

“THE JOY IS IN THE JOURNEY”

The Namaste Center: *Get Well, Be Well, Stay Well*

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Sr. Judian Breitenbach

Diagnosed with invasive ductal carcinoma of the right breast (an aggressive form of breast cancer), the doctors told Sister Judian Breitenbach that without immediate surgery and radiation, she would die. That was over five years ago. Today, sitting on the couch at the Namaste Center in LaPorte, Indiana, she explains why she decided to forgo western medicine, decline surgery, and take an alternative approach to her healing. As she says of her experience, “I can’t say breast cancer is the best thing that’s ever happened to me--you know how people often say that about things that happen--but it has been a wonderful evolutionary experience. The important thing is to get beyond the fear and to trust the knowledge and experience of the God within.” After much prayer and reflection, the path she chose: Traditional Oriental Medicine.

Founder of the Namaste Center--as well as a nurse and woman diagnosed with breast cancer--Sister Judian understands that healing requires more than a quick fix and treatment of symptoms. She says, “What we do here, at the Namaste Center, is part of a whole approach to systemic healing.” Prevention, lifestyle changes, nutrition, inner reflective and emotional work, body work, and mind work are all part of the healing process. “What I am hoping, in the telling of this story,” she says, “is that people will understand that Traditional Oriental Medicine is one of the three major medical approaches recognized all over the world.” What the Namaste Center offers is a medical model for a system of holistic healing. The center’s mission: “*Get well, Be well, Stay well.*”

A Nursing Background

Born in LaPorte at the original Holy Family Hospital in 1930, Sister Judian grew up on a farm with five other siblings. She was the oldest girl of six. Her association with hospitals began early. At age 14, she frequented the hospital to be with an aunt who was dying of breast cancer. “In those days,” she notes, “you went to the hospital to die. So for about three weeks, I was there every night.”

That’s where Sister Judian met the Poor Handmaids of Jesus Christ (PHJC), the sisters. As she says, “I was so impressed with their compassion, their care, and their evident joyfulness in what they were doing. That struck me. One of them became my mentor when I went back as a 16 year old to work.” As a result of those experiences, she made her first vows in 1952 and then

went into nursing training in Fort Wayne, graduating in 1955. “For the next 25 years,” she adds, “I was involved in the nursing profession—eventually going into nursing administration and management.” In 1965, she became Director of Nursing at the hospital where she was born. In 1979, she was appointed chairperson of the board of directors of Ancilla Systems, the PHJC’s 12 hospital health-care system. Then, in 1990, following multiple major hospital reorganizations, she stepped down from that role. Sister Judian explains: “At that time, the hospitals were very much in disarray. That’s when I got involved in alternative medicine. That was a journey in itself.”

Seeking a Better Way

In 1993, a major medical study found that many Americans were seeking alternative healthcare and nonconventional therapies, without informing their doctors. As Sister Judian acknowledges, “Something was missing. People were not happy with the healthcare treatment they were receiving, and they were not telling their doctors.” She pauses reflectively. “At that time, Bill Moyers came out with *Healing and the Mind* book, and there was this aspect in my own thinking that something was missing in the healthcare that we were delivering. I decided I needed to find out what that was.”

In pursuit of knowledge, she took a year sabbatical to visit a number of places of wellness and wholeness. The hospital system supported Sister Judian and Brian Luke Seaward, PhD., wellness consultant, in a study where, as she says, “I traveled with a team of people cross country visiting different places and meeting different people and doing different workshops to find out what was out there.” It was during this journey that she met Dr. Deepak Chopra and Dr. David Simon, head of neurology at the Sharp Medical Center in California; they had established the mind/body institute. As she recalls, “They had just been in business a year when we visited the residential center. I did the whole karma conscious series and also began a friendship with Dr. Chopra. It was a very exciting time, meeting people such as Barbara Marx Hubbard (Foundation for Conscious Evolution), Neale Donald Walsch (author of *Conversations with God*), Herbert Benson (founder of the Mind/Body Medical Institute in Boston), Dr. Andrew Weil, Edgar Mitchell (astronaut and founder of the Institute of Noetic Sciences), and reading authors such as Jon Kabot-Zin (founder of the Center for Mindfulness in Medicine).”

The result of Sister Judian’s study, travel, and learning was the establishment, in 1995, of the Healing Arts Center on the River, in South Bend. “It was wildly successful for three years,” she says with excitement. “We had groups coming from all over the country, the institutions, the hospitals, different groups to see what we were doing.” Unfortunately, the center was closed in 1998—a personally and emotionally painful experience for Sister Judian. Although she strongly opposed the closing of the center, that decision was beyond her control.

Sister Judian then returned to LaPorte as a consultant to what is now Indiana University Health, LaPorte Hospital. As she says, “The hospital developed what they called a complementary care program, which was an adjunct to whatever else they were doing in the wellness program.” But, as she admits, “I felt there was more to this healing process than what was offered in the hospital.”

In 2002, she opened the Namaste Center. The original vision, she says, “was to open a center to raise awareness of holistic healing.” At that time, the Namaste Center served primarily as an educational and informational resource center. Later, after her breast cancer, the vision and mission of the center enlarged.

A Nonconventional Approach to Breast Cancer

Sister Judian was diagnosed with breast cancer in February 2005. She states, “I knew that I likely would not go to conventional medicine. I just knew that there was a better way. But I went through all the consultations with the surgeon and the radiologist and oncologist and all these folks.” She nods thoughtfully. “Of course, they wanted to do surgery immediately, followed by radiation and possibly chemotherapy and all that sort of thing. And I said no, I want to go a different direction.” That’s when she contacted Bryan Manuele, a practitioner of Traditional Oriental Medicine [T.O.M].

“I asked Bryan to partner with me, because I wanted to have a say in my treatment. And he said, yes. But, we had a long talk about what this might mean, what the result might be, and whether I was ready to see this as an evolutionary process of healing--not a quick fix.” She emphasizes that they were not going to concentrate on a ‘cure.’ “If there happened to be a cure, wonderful, but the focus was healing the body.” As she says, “Traditional Oriental Medicine’s primary premise is that the body can heal itself.” Working with Manuele, they developed a treatment plan, which she affirms, “has now morphed into a lifestyle plan.”

She remarks of her breast cancer treatment, “It involved acupuncture, meditation, eating habit changes, yoga, and inner work.” She continues. “I went away for three months and all my stressful things, I let go of them.” During that retreat period and for an extended period of time afterward, Sister Judian did extensive inner reflective work.

“I was not prepared for the depth of my own spiritual reaction to the trauma that had occurred with the closing of the earlier healing center and the conflict around that decision; it translated into triggering the cells to be out of harmony with the body.” Her voice grows thoughtful. “I was in disharmony in my relationships, exterior, so the interior body reflects that. Both the external and internal reflect each other. As Deepak says, ‘As is the macrocosm so is the microcosm,’ but also ‘as the microcosm so is the macrocosm.’”

“One of the things I learned,” she says, “is that I was able to almost pinpoint the day and time that the trigger of my illness occurred.” She observes that Deepak Chopra’s book, *Book of Secrets*, states that when cells separate from the harmony of the body and go off and do their own thing, that is what we call ‘cancer,’ and it can be triggered by physical, emotional, or spiritual causes or events. She acknowledges, “I did intensive healing work: yoga, meditation and massage therapy just to physically and emotionally work out the anger and frustration and resentment.” She also had “the loving support of family and friends,” she adds, “once they got used to the idea that I was probably going to be around for awhile.”

She sips her drink. “The most important lesson I am learning in this process is to overcome the fear of a cancer diagnosis, to put my intention and attention on healing the body, instead of

curing the cancer. To eliminate words and phrases like ‘battling cancer’ and ‘fighting cancer’ and ‘survivor’ in favor of prayerful trust in the Spirit within.”

“The joy is in the journey,” she concludes. “Really, I feel this, I experience this. It becomes recognition of the preciousness of each single moment. And no matter what goes on around me, I have that strength and peace and spiritual essence inside and to be conscious and aware of that and to be aware of that in the other person—it has been a tremendous experience.” Her eyes light up as she talks. “I am probably healthier than I have ever been. I have tests every four months; all body systems are almost perfect.”

Welcome to the Namaste Center

Visitors to the Namaste Center are greeted with calm, melodic music, sandalwood incense, and beautiful artwork (paintings with soft blue, gold, and rose hues). Inside the Namaste Center is a large all-purpose room with windows and a fireplace. Sister Judian explains that this room is often used for group meditation or inspirational movies offered to the community. A library area hosts a variety of books with authors ranging from Eckhart Tolle, Deepak Chopra, to Neale Donald Walsch and many others.

The center now also provides clinical services, no longer serving solely as an educational resource center. There are three therapy rooms, with clay walls to absorb negative ions. The center itself is located in the heart of LaPorte, across from the CVS and down the street from a Dairy Queen. As Sister Judian makes clear, “We want this to be a safe place, where anyone can come in, read a book, and tell us what they need.”

Bryan Manuele is a national board certified and state licensed acupuncturist with more than 40 years of experience. Trained in London, England and Northern India, he returned to the United States to found one of the first schools of Oriental Medicine, in Chicago, Illinois. He is currently Executive Director of the Namaste Center.

As he says of the center, “The concept is a bit unique. I have quite a bit of experience over the last 40 years in the field of holistic health, and I’ve done consulting for hospitals and other places as they’ve attempted to mount an image of something called a holistic practice. Unfortunately, they were modeled on the current medical practice model. Very few have survived because they were nothing more than disparate practitioners practicing underneath one roof, as opposed to providing a real model or system of holistic care.” He pauses. “I thought about this long and hard and decided the best way to do this was to let the holism come from the point of view of the patient.” The system he established is based on, “*Get well, Be well, Stay well.*”

He explains: “To briefly illustrate, most people come through the door with a health care problem or health care situation that they want to deal with. They want to get well.” He continues, “Once they get well, there is the pesky task of being well; in other words, sustaining the condition. That usually means some lifestyle changes. It means healthy practices; it means learning to meditate; it means having a massage; good nutrition; so on and so forth. That’s the ‘be well’ part of the Namaste Center.” He describes the next stage as one of growth. “The ‘stay

well' is the growth part. In order for us to flourish and prosper as individuals, we must learn; we must engage in lifetime learning, really, adding to ourselves."

In practical terms, that translates into a system where someone can come to the Namaste Center through the clinic, the programs, and through the adjunctive therapies, such as massage, therapeutic touch, or tai chi--among other things. As Manuele says, "The programs have to do with staying well, to begin to learn and explore and develop one's own ability to take control of their health." Anyone coming to the center is guided toward those services that will give them the ability to *Get well, Be well, and Stay well*.

What is Traditional Oriental Medicine?

Based on the idea of harmony, balance, and well-being, T.O.M. is a vital ancient system of health and healing. Manuele notes that oriental medicine is a more accurate term than Chinese medicine. As he says, "Traditional Oriental Medicine is distilled from Chinese, Korean, Japanese, etc, with the historical roots in ancient India." The components of oriental medicine loosely include four things: acupuncture, herbal medicine, psychological or spiritual practices, and physical practices.

"Acupuncture includes not just acupuncture needles and points," he maintains, "but also other kinds of similar modalities which have to do with the stimulation of energy on the surface or just below the surface of the body." He adds, "Herbal medicine is, of course, as old as mankind and includes not only herbs but foods, and minerals, etc." There are also psychological and spiritual components. "The physiological practices or the physiotherapeutic side of oriental medicine is anywhere from Qigong to tai chi [various body movements that work with energy], and all the various forms of martial arts in between," he says, "as well as things in that area developing all the time. The psychological or spiritual side mixes in things like breath, meditation, and, really, the whole way of understanding the cosmos and the human beings relationship to the cosmos."

T.O.M looks at the whole person--the body, the mind, and the food--as well as the culture. Manuele recognizes, "We have a sick culture, and we have a lot of sick people. We've got a lot of depression in our culture; we've got a lot of disease and a lot of anxiety. Those aren't found in older cultures." He pauses. "In fact, it was found that within six years, immigrants start to consume the same amount of psychological healthcare as Americans; it only takes six years in our culture." T.O.M examines all the factors contributing to the root causes of illness, rather than merely treating symptoms.

A More Comprehensive View

As an example of T.O.M's approach to healing, Manuele sites a common ailment such as allergies. "A high percentage of allergies--childhood allergies and adult allergies--are commonly tied to food intolerances," he says. "That's becoming more and more understood in western medicine. In a clinic such as this, a high percentage of people have been on medications and have done respiratory therapies and injections, and so on. They have had, for the most part, very

good medical care--*state of the art* care--but their problems persist. So, from the point of view of traditional oriental medicine, it persists because the condition, the disease, and the roots of the problem have not been identified.” For instance, “If you take one asthma/allergy pill per day and drink dairy four times a day--and you’re allergic to dairy--then you are dosing yourself four times a day against one asthma pill. Our whole perspective here, and in oriental medicine in general, is get to the root of the problem.”

T.O.M examines not only the behavior and the condition but also the psychological relationship to things. “In oriental medicine, if someone has a respiratory problem, we also look to see if there is an underlying emotional relationship. If there is, then we have to address that.” As he emphasizes, “It is essential to look at everything because, in terms of medical care, the person likely had good healthcare. By the time people come to alternative practices, they’ve already been medicated, had surgery, and tried all the other strategies--with little or no success. So, something is missing. And, of course, what is missing is a much more comprehensive view of health and disease and, therefore, solutions.”

Getting to the Roots

Another example Manuele sites is breast cancer. “Statistics show that between 65 to 70 percent of all cancers are understood by science as being environment related. That means food/drink/air/water and so forth--things that are directly injected in the system.” Yet, he points out, the majority of dollars for cancer research, such as breast cancer, are focused on genetics.

“If you ask the average woman who does a walk for breast cancer, ‘where do her dollars go?’ The answer is probably, ‘I don’t know.’ I’ve asked the question thousands of times. Most of the money in breast cancer research is going into genetics. What’s interesting is that today, there are virtually no effective gene therapies. Breast cancer and cancers in general continue to expand, exponentially. In other words, we have more cancers than we’ve ever had before. On the other hand, we know that 65 to 70 percent of cancers are environmentally produced. I wonder why no money goes toward that?”

Manuele sees the issue as one of healthcare empowerment. “If all the women and consumers across the country stood up and said we are not going to tolerate a sick food supply or bad air or bad water, something might actually happen. But the whole medical profession has decided to focus on genes and genetics and not prevention. In alternative practices and a clinic like this in oriental medicine, we’re interested in what is causing the cancer or causing the illness, not merely treating the symptoms.”

He explains: “Our culture does not understand anymore that there is a relationship between the life that we live and the life we are living.” With T.O.M, people understand the connections between the choices they make and their results and consequences. As he says, “We empower people to begin to see that they have much more responsibility, and can take more responsibility, for their health and the life that they are choosing and therefore living.” Clearly proud of the work they are doing at the Namaste Center, he says, “That’s the ultimate satisfaction. And that’s the holistic model: *Get well, Be well, Stay well.*” He adds, “I can tell you that people instinctively or intuitively are learning or figuring out that taking medicines is not how we are necessarily supposed to live. When individuals learn how they can take care of themselves and

Namaste services

- Acupuncture
- Traditional Oriental Medicine
- Holistic Lifestyle Consultation
- Yoga
- Reiki (energy work)
- Healing Touch
- Meditation
- Shiatsu (acupressure massage therapy)

then start the process of self discovery, that's exciting to me and makes my day worth getting up for."

Lessons Learned

At age 80, Sister Judian talks with visitors, travels, and remains active in the community. She has bright blue eyes and silver blonde hair.

She concedes, "It has taken me 80 years, to go through the ego thing, which is constant, and get beyond the traditional church thing, and to get to the next dimension of energy and love and consciousness and connection with all, with the entire cosmos, and to experience that we are extensions of nature, the close relationship between the trees and our lungs and how all that happens"

"When I think of the universe, I think of a magnificent kaleidopic change that occurs. I love the image of a kaleidoscope; to recognize that we don't always have to be doing the turning--it's all happening--and to just be aware of that. And to be aware that somehow, regardless of what the changes are, they always fall into a design of beauty and consciousness. It's just our human, finite mind cannot grasp all this . . . though we keep trying." She laughs.

Sister Judian, like the Namaste Center itself, offers a joyful, peaceful presence—serving as a helpful reminder that *all healing* involves more than merely the physical. ■

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