

# Tents Down at Stand Down

By Nancy Khlafallah, HTCP

**D**edicated healers can do important work even under the most dire conditions. I learned this two years ago at a special event for veterans called Stand Down in Dixon, California.

Several weeks had passed since the highlight of Patti Spark's and my dream to bring Healing Touch to a northern California Stand Down became a reality. Through a trial program offering Healing Touch weekly to Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) vets at the Concord Vet Center in California and Patti's connection with the head supervisor, we were introduced to Stand Down plans for northern California. My original understanding of the term Stand Down was vague but learned that it is a carry over from actual war time. When the men/women are taken from the battle zone for rest and recovery they call it Stand Down. Stateside Stand Downs are one to three day events where services are provided to homeless Veterans such as food, shelter, clothing, health screenings, VA and Social Security benefits counseling, and referrals to a variety of other necessary services, such as housing, employment and substance abuse treatment. Stand Downs are collaborative events, coordinated between local VAs, other government agencies, and community agencies who serve the homeless. (Go to [www.va.gov/HOME-LESS/StandDown.asp](http://www.va.gov/HOME-LESS/StandDown.asp) for information about Stand Downs in your area.)

Even though this was a small Stand Down with only 250 attendees expected, Patti and I planned every step of the way carefully. We wanted everything to run smoothly. The Concord Vet Center assigned a tent to us which was an impressive bonus. They also agreed to have a volunteer outside the tent to register those vets wanting to experience Healing Touch. Everything was running with impeccable ease. However, the universe does not always agree with well-laid plans.

A week before this event, the weather forecast was looking ominous. A storm was on its way, but I chose not to believe it. After all, California always talks about storms that turn out to be moderate to light rainfall. But, on October 13th the strongest October storm to hit this area since 1962 struck with a vengeance. Multiple inches of rain and up to 60 mile an hour winds! Without knowing what to expect Patti and I set out on our hour long drive to the Dixon Fair Grounds.

When we arrived nothing was as it should have been. There were no signs directing us where to find our contact person. Evidently the winds were too strong. We trudged through puddles over an inch deep, our umbrellas were blown inside out but we finally, after multiple attempts, found our contact in a dry building where we were told that "the tents are down"! They offered us space in a large building just across the way.

Again, we trekked though the wind and rain. When we arrived we were assigned to a small exposed area in a large room resembling a gymnasium. Not nearly enough space for the 11 other expected healers to set up their tables. Then there was a change of decision. An optometrist did not show and we could use an area that was enclosed by PVC pipe structures and tarp coverings, but it had even less space. We agreed to use fewer tables and work two-on-one in this enclosed setting right out of M.A.S.H.

Some volunteers were kind enough to retrieve our two treatment tables, brought there the night before, from our weather-beaten collapsed tent and left them at our feet. The covers were filled with rain water and the tables were drenched. The other healers began to arrive. We worked frantically trying to dry everything, including the floor, to set up in this cramped space. There were vets already anxiously waiting for their chance to experience HT.

Just as we began our healing sessions the power failed. We and all the vets were soaked from the knees down and remained that way the whole day. There were neither lights nor heat. The door was open at all times and a constant draft reminded us of its presence as it chilled our legs through soaked pants and shoes.

Some of us felt uncomfortable in these less than optimal conditions and wondered if we could really be of help to the vets. But, despite the constant din of so many voices in the area and occasional shouts, chaos turned to calm, as each healer grounded herself, forgot her surroundings and began compassionately working with these needy men and women.

On the second day, we arrived to find our tables had been moved and stacked one on top of the other against a wall because the optometrist had arrived and wanted his assigned enclosure. He agreed to allow us part of his space while other healers worked half in/half out of an open kitchen to the smell of beef roasting in the oven.

Vets wandered in among the treatment tables asking questions while healers were working. Our very helpful volunteer ushered them out, set up a make-shift waiting area and asked them to sit down while waiting for their turn.

We worked almost continuously treating issues of pain. Some related to explosions or being shot in the back, some to PTSD and other issues that come with getting older. Every vet who received HT was friendly and grateful for the experience. Working two on one allowed us to give them all the attention they needed. We had the joy of providing loving and beneficial care to 70 veterans.

Some comments made by vets about their HT experience were:

*"It woke up my imagination and I was dreaming about such beautiful things."*

*"I know what you were doing! Every time I was touched in a new place I heard a new tonal vibration. I'm going to look up Healing Touch Program online and learn more about this."*



*Healers in attendance either one or two days but not all pictured: Emily Barrett, Bobbi Beaudoin, Kathy Briner, Janine Clausen, Mary Eide, Janelle Embree, Karen Fong, Suzanne Mittica, Patti Sparks, Nanette Sagastume, Michele Stern, Mary Sindicic, and Siegrid Willgohs*

Another vet who had just had a tooth extracted was shocked when his healer asked what was wrong with his shoulder. As his jaw fell open he said, "I didn't say anything about that?" He was awed and baffled that she knew he also had some discomfort in his shoulders which he said was due to lifting weights.

One vet was seen sitting outside in ecstasy because his hips were pain free for the first time in years!

Another vet experienced a PTSD attack while being interviewed prior to treatment but calmed quickly as he was grounded. He slept through the remainder of the session.

Then, all too soon, the event ended. We wanted to do more but were exhausted. We all had a better understanding and appreciation of how effective Healing Touch can be even under strained conditions.

There was some humor as well. One vet told his story of not wanting to spend the night sleeping on the floor with hundreds of other vets. He convinced some buddies to check out the collapsed tents. They did find one tent standing but the floor was soaking wet. He was not going to give up his plan for a peaceful

night. Without our prior knowledge he told us they carried some of our massage tables out to the tent and returned them in the morning. We would never have known had he not told us.

The following Tuesday, our regular healing day at the Vet Center, I received hints and reminders there would be another Stand Down in August of 2010. They wanted us to do it again! As a result of this Stand Down in Dixon we made indirect

contact with the Palo Alto Health Care Center. They are anxious to have volunteers there as well. I passed this information to Helen Hann and she promptly followed through. The Humboldt representative in attendance asked about healers for their Stand Down and they were referred to [HealingTouchProgram.com](http://HealingTouchProgram.com).

We all felt privileged to provide this rewarding service to so many deserving veterans. I extend heartfelt thanks to each healer in attendance for traveling in dangerous conditions, some through mountains and snow, to get there and another flew in from the southern part of the States. They have all expressed their wish to do another Stand Down. In spite of the wet conditions we were doing something we had all yearned to do -- help those who lost so much to help our country.

I have since learned that Healing Touch was the favorite event at the Dixon Stand Down!

Special thanks to Mary Sindicic's sister Roberta Davies for scheduling and providing exceptional organizational skills.

About the author:



My first experience with Healing Touch was an awakening. I knew immediately it was something I wanted to do ... to help others realize this same love, peace, sense of grace and connection to something greater than oneself. This realization became my purpose. I was certified as a Healing Touch Practitioner in 2007.