

## Triggers and Awakenings

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In his book "Tribes" Seth Godin tells the story of the Balloon Factory and the Unicorn. The people who work in the balloon factory are timid and afraid of pins, needles, porcupines and other sharp objects. They don't like sudden changes in temperature either.

It wasn't a bad place to work except when the unicorns show up. Usually, the balloon factory folks shush the unicorn and are able to shoo him away. But sometimes, the unicorn wanders into the factory anyway. That's when everyone runs for cover as explosions occur right and left.

Godin uses this story to talk about change -- the balloon factory is the status quo and the unicorn represents the impetus for change. However, I think that this story can be applied to how we deal with our emotions. Most of the time, we go through life trying to be nice and helpful, keeping our anger, frustration, fear and sadness under wraps. But sometimes, someone says something, and we pop just like a balloon.

In the world of therapy and healing, this is referred to as getting triggered. Triggers are anything that reminds a person of a previous trauma or painful situation. In more extreme cases, it is referred to as PTSD or posttraumatic stress disorder and usually involves experiences from wars, disasters, and horrific crimes.

However, Greg Baer, author of "Real Love and Post-Childhood Stress Disorder" says that most of us suffer from a form of PTSD because we experienced numerous traumatic events through our childhood and beyond. From early childhood, our brains are literally molded by love and when we are misunderstood and not loved unconditionally, Dr. Baer says we gather many minor hidden wounds. Most of the time, we are initially blind to the injuries they cause within but overtime, they can become troublesome and even unbearable.

Recently I became aware that I have a trigger around not being acknowledged. Somehow, as a child, I did not feel recognized for my own unique gifts and talents. My parents were loving parents who were overwhelmed with trying to balance work, church, community and family and as the oldest, I felt that I had to play the role of the responsible daughter who downplayed her own feelings, ideas and wishes. How many times have I reacted badly--allowing my balloon to pop--with my husband, my children, my friends when I didn't feel appreciated or acknowledged without recognizing that I was connecting back to childhood pain?

I am realizing that being triggered isn't something to be ashamed of or to keep hidden. Rather, it is an opportunity to become aware of my need to healing. I would like to conclude this post with an excerpt from an article by Becca Stevens, founder of Thistle Farm [beccastevens.org](http://beccastevens.org)

"I would like to test the word 'uncover'. Something happens that 'uncovers' something in me. That something awakens something I already knew deep down, and this something has allowed me to see what was lurking in the shadow part of me. This uncovering gives me the opportunity to see it. It has been uncovered for me. I can now choose to put it aside for a bit, I can choose to let it overtake me and ruin my next patch of life, or I can choose to look at it straight on and see it with all its fear, untruths, and destabilizing qualities that I carry like precious pearls. I then asked, "What other words are out there waiting for us to use them to aid in trauma healing?" Some of the great words that were offered were: disruption, stirring, alert, and awakening... It reminds me that as we do the work, we can reframe, rename, and redefine how we experience healing."