

REFLECTIONS FROM GROUND ZERO

The World Trade Center Therapy Intervention at Stuyvesant High School

by Liz Pasquale, LMT

The airplanes hit the Twin Towers on Tuesday, September 11th, at about 9 a.m. The next morning I called my friend, Dr. Antonio Abad. He told me he had gotten to the towers Tuesday morning to create a triage center at Stuyvesant High School on Chambers and West Side Highway, about two blocks from the site.

I asked him if he needed my help. "Come on down," he replied. "I don't know if you'll be able to get in, but if you can we could use you."

It was a sunny day as I walked toward the black mushroom cloud. Emergency vehicles passed every few moments. The scene was overwhelming.

I almost wished the guards would stop me, but no one did. In fact, I was given a ride to the door. I stepped out of the van into billowing dust and smoke and people rushing about in protective clothing.

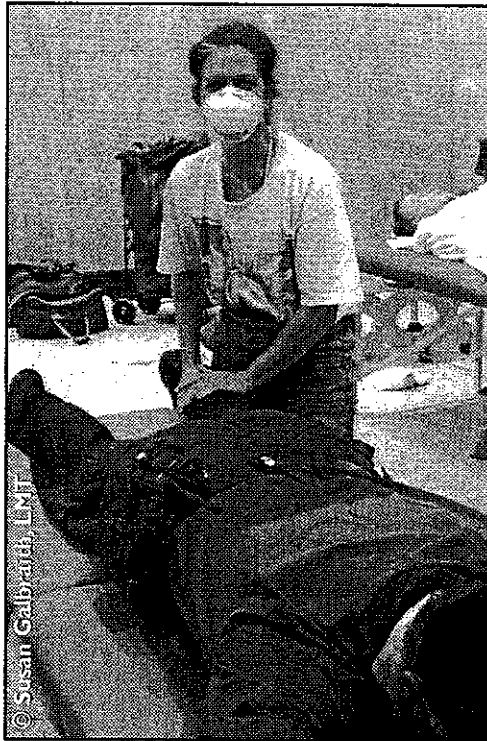
It no longer seemed like New York at all, or any other place I knew. It was a war zone. I felt like I'd left my home state light years behind.

ASBESTOS DUST COATS THE AIR

The wind carried swells of dust into the school with us. It covered everyone. We looked like we were all wearing the same gray uniform.

Signs said, "Asbestos levels high. Please wear a mask." Almost everyone had a paper or surgical mask, generally hanging casually around his or her neck. None had filters. I placed one over my nose and mouth, though I suspected it was no good for asbestos.

I found my friend, Dr. Abad, and he explained my job: to ferret out



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workers showing signs of extreme fatigue and stress. I was to get them to lie down for a massage. If I thought they were really bad I was to get a nurse to check them personally.

It was pure chaos. One floor housed the food, a central area of communications, and a long hall with cots set up. There were IV units, medical supplies, doctors and nurses. The police and firefighters were in the school theater. Everything was covered with that dust. With each step it clouded around us.

The communications center had no phones — the electricity was out.

People would just come into the center of the room and ask for what they were looking for. The person behind the desk would shrug. Somebody in the crowd would overhear and point in the right direction, to a police officer or an army staff person or an emergency vehicle out front.

Generators provided the limited electricity we did have. The toilets had just gotten up and running again, the first time since Tuesday. There were maybe 200 people rushing about in the dust clouds, eating, organizing, talking, medicating. And always a few search dogs.

A FIREFIGHTER SHARES HIS STORY

In the midst of everything was a dusty massage table, so I took it upstairs and found a clean, quiet room. It was filled with school desks and historic pictures showing a barricaded village at the tip of Manhattan. Dr. Abad brought in a middle-aged fireman. I'll call him Paddy O'Flannery.

Paddy was covered with the asbestos dirt. On top of his clothes he wore fireproof gear. He took off his boots and I had a moment of doubt. How was I going to feel anything under his gear?

I decided to start with Lymph Drainage Therapy and began at the clavicles. I could get my hand on the skin there. After that it was easy. The lymph rhythm actually came to me through the gear. I was in it.

Paddy was a chatty guy, but his significance detector quickly indicated we were in deep stuff. He said he had been home when he saw the TV report shortly after 9 a.m. He got over there right away. That was his

home turf. He had wondered if his guys were dead already.

When he arrived he was so glad to see they were all there. A fireman named Ray Downey walked over to them.

"Ray Downey is a god," Paddy said. "He's got a chest full of medals. I've been in this business 15 years and I've got two puny medals. He's got a million of 'em. And he went to Oklahoma. Everywhere there's a big fire, he goes.

"So he walks over to us and says, 'Hey, why don't you stand back a bit. This is looking pretty sketchy.' So my 'guys turn around and start to walk back, and the other guys next to us walk to the right. All those guys, my buddies who walked to the right, they all got it. All gone. And my guys, we were running for our lives cause at that second it all comes down.

"And Ray Downey is gone. Thirty seconds after he told us to get back, gone. He was a god to us firemen."

A STAIRWELL LANDING BECOMES A CROSSROAD OF CARE

I saw a couple chiropractors had set up on the landing between the first and second floors so I joined them. We were between the door and the food so everyone saw us when they passed. It was a never-ending stream of people carrying supplies, talking, kicking up dust.

Yet even in the chaos people would get up from the table after their sessions and say, "That was the most relaxing massage" or "I feel like I've slept for a week."

For days we treated overworked, traumatized firefighters, police officers, rescue workers and debris diggers. Some of them were brought there by their bosses and slumped onto the table wearing whatever they had on — bunker pants, harnesses laden with clips and ropes, gun belts, flashlights, pockets filled with tools. All covered with that gray dust.

I had started working on Thursday. By the time most men reached my

table, it was the first break they had allowed themselves since they began Tuesday morning.

I got into the habit of starting with Lymph Drainage Therapy because it immediately relaxed them. Working over their clothes was no problem. I'd switch to CranioSacral Therapy to Visceral Manipulation as we went along.

Other massage therapists soon joined me. Eventually, we had about six or seven chairs and four tables set up. Most therapists were doing Swedish over clothes. Some did acupressure and Shiatsu while others worked on floor mats. After four days it grew to be 12 to 15 massage therapists on the landing, with two or three chiropractors who had moved to the third floor.

A rough schedule evolved. It became busy around 9 p.m. The therapists were swamped straight through until dawn. Most of us worked without a break as long as there were men waiting. The funny thing was, I never felt tired. When people did, we would badger them to take a rest.

Then morning came and the night shift would leave. I'd have breakfast, shower, sleep. Fresh faces would appear to man the day shift, which wasn't nearly so busy. I'd work on and off during the day when I wasn't napping. Then in the evening we'd be ready to start the all-night massage marathon again.

EMOTIONAL RELEASES RUN HIGH

Ordinarily in my practice, about 20% of my clients — usually people I'd seen a few times — would experience an emotional release. Now more than 80% of these men discharged their emotions, often in the first 5 to 10 minutes. Most of them I'd never met, and they'd never had a massage before.

This is how it went: First I'd give each man some water when he arrived. A quick evaluation always pointed to restrictions of the thorax, compromised lungs. Not surprising, since they'd all been inhaling smoke

for hours. Grief appeared to be omnipresent at the heart level.

I would check the cranial rhythm, which usually seemed shocked — very faint or completely stopped. Then I'd start with Lymph Drainage Therapy at the clavicles, proceeding up the neck to the face. That's when the sudden presence of tears rolling down the man's face would alert me.

Only one policeman cried in silence, not telling me his thoughts. All the others related some traumatic event, usually involving a search through the debris.

Afterward, each man would continue to process quietly in what resembled a deep sleep. I would continue following the body, doing CranioSacral Therapy and Visceral Manipulation.

By the end of the session the cranial rhythm would have revived somewhat, even approaching what one might consider normal. I often ended by inducing a few still points or returning to lymphatic work.

MEMORIES HELP EASE FLUID DYNAMICS

I had just returned two weeks prior from an Upledger Institute workshop in the Bahamas called the BioAquatic Exploration. We spent four days on The Upledger Foundation's Dolphin Star boat, and had two sessions swimming with dolphins.

During the days we did bodywork in the warm, shallow water at remote beaches. The movement of the ocean became integrated with the cranial and lymph fluids we were palpating, which helped facilitate healing.

Now as I worked on this crowded, noisy, dirty balcony, I drew on that experience. I imagined all of us at the beach, immersed in water, using that vision to access each man's internal ocean. I imagined dolphins assisting us. As I did I gained easy entry into each person's fluid dynamics, and together we moved toward healing.

I worked on Michael who was there with his dog, Max. They had driven up from Mississippi in record time. "I saw it on the news at 9 a.m.,"

he said. "By 11 a.m. I was 300 miles away, headed here. The police in my home state gave me an escort, changing as I crossed each county line. After I left Mississippi, each time a cop stopped me and I told him where I was going, he waved me on."

Michael had trained Max himself and they had had a good day yesterday. But today was Max's best day. He found 17.

"Most were parts," Michael said. "Confused the bejesus out of Max. He's not used to this. But neither am I. That's why I don't do this anymore.

"I usually train. I just come out for the big stuff. Like Oklahoma. But this is the biggest. Today we found a kid's hand. I can't take this anymore. I lost a kid myself, so I just can't take it."

After I finished working on Michael, I worked on Max.

LIGHT TOUCH BRINGS PROFOUND RESULTS

Later that night Dr. Abad and I met privately. He wanted to know how it was going. When I told him most of the men I was seeing were having emotional releases, he was shocked.

I told him it was the nature of the work. Lymph Drainage moves fluids and tends to draw emotions out of the places they're buried. CranioSacral Therapy and Visceral Manipulation have the same effect, I told him.

"Keep it up," he said. "The others are only massaging for 20 to 30 minutes, mainly doing muscles. What you're doing is different and very helpful."

At that point I felt like every workshop I ever took led me to that one week in time.

SORROW REFLECTS OFF THE ALTERED SKYLINE

It was 2:30 Friday morning. The massage tables and chairs were full and there was no sign it was the middle of the night.

As I gazed out the window I was constantly struck by what wasn't

there. I never thought in my lifetime there would be no Twin Towers. I remembered years ago when they were first built. People said they were so tall they might just fall over.

James was a volunteer from Connecticut. His boss's daughter was on Flight 11. He was working in the rain.

Lasers are trained on the buildings still standing so the emergency personnel can tell if they're going over. When the buildings move, they trip evacuation alarms. The rain had made the buildings heavier and the alarms were going off.

"Scariest thing I ever heard," James said. "I heard that alarm and ran as fast as I could. Everyone was in a panic. I saw a girl get trampled. They just knocked her down. A fireman stopped to help her out. I just had to take a break after that."

Another man, Mario, began to shudder during his session. His body jerked as tears streamed down his face.

"It's not right," Mario said. "I pulled a young woman out of the rubble today. She was in terrible shape. She was dead. She had red fingernail polish," he sighed deeply, "and no head."

COMMON CAUSE TRANSCENDS ALL BARRIERS

And so it goes, night after night. Generally, it seems to slow down during the day, pick up around 7 or 8 p.m., and then get really busy around 11 p.m. and stay that way until 4 in the morning. By the fourth day someone actually made an appointment with me.

Eventually, I had a real respirator that filtered asbestos. I worked and slept with it on. Other supplies were plentiful. One hallway was packed with donated clothes. New socks, underwear, t-shirts, even boots.

On the fifth floor I could take a shower, even a hot one by the fourth day. There was shampoo, soap, towels, toothbrushes, deodorant, anything you could imagine. The generosity was overwhelming.

And the food was really good.

They eventually got the seventh-floor kitchen operating so the city's great restaurants started sending their chefs to our kitchen to cook.

Hundreds of workers came in every day to help with it, all of them volunteers. Many lived here and just walked in when the trouble began. Others came from up and down the East Coast.

"The Department of Health was in here today," Suzie said as I worked on her. "They told us to leave because we're not their employees. So I asked them, 'Who's going to feed all these people?' Now they're letting us stay."

So here it is, five days later. I'm still wearing my respirator and working on people wearing flak jackets, bunker pants, harnesses and gun belts.

One man asks me if I've had a lot of marriage proposals this week. "More this week than ever in my life," I reply, my voice contorted by the respirator. "And they haven't even seen my face."

He laughs and says, "We're not marrying your face. We're marrying your hands."

AUTHOR'S NOTE:

Thank you to Dr. John for The Upledger Institute. Years of classes and effort culminated in those five days at Ground Zero. To Bruno Chikly, for the Lymph Drainage Therapy on which I relied so heavily. To Frank Lowen, a generous mentor who teaches me faith and trust in my hands. And thank you to my friends at Ground Zero who allowed me an opportunity to be helpful.

For information about continuing education classes from The Upledger Institute, please call 1-800-233-5880, ext. 90021, or visit www.upledger.com.

