

His Name is Earl

A Reflection on My Journey Toward Emergency Preparedness -- In My Own Backyard

by Dawn Warnaca, HTCP, Healing Touch Instructor

blue tarps, old tires and a single, muddy, deeply-rutted driveway.

This began with my idea of helping my community, or my country, or maybe even helping in places like Haiti or Japan. I wanted to join a disaster team, a *Healing Touch Disaster Relief Rescue Operation Society*. I had in mind that I could be of service to firefighters at a 9/11 scene or earthquake survivors suffering trauma in some Super Dome. My thinking also included my training, certification, Healing Touch Program (HTP) national accreditation -- all these verifiable skills that could help victims, as well as, rescue personnel. If only I knew how!

When I read about the opportunity to become part of the Healing Touch Professional Association (HTPA) Disaster Team, I sent an e-mail to express my interest. I received a reply suggesting the American College of Emergency Physician's (ACEP) One Voice Consortium requirement to complete the on-line Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Incident Command System (ICS)-100, ICS-200, and ICS-700 classes. It just so happened that my life was in slow-motion at that time. At least it felt that way. I had recently graduated from community college, and more recently quit a part-time paying, but full-time stressful job. Each FEMA class required a few hours, which I spaced over ten days. I informed HTPA that I had my certificates of completion from FEMA, then sat back to await my call to heroism.

A few months later another volunteer opportunity was posted in the HTPA Newsletter. It seemed to offer options that I could choose like military outreach, disaster response or I could even share my own interest. My problem was, I just wanted to do the work, and I did not care very much how that looked. A few e-mails later, I volunteered for a three member committee to lay the foundation for HTPA's Community Connections. During one

Most of us have a fear of the unknown. The truth is -- I do not know my neighbor. I do know that next door -- in my case that means across the yard, past the gazebo, beyond almost two acres of pasture, the fence and a wide, wild, dense patch of blackberry bushes - is a single-wide trailer. A single-wide trailer -- surrounded by all the negative stereotypical things you might imagine such as boarded up windows, giant

meeting we were identifying just what disaster response really looks like. I was a bit startled to realize that flying off to Timbuktu to help complete strangers was far more appealing to me than sitting down with my neighbors to plan for a local disaster. That phone call inspired me to toss off my apathetic veneer, pull on my cape, and save Gotham City right here in my own back yard.

ORGANIZING MY NEIGHBORS

I called my local volunteer fire department to speak with the Fire Chief and told him I wanted to do some kind of neighborhood emergency planning. You know, like *Neighbor Watch*, only different. I was sure either he or the fire department, or someone he knew had something in place, so why reinvent the wheel? To my surprise, he thought that was great idea, but knew of no organizations that really fit into our type of rural environment. We talked for about 10 minutes when I got the bright idea to create my own plan. I talked about a simple information form that would ask my closest neighbors their names, who lived with them, what their health issues were, and their emergency phone contacts. The Chief hung up the phone saying, *"If you come up with some kind of something and get super rich selling it around the country, let me know. I could use the money."* I chuckled at his response and found myself willing to give it a try.

I typed up a form even adding a line asking about pets and farm animals. I printed ten copies, got in my car that very afternoon and drove from farm to farm dropping them in screen doors or handing them to the people who happened to be home. I told those I met in person that I would type up the information and make a Community phone book. Unfortunately, I forgot to put my name and phone number on the form. Details -- details!

FACING UNEXPECTED FEELINGS

The hardest place for me to go was to that trailer. It was almost the closest, but it took me the longest to get to, and I almost did not go. I had purposely avoided it. Upon returning home I was surprised at the timing, I had made the phone call to the Chief, typed up the form, printed it, and driven to nine neighbors in well under two hours. I would not be late for dinner. I passed my own house, and full of trepidation turned instead into the driveway of the *Trailer House Next Door*. I knew everyone else that I

visited. Over the years my kids sold them Christmas wrap, my cows have tromped through their gardens, my cat died in their dog house. I have lived here over thirty years, yet this person, this farm, this story, I do not know.

The Blackberry bushes are close, the trees are tall, I do not know who lives here, or whether they have a ferocious pit bull chained to the rotting front porch. I breathe and begin to reason - if there was a vicious dog, I would have heard barking from my back yard and I would have heard barking when I drove into the driveway. I would hear barking now, and yet as I listen beyond my breathing, it is very, very quiet. I step out of my car, and begin my approach. Something, a shadow, a movement within announces that my knock will be answered, and for only a moment, the door opens just a little. There stands an elderly man with thick glasses, a bit of white hair, and all hunched over. I stammer my spiel and hand over the form. There is a nodding of his head, a guttural sound, as he takes the paper and closes the door. Speechless and relieved that I have not been attacked, I hurry back to my car full of questioning about who I just met, if he can read, if he can speak, and what I have missed.

TRY, TRY, and TRY AGAIN

Not one form was returned. It was hard for me to understand this because one of the neighbors was as excited as I was by the idea of this neighborhood phone book. At least they said they were. In the meantime I called and left a message with the Red Cross, the one national group with which I am familiar. One of my motivations was to get professional training and (laughingly) covertly infiltrate an existing organization. It could be an undercover sleeper-type operation. Once I got on the inside, once THEY knew me, I could and of course would, bring Healing Touch right along. It would be a natural springboard into offering what I really want to offer. The Red Cross never returned my call.

A couple of weeks later, I revealed my failures to the committee. They encouraged me to call the Red Cross again and look into other organizations like Citizens Emergency Response Teams (CERT) and Green Cross. I did not commit to anything, but I reluctantly agreed to consider it. Part of me believes that the right door opens at the right time, and if the Red Cross did not want me, then why should I force the issue? I did not know one of

these organizations from another but I sent a few e-mails, and made some more calls to ask about training and opportunities for possible volunteer positions.

I began getting responses the next day, and the next, and the next. Details were given regarding the difference between federal, state, county, and city programs. Some of the responses felt open, and some did not. I played telephone tag with the county emergency management department. When we connected I discovered we have more in common than a desire to participate in emergency preparedness. The woman with whom I speak has been in the Public School system like I have. Talking to her was easy and comfortable. She asked about my current occupation, so I told her about Healing Touch and she was interested to know more about me. We made an appointment to meet at her office, which is near the health food store where I work one day a week. At about the same time I was accepted into a CERT training program, which happened to start in a couple of weeks.

OVERWHELMING IMPRESSIONS

The following week when I arrived at the emergency management office, I am surprised at the security. I have to sign in and receive a visitor badge. There are police, firemen, official and busy people in cubicles all over the place. Where the heck am I? I am retrieved by a friendly face and familiar voice. She takes me behind the scenes, in a very up-close and personal, yet surreal manner. I am given a tour of the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) where people gather to support first responders in a disaster. On this day, no one was here. There is no emergency. All the stations are empty. The high tech computers, phone lines, wall-size four-part television screens are blank and quiet -- just waiting. Recent activations included flooding, severe weather, and the planning for a memorial to honor police officers killed in the line of duty. My son is a rookie police officer. As I pick up a cup of coffee near a fallen officer memorial, these disasters feel close to home. I am duly impressed and feel the impact of this space on my entire being.

We sat to discuss the flyers, brochures and volunteer paperwork that are spread out in the EOC conference room. When I am asked about what position I am interested as a volunteer, I

do not have it in me to pretend. I tell her the truth. I want to help those who sit in those chairs, in that highly stressful environment, and I can do that with Healing Touch. I talk more than I want to and I am not sure I make sense. So I jump in with how I am willing to answer phones, file papers, or even man a door. She had a few questions about Healing Touch. She told me they have tried to bring in massage therapists but many personnel were skeptical about this kind of 'pampering' when so many people need help out in the field. We discuss the differences that Healing Touch offers. The space can be secluded, or it can be the kitchen or break room. The simple presence of a *Healing Touch volunteer* might be a much better fit in an EOC. Then she asked me if I could give a talk about Healing Touch, a short informational lecture to key personnel. "Yes, of course", I said. "I teach an introductory class that can be modified to fit time constraints". We walked back to her cubical. I was elated -- and in shock. Was I just accepted here? As a Healing Touch volunteer?

IT GETS SIMPLE – WITH HELP

As we draw toward conclusion, our conversation turns to my failed community involvement project. She tells me that she also works with neighbors to plan how they can help each other and she would be more than happy to come to my house and talk to my neighbors. What do you know? All I have to do is invite them. We set the date and just like that, I have something planned, organized, and someone else is going to do the talking. I came home with a few forms to complete, sign and mail back. I guess that is it. Once I go through a background check, I will be a registered emergency volunteer worker.

A few days later, I composed and typed an invitation for coffee and discussion about neighborhood emergency preparation. It took fifteen minutes to drive around to distribute these. Ironically, the gentleman from the trailer just happened to be on the highway, picking up his mail. All I had to do was pull over, roll down my window and hand him a piece of paper. I took the time to introduce myself, and as he held the invitation, haltingly and with difficulty, he said, "Earl, my name is Earl".

FAST FORWARD – THREE MONTHS

I have completed the nine week CERT training and simulation

drill. I have been issued a state Emergency Worker Identification Card and Saturday was the neighborhood meeting. Two days before the meeting, I once again distributed flyers, which the county made and sent that look oh, so official, reminding my neighbors to come. Nothing seemed to have changed as I drove down the bumpy, muddy, driveway except my fear. There were no words from Earl, and the door did not open much farther. But I know his name, and his name is Earl.

What I hope I shared in this article:

- If you have a desire to help – come forward.
- If you do not hear the answer you are expecting – contact them again.
- If you do not know how to begin – begin anyway.
- Failure is just another way to spell success.
- Call local and national well-known resources.
- Be sure to read Christina Brugman's article **Not If, When** in March 2011 Energy Magazine.
- If you get discouraged - talk about it.
- Expect the unexpected.
- Be willing to test your assumptions.
- If you think you know yourself – give your heart a chance to get to know You better.
- Paradox: This does not take a lot of time, and yet does not happen overnight.

About the author:



Dawn became a Healing Touch Certified Practitioner in March, 2010, and has a private practice two days a week out of her office. She also practices out of Marlene's Market & Deli (in Tacoma, WA). Dawn teaches Healing Touch Intro and Children's Classes, and she is currently in training to

Teach Level 1. Together Dawn and her husband, Mike (a level 3 student) have a HT practice group for the greater Tacoma area, the fourth Tuesday of every month. They have been married for over 30 years, have two children and three grandchildren. Dawn has taken the Qualified Mentor class and finds great joy working with mentees.