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NOVEMBER — DECEMBER 2002

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One with the Ocean

BY SUSAN POMFRET

A wave splashes across my face as I lay in the water off of Grand Bahama Island. It flows up my nose, curves around my nasal passages and comes to rest in the back of my throat. "I will not sputter. I will not spit," I remind myself. An image of a tidal pool comes to mind as my throat fills with water. Slowly, in stages, I swallow it. This is the beginning of my Ocean Therapy experience. I now understand what lead therapist David Dolan means when he says we will "become one with the ocean."

Ocean Therapy is one of the Upledger's Institute's BioAquatic Exploration workshops and the only one open to the public, as well as to therapists. Massage therapist and Upledger Institute instructor David Dolan teaches the class with his partner, Diane Ellerbe, incorporating the work of John Upledger, D.O.'s CranioSacral Therapy and SomatoEmotional Release®, Stanislav Grof's holotropic breathwork and the floatation principles of John Lilly. The purpose of the therapy is to cre-

ate a supportive environment for moving the receiver into a relaxed or altered state of consciousness.

Interactions with dolphins are one theme of this four-day program. The first day, we visit and swim with two domestic dolphins in Sanctuary Bay, a natural seawater lagoon 20 minutes by boat from Port Lucaya in Freeport, Bahamas. As the program continues on remote beaches and in waist-deep water around the island, we put out the intention for wild dolphins to come and join us.

A dozen participants live and work together aboard the Dolphin Star, a 50-foot catamaran research vessel. Each morning, the captain steers the boat to a remote beach. Along the way, Dolan explains the theory behind ocean therapy and teaches simple techniques for facilitating relaxation in the water.

Ocean Therapy is effective, in part, because it puts the ocean's power to work. Participants explore physiological and psychological benefits of receiving subtle-energy treatment while floating in salt-water, where movement is almost effortless and the body and mind rest into a relaxed state.

I am gently supported at my head by a therapist holding my occiput, and by fellow participants on either side lightly lifting my torso and legs. My spine undulates with the low waves, my arms and legs move with the tidal pulse.

The recipient lies on his or her back while being supported at the head by a trained therapist and on either side by fellow classmates. What happens at this point depends on the recipient. As tension and emotions work their way through the body, the person may lie motionless, writhe or turn while the support

team follows. During a session on one member of our group, we moved so quickly through the water that I had to ask the other holders to slow down. They assured me that they were neither pushing nor pulling; the seemingly inert recipient was in fact powering the movement.

Most participants in the Ocean Therapy course are massage therapists interested in learning to facilitate—and experience—emotional releases. The techniques employed are so simple and Dolan's instruction so clear that non-therapists were able to easily work alongside the bodyworkers.

The experiences of participants vary widely from person to person. They may include the sensation of rebirthing, the release and processing of emotional material and memories, deep relaxation and altered states of consciousness. Sometimes people laugh, cry, yell or sing. Most often, you hear quiet conversation, as the therapist leading the session gently guides the recipient with questions about the emotions that arise. This material is processed with gentle validation and affirmation from fellow participants.

Those who are holding and witnessing a recipient's release may be profoundly affected. My first experience with this followed the release of one participant who, in session,

processed a traumatic life event. As I stood alongside in my role as a holder, I experienced a sort of vicarious emotional release and felt myself slip into a joyous altered state. When all participants have finished their sessions for the day, the entire group meets to share their experiences.

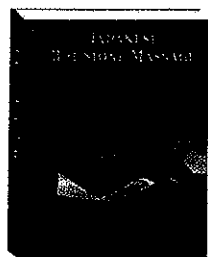
By the second day, the effects of living in close quarters on the boat began to present themselves. An exchange with one participant reminded me of a pattern I had developed with my father. During my session, and with support of my three holders, I yelled, cried and finally laughed as I worked through long-held feelings that arose.

That work out of the way, the third day of therapy led me to explore the task of my current spiritual growth. Dolan guided me with soft conversation as I searched within for new directions.

The combined support of the ocean and my new friends encourages the grip on my mind to loosen, and I slip into a deep state of relaxation. I am visited by angels who rustle their feathers, releasing dander that floats to the earth for us to breathe. I inhale joy! M

Susan Pomfret is a licensed massage therapist in Mesa, Arizona.

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