

UpClose

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MIGHTY JOE DEFIES THE ODDS WITH CRANIOSACRAL THERAPY

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By most accounts, Joseph Polk is a little boy who shouldn't be here. He was born with arthrogryposis, an extreme case of congenital joint contractures. His condition had been diagnosed by ultrasound while he was still in the womb.

Thinking at first that Joe had trisomy 18, a condition normally "incompatible with life," doctors advised Joe's parents to terminate the pregnancy. In return Mary and Wally Polk simply refused further testing, choosing instead to rely on their faith.

While it turned out he didn't have trisomy 18, Joe was born with severely contracted and hardened limbs. "He looked like a pretzel," Mary says. His arms were straight and hard, his wrists were bent, his fingers were crippled, and his feet were flipped up.

"Right away doctors told me his arms were paralyzed and he'd need at least seven surgeries," Mary says. "They even suggested surgically fixing one arm up so he could feed himself, and one arm down to accommodate toiletry."

While both parents agreed to foot surgery to enable Joe to walk, they were reluctant to take such radical steps with his arms and hands. That's when Mary got the idea to pursue another form of therapy she had heard about.

When Joe was 5 months old, she took him to a CranioSacral Therapist in their Illinois hometown. "After just a few sessions he

started moving his fingers and his arm muscles softened," Mary says.

Encouraged, she brought Joe to see CST-developer Dr. John Upledger, who was in their area teaching a symposium. "Dr. John felt Joe would regain full use of his arms and hands." How did Joe's surgeon react to the news? "He just laughed," Mary said.

Refusing to be discouraged, Mary brought Joe to



Joseph Polk at 3 days old. Arthrogryposis and bilateral club feet had hardened his limbs and joints.

The Upledger Institute HealthPlex Clinical Services. There he received three days of concentrated CST from staff clinicians Roy Desjarlais, LMT, CST-D, and Rebecca Hunt, OTR, SCP, who promptly nicknamed this little fighter "Mighty Joe."

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THE PRIVILEGE OF BEING A WITNESS

One of my favorite quotations is, "If you're not smart enough to know that it can't be done, you may be able to do it."

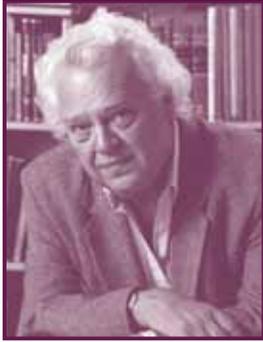
I first said that in 1975 at Michigan

State University shortly after I joined the faculty as a clinician-researcher in the Department of Biomechanics.

I was embarking on research that would document what I was subjectively feeling with my hands — the movement of the skull bones, one in relationship to the other. The motion I was sensing was rhythmical at a rate of about eight to ten cycles per minute. The anatomy department was telling me this was my imagination. They showed me microscopic views of human skull bones taken from bodies in the anatomy laboratory. These slides showed the skull bones fused to each other by calcification.

I was too "dumb" to accept as proof that skull bones are fused together. I kept on working and pretty soon decided to look at microscopic views of skull-bone junctures (sutures) taken from a wide range of patients during brain surgery. A neurosurgeon friend of mine, agreed to assist me with the project. Bone specimens were taken by him during surgery, quick-frozen to preserve their architecture, and sent to me by Federal Express.

Lo and behold, these specimens of skull-bone sutures were not fused or calcified. The spaces in the sutures were chock-full of arteries, veins, nerves, nerve receptors, elastic and collagen fibers. Nature doesn't structure things like this for no reason. These sutures were designed to move. The original fused specimens from the anatomy lab were



indicative of post-mortem changes and the effects of embalming fluids and preservatives.

If I had been smart and "known" that skull bones "could not move" in relation to each other, this whole craniosacral system might not have unfolded, and there would be many children and adults who could not have received CranioSacral Therapy as a means of reaching a higher potential.

I think about Mighty Joe (see cover story) and many of the others who have been helped by CranioSacral Therapy, and I am so grateful that I was not smart enough to know skull-bone movement is impossible.

A Case In Point

Another outstanding impossibility that I was too dumb to recognize had to do with a man in his 60s who showed up at our Institute with a left arm and hand that were still developmentally infantile. He was born with a condition called Herb's palsy in which there is something wrong with the function of the nerves and blood vessels to the arm, and it just doesn't grow properly. He had undergone three surgeries to alleviate unremitting pain in his left shoulder and finally came to us for help.

Initially, we were able to reduce the pain significantly using a variety of bodywork approaches. I thought we might also be able to help the function of his arm. We worked on his craniosacral system. Soon he was able to use his thumb and fingers, which he had never done before. Ultimately, we could see his arm and hand begin to grow. We did x-rays and compared them with x-rays taken before his first visit to UI HealthPlex. Sure enough, the bones were growing in both length and width. Once again, the impossible happened.

A Lesson For Us All

From my perspective, science is just scratching the surface of the biological miracles that can occur. Science is often skeptical; it doesn't really understand, nor does it seem to want to understand, the powers of intention, faith and love. I am so happy that my intellect does not inhibit but rather serves my intuitive side, and that "impossible" dreams often come true as a result.

Let me leave you with two final thoughts. These personal credos are particularly relevant, especially if you are ever advised that surgical intervention is the only hope. (1) Before we try to change nature we should understand her; and (2) Man's ego is a major cause of disease.

These beliefs, coupled with the fact that I'm not smart enough to recognize the impossible, have resulted in some very wonderful things happening — incidents for which I am extremely thankful to have been given the privilege of being a participating witness.



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October 7, 2001 – Williamsport, Penn.

November 3, 2001 – Minneapolis, Minn.

MIGHTY JOE DEFIES THE ODDS

Continued from cover

“The change was dramatic,” Mary says. “Joe’s whole body posture and physical appearance changed. His face filled out.



At home after HealthPlex, Mighty Joe experiences more flexibility than doctors had ever thought possible.

He started obtaining more range of motion in his wrist joints and elbows, and he was moving all his fingers.” Back home a week later Joe began bringing his arms and hands to his face to play peekaboo, and he was finally using a sippy cup on his own. “Our whole family celebrated,” Mary says.

Since his first visit, Joe has been to UI HealthPlex once again, and has seen Illinois therapists Dodie Corcoran, CMT, and Molly Oakford, PT, for ongoing CST. While Mary understands lasting changes come gradually, she says Joe can now bring a spoon to his mouth, climb ladders and use scissors. And the doctors no longer suggest surgery.

“He’s an incredible little child,” Mary says. “Intelligent, with an extensive vocabulary for a 2-year-old. But he’s also loving and kind and very funny.” Yet



Mighty Joe with Mom and Dad in September 2000. The whole family enjoys a new outlook after a successful series of CST sessions.

Mary concurs Mighty Joe’s biggest strength may well be his will to fight. “Despite all the odds he’s pulled through,” she says.

And what lesson has Mary taken from all this? “No matter what body or mind we are given,” she says, “that soul is precious and vital. You can’t devalue that perfectness in any person, in any living being.”

FOUNDATION FUNDRAISER KICKS OFF BEYOND THE DURA '01

The first Silent Auction and Wine Tasting to benefit The Upledger Foundation is set for Thursday evening, April 26, 2001, at The Jupiter Beach Resort in South Florida. Open to all supporters of the Foundation, the fundraiser kicks off this year's Beyond the Dura research conference — an international event featuring healthcare innovators.

"There will be a \$10 donation at the door for those who want to take part in the wine tasting," says Barb Richmond of the planning committee. Several varieties of fine wines have been donated by Southern Wine and Distributing. "The auction is free...well, up to the point

where you successfully bid on an item," she adds smiling.

Items up for bid will range from therapy-oriented products, such as hand-held massagers and a Golden Ratio massage therapy chair, to sports memorabilia and artwork.

"No doubt the most coveted prize of the evening will be Dr. Upledger himself," enthuses Richmond. "For the grand finale we'll be conducting a live auction of a private session with him!"

The evening's festivities will also include a performance of *Gleaning Laughter...Gleaning Light* by poet John Arndt, an approved performer for the 2000-2001 season at the John F. Kennedy

"No doubt the most coveted prize of the evening will be Dr. Upledger himself. For the grand finale we'll be conducting a live auction of a private session with him!"

Center for the Performing Arts in Washington, D.C.

If you would like to attend this fundraiser, please RSVP to Educational Services at 1-800-233-5880, ext. 89008. If you have auction items you wish to donate, contact Nancy Brown at the Foundation, 561-624-3888, by April 16, 2001.

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