

## My Oncology Massage Journey by Lois

I was feeling pretty beat up. I was healing from abdominal surgery, a total hysterectomy and removal of my omentum. I was healing from implantation of abdominal and chest ports. I was in my second cycle of simultaneous intraperitoneal and intravenous chemotherapies being administered for three consecutive days every three weeks.

On top of dealing with surgery, chemo, steroids, anti-nausea and pain meds, I was seized by intense fear, anxiety and depression. Would I live or die? If I lived, for how long? Would I be sick? Would I have any quality of life? Wherever I looked, everything seemed to revolve around cancer ... casual conversations, TV, the news, even ads. There was no escape from cancer. I hated to hear the word, read or speak it. It felt all-consuming.

A nutritional counselor suggested I see an oncology massage therapist named Bruce Hopkins. I looked him up online, was impressed with his credentials and the programs he had started and thought, "What the heck. I'll give it a try." I filled out the new client forms and on my first visit found a nice, comfortable and peaceful man in a nice, comfortable and peaceful office. I was very emotional as I tried to share my situation with him. He was calm and supportive as he listened to my story - he has walked his own and many other cancer journeys. I felt like a new recruit in the hands of a veteran. It's hard to explain but it was easier to talk and to relax. There is a knowing without words.

Bruce explained that his work is basically "between the ears massage" meaning that soothing the body can unwind the mind which in turn allows the body to unwind on its own ... kind of a shortcut to the benefits of traditional deep meditation.

I lay on the warm and comfortable table, listening to serene music as Bruce began ... lavender oil on my temples ... holding my feet. Then he placed a hand on my abdomen, a finger on my forehead and said "Lois ... May you be at peace. May your heart remain open. May you awaken to the light of your own true nature. May you be healed. May you be a source of healing for all beings."

My tears began to flow. I had been seeking peace since seeing the first image of my tumor. I had been seeking healing. I surely had work to do to open my heart - well-meaning friends and family had passed on philosophical thoughts trying to be comforting, but they were not. My anxiety ridden and drugged brain could not cope - it all seemed like garbled crap. Somehow, that simple and sweet massage touched me deeply and I lay there with tears streaming down, not sobbing but

gently releasing. Not the crazed and wrenching tears that had come multiple times each day since the beginning but a gentle healing release flowing from the love and gentleness that Bruce was giving me.

As the massage proceeded, the music brought to mind the sister and brother I had lost too young, both in their 50's. Now at 55 I wondered if I was to follow. The thought had nagged me from first diagnosis. But in this setting, it seemed like a message from them saying things would be OK. Whatever IT was, it would be OK.

Bruce worked smoothly and gently, touching me with healing and comforting strokes. Again, the gentle streams of tears. I realized that since the beginning of this journey everyone who touched me had been probing, feeling, cutting, bruising, stabbing and filling me with poison. The medical journey was a constant source of pain. Now, here on the warm and comfortable table his gentle ministering strokes were touching me in a very different way.

It was a deep and amazing experience that brought relief physically, mentally and spiritually. No longer just a wounded and stitched up body, I was once again a whole person. My chattering mind relaxed - I was lost in the music and the healing dance of his hands. When he finished I lay there quietly and the tears came again. I told him, "That's the closest I have come to a religious experience in many years".

I had tried meditating but my busy mind is hard to shut off. I had tried counseling but it made things worse - it raised issues I did not have the strength to work on. Now I was just trying to keep my head above water. Bruce and his healing hands provided a life preserver. His massage table was a place of peace, not some idea of peace in a book, but a real place and time that *was* Peace. I could relax, shutdown, rest.

With relaxation and emotional release came physical benefits. I would arrive for sessions feeling pretty grim – achy, sick, tense and sore. Massage helped it all - I left each session with a smile.

I have so appreciated the connection with Bruce, our chats before and after treatment, the professional yet personal way he touched my whole person. I have learned much from his simple, peaceful, smiling and knowing spirit. I have become more comfortable with where I am on my cancer journey. I feel very blessed to have found him and to receive his healing care. There are not words to express my gratitude and appreciation.