



Massage Today

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A New Beginning: Massage Therapy Students Tell Their Stories

By Editorial Staff

As children, the month of September marked "back to school," an event that called for new clothes, new shoes, new school supplies, and the opportunity to make a fresh start.

In honor of "back to school" month and new beginnings, *Massage Today* is pleased to present two inspiring stories written by recent massage therapy students, both of whom embarked on careers in massage after many years in other professions.

My Perspective on the Massage Profession

By Roger D.

Werstler

Roger Werstler graduated from Kent State University in 1970 with a BFA in graphic design. After 32 years in factory work, he entered Stark State College of Technology to study massage therapy, and will graduate at the end of this year. In his spare time, Roger enjoys distance running and has completed three half marathons and numerous 10K runs over the years.

I have been interested in massage for a number of years, often giving friends and family shoulder massages as "gifts of love." For most of my life, I have worked in a factory assembling cleaners. Then finally, after 32 years of service at the Hoover Company, I took an early retirement to pursue the ideal job. Now, at the age of 55, I can wake up and go to work to get paid to do something I love to do.

My first experience with a professional massage was at a 10K race in Cleveland about six years ago. The "short but sweet" post-race massage was heavenly, but simply a glimpse of what awaited me. After several more post-race experiences over the next year, I decided to pursue a massage therapist for a full-body

one-hour massage. It was so relaxing and rejuvenating; I was hooked. After receiving such a wonderful treatment, I called upon my memory to share my newfound discovery of massage with "the world." Although the world felt my early attempts were delightful, I knew that there was so much more I could offer.

As time went on, my massage experience grew, and I met more massage therapists. Their positive feedback and encouragement fueled my desire to leave my job of three decades and start afresh. I took a leap of faith and "retired." It's funny actually; most of my friends saw my move to leave factory employment as a move to full retirement, complete with an easy chair, Florida vacations every winter, a beer in my left hand and a remote control in my right. I, on the other hand, will work forever, if the good Lord is willing. This is not retirement - this is a new direction.

So, I entered into a profession where I, a male, find myself in the minority; ironic in a world where, as a male, I am usually in the majority. Most therapists are female and most clients are female. Massage therapy for a male is a challenging career and an insecure undertaking in some respects, but I was never intimidated by a challenge before, so why start now? The key word to being successful as a massage therapist is "trust." You must earn your client's trust. If your clients feel comfortable and safe with you, you are destined to be a marketing success; however, that is only half the battle.

Studying for a massage therapy career is like entering into pre-med. In reality, most of the students who sit around me in my anatomy classes are nursing students. My school provides us with complete education; I believe we are the best educated and prepared students of massage in Ohio. Our lab studies include hands-on work with human cadavers, and the level of technological training is top-notch. The studies are not easy, but they are definitely fun and exciting.

I feel I have learned more in the last four months than in four years of college in my younger years. Are the studies more challenging? Is it that I am a more mature student? Could it be that I've entered the field my heart truly embraces and now I am inspired to succeed? What an adventure! The beauty is, there is so much knowledge to file into our brains; it is knowledge with practical applications demonstrated to us to use in the real world.

When, as new students, we filed into massage therapy classes on our first day, we were strangers. As we learned about each other, explored massage techniques together, and learned to open ourselves and trust each other, we bonded into a family. It was a form of intimacy. Not sexual intimacy, of course, but a form of

spiritual and emotional intimacy. We have learned to "connect" as a family. Families care about each other. They pull together and lift each other up; there is love even when individuals do not always like one another. Classmates in the school of massage therapy fit that form. It is a special group. We share a dream, an art and a passion for this special service, and it bonds us in a mystical way. Just as we bond as students of massage, I think therapist and client develop a similar bond as well.

My goals for my future as a therapist are to do more for my clients than just perform relaxation massages. These are marvelous moments, but I want to seek a higher plane. In addition to relaxation, I hope to research the many modalities of massage and focus on several as healing treatments.

For one, I am studying neonatal, pregnancy and post-pregnancy massage techniques. I also want to learn and develop alternative treatments in massage for patients with Wegener's Granulomatosis (WG) [a rare, but potentially fatal disease characterized by inflammation of the blood vessels.] My oldest son nearly died of WG four years ago, and I have been active in fundraising efforts for a cure ever since. New research is developing indicating that soft tissue manipulation can help treat WG, and I want to be there.

Lastly, as a runner and fitness fanatic over the years, I want to develop my skills in both neuromuscular and sports massage. I find all of this room for growth extremely exciting. Massage may not be new to the world, but the modern world is just beginning to open its eyes to the blessings it can offer to the healing process. I am so glad to be a part of it.

Roger Werstler

Canton, Ohio

In Touch With Me

By Donna Pratola

Prior to entering massage school, Donna Pratola was a medical transcriber, secretary, homemaker and laboratory assistant. She is a recent graduate of Dawn Training Centre in Wilmington, Del.

For as long as I can remember, touch has been a positive force in my life. Being a member of a large Italian family, touching was another way of communicating with one another. Additionally, all of my adult life, I have been intrigued by the human body and its many functions. I would rather read about symptoms, disease processes and treatment than anything else. Thus, I have always tried to learn more about the body

and have chosen careers in the medical field, including being a certified laboratory assistant and a medical transcriptionist.

Then, I happened to go to a massage school for a job interview. I was given a tour of the facility and when I saw one of the massage rooms, I couldn't think of anything else. In a short time, my thoughts turned to ideas and my ideas into a plan. Before long, I applied to be a student in the school's 600-hour massage therapy program. I began my training in September 2003.

One of my instructors introduced us to the world of massage - she taught us to touch. Not just touch, but touch with intention. Before long, each stroke had a purpose. Each time we practiced, our touch improved. Each time a stroke was added, the sequence got more detailed. In the process, we began to understand where stress and strain occurs and how the stroke can provide comfort and relaxation, flush out toxins, and increase circulation.

And so it is, that I am on my way to being a massage therapist. I know that being the recipient of massage is a wonderful experience. What I didn't know was how incredible it is to give massage. I suddenly understand what an artist must feel when creating his or her work, what a singer must feel when performing to an audience, or how a surgeon feels to successfully perform an operation.

For me, the end result has been to find a place inside of me that has gone "untouched" all this time - I just celebrated my 51st birthday. I would like to work with people in hospice care and also operate a small practice of my own to create a stress-free, relaxed, safe and healthful environment for my clients. But what is best of all, is that I am in touch with the inner most part of me.

Donna Pratola

Toughkenamon, Pennsylvania



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