

"The Gift: 34C" by author, Nickie Siegel. This book may be helpful and inspirational for patients dealing with cancer. (*Excerpts*)

"The minute I heard his serious sorrowful voice I knew bad news was about to explode. I was sensing some kind of crisis. After all, if the report had been negative, he would have had his nurse call me to say everything was okay. Clearly, that was not the case. My heart started to gallop, and the adrenaline soared. I screamed a silent blood-curdling scream, but no one could hear it. I shook like a belly dancer, but no one could feel it. I was lodged and trapped with treating my patients and Frank wasn't there to bury me in his arms of strength, courage and tenderness. HELP! Trembling. Icy. I finally mustered the strength to gingerly inquire about the results of the biopsy. Sheepishly, in a soft-spoken yet penetrating voice he said, "I was wrong. You do have cancer."

I repeatedly internalized my previously adopted motto: I have been chosen to have this experience and there will be a gift along the way...

Being a Physical Therapist means dedication to rendering superior quality care to my patients. As an ongoing part of my career growth, I have regularly searched for unfamiliar, new or cutting-edge techniques. About a decade ago, I had heard and read about a therapist named John Barnes who developed Myofascial Release techniques that attracted and challenged me. At the beginning of my first course with John, I wasn't certain I accepted, nor grasped his noticeably alternative concepts. But by the completion of that seminar I was bitten by his infectious bug, the new philosophy and style. A light turned on. I learned that Myofascial Release (MFR) is a mind-body therapeutic approach that frees powerful connective tissue (fascia) restrictions that may cause enormous pressure on various sensitive structures that produce pain. And, because I have been so moved by John's golden magical hands, and by the power and impact of his work on patients and on me, I studied intensely with him for the past 10 years. As friend, teacher, mentor, and clearly my guru, he opened a fascinating new door for me in caring for my patients, and in caring for myself. In fact, over time, I think I began to worship his work, or was it him? MFR became an addiction like chocolate: I just couldn't get enough.

Because John treated me so successfully for my arthritic neck and back pain, and secondarily, altered my thinking, attitudes and life, I became a staunch supporter of his methodology and approach. Over time, John's being and presence became more and more like a shaman. My orthopedic problems were treated with new physical mechanical techniques as well as unusual sensitivity and tenderness. This approach pushed my physical, emotional, and spiritual being to a glowing renewed level of energy, and capacity for performance. Through the years, his work, his style, and his program provided me with the ability to see the world differently. The rigid, linear left-brain patterns in my life and my treatment programs to transition soften and shift into a more creative and free right-brain style. I was able to see, to hear, and to feel more deeply.

His advanced courses introduced me to and enveloped me in Myofascial Unwinding, a movement facilitation technique that allows for an inner somato-emotional release as well as the physical (I had no idea I had quite so much emotional junk of my own to clear out). While it's certainly an injustice to attempt to aptly describe this treatment philosophy in a short shotgun version, I will attempt an abbreviated explanation. It's been postulated by many experts that emotions and memory may be stored not only in the mind but also in a cellular form, such as fascia. Unwinding allows for the "communication of mind with the body and body with the mind, which is necessary for healing. The release of tissue with its stored emotions and hidden information creates an environment for change." Clearly, this is why this form of treatment is not only physically relieving, but emotionally nurturing as well.

In June 1999, I was studying MFR with John Barnes in Sedona, Arizona. Unknown to me at the time, it was the beginning of a new journey. For 10 days, I was instructed in Myofascial Rebounding, Advanced Myofascial Unwinding, and "Therapy for the Therapist". These concentrated intense sessions brought me insurmountable physical well-being of my arthritic neck, back, and hand, and through powerful unwinding techniques, provided emotional cleansing as well. It was a deeply enlightening, and empowering experience, shedding years of tissue memory, and took me to a whole new level of awareness and clarity physically, emotionally, and spiritually. More than anything else, this unforgettable, memorable 10-day episode, with hours spent in the breathtaking, electrifying Red Rock canyons and vortices as well as his clinic "Therapy on the Rocks" overlooking the beautiful, peaceful, serene Oak Creek, amplified my strength and power to emotionally survive breast cancer. It was that positive grounding that created the mindset for my core fluid motto: I have been chosen to have this experience and there will be a gift along the way.

There is another tale to tell. In May, when assisting John Barnes with the seminar in Baltimore, he advised me to see him for treatment after all the surgery was complete. As I follow directions well, am a good listener, and believe in his work, I arranged two appointments with him while he was in Paoli, Pennsylvania. The week before Thanksgiving, and two weeks before the move, what could be more inconvenient? But I was committed. I drove myself up to his clinic for an hour appointment on Monday, stayed overnight, had another session on Tuesday, and then drove home.

As the time for the appointments drew near, I started to feel uncomfortable about the upcoming visit as I would need to face another reality. I may never see John again and I may never do this work again. What a devastating thought. My hands and shoulders were tightening and weakening, and my once fit body was beginning to look and feel its age.

We did our initial hellos and as soon as he touched me the sobbing started. I didn't think there were any tears left. But there were plenty. As he treated my tight shoulders and the multiple scars on my chest, I continued to weep. And then I uttered words that seemed to come from someone else, but it was my voice. "I've been so exhausted. What happened to the year? I have been dead for the year." He calmly, softly, and tenderly responded, "You have been out of your body, and that's what you had to do to cope with all that's happened to you, and now its time for you to come back into your body." He gave me permission to feel the losses, not just my breasts, but my job and my career, his work and teachings. He gave me his unconditional permission to feel the pain, the fear and the anger. He encourages me to find a new life, with or without MFR and believed I would be helping others in some way. What an incredible and powerful two hours I had experienced with him. Thank you, John. But I still couldn't manage to say goodbye as that meant we might never meet again. Instead, we parted with a big hug and farewell. We'll meet again.

I continued my tears on most of the drive home as I do now as I pen this passage. Tears of sadness associated with the losses I've undergone, tears of sadness that this reality may evaporate, that I may never see John again. Tears of happiness because I was fortunate enough to meet this rare and talented shaman and experience his strong but gentle touch and support. Tears of happiness because I feel empowered to take my life back, grateful that I have the opportunity for a new beginning in Florida. What a gift.