

# How I Learned “Healing Touch” through the Elders in My Life

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Like many of you baby boomers, I am getting older! I will be 55 years old this month and I have been reading the AARP monthly magazine for several years now. I am letting my hair turn grey and am finding it empowering. I bought my first pair of “trifocals” last year. This month I will be able to start taking advantage of some discounts that are available for “seniors.” I am joining the ranks of the grey brigade and am enjoying observing myself transition into these golden years. I sweetly recall John Denver’s song “Poems, Prayers and Promises” one of the lines being “it turns me on to think of growing old.” I remember singing it in my twenties when the thought of growing old was a faraway concept. I am in the next chapter of my life and the elders I have known have prepared me well for it!

My maternal grandmother lived with my family (Mom, Dad, and older sister) from before my birth until she died at age 72 - when I was 15. Seventy-two sounded so old back then! Now it sounds friendlier and less mysterious. She was the only “really old” person present in my daily life. I remember being fascinated with her aging body -- the popped up veins in her hands with which she let me play, her textured grey hair, thinning skin, curled toes with corns, facial wrinkles, effortful gait and rounded back. Grandma loved me and was protective of me. She spoiled me as best she could with her attention as she did not have any financial resources. She was widowed as a young woman with five growing children. Her life was hard. I remember how safe I felt with her - especially sleeping with her in her bed. I think I first understood what “healing touch” meant through my relationship with her.



Josephine Poznanski at 90 years of age with daughter Cynthia Hutchison.

My vocational path has continually brought me back to the elders of our population. My first job in nursing was as an aide in a nursing home. Back then I did not have the skills that I now have for care-giving, but I know I was friendly, cheerful and compassionate. I helped these dear ladies with bathing, toileting, dressing, eating, hair combing, brushing teeth, backrubs, walking, exercising, applying comfort measures, the dying process and after- death care, and of course, just spending time talking. I remember one woman who would never buy a large tube of toothpaste because she thought she would never live long enough to use it all. (She finally bought a large tube!) I like to think that my cheerful attitude and willingness to serve was healing for them even though I was just in nursing school and hardly knew anything beyond the basics of nursing care or how I could use my hands and intention for healing (as I do now with Healing Touch).

During the first half of the 1980s, I was working on my doctoral degree in nursing at Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C. Getting discouraged after attending congressional hearings on Capital Hill and watching how bills are created and voted upon, I abandoned my dream to be a health care reformer. I just was not meant to deal with large scale politics! My track was mental health nursing with a minor in Long Term Health Care Administration and I chose to do my doctoral dissertation on “Caring Behaviors among Elderly Nursing Home Residents” (This was my first introduction to Jean Watson’s Caring Theory/Science, which HTP embraced in 2007 as the nursing theory that best supports HT practice.)

During my research study in the nursing home, I found that despite the many physical, emotional and mental challenges that the frail elderly have to manage, the majority of them still want and need to find ways to give of themselves. The inner desire to care for others does not grow old or die. We younger

folks should help our elders find opportunities to continue to serve and minister to others, however small that may be. Most elders who have aged with a healthy mental attitude and emotional health still want to be of service in whatever way they can -- to somehow be instruments of healing. Some HT Practitioners/Instructors have taught HT to our senior citizens with great success. Let more of us do the same so anyone who wants to learn may have the opportunity -- despite age or disability! We can all keep on giving until it is time to exit this life. Healing Touch does not require physical strength or high intellectual capacity. Mostly, it requires an openness to learn, a centered heart and a pair of willing hands --things the majority of our elders still have and want to use!

In 2002, although I was teaching many HT classes and had an active HT practice, I found myself working in a long term care facility again to make ends meet, this time as a part-time staff nurse who had not done any mainstream nursing for over ten years. I had recently experienced divorce and bankruptcy due to my former husband's failed business during the .com crash. My responsibilities from 6:00 a.m. until 7 p.m. each shift included administering several hundred medications to about thirty residents during a twelve-hour period, changing dressings, IVs, enema administration, physical assessments, talking to families, physicians and allied health care professionals, and more documentation than I care to remember. This was the most stressful nursing role I had ever experienced and the ludicrous amount of medications I was required to administer to these dear old folks was a real conflict for my soul. I had about one minute of quality time per resident on the average each day to "really be fully present". How did I get through this?

Having practiced energy medicine since the 1980s (first with Therapeutic Touch and then with HT in 1992), I knew I could still work energetically and though I did not have quantity of time to spend per resident, I could definitely provide quality. I knew that Spirit was not limited by time or space, so in reality, I had all the time I needed to provide Healing Touch if I believed it and held the intention. I learned how to do "one minute HT treatments" by focusing my intent strongly during my designated minute of quality time that I allowed for each resident. I used my hands with a loving touch very intentionally -- I imagined looking into each person's soul with love when I gave eye contact -- I smiled to acknowledge the goodness and wholeness of those under my care -- and I prayed for their comfort and healing. I sometimes had a few extra minutes to provide "a real HT

treatment" with specific HT methods, but those times were few and far between. I will never forget working on a woman who had a mental illness and was often very cutting in her remarks to staff. Somehow the time manifested for me to administer a *Chakra Spread* when it seemed she was dying. She looked so sweet and peaceful as I worked on her. Although she expired a few hours later, I was able to glimpse her wholeness and her goodness in a way that I was not able to see before. That was healing for ME as well as for her. To see her peaceful after such a struggle with her emotions and thoughts all those months was very comforting to me and strengthened my faith in our Creator's benevolence and love for all of us.

When Janet Mentgen invited me to become her Assistant Program Director in 2003, she asked me what I would like to do within my administrative role in HT. One of my two goals was to bring HT to all nursing homes. Not only would it serve the elderly who need Healing Touch, but there is at least one nursing home in every community, making it a perfect place to spread HT locally, teach volunteers, family members, staff, and interested residents how to give HT as a healing modality. This is a very possible dream. Will you join me in manifesting it?

About the author:

Cynthia Hutchison is the Director of the Healing Touch Program™. In the early 1980s, she began studying natural health, holistic healing and energy therapies. She is an avid student of spirituality and energy medicine. As a doctorally prepared nurse from the Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C. (1987), Cynthia is also knowledgeable in the mainstream health sciences with a strong background in nursing and holistic health care. With a master's degree as a clinical specialist in mental health, she has maintained a private practice in Healing Touch for many years. In 1995, Cynthia initiated the research program for Healing Touch and became the first Director of Research. She was invited by Janet Mentgen (founder of HT) in 2003 to serve as the Assistant Program Director. Cynthia became the Program Director in May of 2005 (several months before Janet's death), and was asked by Janet to carry on her legacy of the Healing Touch Program. Teaching internationally and nationally all five levels of the core curriculum, plus Advanced Practice courses and Instructor Training (Level 6), she brings much enthusiasm, empowerment and creativity to her classes. A mother of three awesome daughters, Cynthia has lived in Boulder, Colorado since 1993.