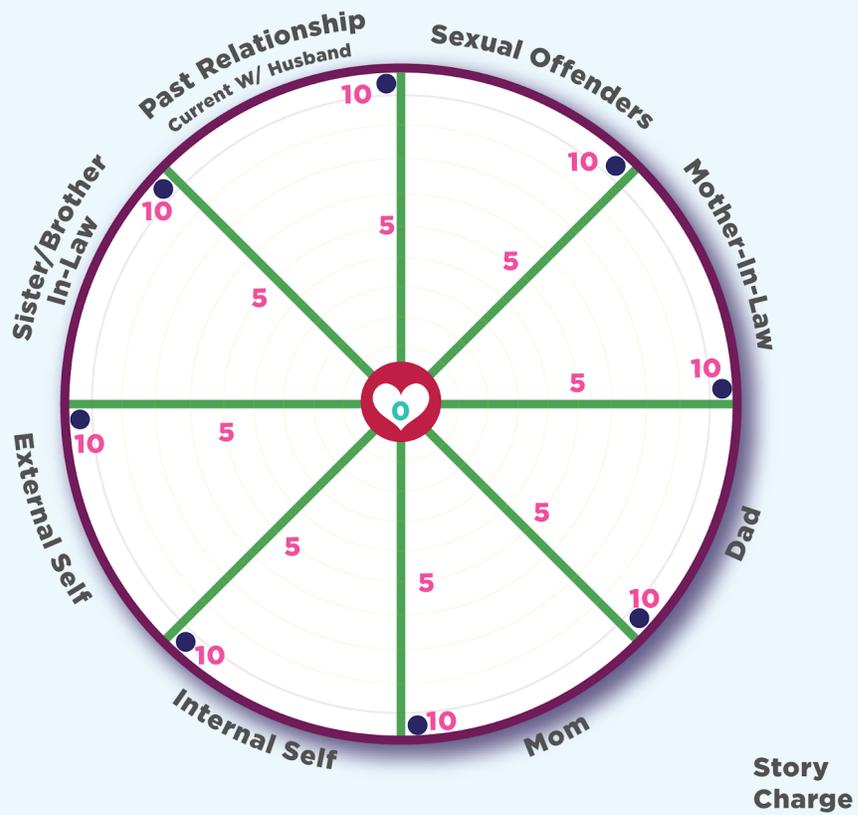
R: RECASTING - RELEASING - REMEMBERING

F: FLOW - FUTURE - FORGIVENESS

My personal SURF practice

Susie's Relationship Score (2011ish)

This was my starting point. When I would think of major relationships in my life, I was very strongly affected by them. I was much closer to a score of 10 on all of them. I was entangled with them; I had little perspective, and I was volatile and drastic when trying to disconnect or release myself, which just swung me back to the same position.



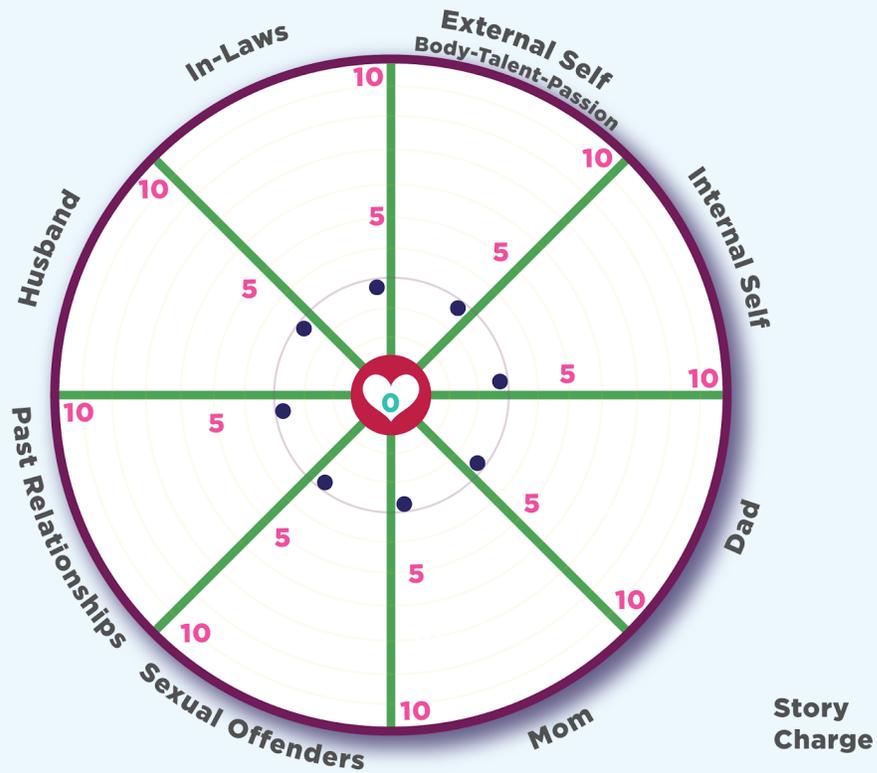
10 = Greatest Charge
 0 = ❤️ Neutral

Susie's Charge before SURF (2011)

Susie's Relationship Score (2011ish)

Susie's Relationship Score (2020)

This chart shows, in comparison to the previous chart, how these relationships charge me now. I am more neutral, accepting of who they are, what I did, and the fallout that has come. I am in a state of love and acceptance of my own true nature.



10= Greatest Charge
0 = ♥Neutral

Susie's Charge After SURF (2020)

After working through my relationship stories I have reduced the original charge that it had. Since my charge is released I can move closer to FLOW.

Susie's Relationship Score (2020)

Story

My best character was Victim. Everything happened TO me. I played this character by wanting to please people, thus finding myself easily manipulated. I was helpless and hurt and, in my eyes, innocent. In my family, starting from a young age, I cast myself as the pleasing victim and I have played that role exceptionally. I honestly think I deserve an award! I had become the Victim.

Understanding

Through working and watching my pieces I saw that I was often *wringing, punching, and pushing heavily*. I was not light at all. I was not often still. Aren't victims helpless? I came to accept that I was not just a great Victim, I was actually also a great Villain. I hurt people, and did so often. Not only in the present, but by holding onto past stories for decades. Playing the Pleaser, I came to understand that I started to expect to be pleased in return. Yuck! As much as I claimed I was seduced and manipulated by others, I learned I was just as good at playing the Seducer and the Manipulator as well. My relationships were not easy because I was not easy!

Recast

I recast myself by releasing the desire to please others and the desire for others to please me. I stopped paying silly compliments and then also stopped wanting them or needing them. I watched my relationships and thoughts mindfully and questioned my intentions often to ensure they were pure. By not being so sensitive to others, I began to discharge my role as Victim. By asking my villains to forgive me for holding them in their character of Villain for so long, I released them and myself. The Ho'oponopono prayer is perfect for this.

My Victim and Villain characters were recast as Healed and Healer, the Manipulated and Manipulating characters recast as Trusted and Trusting, the Pleaser and Pleased recast as Responsible and Reliable.

Flow

I find moving in these kind and loving roles easier each day. It just Flows. I like to think I am easier to be in a relationship with. You'll have to ask my husband, but I will say my friendships seem much less drama-oriented and toxic since I recast myself. I know how it feels to be in Flow, for things to feel easy, and I yearn for that feeling. I feel it more and more each day. Also, I have stopped looking for drama. Sometimes it just happens, and when I get triggered I can totally feel it. Like eating something that doesn't agree with me. I quickly identify the story and character I am playing, and try to understand it and recast myself into a kinder character and better story. If I find I have the desire or need to work it out in a piece, I go SURF myself. I find a song that represents how I feel. I find something to work with (usually a chair). I do a piece and record myself on my phone. It's better than therapy for me. I can see where I am and how I feel; and I can choose right there to transmute that dark energy into light. The more I SURF, the lighter I feel, and the faster I can transmute the dark energy to light.

Testimonials

I mentioned earlier in this book that back in 2014 I rented a room to try and relearn my acting skills. I missed that version of Susie. In that room, all my previous acting classes began to blend together and SURF was essentially born.

As I worked through the process, I invited a few actors to see what they thought. They loved it and kept coming to my class each week. Some fitness instructors from the gym and even a young salesman came because they were curious. It was pretty beautiful to see the way this class seemed to help people. I realized my own personal pains were lifting and my desire to face my relationship fears was getting stronger; even though we rarely spoke in class, my voice was getting stronger.

I was working as an actor, healing my relationships, and teaching the class around town when a friend heard about a job opening at New York Film Academy; since I had a master's in theater, she thought I should apply. I did, and was hired as their movement professor.

As I reviewed the movement material in the syllabus I was given, I found more things to add into my SURF class. I began teaching these students SURF and realized that the healing aspect was starting to truly reveal itself.

The students at the school were between the ages of 18 and 60, and from every part of the world.

Here are a few testimonials.

Students of SURF



“This class helped me shape not only my acting abilities, but my personal life. Being able to express yourself in an emotionally supportive environment is something that people like me need. SURF isn’t just a way for actors to deal with their characters. It’s a way for any creative mind to convey those raw emotions that we have sealed away.” —Azarias



“Learning and understanding the innovative concept of SURF helped me to open up a number facets of my being: love, relaxation, reconciliation and forgiveness. Learning to forgive my parents for their past mistakes only came when I was able to learn how to forgive myself for my mistakes. This ultimately brought my relationship with my mom and dad a peace of mind.”

—Jaq



“A lot of things can be said without really saying anything at all. It healed that distance that made us strangers for the longest time. My mom and I couldn’t be closer now and I’m so thankful that we were able to experience this class. It can really make a difference.” —Rashel



“Your class allowed me to communicate my former brokenness, present trust and hope. This relationship started with recognition and acknowledgement of our spiritual sides and our relationships with God.” —Toni



“Susie's class helped me with every aspect of my life, especially with my mom who I used to fight with over every little detail of my life but since this class, we have been able to connect and appreciate each other more and be okay with the decisions that one or the other makes that might not make the other that happy...the SURF method helped me connect to my true self and realize I don't have to fight every battle or be likable to everyone—the fact that I love myself is enough and the good people in my life will start showing up.” —Daniellea



“Susie's class changed me, in a major way. I loved it every time I walked in; the energy was peaceful and loving. I felt appreciated, and I could finally open up and explore sides of myself without fear of judgment. I was able to play a song and dance freely. So many emotions were left behind, and I felt inspired, creative, and cared for. Susie is an amazing person and teacher, to say the least! Thank you very much for all you've done for me.” —David



“The SURF Technique that Susie created is one of the most powerful I have experienced. The combination of physical movement and meditation helped me to connect the dots to heal past events that I did not even know were stopping me from achieving my goals in life and art. I was able to release all negative energy from the experience and move forward to create with confidence and clarity.” —Dana

Over the past 6 years I have worked with dozens of individuals from actors to authors, from mothers to daughters, from veterans with PTSD to victims of sexual assault as well as couples going through divorce. SURF has helped anyone wanting to get out of character, but it is especially important for actors. My personal mission is helping other actors find the same healthy methods of getting into and out of character.

If you are interested in this class, or for more information, contact me at www.surfoutofyourcharacter.com



About the Author

Susie K Taylor, Born Susanne Marie Kreitman, was raised in Miami, Florida. She was raised in a very accepting family filled with doctors and artists. She found her way into performing at the age of 5 and studied dance and musical theater at a local Miami dance school. Susanne remained in the theater program through high school, where she graduated from New World School of the Arts.

Susanne attended high school at New World School of the Performing Arts, Penn State for her BA, and Webber Douglas Academy in London for her post-graduate degree, both in theater. She returned to NYC and worked as an A.C.E.-certified fitness instructor as well as a cocktail waitress—all while continuing to pursue her acting career by performing in off-Broadway stage productions.

In 1999, Susanne moved home to Miami to marry her husband, Stephen. Susanne continued working as a professional actress and fitness instructor throughout Miami and started training in improv. After appearing on several commercials and TV shows, including *Dexter*, she became a member of SAG/AFTRA and Actors Equity.

In 2004 Susie became a mother for the first time, and she spent the next decade at home, raising her two sons. While watching *Shark Tank*, Susie was inspired by a long, messy plane ride with her young sons to invent the perfect bib. In 2008, along with the help of many, she invented Bibbitec, the ultimate bib®. Eventually Susanne and Stephen pitched Bibbitec to the Sharks on the ABC hit TV show *Shark Tank*. After that episode aired, giving Bibbitec the international attention it needed, Bibbitec was sold all over the world. After accomplishing this dream,

Susanne chose to step away from the business because she knew it had served its purpose. She likes to think it is just paused.

After her beloved father passed away from cancer, Susanne found relief from her depression and grief through the connection of emotion, movement, and music. She began to work in Miami again on stage and screen, but with an elevated and kind acting method instead. She was cast in stage productions, immersive theater performances, and award-winning independent films. It became clear that pain was not necessary to motivate her art or her life.

As Susanne began to heal her own relationships through her method, her confidence in her abilities grew and she applied to the New York Film Academy on South Beach as a professor of movement. There she spent three years refining her method. Eventually she brought SURF to the community and taught students the concept of getting *out* of character.

From this idea of getting out of character, the play *Jewbana* was born, which premiered in 2019 at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival where it was touted as an “excellent show” by reviews.

Susie’s SURF method is for every person, although it is based on acting techniques. She hopes to teach other actors how to safely get in and out of character in a healthy manner. This method can be taught and replicated by anyone, but it is especially beneficial for those within the acting industry.

Book Cover Inspiration

The dancer is based on my grandfather’s sculpture that is filled with my energetic bio color reading. This shows my body’s energetic movement - which I find to be wonderful, real proof that SURF has allowed my energy to flow!

Nicole Kriney @biocolorenergy

Appendix: Resources

SURF Recipe

I have refrained from putting too much technical info in this book because activating your left brain is not my intention...we are opening up the doors of imagination and that comes from the right side. However, if you'd like a little blueprint of how all of this came to be, I thought I would include the ingredients that make up my SURF recipe, and how I found them. I'll also include links to further information—you're welcome to dive deeper into these resources to deepen your understanding of this method.

SURF Ingredients:

Louise L. Hay

The main ingredient or idea comes from the concept that our pain is in our body so that our body can heal our pain. It began hitting home for me with Louise L. Hay's amazing book, *You Can Heal Your Life*.

https://www.amazon.com/Heal-Your-Life-second-Text/dp/B004SVLH9K/ref=pd_sbs_14_7?encoding=UTF8&pd_rd_i=B004SVLH9K&pd_rd_r=ee39acd6-055e-48de-bf51-8f29ce7aeb31&pd_rd_w=LDhvj&pd_rd_wg=6mGuv&pf_rd_p=bdc67ba8-ab69-42ee-b8d8-8f5336b36a83&pf_rd_r=ZRWJYBZ15FV1MS4WCGZ5&psc=1&refRID=ZRWJYBZ15FV1MS4WCGZ5

It has an amazing guide to how illness is manifested in your body. I used that guide to understand my own anger issues that were manifesting as acne.

<https://alchemyofhealing.com/causes-of-symptoms-according-to-louise-hay/>

Ho'oponopono

This world-renowned prayer was given to me through an amazing Reiki coach named Sonia Zepeda, a Miami healer I met one day by chance. She guided me through the prayer after our session and it was like my jaw was locked. I could not for the life of me say, "Please forgive me." I honestly think I had never truly felt I could harm people. I honestly was such a victim at that time in my life that my jaw was having to work through cement to say it for the first time.

Here is the book I bought and ask my students to read:

<https://www.amazon.com/Hooponopono-Hawaiian-Forgiveness-Ritual-Fulfillment-ebook/dp/B078SRJ69T>

Here is a link to it for a mediation—kink of kitschy, but I like it.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7Qoq75-DQm4>

Ho'oponopono
X
Please forgive me
I am sorry
I love you
Thank you

This is link to how it heals mental illness:

<https://mydivinesoul.wordpress.com/2015/04/30/how-hooponopono-healed-a-ward-of-mentally-ill-criminals-magically/>

Energy Ball

Energy ball is a game I think I learned several times from several people on my journey...the first time I remember learning it was at camp, from an acting coach who was grounding me *out of character* when I was stuck feeling sick all day after playing an imaginary invalid.

This is a very basic explanation of the energy ball game:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sk_JtVjkGFY

Tapping

Tapping is something I learned online one day when I was in pain. I love the idea of resetting, which allows me to accept my current situation and then evolve it with my conscious mind. Here is an intro:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QzVd6Ww0as4&feature=emb_title

Love Prayer

I want for you what you want for you

I was given this through a chance online gift with this company. It was in a meditation that talked about the word 'love' having conditions, and changing the use of that word to *I want for you what you want for you*.

<https://yourlifecreation.com/category/law-of-attraction/>

(This is the site, but I am not sure where the specific gift can be found.)

I incorporated this prayer into the touch meditation portion of this book.

Reiki

After a few students I had requested hugs from me, they happened to mention that my hugs were healing...because of my hands. I followed that thought and started taking classes in Reiki and learned how my hand can open my chakra.

My go to is Sonia Zepeda www.energyevolutioncare.net

For your own personal a bio color energy reading, like the one of me on the cover, contact Nicole@biocolorenergy.com

Touch

Teaching sensual pole dancing classes for several years gave me keen insight into how placing hands on the pole in a sensual way was healing for our own selves. I saw women hesitate and then become comfortable, and I added in imagination concepts like painting the skin.

Sensual pole dancing was taught to me directly by Karin McDermott of Soultree Motion (where I worked as a pole instructor, before pole was even cool). Her movement classes were based on acting and performance and sensuality. No mirrors, low lights, and just *being*. It was love. I use many of the movements I learned in her warmup in SURF because they awaken the soul.

As a Soultree motion pole instructor, I learned all my kitty cat moves and gliding on floors and hip openers. I learned how to unlock sensual vibes for myself to do solo pieces. In addition to pole work, my master instructor in oozing sensual energy is Dawn Price at Miami Seduction Dance. <https://www.facebook.com/MiamiSeductionDance/>

Alexander Technique

I was taught this movement practice in London while I was getting my post-graduate degree at Webber Douglas Academy of Classical Acting...now part of the [Central School of Speech and Drama](#).

When I was trying to help my father find relief from the pain of his spreading cancer, I found a Master Alexander Technique instructor for him to go to in Miami—Roberto Mainette (<https://www.facebook.com/rmainetti>) on the website alexandertechnique.com.

My father never went, but I studied with Roberto for many years. When we place our fingers between our toes or when we work standing up from a chair with the least amount of energy...it is Roberto who is with me.

Viewpoints

Viewpoints is another movement technique taught in acting school. I was taught and practiced this class throughout all my training. However, it wasn't until I was a teacher at NYFA that I began to explore how I have been using it in my own work and then how the work with architecture can help me understand—like the pole in the pole class did—how I was feeling about myself.

We use this technique in the pieces to inspire a connection to an object, but there are many other aspects of this work. This is a great article about how it was created and how actors use it in creating characters:

<https://dramatics.org/understanding-viewpoints/>

Laban

A movement process of analysis called Laban is very helpful in understanding your pieces and also used in the warmup. I incorporate the 8 efforts in the warmup as movement scales to ensure we are in touch with the vocabulary of movement before we do our pieces.

I follow their wording and their charts and we explore the way our bodies move in these ways—then search for them in people on the street and in other people's pieces when we are giving feedback. It is an unemotional way to describe the emotional feelings we are witnessing. I learned this in school and then became more fascinated by it through my work at NYFA as a movement professor.

LABAN

Laban's Eight Efforts

THE EIGHT EFFORTS:

Punch, Slash, Dab, Flick, Press, Wring, Glide, Float

THE FOUR COMPONENTS:

Direction: Direct or Indirect

Speed: Quick or Sustained

Weight: Heavy or Light:

Flow: Bound or Free

	DIRECTION	SPEED	WEIGHT	FLOW
PUNCH	Direct	Quick	Heavy	Bound
SLASH	Indirect	Quick	Heavy	Free
DAB	Direct	Quick	Light	Bound
FLICK	Indirect	Quick	Light	Free
PRESS	Direct	Sustained	Heavy	Bound
WRING	Indirect	Sustained	Heavy	Bound
GLIDE	Direct	Sustained	Light	Free
FLOAT	Indirect	Sustained	Light	Free

I found this great graph of Laban's Eight Efforts on Pinterest:

https://www.google.com/search?q=laban%20effort%20laban%20movement%20chart&tbm=isch&rlz=1C5CHFA_enUS843US843&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0CGMQrNwCKABqFwoTCliRgv7liesCFQAAAAAdAAAAABAC&biw=1440&bih=587#imgrc=3bNfShu6T3HXMM&imgdij=mliu1Z-fX6b1tM

This is a great link to see it being used in a theater production:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y6anj5T_I5k&list=PLhQARjsjAVIUygzwuZ8Ctxrghy7LYjWx9

Mirror Neuron

This is explored in the practice of Understanding...having people move with us. It satiates the mirror neuron and I learned this from being a professional group fitness instructor. You get a high from a group of people “hearing” you—ultimately, you feel heard and your story begins to be diluted by others holding it with you. This frees you up to explore it from another angle—especially when you begin to follow them in your piece.

The duet triggers mirror neurons:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CvpqUT2PZrs>

The following illustration and link explain how this process works:



<http://sitn.hms.harvard.edu/flash/2016/mirror-neurons-quarter-century-new-light-new-cracks/>

Music & Sound Healing

Having any song at our fingertips is what truly makes this entire class possible. Inspiration strikes and we need to hear that exact song. The internet allows us to find that song. The songs mostly affect us through the sound/music, not the lyrics. Sound healing aligns a chakra and an emotion. It's proven effective—think of any movie and imagine it without sound...

Selfie

This was something I originally did for myself, then dropped and then reintroduced. In theater we rarely film our work, but in this work it is imperative. It is how we can watch ourselves and see what we are saying to the world. We can begin to remove judgment by being more analytical in understanding movement and looking to see what our truth is saying through our bodies.

Gamification

I feel it is important to understand that emotions need to be worked and played with, in order to be able to transition between them and understand how we do that in our lives. By using the game aspect of the class, the story we work in has a time limit, has boundaries, has an ending, and there is a *point*. The point is to be able to explore the story without being viscerally affected by it. That is the game.

Hypnosis-ish

Through the song, we allowed ourselves to go into a kind of hypnotic vibe, which is what actors strive to reach in their work. This is how we convince ourselves of anything and in this process we choose to do it willingly to ourselves—it is a gift of triggering our traumas.

Meditation

This is how we start the class...it is to quiet the mind and tap into our bodies.

Fitness

I incorporate my favorite moves from when I was a professional fitness instructor.

Mix all these ingredients with love and SURF out of your character!

Back Cover Content

Who are you, really? Do you find yourself stuck in certain roles from either your acting career or your personal life? *SURF Out of Your Character: A Wellness Practice for Actors* shares my proven SURF method, which uses acting techniques to heal emotional pain.

As a professional actor, I learned how to get into character for many different roles. But I created SURF from a personal need to learn how to get *out* of some of those same characters, both professionally and personally. After the loss of my father, I crafted SURF as a way to combine my professional acting training and new movement techniques I was studying, creating a way out of my character of the grieving daughter role. Since then, I have been able to use SURF to release myself from acting roles, as well as other roles I found myself playing in my personal life: pleaser, manipulator, victim. I then began teaching the method to others as a professor of movement at an acting school, and found a way to help others in the same way.

This book explains and explores the four steps of the SURF process: Story, Understanding, Recasting, and Flow. It will give you opportunities to actively take part in the process so you can experience its healing potential.

Using this process, actors can explore and challenge various stories in their lives, using performance, self-reflection, and movement to confront and move on from roles they find themselves stuck in.

I challenge you to give this practice a try, allowing yourself to be released from any negative roles and to imagine and recast a kinder, lighter version of the story.

Love,



