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Medical Intuition

An interview with Nina Zimbelman and Patricia Johnson, MD

Nina Zimbelman is a medical intuitive who works closely with Patricia Johnson, MD, a family physician in Robbinsville, North Carolina.

IJHC: I am so impressed with how the two of you have come to work harmoniously together, blending intuitive awareness and holistic medical practice.

Could you tell us, Nina, how your intuitive gifts developed?

N: By the age of 35, I found I had achieved "The American Dream". My husband and I had been very successful in business, making more money than we needed. Finding that money did not create happiness, I fell into a drug habit that brought me to the place where I had to choose whether to live or die. Knowing on some level it was not time for me to die, I gave up drugs and cleaned up my diet, working to regain my health. In doing so, I was led into macrobiotics, which led to Chinese Medicine. I discovered that the ancient Chinese physicians relied heavily on their intuition in tending to their patients. I began practicing with friends and colleagues, and discovered I have natural intuitive talents.

IJHC: Nina, could you say a word about how you came to develop your community?

N: Yes. There was never any intention around the community. I had been working in the spiritual world since 1983 and had been doing a lot of research in those dimensions. I just had a really clear connection with "the other world," so to speak.

I was living in Portland in 1992, working at the Living Enrichment Center as a spiritual coach. That's where I connected with Rose, Marc and Shaun, and others who came to me as students. In 1995, I had a strong knowing to move to Egypt. I knew with an inner certainty this was right, and although I didn't have the means to do so, began immediately to prepare to walk out of my life in Portland. Synchronistically, money and everything else we needed came in to support us all to go to Egypt for two years. We strictly devoted our lives to living in higher spiritual frequencies and studied the wisdom of ancient times.

We wound up all living together under one roof in a villa in Egypt for two years because that was the most economical way to do it. So, when the project was over and I came here, Marc felt inclined to come also, to at least try it out. Then Shaun got a job here as a physical therapist in home health service. A couple of months later, Rose joined us and got a job doing social work. So, it wasn't like we started out to be a "community." We started out with Spirit just sort of defining us to be together for this two-year project.

We went through so many wonderful initiations and explorations of levels of awareness that it was nice to stay together because we have had a history in working in those higher vibrations so we could do a lot of things together – time travel, be telepathic, be intuitive, and live from our feelings rather than being restricted and constricted by society and conventional consciousness. So, it just sort of evolved.

We built out homes, as we could afford it and as Spirit directed, on the property I bought. So now everybody has their own home but we live on shared grounds. That's how our community came about.

Other people have joined us in the community, including the two local doctors, Trisha Johnson and Katy Lynch. They just felt drawn to do it. It isn't like we had a plan for them to come join us. It's all just been a world that's developed from the inner knowing. And it works.

Some people have come and moved on and other people have come and stayed. It's never a real problem. It isn't like you either have to be here or not have to be here. It's like if you feel guided to be here, you're welcome. And if you feel guided to leave, you're welcome!

And we're learning, as we develop, to integrate the truths that are so easy out of the body, and finding the ways to integrate them in the body, which is a real challenge.

IJHC: That's very interesting, but probably worth a whole other article. Tell me, how did you and Trisha first start working together?

T: I had heard about Nina, but I had a reluctance, I think, to connect just because my life was so busy. In March of 1999, a mutual friend asked if Katy and I would accompany him to dinner at the community. That was when I first met Nina. Both Katy and I were drawn to connect with the community and it was really never much of a resistance after that, that's for sure.

IJHC: What was the community like when you first joined?

T: Well, Nina was getting ready to give a workshop on stress reduction. Katy and I both agreed that our medical center community could certainly use a workshop on stress reduction and we wanted to support that. So, we both decided to come to that workshop.

We got along so well, we decided to work together, joining in the work that Nina and her community was already doing and had been doing for years. Nina and I were drawn to put our work together.

N: It was really easy on my part. I'm not sure how many big city situations would have afforded me a chance to just walk into a clinic and start doing what I do, being able to do it so well and have such an immediate and nearly total acceptance. The patients trust the doctor so much that they're willing to try anything if she recommends it. So, word of mouth has spread, and I'm an accepted part of the community now.

IJHC: Why do you think a bigger city would have been more difficult?

N: I believe the rules in the city tend to be a little more confining. And that's not just in medicine. We're building a subdivision right now – two of them – the one we live in and another one. We just start doing it. You don't have to have an architectural plan and you don't have to have all these forms and applications filled out. You just go and do and then you tell the city and they give you a number and that's it. So, there's a lot more freedom in a small town.

IJHC: So how did the two of you develop your work together?

N: Trisha, do you want to tell Dan about calling for a session?

T: Well, ok. After we met Nina at dinner, Katy recommended that I consult Nina. I was having profound depression that I couldn't seem to pull out of after my divorce. So, I made an appointment to have a session with Nina.

When I came in, we were sitting there talking and that's when Nina felt the pain in her back that I had been carrying for about nine years. I had mentioned some pain but I knew it was my exact pain because Nina described it precisely as what I had been experiencing for so long. So, she said, "Well, I don't think we can work with your emotional body until we get you out of this pain in the physical body."

She and Shaun worked on me through bioenergies and the pain immediately left. I was very happy to get rid of that pain. And I wasn't really astonished at her ability to do so because I had been studying energetic medicine for several years. I was just happy that she could do that and I was grateful. I recognized her abilities and then we sort of developed a relationship. We felt drawn to spend time

together and we didn't know what that meant - but both trusted that we were being guided to spend time together and see what that did mean.

It was really almost a year before we had any real clarity on the fact that we were going to work together in the way that we now do. It was during a conference at Hilton Head that our work came together. People made appointments to see Nina for intuitive assessments. The first two or three sessions, I left the room. Then, Nina said she didn't want to have any sessions with anybody else if I was going to have to leave the room. I readily agreed. "I would like to stay and take notes because I think what you are doing with these people is so incredible that we need to be documenting it anyway."

In the first consultation I sat in on it immediately became a triangular energetic - where I would ask questions and interject along with Nina. For some reason, we could tell right then that we were on to something that was a lot bigger. So, at that point we started working together.

N: I had never worked that deeply in the physical. Most of what I did was energetic, spiritual, and emotional. I was a little bit hesitant to go so deeply into that arena without a lot of experience. But then, when we started working together, Trisha would just feel guided to bring someone from her practice. For instance, she brought her nurse who was having some problems with shoulder pain, and I picked up something in her back. We were able to confirm this with x-rays. So, having the medical community there to validate that I knew what I knew helped a lot in my self-confidence.

IJHC: That's interesting, because often times it's the other way around. The doctors need the sort of feedback that you can give, Nina, in order to trust their intuition.

N: And that's what the value to both of us has been. We have some people who are very conscious but don't understand what's going on in their body; and we have other people who come because they have problems with their body and they don't even know that they have other levels to work with. So, it's a real give and take, and it's a real weaving of the worlds.

I feel like my expertise has always been in the non-physical and I pretty much shied away from the physical. And Trisha has been so grounded in the physical and, even though she was aware of the other levels, neither one of us really embraced the other levels full time. So, it was just two pieces that seemed to fit. When you put the two pieces together there was a much more complete, big picture for everybody to explore.

That connection has expanded. It's like Trisha's medical community is now building the medical center that they need so badly. And the medical center is now opening doors for us to have experiences with doctors who then come to this center to have a place to work and study. So, the initial connection has woven so many more connections.

Marc is very good at computers. So, while he is down there helping with the construction as they expand the medical facility, he also helps them expand their computer system. If somebody gets hurt on the job in our community, they go to the medical center for help. So, it's been interesting to see how it's all being bonded and blended together.

IJHC: That's absolutely lovely.

Trisha, you mentioned that you had some energy familiarity before meeting Nina.

T: Well, I had experienced strong intuition throughout the years myself, so I knew that was there and was a potential. I had never personally felt that I had developed it very well but I had been studying mind-body medicine for about twenty years. Then I was led to study the work of Caroline Myss and have been to several of her workshops. So, the ability to have intuition and to feel other people's pain come into your body, and that type of thing, was something that I was familiar with from studying it, but I hadn't had close contact with a person with that ability.

IJHC: So then you started working together. Would people come to you, Nina, and then you'd refer them to Trisha, or the other way around?

N: Actually, it's been both ways. She would get patients through the clinic where her intuition would say, "This is someone that I could bring to Nina and we could explore further what's going on." I've had clients, for example, who would come here for intuitive readings about their lives and all of a sudden I would realize that Trisha had come in to offer her contributions in addition to what I had been doing. So we started sharing clients and patients.

A lot of my clients and friends grew up with me in the spiritual realm. We're now getting of an age where having physical problems is not unusual: menopause, arthritis, and that sort of thing. So, it was wonderful for me to be able to refer him to Trisha in a physical arena and vice versa. This was another shared experience.

T: I had been studying holistic medicine, and in particular, nutritional medicine, so I know the herbals and vitamins for alternative practices, when to recommend acupuncture, and things like that. Together, we have a pretty wide array of things that we can offer.

IJHC: What other mind-body medicine modalities have you used, Trisha?

T: Well, I studied Ayurvedic medicine for several years and Qigong and Chinese philosophies, and I had always incorporated some type of bodywork. I'd been in the Holistic Medical Association (AHMA) since 1990. So, every year I would go to either the AHMA Conference, or the Conference at Hilton Head sponsored by the National Institute for the Clinical Application of Behavioral Medicine (NICABM), which is focused around energy medicine. They offered a lot of workshops that were really helpful to me

IJHC: Were there individual experiences with people that stand out as landmarks of working together? From my experience, clients come and they teach me as much as I teach them. I think that is a question for both of you.

T: Well, there just have been so many. It seems like everyone we work with has some important shift in their consciousness. Of course, we are all together with the session, so we get an experience out of it as well.

There have been so many – everything from an 88-year-old woman with terminal congestive heart failure whose life was definitely enhanced by a session, to a man who was on oxygen all the time who was able to come off his oxygen, to the woman with liver disease who had such complex symptoms and medical problems that it was very challenging, even for Nina and me, to help her sort it all out.

IJHC: Could you expand on any one, or several of those? You are touching just the tip of the iceberg as you mention them.

T: There was a man, let's call him "Joseph," who had chronic lung disease with recurrent pneumonia. He had pneumonia so often that he was in the hospital a lot and needed oxygen all the time. He also had a constant tremor in his hand that was very annoying to him. Nina could sense that at age 19 Joseph had had a near-drowning experience and she invited him to talk about that. He responded that, no, he really had not had a near drowning experience but he had been in the boat with his best friend fishing and the boat turned over and his friend drowned. Joseph didn't get hurt himself, but he lost his best friend. We traced his lung trouble back to that point, back to that age.

IJHC: In terms of his having symptoms?

N: Yes. It was the guilt. The imprint of that drowning and his own feelings of guilt went into his lungs and he actually carried that guilt and trauma ever since then. Joseph was in his late 50's when we saw him.

N: And, it all went away. He doesn't have any lung problems anymore, and he doesn't have the tremor anymore.

IJHC: What did you do that helped?

N: I think taking him back to the point where he took it on. Getting under that root and releasing it so that he could be free to live his life. There was always a guilt. Almost like he had to carry the burden. Joseph

took it on as if he was responsible for his friend drowning. It was an amazing experience. Now, he doesn't even remember all those years of having lung problems. That's the amazing part. I'll see him at the clinic, you know, he'll come in to get a flu shot and I'll say, "Well, how are your lungs doing?" And it's like he has no memory of the years of stress he went through.

IJHC: That's wonderful. What was the release like? How did that come about?

N: Effortlessly.

IJHC: Did you tell him about the underlying problems? Was it an energetic thing?

N: I kept picking up the year intuitively – the time in his life. I think he was 19. I kept picking up what I thought was a near-drowning but it was his friend that drowned, not him. Getting him to talk about it released a lot that he had been carrying all those years.

We did three sessions together. The first one cleared the tremor completely, and it was just focused on the energy of love. It wasn't anything that I did. It was just that loving presence. Then, the second time he was acutely aware that the tremor had gone away so he felt more safe and more open. We got close to the memory but didn't quite get to it. Then he had another bout with pneumonia and had to go to the hospital. When he came the third time he was ready to go to that place where it all began and he got under it. Frankly, I had no idea it would be such a permanent release. It's been two years.

IJHC: Did you see what happened, Nina, and then reveal it to him? Or, did he come into the memory? How did that work?

N: I just kept saying, "Do you remember anything around when you were about 19 years old?" At first Joseph said, "No." Then I said something like, "I just keep feeling like there was a near drowning or something." He got real quiet. It was like he allowed the memory to come in and he said, "Oh, yeah, something did happen when I was 19 years old." And he started talking about it.

Once he started talking about it, it's like. . . what happens, Dan, is like this presence, a presence comes in. And if the person's intention is truly to - we'll use that word, "heal" - and he is ready to let go of whatever reason he created it to begin with, then it just goes away in our presence. It's a vibration. It's just a level where the healing, where the problem never was.

IJHC: So, energetically Joseph released a pattern that has kept him ill.

Nina, do you have any understanding how the spiritual or the emotional connect to a problem like lungs and a tremor? Why those particular symptoms?

N: Well, in this case, his lungs were carrying the imprint of the drowning.

T: And the lungs are what carry grief.

N: In Chinese medicine, the lungs are the repository of grief.

IJHC: Okay, so that fits in well with the Chinese medicine pattern. And so, once he released the memories and that energetic pattern, then his lungs cleared.

N: Totally. To where Joseph doesn't even remember that there was a problem.

IJHC: And what about the tremor part of it?

N: A lot of times the tremor is there when we carry fear and tension and guilt, and all kinds of negative emotion. The energy gets blocked and after a certain period of time our natural energy just doesn't flow. Tremors are a part of that. You know, when you are really afraid, you tremble. When you do that over a period of time and it builds up in your system, it can be very natural to have that kind of a tremor. That's not the only thing that causes tremor, but in this particular case, he probably just shut down a level of his natural energy flow. It's like he didn't feel like he deserved to live fully because his friend had died.

IJHC: In a case like this, isn't this man wonderfully fortunate?!

Could it be that all of this has been choreographed at another level, marvelously, for Joseph to come to you, Trisha, where the Chinese medicine makes absolute sense of his lungs being the focus of illness, and where, Nina, you offer the path into the memory - while a conventional doctor would really have had a hard time with this?!

N: Well, Joseph had been going to doctors for 30 years.

T: All his adult life, he'd been in and out of hospitals over and over and over.

Dan, it just feels like our work together was meant to be. There are so many people that I take care of and have for years where I now know that what Nina has to offer them will not only help them, but will help me understand. So, together we can offer a bigger picture.

N: Or vice versa. We had "Sheila" who came from California and spent ten days with us. Having a medical doctor on board to work with her definitely helped the whole picture. Sheila, who was 34 years old, had been suffering from a chronic problem all her life.

T: Well, she actually had two problems. One was ulcerative colitis since age twenty. So, Sheila was on chronic prednisone, which causes its own problems after you've been on it for twenty years. The last year she had been also having much difficulty with a really horrible cough that she could not get rid of - a harsh, non-productive cough that just wracked her body. This was very disturbing to her life.

When she came she said if there was one problem that we could help her with, the cough is what she really wanted to work on. She'd seen a lung specialist and had all types of tests - including CAT scans - and no one had ever been able to come up with anything.

Nina and I worked with Sheila. While she was here she had to extend her stay. She was here ten days instead of a week because she arrived with the flu and so she was acutely ill for the first few days, pretty much bedridden, and didn't recover enough so that we could start to do the work until the third day or so.

In examining Sheila and prescribing for her flu symptoms, and just talking with her, I gave her medication which completely eliminated her cough. So, she was impressed that this small country doctor could give her a shot that would make her cough go away when she had been seeing all these specialists in California and no one had ever done anything effective.

IJHC: What was it?

T: Well, I just gave her a shot of a steroid that I've used in my office for people who have an acute respiratory infection that includes a persistent cough. It's just one thing that I have found that works really well. The other thing is, I have a lot of experience because I've done so much outpatient medicine with just the average person and have seen so many different diseases. Being a family practitioner, I had some formulas that I know work. This particular medicine may not be used often by her doctors in California, and it's difficult to get these days. I just happened to know something in my world that worked really well for her.

I must say, that really got her attention, and we had two very good sessions with Nina. Not only is her cough better, but her ulcerative colitis is better and she feels like she's going to be able to get off her prednisone for the first time ever.

What helped? Was it the shot? Was it the session? Was it being here in the community and working through some of her stuff? I don't know what helped. I'm definitely not taking credit for the shot that much.

N: It was the combination of everything. You know, because she stayed here at the house ten days and got to see patterns in her life that gave her stress. She also worked with not being so much in her mind, but more in her heart. It was the complete ten-day experience. She has completely changed. Her whole life has changed.

We did some inner work, getting underneath some of the family stuff that probably created the colitis to begin with, so it was a full experience.

T: But I have no idea which part did what.

N: It may just have been her intention to finally do some deep work, to see if she could find a more complete healing process.

N: Here's another example. When Judith came, about a year and a half ago, she had been having problems for eight months with a leg condition. And no one had prescribed an anti-inflammatory medicine. I mean, it's just going back to simple medicine.

One specialist was prescribing blood thinners, and the other specialist was objecting because blood thinners were being prescribed. She was totally frustrated after eight months. She came here and spent the week. I worked with her energetic patterns and Trisha examined her and prescribed simple anti-inflammatory medication. Within days, she was better, and has been free of any leg problems since.

IJHC: I think the fact of your working together harmoniously, and being able to offer different views and perspectives, has to be really helpful to people to see that it can be done.

T: Well, it feels helpful to everyone. It certainly feels helpful to me, as a physician, to have someone help me see it from a different perspective.

N: Remember "Don?" He has changed so much and he has integrated so much of just the little bit that we taught him. He sends us clients all the time now.

We had a mini-workshop here a week ago and Don's intuition is opening up and it's wonderful to see it growing. He takes his intuitive impressions to a certain point, and then if he feels if he doesn't have quite the confidence or the ability, he sends them on to us. He's learning to do more and more by himself.

IJHC: It's wonderful that you can help people learn to use their intuition like that. I spoke with Don and he said his learning has been transformative.

I'm sure that the two of you have also experienced some transformations as you've worked together.

N: Oh, gosh, yes.

IJHC: Can you talk about any of that?

N: Well, I've decided that the physical world is not such a bad place. For me it's just opened dimensions of myself. I guess what it's taught me is how humans perceive. I've spent so much time in the spirit world that I had kind of disassociated a lot with everyday human life. So, it's interesting to have the opportunity to sit with people who I wouldn't exactly call "super-conscious," but are very real. It's given me opportunity to work with people who would never even know what a metaphysical teacher was. They come with what seems like very rudimentary, physical problems. But then they also get a chance to experience the energy and the vibration.

About three weeks ago Mary brought us her challenges. She had just been diagnosed with hepatitis C, and is going to have to make a decision between now and June whether to take medicine for this. She came, not even knowing all that we had to offer. On her side, Trish just had a knowing to offer her a session and Mary wasn't even sure why she was coming to see me other than her doctor had told her to show up.

She had had much illness, and that's how she found her way to Trish. She had been through a lot of problems and operations. Wasn't she really sick, Trish?

T: Well, Mary was misdiagnosed by the medical community, so she was really burned up with conventional medicine, but she also needed a primary care physician to help her wade through this decision on whether to take medicine for her chronic hepatitis, and someone to follow her and advise and

help, even though she was pretty much turned off by the whole medical community, and very justifiably so.

N: Trisha recommended that we do a session together. When Mary came in, her mind was focused on the question, "How do I deal with the Hepatitis C?" However, in working with her, what came up very clearly was that in her early 20's she had done drugs when her first husband had come back from Vietnam. He'd come back a heroin addict, so she wound up doing drugs with him.

So, she has this belief system that she is being punished for having done drugs. What I was able to do was to get under that belief system. She was doing drugs when she was much younger, to escape the pain of life and to find a sense of herself that was bigger and less painful. She's in her 50's now.

My feeling was that Mary could change her program from "I'm being punished for having done drugs," to "I am now finding the positive result of what I was seeking at age 20." This is a wake-up call for her, to recognize that this is a time in her life to find her true self. And maybe the "her" that sought to find herself, when the only avenue she found thirty years ago was drugs, is now at a place where she can actually find herself in a deeper way.

So, we were able to help her change that belief structure from "I'm being punished," to "I might be being rewarded." When Mary got that piece, her whole energy changed. She just rose to this beautiful person and she started vibrating at a higher level. She could feel this bliss in her body. I recognized that if we could continue to do this work, by June she would know that she wouldn't even have to take medicine, because she'd be at a vibration higher than all that guilt and judgment.

She went away very happy and we just heard from a mutual friend that she's doing really well and is very satisfied with what we're prescribing, which is to do this work and just continue to love herself.

T: Right. And I put her on some herbs to support the liver functions.

(Mary shares her side of the experience, below.)

N: So, it varies. It's all kinds of situations.

IJHC: Trisha, as you've started to work more closely with Nina, do you pick up any patterns that clue you that people are ripe for what Nina has to offer?

T: Well, I just know by watching people go through their process of illness. I usually can get a hint of who's ready to look at it in a different way. They come in and they're victims – whether it's a victim of their circumstances with their lives, or whether they're a victim of the medical system, or whether they're a victim of a virus. Usually they're not quite ready to do the work. I have to wait until they're accepting their situation and wanting to do the best they can with that situation. Then, I think, they're usually ready.

I don't want people to spend a lot of time with Nina before they're ready. People have to reach a certain level of discomfort with their life before they're ready to make a shift in perception or a change in their lives. I have to sense an openness, and I have to sense a desire on the part of the person to make a change.

IJHC: Are there things that you can do to facilitate their moving in that direction?

T: I often suggest it. I know people that I feel need to have a session. Sometimes I start making the suggestion that there's deeper work I feel we might be able to do. I'll put that suggestion out there for two, three, or even six months, before we ever do the session. I start putting the suggestions out and working with them to see if they can make a little progress with whatever part of the responsibility they have to assume for themselves before I know that they're ready to do the work.

If somebody needs to start just being compliant and taking their medication and they can show me that they can do that, then I can see that they have a willingness to do their part. Sometimes, in medicine, there's even that level of nonparticipation by the person. People just come in and say, "Fix me." We can't

just fix people. There has to be a willingness on their part and the intention on their part to change their life. A lot of the people I see really don't want their life changed.

IJHC: Yes, isn't that interesting? They'd like to be free of the symptoms without changing.

T: And a lot of them really don't want to be free without the symptoms.

IJHC: Yes.

I have so many questions, it's clear we won't have time for all of them. I expect from your side, Nina, it's easier to refer to Trish. Is it – when people come to you initially?

N: You mean as far as the physical?

IJHC: Yes.

N: Pretty much.

T: Well, if you know they've got physical problems, you usually just recommend that we start out with all of us together.

IJHC: I imagine along the way you've had some people who have just blocked, or where it hasn't worked. Do you have any lessons that have come from those sorts of people?

N: Well, the big lesson we've learned is that some people just enjoy where they are. Who comes to mind is "George." He just loves being a martyr. He really didn't want to get out of martyrdom. He wanted to have problems where he could suffer and talk about his suffering and be a martyr. It took us probably three or four session before we realized that this guy just gets off on being a martyr, and coming to us was part of the opportunity to talk about his martyrdom. So, in those cases I recognize that some people are still enjoying the course of illness that they are taking in life.

T: And we recognize it a little bit earlier now.

N: Yeah, right! Almost immediately. I think we had an invalid belief system in the beginning that everybody wanted to improve, because that's kind of where we stood in our lives. We're always looking to improve our lives. So, it took us a few rounds with some people, not so much stuck, as people who just enjoy where they are. There are some victims who still enjoy the story. You know, "my husband did it to me, my mother did it to me." And I'm not going to interfere. I'm wise enough now to know that they need to enjoy their story. I just don't need to be in the story with them.

IJHC: Do any other examples come to mind?

T: The work is very interesting and we very much enjoy it. But then usually when it's over we pretty much let go of it. We'd have to go back and look at the files to even remember the different sessions. I know that we've worked with enough people by now that there are a lot of them we could ask if they would be interested in writing up their experiences.

IJHC: I'd truly be grateful if we could have that. The person who comes for healing is a neglected resource in understanding it.

Thank you ever so much, Trisha and Nina, for sharing your rich experiences in working together.

Mary's story

Hi,

I will call myself "Mary" in this report of my experiences with Dr. Johnson and Nina Zimbelman.

I was diagnosed with Hepatitis C two years ago this spring. It was over a year of doctors and specialists to find the diagnosis. A nurse practitioner who was working at our local health department (and who now works for Dr. Johnson) said, "Have you ever been tested for Hep C?" I very indignantly said "No, I'm not spending any more money on blood tests, and wild goose chases." She said, very calmly and firmly "Mary, if you have Hep C, you've probably have had it for years. If you don't find out and start doing things to take care of your liver, you may be too damn sick to get a liver transplant." My response was, "Two this afternoon would be a good time for you for that test."

She called me on Good Friday of 2000 and asked me to come in. I asked her to tell me the news now, , , She said, "I'm very sorry, Mary, but you have Hep C,..."

My life changed forever. . . I spent the next 24 hours on the Internet, freaking out. . . I went into a depression, I felt guilty, I felt ashamed my past had come back to haunt me. I had to tell my two sons, who were 18 and 24 at the time. My husband and my sons had to be tested. I couldn't believe I had brought this horror to my beloved family. I wanted to die and was terrified to die. Luckily, I had always been very honest with my husband and my sons. They knew I had used drugs in my early twenties. My first husband died at 34 of Hep C, after a long battle with drug use. I used for maybe a year, cleaned myself up. I wanted a family I wanted my life to be different. And it was...

I had spent my life dedicated to my family, our business, my friends. Then, I reached late forties and started menopause, and a doctor mentioned my liver enzymes were elevated. I have been lucky, I had never been sick, I have taken good care of myself thru the years.

I ended up at a specialist in Charlotte, who is a wonderful, caring man and we went through many tests, liver biopsies, bloodwork. The final diagnosis was, Hep C, with class three scarring. His suggestion was: Have 48 weeks of interferon, ribfiron, treatment – staggering treatment of shots in your stomach once a week, and pills daily. I read all the side effects, not a pretty picture. But, I wanted to live so on June 4th of last year I started the program.

On June 7th I woke up screaming with terrible stomach pains, I called the clinic in Charlotte and they said, "This is not the meds. Go to the hospital."

I went to the hospital, explained what I was on and what my diagnosis was. They called two doctors who are gastroenterologists and they admitted me. I lay in the hospital for a week, with a temp from 101 to 104, on demerol, with diarrhea and vomiting. . . Just so sick, I can't explain. Dr. Stack kept saying, "This is the meds you're on," while the clinic kept saying, "No."

They did a colonoscopy and discharged me after one week. They said it would wear off. I was home four days, with a temp of 102 to 104. I couldn't eat, I couldn't drink, I slept constantly. My mother had passed away in January, and I had a dream one afternoon as I lay there: The phone rang and I picked it up and it was my Mom, and she said "Honey, you're very sick. call the doctor."

I woke up and realized I had dreamed, but I called my husband and started to cry and said, "I don't mean to be dramatic here, but I feel like I'm dying."

He phoned and literally screamed at the doctor's office to help me. (He had been calling for days with no callback.)

So I had another week in the hospital, with tests, tests, and more, tests. . . They found what they called an abscess in my cecum. . . I could go on for five more pages. . . The bottom line is that my appendix had burst that night of June 7th and I never got it removed till October 23rd. . . The infection had gone into a pus pocket that they called "retro-cecal." It took me months to get back on my feet – mentally as well as physically.

I realized I had to get back on my feet, I started doing Yoga religiously, eating healthier, taking lots of vitamins. I started feeling great – physically and mentally. People saw a happy person, pretty much always up, positive. . . But inside I felt different.

A friend who had seen Dr. Johnson suggested I talk to her about alternative treatments for the Hep C. I loved the way I felt immediately when I talked to Dr. Johnson. Her words were safe, un-judgmental. I think she may have been one of the only doctors who did not ask me how I got Hep C. (If she did ask, I don't remember the experience – which I believe I recall when other doctors asked. She suggested milk thistle and an appointment with Nina. I went the following week.

I remember sitting in the room with Dr. Johnson waiting for Nina to come in and realizing for the first time I had no idea what I was about to encounter. This is very strange for me because it's been important to me in the past to "know" what's going on, what's going to happen, etc. I had no idea who Nina was, I just trusted. I had been told that Dr. Johnson believed in not only medical but holistic medicine. I again had been waiting a long time to be put on the Interferon treatment. I was feeling anxious, I kept asking doctors, "what can I be doing?" My doctor in Charlotte said, "Nothing, you're doing fine,,," "But something kept nagging at me.." I should be doing something" I should be learning more. I had learned more than I wanted to about the treatment... and kept hearing little bits and pieces about "milk thistle, acupuncture, meditation, drinking gallons of water, less fatty foods. But, that old feeling of I might actually have to do my life different. . . WOW, could I???

So, I actually went, knowing nothing about Nina. . . nothing about what she would Do. I didn't know if I was getting a physical. . . But, I've learned in my old age, to go with my gut feeling, and I felt nothing but, "Yes, yes, yes, calm, accepting"

Dr. J gave Nina some background of my experience with doctors in the hospital, and being so sick. Nina smiled at me and said she felt warmth, a bright light around me. . . mentioned I'm a happy person, funny (which I am). But she saw dark in my stomach area, guilt. . .

I started to cry. . . I thought I had moved on from that long ago. But, as soon as Nina said those words, the emotion was there. She talked to me about how what I did is what I did. It made me who I am. Who I am is someone that I love and enjoy, someone who is loved, and valued by others. She said I will know by June if I want to continue the treatment, that I will just know. She added that if I can learn to forgive myself, she believed I wouldn't need to make that decision.

She kept mentioning my stomach area. As I think of my life I think of this volcano erupting, years of sorrow, years of guilt, not letting go, holding in, swallowing it all down. Even the surgery was not enough. Many people have mentioned to me I always had my hand on my stomach, holding my stomach in. I look back now and I think holding it in, after years it took the grip of my hand to hold it all in.

Nina's words of kindness, straightforwardness, encouragement.. kindly saying to me, "It's okay. You're okay. This is growing in you, hurting all that surrounds it. . . Let it go. . .

So, I drink my gallon of water, I walk my miles, I do my yoga, I quiet my mind, I take my milk thistle, I'm considering acupuncture, I eat healthy, and I smile, and I love, and I accept and I am grateful.

I do feel that I have finally forgiven myself, I finally get it – that who I am and what I have done has made me exactly who I am. . . Someone that I'm very proud of. . . My experience with those two women that day, changed my life forever. I no longer look down when someone asks me what I have, or how I got it. I look them in the eye, not with attitude but with heart. Not bragging, but what is, is. I'm in better health at this point in my life than I ever have been before. I'm sustaining a weight that I always wanted, too. I'm feel complete. I wouldn't change anything, not one thing.

My sons and my husband all tested negative, but of course they would, because this is about me, my journey.

Mary

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