



healing words

BY MARK W. McCLURE, MD, MEDICAL EDITOR

the new frontier

The founder of the American Holistic Nurses Association (AHNA), Charlotte McGuire, transitioned at 2:22 on May 15, 2008. “Charlie,” as she was affectionately known, had a dream that one day all nurses would embrace holism in their personal and professional lives. To help manifest her dream, she and 75 other founding members launched the American Holistic Nurses Association in 1981. Twenty-five years later, a major milestone was achieved when the American Nurses Association officially recognized the AHNA as a nursing specialty. Today, the AHNA serves more than 3,600 members nationwide with over 140 local chapters.

Cheri and I had the honor to know and love Charlie. We first met her several years ago at a joint conference of the American Holistic Medical Association and the AHNA. Charlie joined a sharing circle with Cheri, me, and five other conference attendees. Although Cheri had been a member of the AHNA since 1990, she had never met Charlie. Donning a black cowgirl hat and wearing cowgirl boots, jeans, a sequined blouse, and a turquoise lanyard, Charlie introduced herself to the group. Her wise blue eyes twinkled as she flashed each of us an engaging smile. We shared stories. Charlie went last.

She told us that she had been battling breast cancer. Her salvation, she said, was equine therapy. In 1999, she and her partner, Robbie Nelson, had founded the Buffalo Woman Ranch near Dove Creek, Colorado. The ranch is a 50-acre sanctuary nestled between the Blue Mountains in Utah and the Four Corners. Over the ensuing years, they assimilated a herd of six horses: Magic, Belle, Beau Soleil, Cody, Star, and April. We were captivated as Charlie shared each of the horse’s stories. Later that evening, at a fund raising event, we were delighted when a weekend equine experiential workshop at the Buffalo Woman Ranch was auctioned. Cheri and I refused to be outbid. Three months later Cheri and I embarked on an unforgettable journey to the Buffalo Woman Ranch.

After settling in, we were instructed in equine etiquette.

We were then introduced to the herd and “The Way of the Horse.” According to Charlie, horses embody many qualities of our “awakened” nature, including strength, compassion, and freedom. Their powerful and magical presence serves as a profound mirror for our emotions. Their sensitivity and intuition provides deep reflection of our mind and soul and opportunities to release thought patterns/beliefs that block us from experiencing our inner knowingness.

Cheri and I immersed ourselves in the magic of the Buffalo Woman Ranch experience. Robbie, Marissa, and a menagerie of four-legged creatures made us feel at home. Each night, after a wholesome home-cooked dinner, we swapped stories into the night. Each day brought a new adventure. By the end of the workshop, we were hooked. We even toyed with the idea of someday moving to the Buffalo Woman Ranch.

We kept in touch with Robbie and Charlie. We also frequently logged onto the Buffalo Woman Ranch website (www.buffalowomanranch.com) for a ‘fix.’ We traveled again to the Buffalo Woman Ranch in February, 2008, but not for a workshop this time. About eight weeks prior to our visit, Charlie learned that her breast cancer had spread. This time we came to be with Charlie and help Robbie manage the ranch. We spent five magical days together. After the chores were done, Charlie told us stories about her healing journey and retraced the events surrounding the founding of the AHNA. She was at peace.

According to an e-mail we received after Charlie’s transition, she made her journey home with grace, ease, and beauty. Her joy that last evening was nearly overwhelming. Her last night was filled with story telling in a room filled with loved ones. The following morning, the hole that everyone expected was not quite there; somehow she had filled that space with a love that defied form.

Now when Cheri and I look up at the stars, we image Charlie riding across the night sky on a spirit horse singing yippee-ki-yay. **h&h**

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