

UpClose

AUGUST, 2005

HealthPlex Clinical Services

DOLPHIN-ASSISTED THERAPY TRIGGERS HEALTH BREAKTHROUGHS IN SON AND MOTHER

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UI HealthPlex Hours

8 AM - 7 PM, MON - THURS

8 AM - 6 PM, FRI

*The specialty recognition identified herein has not been received from a private organization not affiliated with or recognized by the Florida Board of Chiropractic Medicine.

Graham Tresness did not enter the world gently. Born May 1, 2000, he spent his first 24 days in the neonatal intensive care unit after experiencing post-delivery seizures.

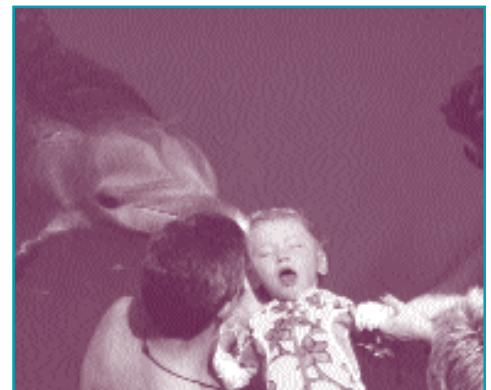
While the cause of the seizures was never determined, the aftereffects were plain. Graham was left with cerebral palsy, which rendered him unable to walk or talk.

Through the next four years Graham underwent extensive medical and therapeutic intervention from a slew of doctors, physical therapists, CranioSacral Therapy practitioners — and some very special dolphins.

Graham's first dolphin encounter came during an aquatic show in Las Vegas of all places. Mom Barb says, "At the trainer's prompting, Graham held out his finger to touch one of the dolphins. Normally playful, the dolphin actually pretended to fall asleep. Then she picked up her head, opened her eyes and put her head on Graham's lap. The trainer was shocked. I knew then and there that Graham had a dolphin connection."

Some time later, Barb recounted the story to CST practitioner Chris Scanlon, PT. "He remembered The Upledger Institute's research and suggested I call the clinic," she says. Already sold on CST — "ever since I heard my son belly laugh for the very first time in a CST session" — she didn't hesitate.

In August 2004, the Tresness family headed to the Bahamas for what was then just the



Graham Tresness, 4, receives a gentle touch on the head from an attentive dolphin during one of his therapy sessions in the Bahamas.

fourth Intensive Program held at The Dolphin Experience in Freeport.

Run much the same as clinic Intensives, dolphin programs include group meetings each morning followed by up to five hours of multiple-therapist and one-on-one CranioSacral Therapy sessions in the water and on land. For part of each day's water session dolphins are present and permitted to interact with the group.

Barb admits to being a bit unnerved at first. "When the dolphins popped up out of the water and approached my tiny boy, I could only imagine how it felt to be Graham." Seeming to sense the anxiety, the dolphins looked for the best way to get close to Graham.

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DOLPHIN INTUITION RUNS DEEP

by John E. Upledger, DO, OMM

My fascination with dolphins began back in 1954 during my tour as a U.S. Coast Guard medic based in Panama City, Florida, on the Gulf of Mexico. I was participating in my very first "swim call" and was more than a little nervous about it. Something about seeing a gunner's mate poised behind a 40-millimeter gun scoping the waters for sharks will do that. I "bravely" dove in anyway.

Almost immediately I found myself escorted by one dolphin who was longer than I was. It was as though that dolphin sensed my anxiety and sympathized with me. He/she touched me and all my fear disappeared.

Fast forward to 1964. I was in private practice by then in Clearwater Beach, Florida. I spent a lot of time in those days swimming, sailing and encountering dolphins in the warm Gulf waters. The dolphins were always playful yet very careful at the same time. They seemed to know how fragile I was in comparison to them. I learned to accept their friendship and trust them implicitly.

Over time my intuition told me that there was great wisdom residing within each dolphin I met. What is more, I was certain that each

possessed a powerful ability to understand a person's needs and "heal" pain. I began to hope that I would have the opportunity one day to develop a healthcare partnership with them.

In 1996 the dream began to take shape. A dolphin-assisted therapy research program was birthed through The Upledger Institute at the Dolphin Research Center in Grassy Key, Florida. The program was run much the same as our current Intensives in the Bahamas.

Typically the dolphins would circle the patient-therapist group a few times. One of them would then approach very gently and either touch a therapist or patient with his or her nose (rostrum). All of us would feel very powerful energy from the dolphin. The therapeutic results were often quite remarkable.

I remember one young lady who had a crooked pelvis and a right leg that was shorter than the left. My goal was to gain some loosening of the injured pelvis and correction of



Dr. John E. Upledger

its central control system in the brain.

I and two other therapists were working with her in the water when a dolphin chose to join us. She never touched the patient, but at different times put her rostrum on the backs of the two assistant therapists for about a minute or less. During each of these dolphin contacts we all felt significant but pleasant vibrations throughout the patient's body. I also felt the patient's pelvis release and soften each time contact was made.

I'm convinced that dolphins, when allowed and encouraged to make their own choices, are powerful therapeutic facilitators. The experiences of Graham and Barb Tresness along with scores of other patients and therapists bear that out.

My hope is that you, too, will have your own dolphin encounter at some point in the near future. I believe it will change your perception of healthcare for all time. It has certainly transformed mine.

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DOLPHIN-ASSISTED THERAPY TRIGGERS HEALTH BREAKTHROUGHS

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"It was amazing to watch," Barb says. "They would touch him directly. They would vary the speed of approach. They would also weave through and touch the therapists and me, sending energy to Graham."

Barb remembers a particular occasion when "two of the dolphins formed a circle around us. One of them had its nose touching the head of the therapist who was holding Graham's head. It was a beautiful, peaceful moment."

Another time, she says, "I was holding Graham's hand when I suddenly felt a dolphin's nose on my jaw. I was stunned. I had suffered from jaw pain for 20-plus years. How could this dolphin know that?! The experience opened a door to self-healing for me."

By the end of the four days, "Graham's head control had dramatically improved," Barb says. "Cognitively he followed the adult conversation and laughed appropriately."

Just the fact that Graham was able to laugh at all was a miracle to the Tresness family. "He would always throw up after laughing," Barb says. "But I got him laughing really hard for about 20 minutes one day during the program, and he never got sick!"

Other milestones followed in the months to come. While seated on Barb's lap, Graham displayed perfect head control and moved all four extremities independently for the first time. "He was giggling and smiling," she says. "I'll never forget it."

Barb then enrolled in an entry-level CranioSacral Therapy course. "I wanted to feel the (craniosacral) rhythm myself," she says. "I'll always remember the first time I put my hands on Graham and felt his rhythm. Our eyes locked and I said, 'You know I can feel it now don't you?' His smile said it all."

The pinnacle moment came when Graham pushed himself up to a standing position and

took about 20 steps. "It was like he'd been doing it his whole life," Barb says. Though he was unable to repeat the move, "We were ready to do whatever it took to get him back to that point."

Over the next nine months, Graham participated in three more Intensive Programs, each at the UI HealthPlex clinic.

The second clinic visit was prompted when Graham started throwing up a foamy white substance. "It was not a medical illness, and there was no explanation," Barb says. "My mother's instinct and CST training told me that this was a significant pattern his body was stuck in."

When Dr. John (Upledger) put his hands on Graham's head, he asked what had happened. That's when Barb remembered the fall Graham had taken several months earlier. "We thought he was okay at the time. I realized that day that he wasn't. He had no way to verbally tell me that something was off; his body did that. After our visit he stopped throwing up and began sleeping better." The other significant occurrence: "Graham took 10 to 15 steps!"

Barb remembers that clinic visit as the point "I knew I was hooked on doing this work." Invited by Dr. John to work with him on Graham, she says, "I was struck by the excitement he felt when a huge energy cyst released. Dr. John has been doing this for 30-plus years, and he was as excited as I was! I learned that moment how powerful this work is."

Little did Barb know that her conviction would soon be put to another test. On April 10, 2005, she and her three boys were in a major car accident. "There were no broken bones or blood," she says, "but Graham had a bump the size of a golf ball over his right eye. I did direction of energy (a CST technique) on it in the ambulance and it was gone when we arrived at the emergency room. Another confirmation to me that this really works."



The Tresness family enjoy a day at Discovery Cove. Pictured l-r: Barb, Graham, Colby, Greg and Tysen.

As she continued to work on her boys in the weeks following the accident, Barb noticed that something wasn't right with Graham. "To the rest of the world he looked better, but I knew that he needed help on the inside," she says.

Off the two of them went to another Intensive Program, unaware that they were about to receive a double blessing.

"My goal for Graham was simple: I wanted my boy back. Three days into the program he was making eye contact again, he was sitting up better, and his head control had improved."

The bonus came when a cancellation opened a space for Barb to take part in the program, as well. During her sessions, she says, "I felt severe pain in the same place the dolphin had touched. I'll never forget my last day when, in the loving care of five remarkable therapists, I uncovered a traumatic memory that led to a deeper understanding of the pain I'd had for more than 20 years."

For the Tresness family, CST is now a healthcare staple. Sons Colby, 10, and Tysen, 7, ask for work when they need it, and dad Greg has even joined in. "I've learned to help myself, too," Barb says.

As for Graham, "He still has trouble making his muscles do what he wants them to do," she says. "But he'll pull my hands to the part of his body that needs work. It's the only time he reaches for me. I can't emphasize enough how huge that is. The fact that he'll draw me in like that is so powerful."

"We're all headed back to the dolphins this summer. I can't wait to see what amazing things will happen this time!"

Graham displayed perfect head control and moved all four extremities independently for the first time. "He was giggling and smiling," Barb says. "I'll never forget it."

MEET ROBYN WALPERT, MPT, CST

Robyn Walpert was first introduced to CranioSacral Therapy while in physical therapy school. "I heard about it in an upper-level orthopedic class taught by two instructors named John and Roy," she says, adding, "How ironic that my two biggest mentors at UI HealthPlex have been Dr. John (Upledger) and Roy (Desjarlais).

"I was fascinated as they talked about using manual therapies and seeing these tremendous results, like relieving colic in one treatment. I remember thinking, 'I want to do that someday.'"

After graduating in 1997 with a masters in physical therapy from the University of Maryland, Robyn worked in a rehab hospital for a year doing transitional subacute care. She also worked in small, private outpatient practices in Florida and New York that specialized in various manual therapies.

In 1999 Robyn took her first CST class. "I was really just there for the technical information, but quickly got excited about the work. The idea of trying to fix problems in the traditional physical therapy way by treating just the symptoms began to feel very limiting. People are more complex and diagnoses more wide-ranging. CST felt like the missing link."

Determined to make CST her career, Robyn began externing at UI HealthPlex. She joined the staff full-time in 2003. Dividing her time between Intensive Programs and private sessions, Robyn says, "CST has allowed me to step outside of the box and blend art and science in a whole new way. I integrate CST along with joint mobilization, neuromuscular reeducation techniques and exercises focusing on core stability."

The cases Robyn has worked with have taken on many faces and situations, each impacting in its own way. "I've worked with people who have regained functioning of their limbs. I've seen people completely distraught over a trauma or illness find peace and regain hope to move forward," she says. "To me, cases like these pinpoint what CranioSacral Therapy and SomatoEmotional Release are really about — the power of human connection, the profound depth of the body's wisdom, and our ability to find true healing when we are open to unknown possibilities."



Robyn Walpert
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