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Tribe and Duty

by Susan Emily Russell, LMT, HTCP/I

When I took my first Healing Touch class I understood the Instructor's lesson on the importance of grounding and centering. As someone prone to day dreaming, who can easily drift, I greatly appreciated the need to be focused and connected. However, the Tree Meditation we experienced was difficult for me. When the instructor asked us to visualize the roots of our tree attaching us to the earth, all I could think was that I am an Army Brat and I have no roots. Later in the day when we learned of the Root/Base chakra and it's significance to tribal or family connection it clicked - the military is my tribe, my base, so to speak. I remember sitting on a beach in the Florida Keys looking at a palm tree and being told that it had been blown a distance down the sand during one of the storms. So now when I utilize the Tree Meditation, I am a palm tree, with many short roots that hang on tight until a big wind blows me along some shore.

When I read the October 2007 Energy Magazine article about the Stand Down in San Diego, I knew this was something in which I wanted to participate. I searched the Internet and found there was a Stand Down planned for August 2009 in El Paso, TX. August in the desert! I was able to arrange an invitation after writing to everyone involved, telling my Army Brat story and stating that I wanted to help my tribal brothers and sisters.

The event was held in the Texas National Guard Armory's gymnasium. What a place for healing! They gave me a booth at the end of a hallway labeled with numerous signs warning that it was an off-limits, secured area. After the moving Opening Ceremony, I donned my Healing Touch apron and began

to do the work. Viet Nam era rock & roll, Tejano polkas and country western music were blaring from the speakers. I gave treatments to 10 Veterans, two females and eight males. Four of the eight men were named Richard. Not Rick, Ricky or Dick - Richard. Richard means powerful leader or brave power. I knew it was a sign that I was in the right place at the right time. I received the message that one of the Richards was an artist and that drawing his story would greatly help his Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), so I rushed to a store at lunch and bought him a tablet and pencils. He came to me later, beaming, and handed me a drawing, stating that he was already feeling the benefits of the work.

"Healing experienced in body and mind. [My] pain is gone."
-Viet Nam Veteran, Male

After telling friends and colleagues about my experience, nine volunteers were invited to the Stand Down in Dallas later that same year. This event was a citywide homeless event patterned on the military Stand Downs and 12,000 people were expected to attend just a week before Christmas. The Veterans Administration (VA) had a corner of the huge convention center, and they gave us a curtained off section to set up our tables. I wanted the four Apprentices to have the opportunity to get in a lot of documented sessions, so I stood back and watched.

"Believe it or not, I actually feel better. The lights look brighter."
-Afghanistan & Operation Iraqi Freedom/Operation Enduring Freedom (OIF/OEF) Veteran, Female,
Four Deployments

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"100% different on how I feel now. Would be great for the Vets at the VA!"

-OIF/OEF Veteran, Male

A young man, named Richard, wearing a black shirt covered in military patches came up and I felt drawn to work on him. He rated his pain as an 8 and stress as a 12 on the 0-10 scale. After just 20 minutes of Healing Touch, including a *Mind Clearing* and *Chakra Connection*, he had the most beautiful smile and deepest dimples on his face. He asked for brochures for himself and his pain management physician.

"I haven't been pain free since I stepped on that mine!"

-Afghanistan & OIF/OEF Veteran, Male, Five Deployments, Three Purple Hearts

In 2010, I was invited to return to El Paso, so I interrupted my time at Healing Touch Program's Worldwide Conference in Denver to fly there for the day. It was heart warming to be happily greeted by those I had met the summer before. This year I had the help of Michal Curry, HTCP, who drove from Santa Fe. We worked on homeless Vets, support staff and a group of Medics recently returned from Iraq. One of the Richards was there again, sun scorched and eager to get on the table. He scratched a note for Michal and me, bringing tears to our eyes.

"Emotionally and physically I feel really good. Spiritually I feel real, real strong."

-Active Duty OIF/OEF, Male, Three Deployments

"A new feeling, pain relief without meds."

-Active Duty OIF/OEF, Female, Two Deployments

"Felt as if I was on another plane. Relaxed. Aware of my breathing."

-Desert Storm Gulf War Veteran, Male

In October 2011 we were invited back to Dallas where a Veterans only Stand Down was planned at the VA Hospital. It was cramped and extremely loud giving me the opportunity to emphasize to the Level 2 students that WE are the healing environment, creating sacred space as we work. The three of us who had been at a Stand Down before made sure that the others took time for self-care. I was fortunate to work on a Gulf War Veteran who, a while later, wandered back to tell me he

just wanted to hang out with us. All the volunteers agreed that this was an exhausting - but very inspiring day - and we look forward to the next chance to participate.

"[I feel] refreshed!"

-Gulf War veteran, Male

"[I'm now] spiritually full."

-Korean War Veteran, Male

"Will start distributing your pamphlets right away!"

-Gulf War Veteran, Female

So, are you motivated to carry on the work in this way? I suggest you read all the related articles in previous Energy Magazine issues, call the Social Work Department at your nearest VA facility, go to www.nchv.org/standdown.cfm, sign up on the HTPA Community Connections volunteer list, and/or talk to anyone who has had the fortune and honor to participate in these events. You will then know how lucky this Army Brat feels to be back with her tribe and each short tour of duty.

About the author:

Susan Emily Russell was born on a basic training camp and grew up as an Army Brat in some pretty exotic locations. This nomadic lifestyle, along with her Viennese mother, allowed Susan to observe and enjoy people of many cultures, and adopt an altruistic nature in her early years. She learned to cherish our similarities while relishing our differences, and is most fortunate to see beauty in each face she sees. Susan gladly suffers from Chronic Girl Scout Syndrome, being well prepared to do a good deed daily and leave things better than she finds them.

Susan is pictured on page 10 and below bottom center.



Above: Healing Touch volunteers at the Stand Down in December in Dallas, TX in 2009.