



Cape & Islands Cancer Retreat: Healing Body, Mind and Spirit

by Olivia H. Miller

Last year Sheila Mulcahy had a vision. She wanted to offer a retreat for people whose lives have been affected by cancer – those who currently have or have had cancer, family members and caregivers. And she wanted it to be on Cape Cod.

"It was like a light bulb went off in my head," she said. "We have the beauty, the hotels. I started to think about what would be the ideal retreat...for me!"

The Marstons Mills resident was diagnosed with blood cancer five years ago. A registered oncology nurse, she has personally benefited from a combination of traditional Western medicine and Eastern healing modalities.

"There is a mind/body/spirit connection," said Sheila, 55. "You can't separate them. In the West, physicians are concerned only with the cancer cell or the affected organ. They look at it as a microcosm. But you have to look at all three as a macrocosm."

Sheila shared her idea with several others. One was her friend Shelly Levin, 65, of Bourne. Shelly, who had breast cancer, volunteers at the Falmouth-based nonprofit, Haven for Healing, which provides services to people touched by cancer. She thought a retreat was a great idea.

Sheila also told Kathy Finnegan, a friend who had attended similar retreats; she too loved the idea. The three women, plus Sheila's husband Mark Miller, were officially the planning committee.

After lots of hard work, the Cape & Islands Cancer Retreat became reality on July 9-11 at Wareham's Sacred Heart Retreat Center, 118 heavenly acres of scenic woodlands and gardens on the waterfront.

Along with a gorgeous, peaceful setting and healthy and delicious meals, the retreat offered a wide array of choices, designed to compliment, not replace, traditional medical treatment.



Among the many workshops were yoga and laughter yoga, Reiki, meditation, energy work, gi gong, journaling, Chinese brush painting, life coaching, nutrition classes, and more.

Practitioners donated their time and expertise; businesses, individuals and community members provided goods and services, as well as financial assistance to fund scholarships. "The community really rallied," Sheila said.

"We tried to make it affordable for people going through treatment often can't work," Shelly added. "We asked people to tell us what they could pay."

Over 50 women and men participated in all or some of the weekend. People, ranging in age from their 30s to 80s, came from Cape Cod, the South Coast, South Shore and the Boston area. Some were retreat junkies, others had never been on a retreat; there were couples, singles, friends and caregivers.



Attendees were free to do as much, or as little, as they wanted. It was a place for people to gather, share resources, swap stories and feel hopeful.

"I wanted to go [to the retreat] because with cancer, you feel like you're on an island by yourself, but the retreat provides camaraderie," said Cotuit resident Patty Hinckley-Kilmain, 56, who was diagnosed with breast cancer seven years ago and has fibromyalgia and arthritis. "When you have cancer, it's like your body is out of control. Here I feel like I am taking control of my body rather than it taking control of me."



Harwich resident Jane Chase, 75, was diagnosed with breast cancer when she was 57. Nine years ago, she had a second occurrence; last year, she was diagnosed again. Each cancer was different and treatable.

Jane heard about the retreat at a cancer support group she attends in Dennis. She had never been before, but knew she wanted to come. "I had three other things to do this weekend, including a family birthday party in New Hampshire," she said, "but I needed to do this."

"It's very uplifting. You feel the good energy around you, meet people who have the same feelings as you. There is a certain amount of therapeutic companionship."

"There is life after these diagnoses," said committee member Kathy Finnegan, 63, "but when you hear the word 'cancer,' you think your life is over." Diagnosed with leukemia seven years ago, the Cataumet resident said that for a year she wouldn't tell anyone because she didn't want to be treated differently. After becoming a volunteer at the Leukemia/Lymphoma Society, however, her outlook changed.

"I realized you can get through this and come out the other side. You'll be changed, but not all change is bad. You learn to take the time to stop and smell the roses, and not get into a snit about the little things. A bad hair day doesn't matter anymore."

Kathy finds that attending healing retreats is also tremendously helpful. "It is a wonderful opportunity to learn from others," she said. "I never cease to be amazed by the strength and courage of the people I

meet. It's so inspiring. I feel blessed."

"The participants were into it one hundred percent," Shelly Levin said. "These people are excited about life and living."

The 2nd Annual Cape & Islands Cancer Retreat will be held November 4-6, 2011 at the Sacred Heart Retreat Center in Wareham.

For information, contact Haven for Healing at haven4healing@gmail.com or call 508-563-5722

Photographs published courtesy of Jody MacBeth Brewer

Helping People Through Tough Times

[Haven for Healing](#) is a nonprofit organization that offers free holistic services to people in treatment for cancer. Staffed by volunteers, the organization began 13 years ago, offering complimentary treatments to women with breast cancer.

Shelly Levin, a massage therapist and volunteer coordinator at Haven for Healing, described those early sessions, which were held at Falmouth Hospital's Women's Resource Center.

"They put blankets on conference tables for clients to lie on," she recalled. "But going to a hospital – even for something good – isn't such a great experience. You can't totally relax."



Haven for Healing is now located at Healing Point in Falmouth. Services are offered to anyone – women, men, children – in current or ongoing treatment for cancer.

The nonprofit provides weekly bodywork clinics (Reiki, reflexology, massage), programs for creative expression (journaling, art, gardening), support groups, resources, and referrals.

Haven for Healing is dedicated to enriching the lives of people touched by cancer by focusing on wellness and education. "We share ways to treat nausea, pain, feelings of isolation and depression," said Shelly.

Patty Hinckley-Kilmain, who attended the recent retreat, credits Haven for Healing with helping her get through some tough times. "It's nice to have an hour when you don't have to think and where you can talk, hug, cry, and laugh. It is a loving, safe place where you feel completely nurtured."

"We offer different ways to perceive illness," Shelly explained. "People are not their illness. You are a person who happens to have cancer, but you are not your cancer."

Haven for Healing is located at:

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