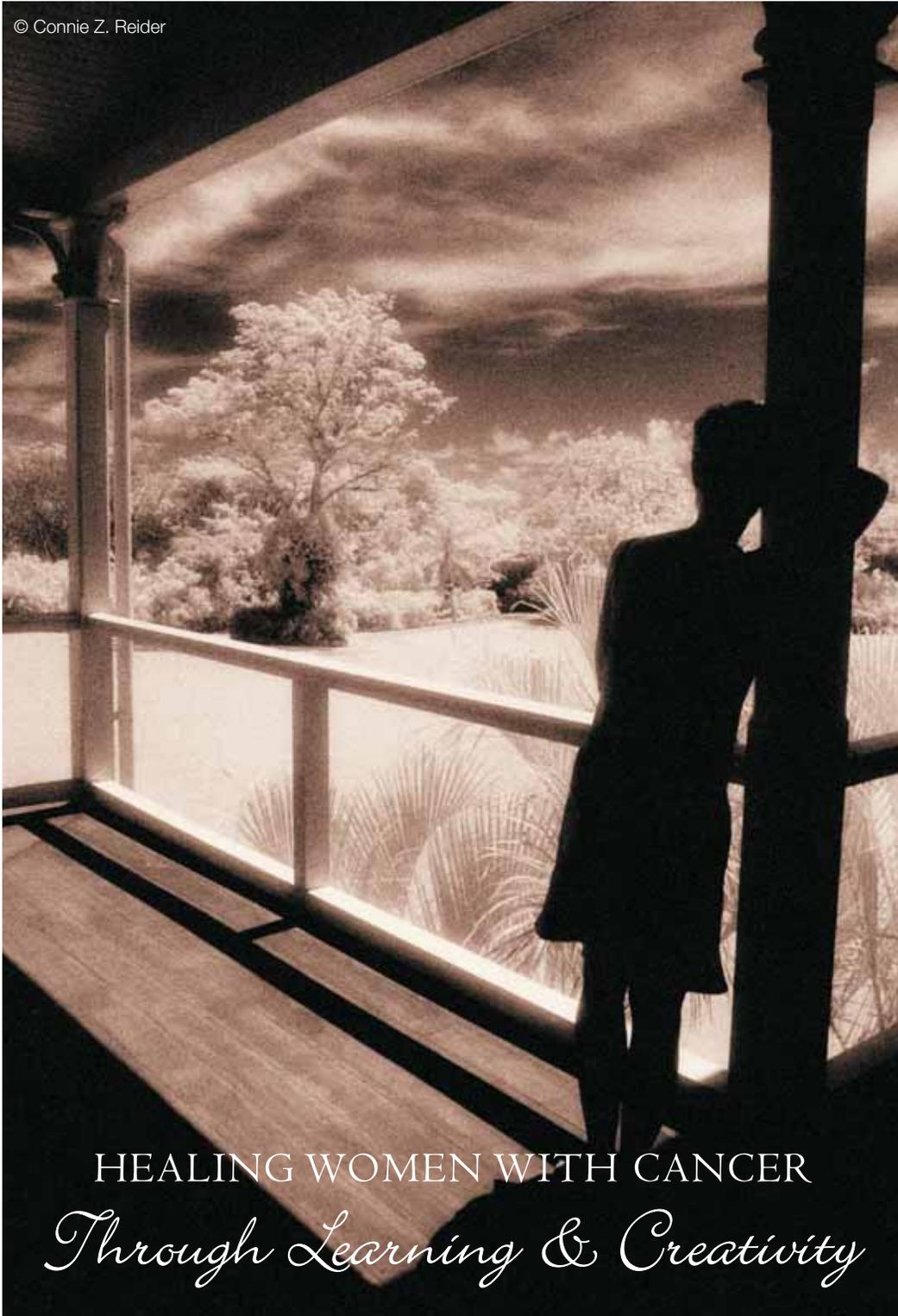


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HEALING WOMEN WITH CANCER  
*Through Learning & Creativity*

BY ELISE LAPRADE

At first sight, the F. Holland Day House, located on a quiet cove in Maine, reminds you of a stunning luxury travel destination. Once inside, the elegant setting of the coastal chalet unfolds. However, visitors to this location are not your typical tourists. Instead, they are attendees of the F. Holland Day Foundation for Creativity and Healing Retreat for Women with Cancer.

The Center itself was built at the turn of the 20th century by F. Holland Day, a famous American photographer. He used the building to house youth in crisis programs. Dr. Matthew Budd, a retired professor from Harvard Medical School, purchased the house in 1998 and after his retirement he and his wife converted the building into a comfortable retreat center.

During his years of practice Dr. Budd was deeply engaged with the emotional aspects of illness. Though an internist, he developed programs and eventually a department of behavioral medicine at the Harvard Community Health Plan to help people live more satisfying and emotionally balanced lives. The programs were scientifically studied and were shown to enhance quality of life and improve depression, fear, and anxiety. Patients with psychosomatic conditions improved considerably; those with chronic conditions found more peace and emotional balance in dealing with their illness. Both groups benefited.

The program, later called the Personal Health Improvement Program, was purchased by Procter and Gamble and later sold to Pfizer. The program is offered in many sites across the country. Dr. Budd wrote and lectured widely on the content and results of the program.

When he retired in 2003 he decided to use the Day facility to house healing retreats and bring his skills to people with cancer. The retreats began in 2004 and are supported by a non-profit foundation.



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Reider developed her craft as a children's photographer. This hobby quickly grew into a successful business venture. Reider used her keen interpersonal skills to enable her subjects to feel relaxed and to forget the camera's presence. Her business has evolved and now includes social events, corporate photography for numerous women's organizations, and projects for cancer organizations such as The National Coalition for Cancer Survivorship. Reider is very involved in The Wellness Community, an international non-profit organization dedicated to providing support, education, and hope for all people affected by cancer—at no cost.

In early winter 1996, a snowstorm that blanketed most of the East Coast caused everything around Reider to stand still. This storm served as a metaphor for Reider. The blizzard did not put Connie's life on hold; breast cancer did. The diagnosis left Reider with a sense of vulnerability and the fear of being unable to care for herself. Reider opted for a mastectomy to remove the mass so that the cancer would be completely eliminated from her mind and body alike. This year, Connie Reider will have the honor of celebrating her ten-year anniversary as a breast cancer survivor.

"Some people define cancer as a gift," says Reider. "I do not believe that cancer is a gift. Instead, I would call it an invitation that comes in a black envelope asking you to answer this question: 'Is this how I want to be living my life?'" She adds that a crisis such as cancer can cause you to face things that you had not previously addressed and can fuel your desire to make changes in your life.

As a result of her life-altering experience, Reider's photography took a new twist: Images that she captured became metaphors for walking the path of life, and her subjects now dealt with solitude. Reider's photography portrayed the positive and negative aspects of life. Using infrared film, her photos capture a light spectrum that is invisible to the naked eye. Clouds become fluffy white, blue skies turn black, and skin becomes porcelain-like. Due to its ethereal appearance, Reider calls her unique style of photography "Dreamscapes."

Elizabeth Opalenik, a friend and photography mentor of Reider, arranged for Connie to meet Dr. Budd in the spring of 2004. After their meeting,

Dr. Budd explains, "We're not promising to cure a patient's complaint or disease, but instead to help her look at patterns of behavior that put her in a state that may contribute to her illness, or to alleviate some of the pain that results from her condition. We hope for patients to look more at today instead of at their fears of the future as a result of their disease state."

Dr. Budd says that the presence of cancer in a person's life often triggers deep emotional reactions and questioning. Guilt may occur, "What did I do to have this happen to me?" Anger and blame is often present, "If it were not for... I would be healthy." It is his/her fault. Hopelessness and despair often occur.

All of these emotions have negative physiological effects and damage people's ability to live fully. This is what the Retreat focuses on. The tools Dr. Budd teaches help people to observe and alter these emotions, not live helplessly with them.

Connie Z. Reider, a photographer with over 20 years of experience, serves as co-founder of the Retreat. As a visual person with an acute love of nature,

Connie was invited to become a facilitator for the Retreats. In 2004, the F. Holland Day Center for Healing and Creativity opened its doors. The retreat is a seven-day workshop that provides an opportunity for women with cancer or other life-threatening illnesses to mobilize their natural powers of healing. The staff for the Retreat includes therapists and healing educators.

The results were nothing short of spectacular. Deep psychological learning, meditation and physical practices such as yoga, in conjunction with creative immersion, proved to be a powerful combination for growth and healing. Some people mistake the retreats for photography or writing workshops. The creative activities are merely tools which, when in a carefully designed context, enable people to transform their lives to create desirable outcomes with the same vigor that they draw, or photograph. The creative arts help them to exercise their “possibility” muscle.

Reider states, “Some of the participants of the retreat come simply for the healing, others come because they want to learn more about photography. We always stress that it’s not about the beauty of the photos they capture, but the meaning behind them. Images should be self-metaphors.”

*“We are interested in giving women with cancer the best quality of life possible by focusing on today, and not how much time is left in their lives because of their disease.”*

Since its inception in 2004, the core retreat staff has grown to include Molly Reno, an attorney from Michigan and Susan Irish, a minister from Vermont. The staff stays in contact with participants after the retreats, as both coach and friend. Many participants return for a second retreat or to assist at retreats. Connie emphasizes that “even as we grow, we need to maintain the limited size and intimacy of the retreats that allows women to open up and look deeply.”

This year the number of retreats has tripled and the program has been embellished but the core learning remains constant. Dr. Budd summarizes, “We do not work magic. Instead, we are interested in giving women with cancer the best quality of life possible by focusing on today, and not how much time is left in their lives because of their disease. We want participants to walk away living their lives like they are the main show and not dress rehearsals.”

*Elise LaPrade is a senior communications and publications coordinator at ION.*

The F. Holland Day Foundation for Creativity and Healing Retreat for Women with Cancer is a non-profit organization. Lodging and food is included in the cost of tuition.

Tuition support is available.

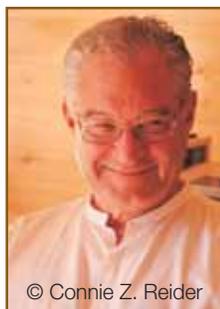
*Retreats are limited to 10 guests.*

#### **2005 RETREAT DATES:**

August 28–September 4

September 25–October 2

For more information on the Healing Retreats for Women with Cancer, please visit [www.fhollanddaycenter.org](http://www.fhollanddaycenter.org).



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Dr. Budd is the author of the book, *You Are What You Say—A Harvard Doctor’s Six-Step Proven Program for Transforming Stress Through the Power of Language*. The book is available at [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com).



For information about Connie Z. Reider’s book, *In Shadow and Light*, please call 301-229-1313 or e-mail [connie@conniereider.com](mailto:connie@conniereider.com).