

Journal of a Hospice Volunteer

by: Reiki Master, Keith Webb

A couple of years ago I took the training to be a volunteer with my local non-profit hospice organization. It was my desire to share Reiki with the hospice community – with patients, family members, caregivers, and staff.

The Lower Cape Fear Hospice serves five counties in Southeastern North Carolina, including Brunswick County where I live. When I took the training, care centers (home-like facilities where patients can spend their final days or receive respite care) were operating in two of the five counties. A third one was under construction in Brunswick County.

I began my life as a hospice volunteer with a client with cardiac issues. He was a large man, having played the position of center in football at Wake Forest University. He played in the era when centers played both offense and defense. After graduating, he continued at Wake Forest in law school; being part of the coaching staff paid his tuition. He later served in the US Navy, reaching the rank of Captain and serving as the head of the Naval Justice School. When I met him he was spending most of his time in a wheel chair.

I visited him for three to four hours every Sunday for several months, giving his son, the primary caregiver, some much needed time away from home. Over this time, I became close to my client. We talked about his life, his career, his travels, his family, and his passion – food. He owned more cookbooks than I do! And we talked about Reiki. It fascinated him so much that he shared it with his son.

During one of my visits, he had a “spell” where he lost consciousness for a few minutes. I stood behind him and offered Reiki through his shoulders and crown. When he came to, he was at first disoriented. I was still behind him and began talking to him, calming his anxiety and still sending Reiki until he was all the way “back.”

Then one morning, as I was getting ready to go see him, the phone rang. My client had passed on during the night. I felt the pain and sorrow of losing a friend. It is customary for hospice volunteers to attend services for their clients if they have developed a relationship with the family. It is a great way for the volunteer to have closure. In this case, though, there were no services. My relationship with the client and his family ended with that phone call. Through this experience, however, I knew that I could be an effective hospice volunteer.

Fast forward a year. The Care Center building project is complete and it is open for patients. I continue to press the volunteer coordinator for access to patients and families for Reiki. Hospice requires that Reiki practitioners show proof of insurance and proof of Reiki Mastership. I secured the insurance and produced all the paperwork. Reiki falls into the Healing Arts program of this hospice organization. Because this care center was new and the staff was getting acclimated, it took about a year for the Healing Arts program to get up and going. I

know the time frame, because the insurance policy I purchased expired just before I was to start!

In November I began visiting the Brunswick County Hospice House one evening a week. I spend time with patients (most of whom are comatose and actively dying), any visitors who are with them while I am there, and the nursing staff on duty. One of the nurses is highly tuned to our Reiki energy, and she always gets some “juice” when I am there.

The Care Center has five patient rooms. Some evenings there are as few as two patients in-house; other nights the center has been fully occupied. One night the house was full, and there were two patients waiting to come.

One evening I visited a woman who had just arrived by ambulance from another part of the state. Her husband was still en route. She was awake, aware, anxious, and talkative. Her ovarian cancer had rapidly spread after a few months of remission. I walked in, introduced myself, and we started talking. She told me her story – of her illness, of her family, of her fears. I told her about Reiki, and after a while, asked if she would like to try. She was receptive, so I dimmed the lights in her room, held her hand with one hand and covered the upper chakras with the other. Her anxiety lessened and she dozed off. I then treated the lower chakras and her swollen abdomen, and returned to hold her hand a while longer until I knew she was in a deep sleep.

Two nights later I went in to check on her. Her husband and her son were with her and they were all laughing and talking. Her husband had arranged for them to move to an ocean front condo in South Carolina near their daughter. I asked she would like me to come see her there, and she enthusiastically encouraged me to come. My first visit was several days later, and her condition had declined. She told me she was ready; that she had made peace. I nodded and held her hand sending the love and compassion of Reiki throughout her cancer-ridden body. Again she relaxed and fell asleep.

A few days later her husband called me with the news his wife would most likely pass that day. I went to the condo where the patient was surrounded by her two children and her husband. I held her hand and focused calming energy into her. I then sat at her feet, rubbing them to encourage circulation and sending energy as well, all the while talking with the family and hearing their stories. After a couple of hours I said my goodbyes, telling Donna we would meet on the other side and sharing tears with Cam, Matt, and Jennifer. Closure is nice.