

RUBBED THE WRONG WAY

The author gains a new perspective on massage

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I'm not ready to say that I was wrong. I am ready, however, to acknowledge that I might not have been completely right. How's that for personal growth?

A couple of months ago, I injured my back picking up a package, so I've been doing whatever I can to heal. One suggestion that Jenny--my wife and coach--made was to get a massage. She might as well have asked me to get a recreational root canal, since my experiences with massage therapists up to that point had been less than positive.

My first massage ever was with a guy who had probably been giving massages for about a week. We spent the better part of the hour listening to whale sounds and talking about the new age. Then he spent about 10 minutes doing the kind of rudimentary massage that members of high school choirs do on each other before a performance.

My next experience was with a woman who was strictly business. She had me undressed and on the table without even a hello. And while it was supposed to be a deep-tissue massage, it turned out to be a bruise-every-inch-of-my-body massage. When she wasn't doing her best to rip my skin off, she was trying to push her fist through my back.

My third experience is almost not worth mentioning. This woman seemed very uncomfortable touching people's bodies. The way I look at it, a massage therapist pretty much has to be okay with touching. Touching is part of the job.

Yet despite my track record with massage therapists, I decided to go along with Jenny's suggestion--just so I could tell her that she was wrong. The first of my two massages, just four days postinjury, was with a young woman on staff at the hotel where I was staying when my back went out. She seemed to have a real passion for the way the body worked. I explained right up front that I wasn't looking for total relief, but just the ability to move again. She did a great job. She targeted the affected area, worked several pressure points, and in less than an hour restored my ability to move my right leg.

Based on that experience, I agreed to have another sports massage two weeks after the injury. I was feeling better, but was eager to see if I could move forward. This time I saw a man with 15 years of experience. After I outlined my expectations, he took a few minutes to assess the situation, then started right in. He found the hot spots, the knots, and the misalignments, and he skillfully manipulated around the damaged areas. And he talked me through every movement. He treated me like an athlete--an injured athlete, but an athlete. Yes, I was sore for a day or two, but it was a soreness that felt like the harbinger of healing, not the result of a schoolyard beating.

So I've been forced to reconsider the benefits of massage therapy. Clearly, it can help. (There, I said it, Jenny.) And the fact that I'm slowly building my mileage is proof positive. But just as clearly, it's important to find the right person to work the kinks out of your body, since massage--when done well--is a collaborative effort.

Waddle on, friends.

<http://www.runnersworld.com/article/0,7120,s6-243-332--11980-0,00.html>