

Here a little report about a strong and moving experience in Chengdu from Agnes and Bijan Ghaznavi

The 8.0 earth quake in Sichuan province shook the whole world. Hearts opened and reached out to those who were so badly shaken in all ways, having lost limbs, sons, daughters, parents, whole families, as well as their house and their livelihood.

Hearts and purses opened to relieve some of the pain and utter distress.

Five of us, two translators and a technician, as well as Bijan and Agnes Ghaznavi, flew to Chengdu on the evening of 25 May. We were an excellent team and gave out the best of ourselves. From what we heard from all sides, our help was well received and appreciated.

We had to stay in Chengdu, the 10 million capital of Sichuan. The Northern parts all still were danger zones and were having after quakes.

We gave a training course of 2 days to about 300 students of medical psychology, teachers, principals, psychologists, and others. We had written programs on the concepts of helping people who have experienced trauma; on grieving; on several aspects of Positive Psychotherapy, such as retaining hope and remaining in balance, and a little about problem-solving and learning to consult as well as mend our ways when we obstinately remain in our traditional or habitual ways. These programs were well received.

We gave them permission to video tape the courses as they were going to use them for others who could not participate at our course.

The four 2-hour supervision times of the program were much appreciated as well. Many students needed to learn about multiple aspects of psychology in a short time. Near-death experiences (many of the victims were buried in rubble for 4-6 days) also needed explaining, that they can permanently change people's outlook on life and personality for the better or the worse..

It was interesting to learn, for all of us, that very cunning ³victims² of every-day life, that is, people with damaged character, in a very cunning and clever way tried to receive psychological help, pity, and also other ways of help, although they had not been touched by the seism!

We then met up with a middle-school teacher who had just learned of the death of his 8-year old son. We stayed with him for more than 2 hours, accompanying him on his path of grieving, expressing impotent rage at all the mistakes that had happened, but also anger with himself and others. This is a very normal reaction, but not easy to accept: anger should be expressed, then it will fade away, and sadness will be felt, but also the fact of looking into the future can be sensed, and gives meaning to life, in spite of intense pain, distress and helplessness. Gently helping people to look into the future, and to use what they have learned for the future and for others is most vital to mental health.

We also met the only psychiatrist of this place who has to meet constant tragedies and who suffered from burn out.

She has been trained for 8 years in Japan but felt so much overwhelmed with all these tragedies that she felt totally inadequate. We strongly encouraged her to get her own strength again to resume her precious and so badly needed help to the victims of the earth quake again.

She told us that in Japan when professional feel helpless they let some commit suicide.

We strongly emphasized how good it is to be in China, as people have a big heart and

care about each other.

At the end we all felt so good to be in China.

We also encouraged a school-counselor who was dealing both with children and teachers and was overwhelmed with the pressure and the work to be done.

Many of the helpers were near burnout when we came to contact them, but they felt better after that! Encouragement, but also the sincere counsels of having to be responsible for their own health and equilibrium were most important for them to go on with their most important task.

We came back exhausted but so much touched by this very strong experience and we will go back again and again as these people will need help for long period of time.

Agnes and Bijan Ghaznavi, May 2008



Si-Chuan, May 2008