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# The Art *of* Wellbeing

A RESOURCE FOR  
HEALTH AND HEALING



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## INTRODUCTION

**T***he Art of Wellbeing: A Resource for Health and Healing* evolved at a time of personal and professional transition. Putting our energy into fields where we had experience, we began the journey of interviewing individuals in both traditional medicine and complementary alternative medicine (CAM). We then expanded to include industries that may not always be seen as providing health care but in essence have a significant impact on health. What we experienced was not only additional insight but transformation in our lives. During this journey, new learnings with providers outside the healthcare silo were revealed. This new awareness may help others who are experiencing transition and are seeking new motivation toward wellness.

**ANITA:** My mother died in a nursing home hospice after struggling with pneumonia, heart failure, and the painful effects of being over-medicated. One month after my mother died, my job also ended. My younger daughter Jennifer returned from France and

needed a temporary home. My husband was being treated for several health conditions. I was exhausted and discouraged. As I was experiencing both personal and professional grief, thus began a time of exploration.

Through the painful process of my mother being rushed through a myriad of healthcare settings—emergency rooms, hospitals, rehab facilities, nursing homes, and assisted living centers, I became appalled by the fragmented care and apparent burnout of the professional staff. Most physicians, providers, and caretakers continued to rush my mother and our family while moving us through their systems. My mother was often struggling, saddened, anxious, and at times neurotic due to higher doses of drugs she was not used to taking. The most startling was when she fell out of her hospice bed during the night—she died within a couple of days due to the trauma while she devotedly held a picture of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus. I still remember her saying, “It’s not easy to die.”

After my mom died, I reflected on my thirty years’ experience in health care and realized that I was one of those hurried, burned-out healthcare workers. Thus, I began to explore other opportunities. Specifically, I was increasingly interested in traditional and holistic services to help balance the inequities in traditional systems. My intent was to share insights gained with those who may be seeking solutions to the barriers related to achieving wellbeing within themselves or their organizations. This ultimately would then lead to more opportunities to collaborate in order to avoid difficult healthcare experiences.

**JENNIFER:** During my four years living in Paris after college, I led a busy, often hectic life. My days were filled with teaching English for well-to-do French families, my own intensive contemporary violin studies, the work required to launch a non-profit arts organization, and intensive translation studies. Not to mention that the daily commute within Paris via train and subway was unpredictable due to frequent construction delays and regular strikes.

In the summers, I returned home or traveled within Europe, performing and/or working administrative jobs at various summer music festivals. Though I was just barely scraping out a living, I was able to afford Parisian rent each month—and sometimes a cheap French pastry on occasion. To lower my carbon footprint, I ate a mostly vegan diet. As it turned out, this helped me save money, too.

The experience was liberating though definitely grueling at times. A friend messaged me on Facebook to ask how I was managing to survive in Europe. She seemed incredulous that I was eking out a living there. She was interested in doing the same but seemed trepid and daunted by the task. At the time, I was slightly stunned by the question because, from my standpoint, I had no choice but to survive. Well, through the daily grind of carrying my violin and backpack in the crowded transit systems, I eventually developed a shoulder issue that made it painful to play the violin. Given these factors, and having put closure to my music studies and nonprofit work, I decided to return to the Twin Cities in my home state of Minnesota.

Even once I had moved back to my own country, I had the continual nagging sense of being a foreigner. It was difficult to put my experiences into words. Furthermore, people didn't like hearing about France over and over again. To top it off, most of my childhood friends had either moved away or were busy with their own careers and family lives.

Seeking care for my shoulder condition, and trying to get my bearings, I volunteered and engaged in projects outside of music—permaculture, teaching, arts administration, and solar energy. Peripherally, I had always been interested in these activities, and getting more involved with them not only broadened my experiences but also afforded me the opportunity to interact with leaders I admired across a spectrum of industries. Through observing these individuals and contributing to society in new ways, I began to feel empowered again, and healthier.

As my mom and I both worked to support each other through our respective transitions, we began to notice commonalities in our experiences and reflected on our thirty-five-year age difference. Through this process of grief, healing, and job transition, we gained a more complete view of the many components that impact health and wellbeing.

For *The Art of Wellbeing: A Resource for Health and Healing*, more than seventy individuals were interviewed across diverse industries—physicians, providers, nurses, integrative practitioners, clean energy leaders, permaculture designers, artists, musicians, and spiritual leaders. We gathered their insights and responses to the following questions:

1. How would you define health and wellbeing?
2. What are the barriers to achieving health and wellbeing?
3. What are solutions to these barriers?
4. What is one key recommendation for the readers of this book?

Ultimately, we share the wisdom, principles, and values contributed by these multi-sector leaders. These individuals include many colleagues in our own Twin Cities area. For individuals whose organizations are outside of the Twin Cities area, their locations are indicated in their introductions. We transcribed all of the interviews, several of which were thousands of words in length, and for consistency consolidated them into 250–300 word responses. Their recommendations serve as fuel as we seek new and enlightening ways to feed our minds.

Each of the seven chapters of *The Art of Wellbeing: A Resource for Health and Healing* focuses on a different industry that has its own vocabulary, thus the diversity of resources and responses deepens our understanding of health and wellbeing.