

## In Memoriam

# Christine Luthra, MD (1951 – 2006)

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I am writing to commemorate the life of a dedicated homeopath and a splendid human being whose name and accomplishments are not as widely known as they deserve to be, and whose recent, untimely death left a serious void in the hearts of a great many practitioners in America and Europe who knew her and in the lives of thousands of individuals and families throughout New England who felt blessed and honored to have been in her care.

I first met Christine around 1982, not long after we both moved to Boston, she fresh from her Family Practice Residency, with two small children in tow. Born in Belgium to French-speaking parents, she was educated in philosophy and medicine at the University of Louvain, a venerable Catholic institution dating back to medieval times, and remained a serious intellectual all her life, with far-ranging interests in philosophy, literature, fine art, music, and poetry, not to mention more esoteric fields, such as anthroposophy, psychospiritual healing, Jungian psychology, astrology, and indeed homeopathy itself. Back in Europe after an extended spiritual pilgrimage to India, she met her future husband, Dev, who was himself partly of Indian ancestry, emigrated with him to the United States, and there gave birth to her two children, Yannig and Lakshmi. Her marriage was short-lived, but the yoga of running a busy practice as well as raising two children to a large extent on her own gave her life a concrete, practical focus that engaged and sustained her and brought her deep joy and fulfillment throughout her

life.

Her practice quickly grew and flourished, and as her friend and neighbor, I found her inimitable blend of homeopathy and philosophy both congenial and complementary to my own. I still treasure the memory of our impromptu lunch meetings and

walks in the arboretum, where we could let our fancy take us, conversing about everything under the sun with a warmth of heart and a freedom of imagination that sometimes left us both nearly breathless with pleasure, and that made me sublimely grateful for the existence of such a soul-companion as one meets but seldom in the course of a life. Yet at the same time I knew that this was just one side of her multi-faceted nature, and that other friends whom I also knew were having very different kinds of experience with her that were just as treasured and memorable.

I valued her first of all as a skilled physician and homeopath, who was faithful to the essence of the old teachings, yet ever sought to expand her horizons and deepen her knowledge. Already learned and practiced in the use of anthroposophical remedies, she often prescribed them as intercurrents or more generic prescriptions for basic, energetic support when the exact *simillimum* appeared elusive, or when she was reluctant to repeat it just yet. At the same time, she was receptive and indeed dedicated to many of the newer teachings, especially to the pioneering work of Jan Scholten, whom she knew personally, and the charismatic style of Lou Klein, whose highly personal synthesis she followed dili-

gently and faithfully for years. I think it must have been in Lou's class that she first became acquainted with many of the best students and practitioners of her own generation, and so eventually began teaching some of the younger students as well.

Our methods and styles of practice were similar enough that we often referred patients to each other when we had given them so many remedies that we realized we were part of the problem rather than the solution, and I know for a fact that many of my referrals were greatly benefited by the exchange. With Betty Wood, M.D., another long-time friend and colleague, she was also a founding member of NEHA, the New England Homeopathic Academy, which sponsors seminars by leading homeopaths from Europe, India, and throughout the world. Yet she herself remained a bit shy in her adopted country, and wrote very little in English, despite her remarkable fluency in it, although finally, toward the end of her stay in Boston, she did teach a course with two colleagues that was very well-received.

She was also a fine and dedicated physician, who always put the interest of her patients well ahead of the purity of any doctrine. A gifted and intuitive diagnostician, she used laboratory tests both for screening and confirmation, prescribed antibiotics and other conventional drugs when indicated, and interfaced freely and effectively with specialists, to whom she often referred, and with hospitals when needed.

But above all, she was a friend and a *soul*, a warm, lively, and attractive human being who related easily to others on a spiritual plane, yet whose spiritual life was well-grounded, fully engaged in and by no means disdainful of ordinary life on this far from untroubled planet. Indeed, I would have to say that here lay both her unique gift and an exquisite vulnerability, for her empathy with others in pain and indeed with the state of the world at times became more intense than her sensitive nature could easily tolerate.

This quality first became apparent to me and took me by surprise in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks of September 11 and the US-led invasion of Afghanistan. Early in 2002 she was hospitalized with severe, acute abdominal pain secondary to an inter-

mittent intestinal obstruction that laid her low for weeks and required opium-type narcotics to afford any relief. Always interested in and knowledgeable about world affairs, she had become alarmed by the latest turns to the right in American politics, from the disputed election of 2000, which she was sure had been stolen, to the invasion of Afghanistan, which she instinctively distrusted and saw no benefit in.



Dr. Christine Luthra

By the time I visited her in the hospital, we both knew that the Iraqi invasion had already been decided upon. For me this was largely a political matter, a clear violation of international law, to be opposed with marches, demonstrations, articles, and outpourings of public outrage and indignation. But for Christine, I realized that she felt this war crime literally, intensely, and in every cell and fiber of her body, as though the mechanism by which most people compartmentalize such matters was simply not available or acceptable to her.

Eventually she overcame this illness, but about a year later she discovered a lump in her breast that proved to be not only cancerous, but exceptionally aggressive in both its cellular morphology and its clinical behavior. Immediately after surgery, she began a punishing course of chemotherapy in spite of her serious misgivings about using the drugs, not only because of their side-effects, which were intense and worrisome in themselves, but also because their cell-destroying purpose went against every instinct that she lived by and every philosophy that her practice was based on. Although she was a wise, experienced physician, and by no means a fanatic for homeopathy or unalterably opposed to conventional medicines when indicated, it pained and saddened her beyond measure when she herself proved unequal to the task of living solely according to her chosen principles and felt compelled to resort to methods of brute force that she herself detested. Nevertheless, she did what she knew she had to do, supplementing with the best alternative treatments available, naturally including homeopathic medicines as well. For two years she went into remission and did quite well, although greatly weakened and as yet unable to resume her active practice.

Some time later, she sold her house in Boston and moved herself and her practice to Maine at

the invitation of a new man in her life, with high hopes of beginning a new and less hectic mode of life. But neither the plan nor the relationship long survived the recurrence of her cancer about a year ago, with metastases in several places, including the peritoneal cavity. Once again, in spite of the same highly aggressive pathology, which required a central venous line and total parenteral nutrition at times, she rallied repeatedly and heroically in one of the most remarkable displays of physical and emotional fortitude that I have ever witnessed. Although she was severely emaciated and weakened by the chemotherapy, and had been on the brink of death several times already, she almost always brightened up when friends dropped by, and when I visited her this past May, we talked most animatedly for hours on sundry topics, just as we had in days gone by.

But that was the last time I saw her alive. By then Yannig and Lakshmi, now fully grown, had put their own lives on hold to be with her and care for her in the final months, and sent out regular e-mail communiqués to her many friends and well-wishers, as well as her mother, sister, and brothers, who visited from Europe as often as they could, while her death loomed more and more inexorably and slowly encroached on what was left of her life. Her last days were peaceful and serene, without pain or torment.

She died in late August, at the age of 55, and the funeral service at her church in Portland was quiet, deeply affecting, and memorable, not only for the love and warmth that were felt and expressed by the many friends and family members who spoke of her, but also for the depth and variety of her friendships and interests, as personified in the diversity of her mourners, who included friends and relatives, colleagues and patients, poets and painters, fellow-parishioners and atheists, with each of whom she had shared experiences that were unique, yet always seemed to go further, toward that spiritual realm wherein all souls are one.

She was a dear friend and an inspiration to many, not only as a homeopath and a physician, both of which roles she practiced with skill, grace, and distinction, but above all as a fellow human being, a loving parent, a beloved daughter and sister, a wounded soul on the path to enlightenment and capable of great beauty that touched the sublime. Although she was not a saint, and had her share of foibles and frailties like everyone else, she always kept her gaze fixed on the divine, on what was best and truest about each one of us, and so reminded us to look for and even helped us to see that in ourselves and others as well. She will be missed.

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