



Fran Yoeli's report from Thailand

It is almost a week that I have been home from Thailand and my “making waves” experience. Our EMDR project is being sponsored in part by some very special persons who have named the project ‘making waves’.

I am enchanted by the people I met, by their resilience under the enormity of their experience.

I am humbled by their strength.

I am honored to have been welcomed into the homes.

I am privileged to have shared with them their deepest pains,

And I am grateful to them for allowing me to help them heal with the tools that I have acquired over the years.

I was part of a 5 member Israeli HAP EMDR team plus one other Hong Kong facilitator who were invited by the organizing emdr facilitator from Cambodia. We trained 60 mental health professionals from the Bangkok area to use EMDR and EMD. The emd is used for desensitizing the impact of recent trauma without reprocessing old traumatic experiences. The idea is to provide the EMDR tool to the mental health professionals and supervise them for the year empowering them to help their own people work through the tsunami trauma and reduce the number of ptsd issues.

As the newly trained therapists did not come down to the temporary sites set up for the tsunami survivors part of our team had the privilege of going south to the Phuket region to set up the help system in the sites. Without this help of one very extraordinary dr. Su – this could not have been done.

Dr su arrived at the hardest hit area by the tsunami and remained there from the first few days helping the survivors, gaining their trust and working towards enabling their lives to resume, one very special woman.

Once dr. Su brought us to the key persons needing help we began to work. What probably looked like 'magic' to these persons soon became a resource for many of the grieving persons.

So much pain from so many different perspectives. The first person we were asked to help was a mother of three who had lost two of her children to the tsunami. She had recovered only one child's body and was frantic about recovering the second. Since her loss she neither slept or ate well, spent much of her time literally digging into the sand with her hands in search of the lost child. She needed help and was willing to accept our help so long as she could show us the sites, - where her house was standing, and how and where the wave came.

In the bizarrest of circumstances with translators, and client and dr. su and all the team in the back of a pick up truck we went through the area. The truck stopped at the side of the road and dr. su explained that this is her house. We all looked and not one of us could comprehend or grasp at first what was before us.

And I said... where are we supposed to be looking. And dr. su kindly said - you see the palm tree... and the other tree... well between them is her house- was her house... all that was there was a ceramic floor. Comprehension became astonishment and shock and realization of the enormity of what had actually happened. Then she pointed to the left of us to show where her in-laws had lived and the cement block that remained of their home. She began to cry - heart breaking tears and gut wrenching sobs. The helping process began. As the therapist talked calmly and slowly the other surrounding her tapped bilaterally or held her hand or were just there with her.

As the process moved we were about to experience the greatest fear of the survivors of the tsunami - in the distance there was the sound of crying, and the hum of motorcycle engines and an ambulance readying to go and then the shouts "wving, wving, wving" (run run run) and our hostess dr. su - began to explain... this is a rumor. It happens every other day -There we were on the back of the pick up truck with the entire village escaping in the opposite direction as dr su is calmly telling us THIS is a rumor.

We did not know what this was till we asked... ahhh she said - ohhh... another tsunami.

Don't worry – it is a rumor.

She began to shout to the people. It is only a rumor. And the remarkable thing – -- the town people and the engine sounds came to a halt. I didn't have a mirror but the other team members on that pick up truck were pale pale pale... I am so glad I could not see my own reflection.

Back to work and as we traveled back to the camp this client worked and processed the hardest of her trauma as we helped her and shared her pain. When I first had touched her hand – it felt almost lifeless.

The next day her color was back to normal, her spirits were up and her being was present. Her pain was still strong. Her determination to find her son's body was strong and her will to live was recovered.

We shared more sessions with her to finish up the processing and by the time I last saw her she had regained her life and held a sense of purpose.

This story repeated itself in different formats over the next few days.

We went to three sites in total.

Had the privilege of sleeping in what was left of one survivor's small hotel house. In search of the air conditioner (with temperatures at around 100 F or 40 C and humidity high)... my westernized self could not grasp that that beautiful air-conditioner did not work. It was in the wall – the plug was in the socket... and the remote was in my hand but still it did not work. It took me a few frustrating moments, as I wiped away the sweat and slapped at a few mosquitoes, to remember that the tsunami had been there – and there was no electricity for the air conditioner. I found out that only one person in that house had died... and in the house. And then I found out why there were so many water buckets... the tsunami had destroyed the pipes too.

Hard to grasp – hard to conceive.

It was time to deal with children. The process was basically the same, safe place, focus on the tsunami as you remember it, and what do you believe about you and want to believe and how do you feel and bilateral stimulus. And go with that.

And in a variety of ways with drawings, and butterfly hugs and translators and prayers and helpers and music and anything that helped with one of our team

leading the way the children were helped to overcome their fears of the great wave and their fears of the wave happening again and their fears of the water. And thus was born the idea of a trip to the sea to build and rebuild and build and rebuild sandcastles.

The children were prepared, the anxiety was down and the team tried to anticipate every possibility – and of course we missed the most realistic one. We underestimated the children.

On the first day we took six children to the beach. And they did what children do. They took the first step. Listened to the therapist for a brief second and then ran off. The therapist built his sandcastles and the children played in the water and watched him build castles and then knock them down and a few came over and helped – but the children were happy.

They asked to come again and we asked they bring a friend and the next day there were 25 people young and old who we had readied and prepared for the trip to the beach.

And by the third day... well it was remarkable and there were miracles.

One 10 year old who was mute since the tsunami (5 weeks) began to speak and one woman found hope in a teddy bear lying on the beach.

And one woman gathered shells as a gift – the only thing she could share to say thank you to these strangers who had walked into their shambled lives and helped them find some hope.

Yes – it was amazing.

Thank you all.