



*Gillian Desreaux at work in the SAH*



He was a small man; a GP spent his life serving his community. He now lay in the hospital bed with wide doe like eyes. He was early seventies, thin darkish hair unruly over the hospital pillow, quiet – no radio or television playing, just lying in bed looking vaguely around the room. It was just after breakfast, the hospitality staff busy in the corridor, a doctor doing rounds and his nurse busy with patient workload – the nurse suggested something soothing, he was unsure of his reaction to a massage as the patients’ cancer had metastasised throughout his whole body, including the brain.

I approached quietly and asked if he would like a massage – gentle touch, a blank expression. I asked again “some gentle holding of his hands and feet maybe?” His gaze did not change – he was looking straight into my eyes. I then realized maybe he couldn’t communicate with words (not stated in his notes but I could have missed it). So I took his left hand in my left hand and feeling him respond to my grasp - asked yet again with the guidance of “squeeze my hand if you want massage” with that there was a resounding powerful full hand response – no expression change though! He was in a body that was breaking down, what would I be like in his situation? Several thoughts crossed my mind – his family, career, intelligence, humanity, memories, my purpose for being there.

I relayed to him what the massage would entail and then started the session working with OM holds and Bowen moves. All the time, which now had been for 15mins, he had held my gaze! Every time I looked up he was looking straight into my eyes. I worked down his left arm eventually holding his left hand in my left – I looked up, our eyes met and then he spoke. He was reciting a prayer for the dying, I stopped - placed my right hand over the top of his left hand saying nothing. As the prayer progressed his confusion set in and the words of the Lord’s prayer started to jumble in, at this point I joined him in the prayer – so we finished the Lord’s prayer together, eyes fixed intently on one another, no other sounds, his grasp easing, his body relaxing.

In the moment questions flashed into my mind – do I finish now? Keep going? His body told me, he was letting himself surrender to the touch of another – a soothing. Very slowly and gently I worked his upper body with Bowen moves. He didn’t look into my eyes anymore for he had closed his - until the final OM holds of his upper cervicals. He met my gaze once more and then closed his eyes as I stayed quiet and still my right hand on his upper cervicals and my left on his upper sternum.



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I let him know the massage had finished – his eyes opened, he then nodded his head. I thanked him for the time we had spent together and left him. As I approached the closed door, the impact of our session was setting in – I took a deep breath ready to face the world of the ward/corridor. Their routines had gone on as normal as I had just shared a very intimate passage of time. I had never massaged this gentleman before and within 15minutes the closeness of touch had opened such an intense exchange.

I went outside for morning tea – the sunshine, the breeze rustling through the leaves and the faint scent of blooms, I needed time – what I thought of was his expression it didn't change at all but his voice was strong – a determination, 'this is what I want', that is what he told me. I went back to the ward and rechecked his notes to see if spiritual care had seen him, they had. I spoke to his nurse and relayed our session to which it was agreed another visit from spiritual care would be appropriate.

This quiet but determined gentleman taught me that no matter the circumstances we find ourselves in, our spirit can come through.