



# Of Journeys and Transitions

by Deborah H. Russell, RN, OCN, HTCP

I wonder if you know how much a mentor finds about which to reflect when an apprenticeship year concludes. I recently participated in a pinning ceremony of one of my mentees at an Advanced Practice Class we both attended. It brought back memories of my experience years ago of taking the class with Janet Mentgen as the instructor. I found myself reviewing my journey while witnessing the journeys of others completing their process towards certification.

While sharing impressions of the mentorship experience, we found ourselves also sharing large life style changes and events which have occurred since we embraced Healing Touch. Job changes and deaths were frequently mentioned. I have experienced both.

In my role as an oncology nurse I have witnessed plenty of grief. But do I really get it? Do I really know how to process one's own grief? Do I know how to honor the journey? This is the reflection I am engaging and my Healing Touch journey has given me many answers.

As a Breast Center Nurse Coordinator exploring how to assist my breast cancer clients, I was motivated to seek more tools to honor their spiritual needs. The universe got my message and I found myself meeting Nancy Lester and soon taking Healing Touch classes. I soon developed a passion for integrating the work with traditional health care, but began meeting resistance from individuals supervising me at the hospital. As I continued my HT studies and practice and honored my transformation to one who finally learned boundaries and self-care, I decided that I needed to approach another work situation where Healing Touch would be accepted.

My professional and personal journey stayed as concurrent as always. My apprenticeship year included dealing with the fast failing health of my sister in Minnesota. I remember carefully

mailing my certification packet on February 22, 2003 so that I would not miss the March 1 deadline since I was flying to visit my sister again later that day, knowing it would be our last visit together.

Then after six weeks of phone calls and the creation of a position, I was asked to come for an interview. The only time the Vice Presidents and managers could coordinate a meeting was the day I was scheduled to fly to Minnesota for my sister's funeral. Fortunately I was able to do both.

Upon reflection of my apprenticeship, I am very aware of the lessons I learned -- about how to honor a dying patient's transition -- how to encourage their acceptance of the situation -- and how to facilitate their love of self with no regrets at the end. Healing Touch techniques and the process prepared me to be helpful to my sister and her family at that time. I also had dreams encouraging me to trust distance work, and found myself exploring new talents and skills. In addition, I see, in my ongoing assimilation of the loss of both my mother and sister from cancer, how to manage my needs and my spiritual health. Now after six years at Baltimore Washington Medical Center, bedside nursing includes the offering of Healing Touch by several members of our nursing staff. Nurses and techs who have taken classes are comfortably able to offer Healing Touch to patients with physical or emotional pain resulting from procedures, or when approaching death and dying. This began slowly and the universe supported my vision all along.

So, continuing on my life's journey, I am blessed to be able to greet newly diagnosed breast cancer patients or dying patients facing major transitions, with the statement "I am your oncology nurse navigator, and am here to assist you at Baltimore Washington Medical Center, to answer your questions, and provide you what you need to get through all of this in the best way possible. I am also here to provide you with Healing Touch techniques before and after surgery or treatments."

More and more nurses and doctors are witnessing the effect

of HT on their patients and asking about learning the techniques. More and more staff is participating in department "Staff Care Days" when mentees are organized to provide HT to them. More and more clients are making a real commitment and incorporating HT in their ongoing care by partnering with practitioners in the community. More and more I am learning to practice self-care before I present myself for service --and colleagues are learning to do likewise. So Janet Mentgen's vision to have Healing Touch become a household word and be present in every home, hospital and school is happening. The universe has provided opportunities to integrate this sacred work in our patient care at my hospital.

Andie Melendez, HTCP has been a colleague here doing likewise. She is our clinical specialist we call when there is a pain control issue. She has encouraged and facilitated several staff members to take Healing Touch classes, and has demonstrated the benefit of integrating these techniques. When a surgeon asked a unit manager to find Andie or myself to assist in his patient's anxiety control, we knew we had been doing the job we were meant to do.

In fact, at last year's hospital annual awards banquet, Andie and I were recognized for our compassionate and innovative care. The awards ceremony, when the presenter read a summary of our work and accomplishments, mentioned our Healing Touch. The physician of the year was then called to the stage. His accomplishments were vast but since he does not know HT, Andie and I will hold the intent that this is the year we entice a physician to learn Healing Touch techniques!

As a patient of mine recently demonstrated, Janet's famous "Just do the work" still applies. As I finished my pre-operative teaching in a phone call to one of my patients, I held space for an opportunity to then say "When I see you in recovery, I would like to offer you a complementary energy medicine technique called Healing Touch. In fact I would be glad to offer you a time to come see me at the Breast Center a day or two before surgery". We quickly set a time to meet. My patient couldn't wait to get off the phone to email her friend who had been pestering her about how important it is to get her "chakras cleared." I was taking a deep breath before explaining

my offer, as I usually have to do, when my client was elatedly thanking me and hanging up the phone.

You might be surprised how ready our hospital systems, patients and staff alike, are ready for this grass roots spreading of HT. As we continue to hold Janet's vision -- as we continue to let ourselves as healers evolve -- as we honor each of our own journeys -- the universe provides wisdom and opportunity for the work to proceed!

### About the author:

Debbie has almost 30 years experience in nursing, mostly with oncology patients. She has been working since May 2003 at Baltimore Washington Medical Center with their Breast Program. She has been offering Healing Touch techniques to her patients in the out patient clinics as well as to those admitted to the oncology unit. She and her husband live in Odenton, Md. and share ownership of their daily routines with two Scottie dogs. Participation in the Unitarian Universalist Church of Annapolis has enhanced her spiritual growth as much as has the ongoing journey with Healing Touch colleagues. Seeing her 30 year old son make choices based on integrity and compassion gives her hope for the next generation. Seeing her father, now 80 years old, facing life with much vigor and optimism gives her hope for her generation. Seeing HT practitioners offering heartfelt work to many gives her hope for us all.