

Full Circle

In Service of Community

by Betty Ann Baker, CHTP, LMT
Executive Director, Healing Touch Buddies, Florida, Inc.

This past month, I returned to Colorado for my second HTI Annual Conference. Two miles in the Breckenridge sky, far away from my South Florida home at sea level, I became quite reflective. I was immersed in the memories of classes, friendships, partnerships, shared visions and community projects. Healing Touch had remained a most vital ingredient in my life and work.

As I looked back, I became aware of a series of full circles, all joining to manifest the one I am included in now and that continues to open. Perhaps the rarified air kept my thoughts expansive . . . perhaps the oxygen prescribed allowed me to connect all that had transpired in the full circle of service since attending that first conference in the winter of 2001.

Midway through my certification work in October of 1997, I was diagnosed with breast cancer. In the safety of a Healing Touch practice session, I first spoke the words, "I have a

lumpy area in my breast," to my mentoring group friends, Judy Heidrich and Sue Goscher. From that moment, Healing Touch was a constant in my healing experience. My Healing Touch training took on the deepest quality as I navigated through anxiety, fear, and pain, and diminished cognitive abilities caused by a forced entry into menopause (that brings up images of a burning rocket on reentry!) I thought breast cancer would never be part of my life story. My mother died of the disease. I followed her example and turned my diagnosis into an opportunity for profound realizations about myself and my soul in the world.

As I gradually regained strength and confidence after the surgery, chemotherapy and radiation, my Healing Touch practice returned to me through service. I refreshed my understanding of the work by volunteering as a Healing Touch helper, and I held tight to my mentoring group, embraced by their love, care and humor. (Bless you Heidi Holfacker!)

I can not imagine anyone going through cancer treatment without Healing Touch. When Diane Agnello and Marcia Gill suggested I volunteer at the Wellness Community giving Healing Touch to cancer patients, it seemed a natural me, especially as I was working on my certification.

When a family move made it too far for me to travel to the Wellness Community, I searched for a place to continue volunteering, but didn't find the match I was looking for until I learned of Bosom Buddies of Hawaii. With a mission to bring a program of this kind closer to home, I signed up for the conference, and specifically, the workshop hosted by Bosom Buddies.

After that, Judy Heidrich and I, "old friends" since our first Level I class together, ventured west, far from the sunny south, to Denver for the 2001 conference. In my core I felt we were a part of something sacred, global and universal in scope. I understood that I was standing with people "doing the work" on the cutting edge of healthcare; it was both timeless and timely. Like many Healing Touch students, I was moving forward on faith. It was clear that a way was opening before me. Healing Touch was not just something I performed; it was a life evolution from a very deep place in me. I remember thinking, "If I am never given another opportunity to do Healing Touch, this training has changed and healed my life."

I returned home loaded down with information, and into the incubator it all went. I began to build relationships and networks. Janice Dipaola and I spent hours hatching ideas and possibilities. Being idealistic and sufficiently naive, I kept going. Being really smart about one thing, I asked my friend, Judy Lynne Ray, to co-found Healing Touch Buddies, Jupiter, FL. As an area Level 1 and 2 instructor, Judy would be able to provide a link with students and practitioners who would connect with our project in a number of ways. Once given Healing Touch Buddy training, preceded by at least a Level 2 HT class, students would be able to fulfill a desire to be of service. Judy would be available for mentoring and guidance and I would be available for everything else.

On the heels of an energizing send off and carrying the blessings of our Healing Touch Florida Retreat friends, Judy Ray and I traveled to Honolulu, where we attended the Bosom Buddies training. There we received the "seeds" of our new program from our big sisters on Oahu. Susan Suzuki and Joy Wong shared details, inspiration

and encouragement, providing all we needed to transplant the program to South Florida. Hob Osterland, Joanne Little and Sivitri Kumaran shared their training and insights with us. We brought home the Ka Poli Ola (healing embrace) of the program, which now threaded through all our actions and connected us to our Bosom Buddies roots.

I was in awe as I reflected on the past two years and the quality of those who had shown up to participate in our new Healing Touch Buddies program, headquartered in Palm Beach County. It was absolutely clear to me that Healing Touch Buddies, Inc. was not mine; it was now a vital entity on its own, more than the sum of its parts. It had become a staging point for the sacred call to service for more than twenty five Healing Touch Buddy volunteers, the founding board and advisory committee. A few of the more than twentyfive women we served have become Buddies themselves or have volunteered in other roles as fund raisers, advocates or underwriters of our program expenses. They joined the circle of service in our Healing Touch Community and it embraced them.

Below: Janet Mentgen, Joel, Francis, Judy Ray, BettyAnn and Judy Heidrich at the Cenacle



Healing Touch Buddies reached out to the community in many other ways. We formed partnerships with Business and Professional Women's Club, Women's Wellness Society, Cancer Alliance of Help & Hope, Jupiter Medical Center's Living with Breast Cancer Support Group and Hospice of Palm Beach County, among others. We put up our tent at Relays for Life and Cancer Alliance functions and were always the last to pack up! Most recently, we were invited to join a new group called the Community Cancer Council, hosted by Cancer Alliance of Help & Hope. Directors of both the national and local organizations began to gather together to share resources and find better ways to help serve those diagnosed with cancer. Healing Touch Buddies represented that program's first complementary therapy program as it shared the table with the Jupiter Medical Center Ella Milbank Foshay Cancer Center, American Cancer Society, Susan G. Komen Foundation, The American Lung Association, Hospice of Palm Beach County, and many more

Of all the outreach, projects and partnerships we created,

Below: Betty Ann and Susan Suzuki at 2006 HTI Conference



there is one I'd like to share because it has great personal sweetness and meaning for me and because the message of this year's HTI conference, "Service: A Path of the Soul" is manifested in this particular circle of events.

The WOMEN'S RENEWAL, *an Intensive for Women*, was a retreat conceived as a fundraiser by one of our Healing Touch Buddy clients, Lyn Rosenthal. Lyn wanted to "give back" something for the Healing Touch sessions she received while being treated for a recurrence of breast cancer. She served as an honorary Healing Touch Buddies board member and donated her talents as a professional fundraiser to support the work of our program. Gloria Karpinski, holistic counselor, spiritual director, teacher and author was a favorite teacher of Lyn's and her mentor. She facilitated the event. Lyn wished to share Gloria's teaching with other women and this program was one she had missed because of the effect of her treatments during her first experience with breast cancer.

The retreat was held at the Cenacle Spiritual Life Center in Lantana, Florida in April 2006. Choosing the Cenacle site allowed me to return to a place I love. I held great reverence for the center and had tender memories of Healing Touch Florida (Nancy Wingerter) classes provided there . . . of Janet's Advanced Practice workshops and meeting Diane Wardell as she followed Janet for her book, *The White Shadow*. Wandering the property in the early planning stages for the retreat, I looked out over the Intracoastal, a calm waterway that told no tales of the hurricane assaults of the past two years. New growth was returning to the grounds and the chapel windows were new, as was the front door. A craftsman was installing newly etched glass panels that day. The Labyrinth had been upgraded from a dry, scrubby path to one of modest circular pads which now served to hold the memories of all past visitors' prayerful footsteps.

There was such excitement and pleasure as Lyn and I planned who would take on what and how it would all come together. Our intent was to gift our Healing Touch volunteers with an expansive experience, one that would

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connect us to other women serving the world in various capacities. Although Lyn was again undergoing cancer treatment and facing further surgeries during this time, she set her sites on the April date. She envisioned herself sharing something sacred and dear to her heart with other women. She gifted her Healing Touch Buddy, Carol, with the tuition to attend and contributed financially to the program costs. Money for the tuition for three Healing Touch Buddies was raised through her efforts.

As the opening day of the retreat approached, Lyn made every attempt to attend. Navigating the airport by wheelchair, she picked up Gloria at the airport. They spent a few days together at Lyn's home, making final preparations for the retreat to begin. When set up day at the Cenacle came, Lyn realized that the effort to stay comfortable in any location but home would be impossible. Her confinement to a wheelchair frustrated her every effort. Lyn had given so much and it was hard to make that choice, but she knew she was unable to stay. Although physically at home, we viewed Lyn as a very real participant with us.

Gloria, author of *Where Two Worlds Touch: Spiritual Rites of Passage* and *Barefoot on Holy Ground: Twelve Lessons in Spiritual Craftmanship*, led our intimate group of 12 women. Together, we explored the opportunities for spiritual growth provided by times of challenging change in our lives and in the world. All expressed great gratitude to Lyn for this experience. Because of Lyn's intention to "give back" we were challenged to step up to our true power and responsibility as women, not just for saving ourselves, but the planet.

As I returned home from the HTI Conference, I shifted from reflection and memories to anticipation and energy for future work. I anticipated sharing experiences and new ideas I had received with our Healing Touch Buddies volunteers. I wanted them to know how they fit into the full circle of service, manifesting through Healing Touch around the world. Mostly, I wanted them to truly know how their service was "A Path of the Soul".

Author's Note: Today Lyn's physical and spiritual con-

dition is somewhat improved since our April retreat. She is comfortable and continues to give back to the breast cancer community throughout Palm Beach County. Since the retreat she has been helping to coordinate a local Breast Care Awareness program that will be held September 30th. 📍

Betty Ann's Bio:

Betty Ann is a CHTP, LMT, and Charter Member of Healing Touch International. She is co-founder and Executive Director of Healing Touch Buddies, Inc. headquartered in Palm Beach County, Florida, where she lives with her husband, Richard and son, Mac. She is on staff at Phoenix Health & Wellness in Tequesta, Florida as a Massage Therapist. Betty Ann can be reached at 561-741-1671 or by email at HTBuddiesInc@cs.com. Visit our website at www.healingtouchbuddies.com.