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South Africa – A Different Kind of Safari – for Healing and Ubuntu

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Abstract

This is a first-hand account of how an American nurse was “called” into service in various areas of South Africa to bring an Energy Healing Curriculum, Healing Touch, to many groups with little or no resources. This work has sought to assist with caregiving of children orphaned as a result of the AIDS pandemic, and to give simple information and tools for front line hands-on caregivers in a marginalized indigenous community in the northern Kalahari Desert region. Accounts are shared explaining how this teaching was used to ease distress and disease and has created strong and caring relationships.

Key words: Healing Touch, South Africa, AIDS, Ubuntu, holistic nursing, South Africa, energy healing, Bushman, Kalahari, Khomani San, indigenous healing

Beginnings

When I first traveled to South Africa about fifteen years ago, I was picked up at the airport in a vehicle that had an African word painted on the side, *Ubuntu*, that was unknown to me. Since then, I have spent years growing in understanding of the concepts, connotations and deep emotions that are contained in the inner life of this word, Ubuntu. These individual threads have been woven joyfully together into a continuously unfolding tapestry in my life. It has all come about through experiencing the people, the land and animals of South Africa. *Ubuntu* or *Umunthu* is an African word with roots that can be traced to ancient Egyptian dynasties with an endless variety of translations and meanings such as: Humanity; Sisterhood-Brotherhood; Universal Goodness or Creation in man, the Potential for Being Human, and on and on.

I started my nursing education at 36 years of age, after changing university curricula several times. I was raising a toddler and holding a dream of serving humankind. Under no illusions and with a love of science I forged ahead. I knew that straight hospital nursing was not the end point of my career, but the means by which I could be propelled into a specialty of holistic practice of some kind. Learning medical nursing has served me abundantly. It is very practical, useful in everyday life, a means of career support, can be called upon to aid in a mid-flight crisis on a trans-oceanic crossing. It is, as well, the most trusted of professions.

Years in a community hospital, general practice clinic, and home-based hospice practice, in mid-sized town Louisiana, also served me well while I learned Healing Touch (energy based hands-on healing), clinical hypnotherapy, meditation, herbology and essential oil basics. I was an active member of the

American Holistic Nurses Association (AHNA) and benefitted hugely from the guidance, knowledge and wisdom I found there – with role models of the highest degree.

With board certifications from the AHNA in *Holistic Nursing* and as *Healing Touch Practitioner* and *Healing Touch Instructor* from Healing Touch International, Inc., in hand, the stage was set for international, service, work and travel.

Bringing Healing Touch to South Africa

At a Holistic Nursing conference I connected with another Healing Touch Instructor, Robin Goff, and together we grew a dream that took us on our first of many trips to South Africa. We had two contacts, one in Johannesburg, a Unity Minister, and one in Cape Town, founder and director of Novalis Ubuntu Institute. These two exceptional individuals were open to us coming to these city centers and allowed us opportunities to share training in Healing Touch with a variety of enthusiastic individuals.

We visited a hospice for individuals affected by HIV/AIDS in Soweto. There we taught introductory basics in palliative methods of energy therapy to a group of caregivers and Founding Mothers who were retired teachers and nurses. These retired human dynamos had turned an abandoned power station into a gleaming care center for the burgeoning number of terminal AIDS patients, many of whom had been abandoned by their families. Through exchanging hands-on care techniques with each other, they discovered how easily they could help someone relax, become more comfortable and let go of anxiety and some of their physical pain. These “no cost”, simple techniques evolved into a truly holistic approach to care that also soothed the Spirit and brought acceptance of the inevitable final transition that this disease would bring. All medications and supplies, including beds, sheets and everything available here had been donated to the hospice. Patients were fed from a large vegetable garden in the back yard. The addition of Healing Touch was a major contribution in this setting, which was surviving on a shoestring. Stresses were eased enormously, with these added ingredients of care and compassion.

We shared a two-day class with an eclectic church group, home care workers, teachers and others. This served to bond the group, with a focus on self-care and care for the caregivers. We shared our simple and effective techniques at a Children’s Village, one of a series of orphan care centers that have sprung up all over the world since WorldWar II. It empowered staff to be able to provide ancillary care for the children and for each other, too. Healing is hastened with the application of the energy healing techniques to the whole person for a full twenty minutes or to a local area for as short as five minutes. With a simple “brushing of the energy field” technique, they could calm the children, help them to sleep and provide supportive care for all of the cuts and bruises the children experienced.



We walked out into an informal settlement of refugees to see how one can minister to those in dire need with no equipment. One very distinct memory from this afternoon foray was our doing group prayer and healing for a blind woman. Her daughter had passed from AIDS and her granddaughter had recently gone to live elsewhere. She was now alone in her three-sided shack, wearing clothes with holes and only a pumpkin to eat. She sat on an upturned bucket and our African friend asked permission from her to do the prayer and laying-on-of hands. Our intention, as the four of us gently put hands on her head, shoulders and back, was to create a field of light, love, and healing energy to surround her and lift her Spirit and infuse her mind and body with peace and comfort. It was a phenomenal experience to be without any barriers between us as we all experienced the peace, light,

love and healing. Afterwards, we enlisted the help of a neighbor to cut the pumpkin, build a fire and boil the pumpkin for her meal.

For us, this trip was an opportunity to experience the transcendent concept of Ubuntu – members of one human family – sisters and brothers under the same sun.

Now it is years and eight trips later of visiting and teaching in other diverse South African communities, creating lasting friendships and a deeper appreciation for the culture and diversity of this most beautiful and captivating country. I am in awe of this blessed experience. Two other of my most memorable opportunities presented themselves.

The first opportunity was in a Township of Johannesburg, where I taught both Healing Touch and basic nursing skills to a HIV/AIDS organization, PUSH (Persevere Until Something Happens). This agency was staffed with a few nurses and social workers, but mainly with dedicated home caregivers who tended ill and dying clients, carrying heavy backpacks of supplies on foot into a nearby shack village.

It was there that I had a “eureka” moment of knowing I was in perfect alignment with my life purpose. The caregivers gathered for the six-hour Healing Touch class on a Saturday and they began the day in the usual way with prayer and song. As we proceeded through the class and the treatment exchanges, they relaxed more and more and were very open and receptive to personal healing as well as to learn how to care for their fragile and gravely ill clients. For the final treatment exchange, we did a longer, thirty minute experience into which I encouraged them to add prayer and song when they took the role of practitioner. It was so powerful that one young woman being treated (who had disclosed to me that she was HIV infected) leapt from her chair, moaned loudly while she threw her arms up into the air and fell to the floor in a deep, unmoving trance. I was somewhat stunned but had the others form a circle around her and pray, eventually all putting hands on her, and then a final soft, slow, song was sung. She eventually opened her eyes, smiled, pushed herself up, and shared that she felt “purged from demons.” This was a healing unlike any other I had witnessed.

A couple of mornings later I dropped by the agency to chat with the caregivers. The young woman who had been “purged” rushed over to me with a beaming smile and glistening eyes. She excitedly told me that her energy had come back, she felt like “new” and she had been able to attend church on Sunday – after many weeks of absence and total exhaustion, and had been able to stay all day!

Others also related accounts of personal improvements, including one who had “lost” the taste for alcohol and was no longer drinking. Several reported that they had been able to do some Healing Touch for patients while on home visits and that the patients were comforted and rested better. They now felt confident enough to continue this practice with others.

Figure 2. TT outdoor classroom

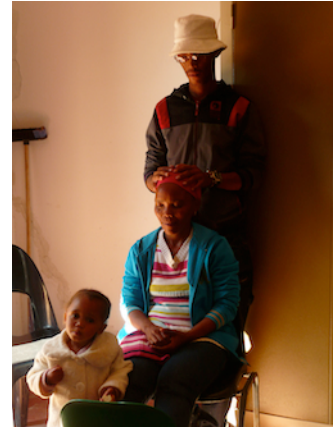


In 2013 I was welcomed at the Hillcrest AIDS Centre Trust on the outskirts of Durban (on the Indian Ocean) in Khwa Zulu Natal province, with the highest incidence of HIV infection and AIDS in the world. Here, too, I taught basic introductory, palliative comfort care techniques to the caregivers. After the three-hour class, I witnessed them going immediately back to the patients in the Respite/Hospice to offer them the compassionate hands-on care with confidence. As I watched them treat the patients, light streamed into the unit and to those in recliners on the back porch. The caregivers worked with tender care and quiet grace and the patients, allowed themselves to receive with most sincere gratitude. This was giving and receiving of the highest degree.

If I could give this experience to everyone I have come across in my life, I would say that their lives could change as much as mine.

My most recent time in South Africa this year (2014) was spent with a dear native colleague, Claire Barry. We have been now twice together in the near extinct community of the Khomani San (Bushman) of the Kalahari Desert region on the border of Botswana and Namibia. Claire has dedicated years to living in the region as UNESCO health educator, advocate and tireless friend and supporter to this group of indigenous, first peoples of southern Africa. They once inhabited the entire southern peninsula of the continent and along the Atlantic and Indian Ocean coasts, many in caves. . Nothing can prepare one for the glimpse into the life and history of these small brown-skinned people who have been so severely mistreated, marginalized and tortured by the German, English and Dutch colonialists as well as other encroaching African tribes. A few of the San elders still carry their ancestral traditions and healing practices, which we hope can be preserved and passed on. Many San have succumbed to alcohol addiction, and the diseases that spread with the colonialists as well as with the modern day road workers who come into their scant and receding territory. There is HIV infection, TB, malnourishment, alcoholism, violence in families and within and against community members, hopelessness and lack of education beyond middle school. Many of the younger generation emigrate to other regions if given any chance. (Glyn, P. 2013)

Figure 3. Kalahari HT introduction class



We have sought support from small grant awards to travel there and teach Healing Touch. We offered the classes to men and women, young and old, to introduce those who would be open to learning these basic, timeless healing traditions, to reinstall interest and enthusiasm within the context of global supportive Healing Touch community. In 2011 I brought two other healers from my community in the U.S. who participated in a Healing Touch Clinic open to all community members. . Many walked to the clinic, which was held on a warm afternoon under a large shade tree with a few scavaged chairs to sit. Women brought babies and elders came for treatment. We treated mostly headaches, joint pains, and stomach upset. Heads nodded and all relaxed and reported they released tensions and felt better.

Claire has taught four Introduction Healing Touch classes, and I later have followed with the two-day Level 1 and Level 2 classes on subsequent trips and donated workbooks to their fledgling library. Most are Afrikaans speakers but some of the younger people have learned and assimilated various degrees of English fluency.

The second objective was to bring in the local, native traditional healers to a forum for sharing their stories and methods to connect the community to their healing heritage in an honoring, valuing context. Two women elders, Enna and Tiennas, who learned from their mothers and grandmothers , who learned from their own before them. were received with curiosity but eager anticipation. Some of what they learned from their healing lineage was hands-on body manipulation of organs, like “gentle adjustments or putting them back into place.” They both also remember when the practice of “Trance Dance” was performed in the community. A group would gather, dance in a circle, singing and playing instruments with an ill person lying in the center on the ground. The shaman or medicine person would go into a trance and would eventually suck the dis-ease out of the reclining one, dash out of the circle, and expel the illness with violent coughing.

Enna related her story to the gathered group – that as a young woman she pushed away the healing knowledge of her Mother and Grandmother. When her first child was gravely ill and she was living a distance from them, she prayed that she could receive the knowledge. After some time of fierce and concerted prayer, she heard a voice which directed her in how to help her child. She followed the instructions from the “voice”, her daughter became well, and others getting wind of this began bringing family members to her. She now practices what is termed, “Smeer,” a traditional hands-on scanning of the body to get information for which a treatment follows. Enna demonstrated a simply scanning to the group, after which they partnered and practiced under her guidance.

Tiennas told her story about being taught similar practices from her female lineage and of how she treats women quite successfully who have problem births and pregnancies. She shared that sometimes she just “knew” things, and recounted a time when a woman delivered a child, but there seemed to be some kind of problem and the mother was restless and very uncomfortable. Tiennas told the midwife that there was another child, a twin yet within the womb, and sure enough, with a little hands –on treatment to the belly, strong contractions began and another child was born.

The group had very animated interactions and great delight at exchanging treatments that were demonstrated by the elders as well as by Claire and myself. They willingly shared their experiences and made promises to gather together with Enna and Tiennas in the future.

This has all been Ubuntu, flowing through this little, nearly forgotten area of the world where gentle hunter-gatherers may be losing their indigenous languages and way of life, but not their heart and spirit or connection to the plants, animals, sky and sand. These people are treasures each one, more precious than gold or any promises of material rewards. All human beings and living species deserve the opportunity to have core healing and movement to wholeness and hope.

Glyn, Patricia, *What Dawid Knew: A Journey with the Kruipers*; Picador Africa (Pan Macmillan South Africa), 2013 ISBN 978-1-77010-304-7 www.panmacmillan.co.za

To learn more about Healing Touch, Visit - <http://HealingBeyondBorders.org>
To learn more about the Khomani San, Visit - <http://KhwaTtu.org>

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