



You can heal your life: Hoffman teachers, and (below) the Seaford base where Lucy stayed

BREAKING THE CYCLE

LUCY FRY TACKLES HER DEMONS ON AN INTENSIVE PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT COURSE

One Friday in January this year, I found myself at a beautiful country house in Seaford, checking into the intensive self-development course, the Hoffman Process, with another 23 nervous strangers. It seemed we all had different reasons for coming – some were facing a crossroads in life and couldn't decide which way to go, others were just fed up with feeling unhappy and unfulfilled, some had issues around relationships, intimacy, self-esteem... For me it was a combination of identity issues, self-hatred, an ongoing and sporadic battle with addiction, and a deep and painful melancholy that I had felt for as long as I could remember.

But according to Hoffman founder, Bob Hoffman, we all had one thing at least in common: we were victims of Negative Love – the absorption of all one's parents' negative habits and patterns (examples are endless but include avoidance, unreliability, procrastination, compulsive behaviours, anxiety, fear and perfectionism) and any deliberate rebellion against such patterns.

The first part of the course, known as the "prosecution", focuses on the anger we often feel towards our parental figures and the healthy expulsion of that anger. Techniques which allowed us to do that included writing (unsent) letters, and using our bodies to physically "bash" away negative patterns, taking it out on a large cushion which we hit repeatedly for minutes on end with a wiffle bat. The idea is to move energy around the body at the same time as verbally expressing it, and the result is a huge, beautiful catharsis.

The next part of the course, the "defence",

is all about forgiveness. We were encouraged to use our imagination, through writing and guided visualisations, to identify with our parents as children, and thereby recognize that they too were simply the product of "negative love", with their own parents' patterns imprinted onto them.

Some of us faced a crossroads in life, others were just fed up with feeling unhappy and unfulfilled

Put like that, it perhaps all sounds a bit far-fetched and ambitious, certainly for an eight-day course. But all I can say is that some of the things I saw and felt were quite astonishing. Each day we were introduced to a variety of techniques to help us understand more about who we were and why we behaved the way we do. We were taught how to engage our intellect, emotions, body and spirit (by which I mean our "spiritual self" – that part of us that is unaffected by surroundings or circumstances) and find a way to keep them working in harmony.

For me, some of the most powerful work done was around self-forgiveness and self-love. Of course there were moments when I felt overwhelmed, embarrassed, or just wondered what the hell I was doing supposedly learning to comfort my inner child (as represented by the pillow I held in my arms)... But, thanks to the strength of the group en-

ergy, I grew willing to divulge, experience and trust the experience. Plus, I quickly began to realize how my negative feelings and thoughts towards myself had injured me in the past, and just how much self-hatred I had been carrying around for too long.

And then there was shame... I don't think anybody in the group could attest that they weren't in some way overburdened by a toxic kind of shame. But, by way of one particularly important ritual involving the group standing around a roaring bonfire, each of us stepping forward in front of benevolent witnesses, to "offer" specific past events we were ashamed of into the fire, I was able to begin to let go. And, my god, it felt good.

Now months have passed since my Process experience and, while the initial euphoria has worn off, I still feel lighter and unshackled. I am learning how to love and care for myself, to forgive myself for past mistakes and instead live in the present. But most of all, I have begun to truly let go of my parents' negative patterns (a change which was set in motion by the Process but which continues on a subtle level, every day), and those they inherited from their own parents. I have choices. I am no longer a victim. And with that comes true freedom.

hoffmanprocess.co.uk

● Cost: £2,600 for seven nights. This includes accommodation, food and about 100 hours of therapeutic interaction, with three follow-up meetings back in London

● *You Can Change Your Life* by Tim Laurence, director of the Hoffman Process UK, is available at amazon.co.uk and in bookshops