

INSPIRATION

in(t)-spe-'rā-shen *n* 1. a divine or supernatural influence 2. to be an animating, enlivening, or exalting influence on another; to spur one to act 3. to draw forth or bring out

"The beauty of the surroundings, the people, the sharing, the unbelievable fact of going way beyond your fears and facing them was a boost for the immune system and a tonic for life." **Debbie N.**

HEALING RETREAT AND SUPPORT PROGRAM ODYSSEY FOR WOMEN CANCER SURVIVORS

NANCY RAYMON & DONNA FARRIS, CO-FOUNDERS

In 1991, Nancy Raymon experienced a serious illness that required six months of treatment and recuperation. Towards the end of this time, she attended a ropes course with her husband. During this experience, Nancy accomplished a mental/physical challenge that she didn't think was possible, given her recent illness. She thought to herself, "If I can accomplish this, I must be well." With this in mind, the idea for Healing Odyssey was born.

A UNIQUE ORGANIZATION IS BORN

Nancy sought to create an organization that would give women cancer survivors the same experience and feeling of physical and mental well-being and support that she had experienced during the ropes course. With a background in oncology nursing and 15 years experience leading cancer support groups, Nancy had the necessary skills to make Healing Odyssey a success.

In the summer of 1992, Nancy recruited Donna Farris, Co-Founder of Healing Odyssey and an oncology social worker, to join her at a camp to learn how a ropes course operates. Next, Nancy connected with Bill John, Owner of Odyssey Performance Enhancement Network, a ropes course training company in Chico, CA. Nancy would use Bill and his talented staff to facilitate the ropes course aspect of the retreat. Melissa Jeffries, late Board Member of Healing Odyssey, encouraged Nancy and Donna to begin the non-profit organization now known as Healing Odyssey.

The first Healing Odyssey retreat took place in the spring of 1994.

Currently, Healing Odyssey is on their 21st retreat and is held at The Shalom Institute, a camp set in the scenic mountains of Malibu, CA. At each session, 30-35 women cancer survivors come together in a camp environment for a weekend filled with a series of exercises that serve as a metaphor for the challenges of illness. Women at various stages of survivorship, from newly diagnosed to ten years post diagnosis, have found this experience to be valuable in meeting the ongoing challenges of living life well, during and after treatment for cancer. The retreat is led by a staff of 12 (mostly volunteers) with at least one oncology nurse on-site in case medical attention is required. Healing Odyssey is unique because it creates a support group away from the clinical setting.

Some of the themes of the weekend retreat include, "Coping with Fear," "Establishing Connections," and "Fostering Friendships and Sisterhood." The weekend introduces participants to journaling and guided imagery and maintains a focus throughout on living in the present moment. An emphasis on having fun and being lighthearted is stressed throughout the weekend. Other sessions include meditation, sexuality and spirituality. A Healing Odyssey retreat offers a participant the tools for whatever challenges she faces, whenever she faces them.

Healing Odyssey is committed to a policy, which provides that no woman cancer survivor will be turned away due to lack of funds. Financial aid is available on an as-needed basis through a scholarship application and approval process.



FUTURE PLANS

Healing Odyssey is in the process of packaging this program for implementation at other sites throughout the country. The organization is willing to assist people in starting an affiliate chapter of Healing Odyssey and is currently working with a pilot affiliate group in Chico, CA. They hope to hold their first retreat a year from now.

A major strength of the program lies in building a supportive community for survivors. People like Nancy and Donna, who can turn a passion for healing people mentally and spiritually into an organization that benefits the entire cancer community, are an inspiration to us all.

Oncology Associates would like to thank Debbie Kleinzeig, OA Member and Healing Odyssey volunteer nurse, for introducing us to Healing Odyssey and making us aware of this phenomenal organization. For more information, please contact Healing Odyssey directly at 949-951-3930 or visit their web site at www.healingodyssey.org.

Please send your stories to OA so that others who read them can be filled with hope and inspiration to press on against cancer. Send your stories to kdesatnik@rmed.com or fax to 440.942.7970 marked Attention Asst. Editor.