

The Piano Player

by Bill Badiner, BA, HTCP



I was new to hospice, volunteering as a “complementary care giver.” My experience working with the dying was limited, and I felt anxious. My assigned patient, SP, resided in a skilled nursing facility. She was a 78 year old female who, I was told, was “declining.” This meant she had six months, or less, to live.

As I walked into the facility, my first impression was one of surprise. A group of residents were gathered in a large party room, being entertained by a piano player, singing a version of “House of The Rising Sun,” by Eric Burdon and the Animals. Something just didn’t seem right. This was a song written in the late 60’s, listened to by underaged kids who were juiced on methamphetamines. Here I was, reflective, ready to do serious energy work, and this guy was singing to the sick and dying about a house of prostitution. Could he be that insensitive? It all seemed so surreal; I stood there frozen. The residents were very quiet, some appeared disconnected. One man was wheeling around, his head protected by a helmet. After the song, there was silence, no clapping. I wondered if the residents were also confused about the selection of this song, questioning its relevance.

Feeling apprehensive, I went to room 30B. Although the facility was very clean, there was a lingering smell. It was unpleasant, and I began to wonder if I was well suited for this kind of work. I introduced myself to SP, who was alert and sitting in her wheel chair. She was unimpressed with me and was indifferent as to whether I did, or did not do, a session. She told me she felt like “jumping off a bridge.” I felt like leaving, but where was I going to go? I had no idea what technique would be appropriate for this situation. I took the path of least resistance and proceeded to do a *Chakra Connection*. It was hard, but I knew I had to stay heart centered and focused. I was accustomed to my clients lying comfortably on a massage table, eager for their energy

centers to be balanced. I was used to being able to rotate the client at will, moving him or her so that I could touch the exact point at which the chakras would transform energy to a frequency at which the cells would resonate. No, this was going to be a very different experience. I had learned my first lesson - in some situations, I would have to adapt and work with what was given to me. I made it through the connection and was grateful that SP didn’t ask me to stop. She said I could come back, and I felt successful. I didn’t want to report to the coordinator that I had been turned away. Lesson number two - I would take the small triumphs.

The next four sessions went more smoothly. SP appeared happy to see me and seemed to relax during the sessions. At times during the session, her eyes would close and a delicate smile would appear on her face. Again, I eagerly accepted the small things.

Hospice had provided for a limited amount of Healing Touch sessions for each patient. I decided to tell SP that we had only three sessions remaining. She seemed comfortable with this. However, her health was deteriorating. She refused to get out of bed, and would not feed herself.

As I went to my final sessions, the charge nurse greeted me and said that SP would be happy to see me. She was maintaining. SP was, in fact, happy to see me and seemed eager for our sessions. She smiled and told me to pull up a chair. At this point, I had put aside much of what I had learned regarding technique. Whether or not I was effectively balancing or recharging chakras, or releasing accumulated auric debris from her system, I really did not know. I had stopped interpreting. What I did know was the relaxed smile on her face as I cupped the soles of her feet. I knew that when I made the connection between her ankle and knee, her leg would spasm, and I had

been told it had nothing to do with her medical condition, nor her medication. I knew that when I held her weightless hands, there was a slight clutch as if she did not want to let go. I knew that when my hand was on her heart chakra, she would always close her eyes, and she seemed at peace. I had learned very well to attend to the small successes. The small things could be overpowering. There were signs everywhere that Healing Touch was something special.

I was apprehensive about our last session as I knew that I had to say goodbye. The charge nurse told me that SP was in good spirits. As before, she greeted me with a smile and told me to pull up a chair. I proceeded to tell her how much I had enjoyed our time together, and reminded her that this was our last session. However, I was unprepared for her response. As she lay in bed, her gaze affixed to the ceiling, her eyes began to well with tears. Every once in a while there is a defining moment with a client when I know that a connection has been made. At that point nothing else matters, neither the method used, nor the technique. Results are incidental. For me, it is a feeling that I have become one with the client. It is almost as if a surge of electrical current, something much greater than I, has infused my system. Maybe it is a feeling of grace - I do not know. But this was one of those moments. I realized that I had made a difference. However, SP was upset, and I was totally unprepared.

She refused to look at me. It was as if I had given her new news. I asked her if she would like to do a session, and she refused. She was more upset than I had anticipated, and I did not know what to do. I felt like a child who just wanted to run. I glanced straight ahead and noticed that there was a blank space on the wall next to her bed - perfect for a picture. I told her that I used to work as a photographer and asked her if I could give her a nature photograph for her wall. She seemed to like this idea. I told her I lived a few minutes away and would be right back. I rushed home, retrieved a photograph of a purple iris in full bloom, and brought it back to the facility. As she lay in bed, she held the picture above her face for quite some time, and finally responded, "this is beautiful." I told her that now she had something to remember me by, and she responded, "I could never forget you." We put it on the wall. With that, I gave her a gentle kiss on the forehead; she smiled, and we said our goodbyes.

I had learned lesson number three. The piano player knew what I had to learn. It didn't matter what song he played, any more than it mattered what technique I administered, or the order in which I applied the techniques. Sometimes all that matters is one's presence, just showing up. That's it; some people refer

to it as "bearing witness," being willing to sit in the presence of another's suffering, without judgment, without expectation. The piano player understood this all along.

About the author:

Bill Badiner, BA, HTCP, is a Healing Touch Certified Practitioner and maintains a private practice in Sonoma, California. He holds a degree in Psychology from the University of Minnesota, and a degree in Applied Photography from the School of Communication Arts in Minneapolis, MN. Currently, Bill is volunteering as a complementary care giver for Hospice By The Bay, Marin/Sonoma, Ca. His article, The Piano Player, is a reflective piece about one of his memorable Hospice experiences.