

By CHRISTINE HENNEBURY, Special to The Telegram

Linda Courage smoked for 30 years. Like most smokers, she had tried to quit, but she was only successful for one three-month period. Then, one morning three and half years ago she turned down her son's request for some money because she had no time to get to a bank machine, and she only had enough cash on hand to pick up a package of cigarettes for work. She spent the day thinking about how she had turned her son down, and that was the final straw — it was time to give up smoking. She didn't like the idea of putting more chemicals into her body from a patch, so Linda decided to try hypnotherapy. And because she was ready, and really wanted to change, it was successful. She has been a non-smoker ever since, leaving her hypnosis sessions in 2002.

She can socialize with smokers, or travel in a car with people who are smoking, without wanting a cigarette, and she suffered no side effects of nicotine withdrawal — no weight gain, no sleeplessness, no craving.

Hypnosis tends to make people think of amusing stage shows or of evil movie villains with helpless damsels under their command, but hypnotherapy can be a valuable means of correcting bad habits.

Just as Linda was able to stop smoking, countless others have used hypnosis to lose weight, conquer phobias, combat stress, and to manage pain.

Furthermore, while hypnosis stage shows are funny, the person is actually still conscious and in control. A hypnosis subject cannot be made to do anything they don't want to do, so all those movie damsels were just acting out their own darker impulses.

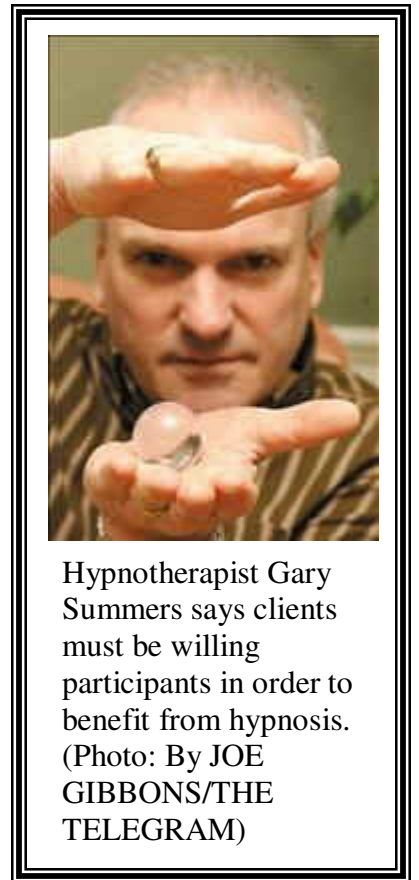
Gary Summers, a certified hypnotherapist living in St. John's, has been providing seminars and private consultations in hypnotherapy for the past eight years.

“Hypnosis is a valuable tool. If you want to make life-changing decisions, hypnosis can help.”

But since the success of hypnotherapy depends upon the desire for improvement, he adds, the person undergoing the therapy has to want to change or the hypnosis will not be successful. A client has to have an open mind and a willingness to co-operate with the therapist in order to be lead into a hypnotic state.

Despite the stereotype of the hypnotist waving a pocket watch and chanting, “You are getting sleepy ...,” there are many different ways of achieving a hypnotic trance.

One of the most popular is progressive relaxation, a guided technique which prompts the client to concentrate on relaxing body parts in a specific order. This is usually followed by some sort of imagery about descending, such going down stairs or taking an elevator down while watching the buttons light up as “the elevator” passes each floor. At the bottom of the stairs, or the lowest floor



Hypnotherapist Gary Summers says clients must be willing participants in order to benefit from hypnosis. (Photo: By JOE GIBBONS/THE TELEGRAM)

of the elevator journey, a clear, positive suggestion for change is made and repeated and then the client is guided back out of deep relaxation.

After hypnotherapy, the client will feel extremely relaxed (and will sleep well that night), and will be well on the way to eliminating that bad habit.

Dr. Darryl Hogan, MD, CCFP, from the Commonwealth Medical Clinic in Mount Pearl, describes hypnotherapy as “teaching the client to put mind over matter, training the subconscious mind to control the matter — the bad habit.” While hypnosis cannot be subjected to the sort of blind tests that are the standard in medical therapies, Hogan says that at the very least, the relaxation provided by hypnosis is valuable, and, in fact, similar to the relaxation therapy doctors often recommend.

Summers explains that the relaxation experienced during hypnosis allows new ideas to be introduced to the subconscious to replace the ideas that support bad habits. He compares this to explaining to the subconscious why things need to change and how life will be improved by eliminating the bad habit.

He guides his clients to use positive language for hypnotic suggestions — “I enjoy taking a long walk each day,” not “I won’t laze around after supper” — and advises them to visualize the ideal situation, not the current one.

“You have to focus on the end result, not the drudgery of achieving that result,” says Summers. “You never focus on what you want to eliminate.”

So, if a client wants to lose weight, instead of concentrating on not eating between meals, Summers would suggest visualizing slipping easily into a smaller pair of jeans.

Obviously, guided exercises are the most effective way of using hypnosis to conquer bad habits, but self-hypnosis techniques can also be very beneficial.

As Summers says, “You always succeed at what you want most,” and if you really want to stop a bad habit, hypnotherapy can help you make that change.

For more information about Gary Summers’ hypnotherapy seminars, visit www.garysummers.ca.