

Rosen and the Treatment of Breast Cancer

by Marjorie Huebner

I was diagnosed with breast cancer in April, 2001. I finished chemotherapy in December, 2001. The cancer is gone for now, but as I move into the next phase of living with cancer—whatever that may bring—I want to talk about how important it was for me to actively stay in touch with my body during the treatment of a life-threatening illness.

During cancer treatment I received a Rosen session almost every week. In addition, for the past five years I have been working with a group of women in a peer-led Authentic Movement group that meets once a week for two hours. These sessions, and the wonderful family and friends who love me, were the bulwarks of support for me during my treatment.

Both Rosen and Authentic Movement invite us to use the body as a resource, to be aware of what we feel or what motivates us to move, to allow us to be seen in a non-judgmental way, and to utilize the relationship—or the connection with the witness—to provide support for being deeply inside one's experience. This process of going inside has helped me come out into my life again—renewed, connected to my inner strength, and knowing more about the part of me that transcends death.

When dealing with cancer, it is obviously important to focus on the body and the trials through which it is being put. Many books on cancer focus on spiritual and emotional trials and transformation during cancer diagnosis and treatment, but don't often speak about the importance of utilizing the body as a way to access this emotional and spiritual guidance. Given the toxic, painful and “physical” focus of conventional cancer treatment—whether it is surgery, chemotherapy, radiation, or all three—staying connected to the body as a source of healing, on many different levels at the same time, may not be easy. The emotional and spiritual healing can thus become almost a form of “retreat” from the body's experience during this difficult time, leading people to see these as journeys—the physical, the emotional, and the spiritual—as separate from each other. They are not.

I wanted to be fully present in my experience, so I needed a place, or places, to stay in contact with my body. While cancer support groups can be important parts of treatment for many, I felt worse after going to them. I found that Rosen and Authentic Movement allowed me space where I could feel and literally move with anger, fear, grief, and loss. It also allowed space to express and honor my love, gratitude and surrender. This surely was not a part of the treatment options encouraged or allowed in the cancer clinic I went to! I had a place to give voice and expression to my experience, and to be witnessed physically, emotionally and spiritually.

Cancer has provided me a huge lesson in the importance of having limits. Taking care of basic needs was essential during cancer treatment and I had many feelings about how to let others help me with those things. I couldn't do as much for myself, let alone do what I would have wanted to do for others. I had to receive more than I was used to. This brought up incredible feelings of vulnerability and, sometimes, shame.

I was not able to respond to everyone who contacted me during this time, and I struggled with how I would have liked to respond as I had before—promptly, of course! Could I believe they would know I loved them if I didn't respond? People wanted to be able to do things for me during this time—Bless them!—*and* it sometimes was not what I wanted or could take in. Setting boundaries is difficult for me, but I had to learn that it was important for me to be able to choose what to receive without worrying about how others feel.

Cancer and needing to pay attention to my limits again pressed against my defenses, exposing a new layer of an old wounded place from my very young self again!. Through Rosen sessions I've learned that I have a lot of love inside me and that it was not received when I was very young. The result is that I came to believe that simply being loving isn't enough, and I learned to express and receive love by doing things for others. Because of this, I know the pain of being rejected and because I wouldn't want to "reject" others, I would accept things that I didn't want to have, or do things that I didn't want to do. It has been hard for me to say no (or yes) and I take care of others (or so I think) more than is good for me.

And the flip side of that is that over and over again in my life, when my "love" wasn't received I would feel angry, hurt, and rejected, and often withdraw from relationships rather than say how I felt. Although I do like doing things for other people, I am learning that I have to discern between the times when I want to receive and the times when I want to give. I am learning to see how *my* love might not be received and that it might not have anything to do with me or my love. (I heard echoes of what I was told during my Rosen training: "Marjorie, don't take things so personally!") When I can remember that the things others express are born in their own life experiences, and that their expressions may have little to do with me. I can then know what *I* feel and respond to those feelings instead of having to protect and defend my wounded self. When I can let it come, I can feel the grief of this old wounding—of not having my love received—and begin to allow how I feel out, not always knowing how to do it "right" yet.

The chemotherapy and other drugs distanced me from my body, and also interacted with other parts of me besides my physical body. Using Rosen and Authentic Movement was again helpful in checking in the best I could. I felt the Adriamycin was connected to my anger and arrogance, the Taxol to my grief, the Gemzar to my avoidance. No matter what the outcome of having cancer is, each of these "anti-cancer" drugs ferreted out and brought forth these other aspects that needed to be moved in me to keep me more alive. I did other things—journaling, making collages, going to a therapist, attending retreats—but what continued to be invaluable was the exploration and information available to me through my body during the cancer treatment.

Events in life should change one, shouldn't they? I am now struggling with how to live life with the wild card of cancer, how to use it as a reminder to live more fully. It is not something that I can put behind me. Life is not the same and never will be—just as it is not the same when a parent or child dies. This is what I want, to be permeable to life. This is what Rosen asks of us—to be moved by life's events and allow them to change us. You might think *that* would be a given after such a tough experience, but it is amazing to me how tempting it is to deny my feelings, to deny life. Cancer can be very silent and one doesn't know if it's there or not. So I want to keep remembering to live with the unknown, to remember that death is not too far away.

I want to live with love for myself, and for others. As I struggle to live well, I want to keep the process of transformation close at hand. So I continue to receive Rosen, to go to my Authentic Movement group, and as I can, let my love come out.

Many Rosen practitioners may have clients going through cancer treatment. The intense nature of most cancer treatments may cause some clients to be tempted to “take a break” from Rosen during this time. My experience tells me that many clients would benefit from continuing to come for Rosen sessions while they are being treated for cancer.