



Healing Cancer in a Holistic Environment: An Interview With Karin Whitney Cooke, RN

Interview by Karen Burnett

Karin Whitney Cooke, RN, president and cofounder of Kokolulu Farm and Cancer Retreats, Inc in Hawaii, is a cancer survivor and a registered nurse with 40 years of experience and research in allopathic as well as complementary and alternative medicines. She has a bachelor of science in natural health, and has experience as an oncology nurse as well as clinical research coordinator, and is co-author with Dr Jeanne Achterberg on research of distant intentionality and healing. Additionally, Karin is a cancer guide/wellness coach, nutrition consultant, auricular acupuncturist certified by the National Acupuncture Association, Reiki master, qigong teacher, and teacher of energy medicine to university medical students. <http://www.cancer-retreats.org>

Integrative Medicine: A Clinician's Journal (IMCJ): Where did you grow up, where did you go to school, and how did you become interested in nursing and medicine, and then complementary and alternative medicine?

Karin Cooke: I grew up in southern California. As a little girl it was one of those things—I grew up reading all the nursing books I could find. I knew I wanted to be a nurse and my dad used to tell me “Don’t put all your eggs in one basket. Think about being something else, like becoming a doctor.” None of that ever fit for me, and as far back as I can remember, I wanted to go into nursing.

My dad had a heart attack when I was 13 or 14. It was very mild, but it was my first exposure to caregiving and to the medical realm. He and I were out together, just the two of us, when it occurred—and he had to tell me how to drive the car to get him to the hospital. I felt so empowered to be taking care of my daddy. That experience cemented my drive to go into nursing.

I always had an interest in research. I can remember in high school having a desire to someday do research that didn’t involve medicine or drugs, which is what I considered medicine in those days. I now know medicine to be anything that helps or heals. I don’t know why at such a young age I knew I wanted to do research that didn’t involve drugs, but it was a dream I held to through-

out my nursing career.

I met my late husband when I was in high school and we dated all through high school and college. We weren’t married very many years before he was diagnosed with a non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma, which eventually took his life. He was on chemotherapy, a multidrug regime, for 12 years—very, very sick. He was the fifth person in four generations of his family to die of cancer. I believed there had to be some link, and I felt strongly it was not just genetics. We had two small daughters that I didn’t want to have follow this pattern of cancer. At the time, I was a new, young RN, and wondered why conventional medicine couldn’t seem to do something to stop this. That pretty much fueled my desire to learn everything else there was about healing the body and that became my driving force, which continues today.

I suppose that answers that question of how I got interested in complementary and alternative, integrated medicine. It very much defined me as a nurse, as my passions were always in integrative modalities, as opposed to treating with drugs. For some reason, that was knowledge I had from early on. Drugs weren’t doing it; we needed to find something more.

IMCJ: Doing what you do now, do you find that your background in Western medicine complements your holistic approach to treating illness?

Karin Cooke: It does, absolutely. I have a deeper, more complete understanding of what may be going on in the body. I had the opportunity to train residents and interns at a Western internal-medicine clinic for many years at a teaching hospital in Portland. As a result, I have a strong background in Western medicine and I understand what my patients are going to be told and why. This helps me to seek other, natural modalities to achieve the goal or recognize what it is that Western medicine is not looking at that we need to bring into our approach. Nutrition comes to mind very quickly in that regard.

Aside from helping me have a better understanding, I find it also gives me more credibility with my clients.

When they learn that I also have knowledge in Western medicine, they know they can bring those questions and confusions to me to help them sort through. When the client has a full understanding of treatment options, they can make better decisions, of course! They then feel empowered and take a more active role in their healing process. I believe this contributes to a better outcome.

IMCJ: You've had your own experience with cancer, haven't you?

Karin Cooke: I have. I am a cancer survivor of 12 years now!

IMCJ: How has your own personal experience with cancer informed your work at Kokolulu Farm and Cancer Retreats?

Karin Cooke: Being a cancer survivor puts you in "The Club." When my late husband was fighting his cancer, we were very young and we didn't know anyone our age battling the disease. He died 20 years ago. Back then, you just didn't see that much cancer; you heard about it but it didn't happen to you! We are a much more global society today and have more awareness of cancer, generally, than we did then. Dave and I never had anyone we could talk to that really understood the experience we were living. I find that clients open up more and they get that I know what they're going through because I've been there, too—not only as a survivor, but as a caregiver as well.

I had a cervical cancer and was able to have a hysterectomy and excise it. I didn't need to have chemotherapy or radiation, but my husband had been through all of that so I also have a deep compassion and understanding for caregivers and what they're going through. This is also valuable in working with our clients and their families. It's not only the client that we're treating, but the caregiver, too. I think that a team approach is very healing—for people to know that they're understood. Caregivers need and appreciate being recognized, and the patient appreciates when their caregiver is taken care of too!

IMCJ: You've seen it from all angles.

Karin Cooke: I have! I was an oncology nurse before becoming a research nurse. So yes, I have seen it from all angles.

IMCJ: Could you please describe the research you have

done on the distant intentionality and healing with Dr Jeanne Acherberg?

Karin Cooke: Dave died in 1992 and I remarried a couple years later to my current husband, Lew, co-director of Kokolulu Farm and Cancer Retreats. He and I bought our Hawaii farm in 1999. We both had a deep interest in natural healing; he is a mental health therapist, bodyworker, and qigong monk, trained in China. We wanted to develop the property with the dream of bringing people here and teaching natural healing techniques.

Connecting with Jeanne was an amazing experience. I had heard that Dr Earl Bakken, the man who invented the pacemaker and quite a generous advocate of blended medicine as he calls it, lived on the Big Island. He wanted a prayer study done and Jeanne and I came together to formulate what that might look like. We were just beginning our research, but Harvard and Duke Universities had finished their big prayer studies. So, there we were, trying to do a significant prayer study on the Big Island with limited resources—such as a very limited pool of potential subjects. We questioned how we would do something that might make a difference. What was it going to look like? What would the design be?

At the same time, our qigong master, originally from China but teaching in Portland when we met her, came to do a qigong training with us in Hawaii. While she was here, we asked if she would go into the functional magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) unit and send distant intentionality (DI) of *qi* in a random on-and-off pattern, as I directed her, to Jeanne who was in the control room with me.

The primary neuroradiologist we used to analyze our data was Dr Todd Richards from the University of Washington. When he looked at that first scan, he said it looked more like a positron emission tomography scan. He said he had never seen an MRI of the brain light up like that. That helped define our research and we thought, "Perhaps this could be our design?" What we found, however, is that healers didn't want to go in the MRI; they were afraid that it would interrupt their *qi* flow, or somehow change their "powers."

It was very interesting that the majority of healers we talked to all said that same thing, especially since this was 10 years ago. All those healers seemed to just know, right off the bat, "No I don't want to do that. It will mess up my power and my energy." I don't personally agree with that, but that's another story.

What we did, ultimately, was to put receivers (of the healing intention) in the MRI for a scan of the brain while we had the healer in the control room sending the distant intentionality in a random off-and-on pattern. We used healers of many different modalities, such as Reiki, qigong, Christian prayer, psychic prayer, Hawaiian "breathing with the *Ha*." We defined *healer* by the fact

that they had a following of people who considered them to be healers. We didn't require any kind of certification because we wanted to make this as broad as we could in the definition of what a *healer* was. So for the healers to each have a following that thought of them as such satisfied that definition.

In the first part of the study we had the healers send intentionality to someone they had a history of working with in some capacity. These were our "bonded pairs." When we whittled out all the scans we couldn't use, due to movement artifact, for example, we ended up with data on about 15 participants. Out of 15, 12 of them had significant changes that occurred in the brain with the on-signal—signal changes that were not there with the do-not-send signal. In other words, I would say "go, stop, stop, go, go, etc" and when they were not sending their thoughts or their intention of healing energy, I would, as we say in Hawaii, "talk story" with them so that they were thinking something totally unrelated and their minds and thoughts weren't on the person (receiver) in the MRI.

We had 12 two-minute epochs in the design, so there were 24 minutes of distant intentionality being sent in an off-and-on fashion. This part of our research was very statistically significant, but we wondered if the reason the data were so strong was because the healers knew the people they're working with. What if the healers were sending DI to someone they did not know? Part 2 of that study looked at healers sending distant intentionality to people they did not know. Because of Bell's Theorem and entanglement theory, we didn't want the pairs to even see each other prior to the scan. So I would line these people up, which was a little tricky on an island, and then bring them in to meet each other at the end, and I can't tell you how many times they knew each other as friends. They might come from opposite ends of the island and they were brothers. We threw all those scans out. We did this for a very long time, until we got about 20 scans of people who truly had no relation or knowledge of each other. The results of this part of the research project were not statistically significant.

Then, we started thinking, "Is it the healer or is it the bond?" In part 3 of the study we asked people who had never thought of themselves as a healer to send healing thoughts, whatever that looked like for them—love, thought, or whatever—to someone they were bonded with in some capacity, be it a mother and daughter, husband and wife, friends, etc. Again, the results were statistically significant.

Pretty powerful. But what I always tell people when they talk about our study is that just because part 2 did not show a number that was statistically significant for science to call it effective, still it did work. It's really no surprise to me that prayer is more powerful between people you know. Then again, I always remind people that this was a very tiny study—but still pretty cool!

IMCJ: When you speak now of setting the intention to heal, is this study the basis for that idea?

Karin Cooke: I suppose so, on some level. But it's more like an understanding and a belief system of mine. It becomes my value system, and I just believe that. In qigong I learned that as well. Positive energy circulates positive qi and negative energy creates blockages, since the qi isn't flowing properly. To answer your question, I'm sure there's a relation. But it goes way deeper than that. It's not just that I did this research and now say, "Because of this tiny research study, if you send distant intentionality there's going to be a healing effect." It goes way deeper than that for me. It goes down to a level of knowing, at least for myself.

IMCJ: Were the study and the founding of Kokolulu Farm tied together in some way?

Karin Cooke: Jeanne and I designed the study, and she and I were both cancer survivors. Earl Bakken hired us to do this study for him. He said, "What would you ladies like to do while you're doing this for me." We both thought it would be great to do some sort of cancer aftercare program because we knew from experience that once you have come through cancer, people expect you to return to your old life as if nothing ever happened—get back to work, do everything you were doing before, be the person you were before. But in fact you're changed. You've gone through the dark night of the soul and you have amassed new wisdom. Things have changed and that needs to be honored and respected. Jeanne and I wanted to have an aftercare retreat program to help people realize and acknowledge that change and to honor that they've come through a lot—and to allow participants to discuss what to do with this new wisdom that they gained by going through that dark night of the soul.

Initially, we looked at doing the retreats at some of the resorts on the Big Island and encountered a couple of stumbling blocks. First, it was just not cost-effective. It was going to be very expensive at a resort. Secondly, the resorts didn't really welcome the idea of having cancer patients there. It didn't exactly set a good vibe in their mind that aligned with that they wanted. We ended up tabling the concept of the cancer aftercare program for a few years while we finished the study.

After the research ended, in 2006, we decided to bring the cancer aftercare program back out and hold the retreats on Kokolulu Farm, which is the farm Lew and I had bought. What we noticed in the first 2 years of operation was that 90% or more of the people who came to the retreats weren't in the aftercare phase, but deep in

the throes of their diagnosis—whether just diagnosed and didn't want to do Western medicine, or about to begin a conventional treatment regime. They wanted to know what helped and what they could do alongside of, or sometimes instead of, Western medicine. We decided to drop the word *aftercare* and just call it a "cancer retreat."

We always discuss the research Jeanne and I did at our cancer retreats. We suggest our participants share their diagnosis with as many as they can. Get on prayer lists. We want them to have awareness that having distant intentionality sent to them helps! We also have discussions that if it is helpful when others send positive intention to us, think how powerful it must be when we send positive intention to ourselves!

IMCJ: What year did Kokolulu Farm open for the first time?

Karin Cooke: Lew and I purchased the property in 1999. It's a 7-acre piece of land in what has always been the farming belt for the state of Hawaii. We have an expansive view of the ocean and the gentle trade winds blow most of the time, giving us reportedly the cleanest air on Earth! This farming community just kind of fell by the wayside for many years, then became sugarcane land. Then, when that died back, it was a sleepy area of the state and certainly of the Big Island as well. Kona grew and grew and became a tourist spot. We are about an hour north of Kona. The north part of the island was just a sleepy little village, but that's where the breadbasket was. That's where most of the food was grown for the state and had been throughout history. Then it was sent to the other islands via canoe. This area is now enjoying a resurgence of people striving to grow food in the year-round environment. We had always wanted to grow our own food so we bought this 7-acre piece of property and thought, "Wow, this is like the greatest place to get to do that." There had been cows on the land for the 30 years since the sugarcane era, so we figured it was nice and fertile, which it is. We bought it figuring we'd have a 5-year plan: maybe in 5 years we'd retire and move here.

We were there within a year. Going back and forth was just too difficult—physically as well as emotionally. Each time we had to get on a plane back to the mainland we'd get so depressed. We finally wondered, "Why are we doing this? Let's just move there and get going." That's how the farm started. We wanted to be able to grow organic food for ourselves and for our guests, so in 2000 we started planting. Trees first, then veggies and herbs and flowers. I might add, neither Lew nor I were farmers. Remember, I said I grew up in southern California—in a city! It's been quite the learning process.

IMCJ: The food at Kokolulu Farm and Cancer Retreat, as you mentioned, is vegetarian and organic. Do you believe this is an important contribution to healing?

Karin Cooke: Absolutely. You know we have research, but we also have our own inner-knowing. I am personally appalled by how unhealthy most of the food sold in supermarkets is for us. I was visiting my daughter in Seattle last month. She and her husband and friends were planning a barbecue one evening. I don't eat meat so I thought I'd just run to the store and pick up something that I felt like having for dinner. I went to the large, chain supermarket nearby and looked through the entire store. I was looking at the labels and it was just blowing my mind how difficult it was to find something that didn't have sugar in it, much less another kind of chemical.

I've been a vegetarian since my late husband was diagnosed—about 30 years, probably 35 years. I think some people may need meat, but I don't want it for myself. I think organic is important. I also think that there's a difference between organically grown and certified organic. I'm trying to help people understand that now. I know with government regulations it's become quite expensive to be certified organic, but there are many people like ourselves who are growing organically but don't have the certification. I think people need to know that distinction. If it's not certified it doesn't mean it's not organic. And, I realize purchasing all organic foods can be very expensive. I think what's important is that you get live food grown without fertilizers and pesticide. And, try to eat local. If the food has not had to travel thousands of miles to get to us, it can be much more nutritious!

IMCJ: Your retreat uses natural farming with indigenous microorganisms. What is this all about?

Karin Cooke: We use Korean Natural Farming methods. My understanding is that 50 or more countries throughout the world use this method and only one state in the United States is now adopting it, and that's Hawaii. So there's a lot for this country to learn. Korean Natural Farming uses, as you said, indigenous microorganisms or IMOs. You learn in this procedure and this concept to harvest the natural indigenous organisms that you have growing on your own farm, and you encourage their growth. You go through a process of learning how to get them to grow. Then you inoculate your soil with those organisms you grew. This nourishes the soil that nourishes the food that offers us optimal nourishment! You don't need fertilizers. You learn the inputs to use. *Input* is the word used in natural farming. There are fertilizers and calcium supplements, but you learn how to make

them out of things like fish guts and egg shells. You make the sprays you need to control insects. You're spraying with something natural that's actually feeding the food. It stems from a concept of Master Cho—I forget Master Cho's first name. Master Cho is from Korea and he said—like successfully raising a child or building a house—success in growing food as good medicine starts first with a good soil foundation. So he teaches you how to take time to build that big fertile foundation to get the dividends later.

IMCJ: Have you noticed any improvements in food or is it more gradual?

Karin Cooke: The improvements are immediate, within a week. We've only started implementing natural farming in the past 2 years, although we've been organic from the beginning. We have used permaculture and biodynamic processes, and instituted natural farming maybe a year-and-a-half, or 2 years ago. The results are just amazing. I have a Mandala garden where our herbs and flowers grow; the design is 10 pie-shaped sections in a round mandala. As I was cleaning out one of the pie-shaped sections, I encountered a large weed so rooted in there I couldn't even dig it out! I couldn't even get a pitchfork in the ground. It was like cement, it was so compacted. So I thought okay, I'm just going to put the IMO there, put a little compost over it, and walk away. You're supposed to leave it for 2 weeks, but I was going to be leaving town after a week and I wanted to put a few things in that spot before I left. So, a week after spreading the IMO, I took my pitchfork and a pickaxe and went out to the plot. I went to really step on the pitchfork and see how far down I could get. Honestly, I could push the pitchfork in by hand—all the way in—without stepping on it. It went all the way down into the earth. I had an intern with me and we both looked at each other and just went "Oh, my God." We've had a lot of experiences like that. It's just amazing. The food is unbelievable. The supply, it's beautiful. You can Google "Korean Natural Farming" and you'll see many illustrations online, or come to my farm and I'll show you.



IMCJ: What kinds of medicinal herbs do you offer for your guests?

Karin Cooke: We're not a treatment program. It's a retreat program. While I do have a lot of herbs—and I'll talk about that—I want to be careful that I'm not offering medicinal herbs because that would be more along the lines of treatment. I do show them what we have and we use fresh herbs in all our meals and morning teas! As an example, there's good new research out of India on the power of limonene in lemongrass to help keep cancer cells from replicating. We grow a lot of lemongrass. Besides the lemongrass, we probably grow whatever you can think of. We don't have cumin, and I use a lot of that. I haven't been able to get it to grow, but I have rosemary, oregano, thyme, parsley, sage, cinnamon, nutmeg. A lot of turmeric and ginger. We make a tea every morning out of lemongrass, mint, turmeric, and ginger. Just pick it and slice it up in your water bottle, then put some hot water over it. We add more water to that all day so that all of us are drinking the herbs and we're infusing our bodies all day with these. Turmeric has great research for people with cancer, but it is good for everybody's immune system.

IMCJ: You offer biofeedback, Reiki, far-infrared sauna sessions, meditations, guided imagery, and other stress-reduction techniques at your cancer retreat. Could you please explain how each of these treatments helps people deal with cancer?

Karin Cooke: Biofeedback, Reiki, and meditation are all stress-reduction techniques. There is such a clear link between elevated cortisol levels from stress, circadian rhythm disruption, and our immune function.

I use a PowerPoint presentation of electron-microscopic views of actual cells from the immune system to show guests just what cells of their own immune system look like, what a cancer cell might look like, and what it looks like when a macrophage is attacking a cancer cell or an invader cell, to help them develop their imagery. If we concentrate on our imagery, three times a day for 20

to 25 minutes each time, it can markedly increase our natural killer cells and other immune components. So I give them that research to help them understand that stress reduction is so crucial.

I use a simple biofeedback-like interactive computer game to help guests learn how it feels when the cortisol levels are down compared to when they are elevated.

IMCJ: Can you describe what a far-infrared sauna session is like?

Karin Cooke: A far-infrared sauna (FIR) is a type of sauna that uses light to create heat. *Far* describes where the infrared waves fall on the light spectrum. A traditional sauna uses heat to warm the air, which in turn warms your body. An infrared sauna heats your body directly without warming the air around you. It is believed that these sessions are detoxifying for the body and enhance healing. They certainly are relaxing! Numerous studies looked at FIR saunas in treatment of chronic disease and I know of no side effects.

IMCJ: With regard to your use of qigong, the ancient Chinese meditative healing and spiritual practice: if true qi is the constant flowing energy unique to each individual's vital forces, what role does qigong play in healing a person with cancer and do you think it's more effective than just, say, tai chi or some others?

Karin Cooke: Tai chi is actually a qigong form. It's a martial art form, one of thousands of forms of qigong. In Chinese medicine, as in Ayurvedic medicine and all the ancient cultures, energy is seen as the basis of medicine. Energy flow without blockages is the key to health and healing. We don't look at that in Western medicine, but all of the other ancient cultures do. So, for example, in Chinese medicine, their concept is that if you have no blockage of qi in the body, it means that you have no pain and no disease. So what creates blockages? Life itself, stress, toxins. The nutrition we put in our bodies, the air we breathe—it's all around us. We can't avoid everything that leads to the blocked qi, but what we can do is whatever it takes to help that qi move through the blockages. That's what qigong does. It helps move blocked qi through the system and keeps the qi flowing. Qigong is a very important tool; it's an amazing stress-reduction technique. It's meditative, but the primary force behind the concept of using qigong in healing is to move the qi thorough any blockages, to keep it flowing unimpeded through one's system.

IMCJ: And it's spiritual too?

Karin Cooke: It is spiritual.

IMCJ: Do most guests come open to this type of spirituality?

Karin Cooke: Based on my experience, most come with some spiritual beliefs. For some, it is nature itself. We don't preach any particular religious dogma, so we don't get in the way of people doing whatever their belief system is. Sometimes, it's hard to explain that this will not interfere with an individual's spiritual or religious belief system. It is moving the life force energy that all of us have. It doesn't matter what one's religion is; we all have life-force energy that we need to have moving throughout our body without getting stuck whenever we can. We did have one participant who saw it as interfering with her religious beliefs.

IMCJ: How does Kokolulu Farm and Cancer Retreats provide emotional support for cancer patients? They must come with tremendous amounts of fear and anxiety, as well as helpfulness and enthusiasm.

Karin Cooke: I have been in this field for almost 40 years. I think, number one, we help them see that this is a pilgrimage they are on. Perhaps not a pilgrimage they consciously chose for themselves, but that does help people to understand and they do get it. Most of the clients/guests who come to our retreats have a sense that they just need to get away to be able to process without being bombarded with medical appointments and tasks, and everyday stresses and strains. I see this over and over again: an individual finds it difficult to make sense of what it is they need to do, what is healthful and what is not. They are being told many different things by many people in their lives, and so much is conflicting, they don't do anything. We want our guests to understand that they can communicate with their inner-self and to know what they want to do. I teach them a very simple way of doing some personal kinesiology—similar to muscle testing—on themselves, and I am not talking about “raise your arms and push it down.” I think that's too subjective. We help them to learn how to check in with their inner-self. They begin to feel empowered to know that they have the answers within—if they just find silence to listen.

IMCJ: I like your focus on humor and laughter. Do you believe laughter and humor are an important component to healing?

Karin Cooke: Very much so. And we do have so much fun! Laughter, lightheartedness, joy, fun—those are all positive emotions. When we are in a positive state, our cortisol levels can drop. There is no question that elevated cortisol is associated with disease processes. We laugh together, we also cry together. Very deep bonds can form at these weeklong group retreats, and we maintain contact with almost all of our participants. I feel very blessed to get to do this kind of work; we have such a huge family, *ohana* in Hawaii, as a result of our work!

IMCJ: Speaking of feeling blessed, you also mentioned the importance of gratitude in healing.

Karin Cooke: Oh my goodness, we certainly do recognize the healing power of gratitude! It's part of the biofeedback tool I mentioned earlier. Gratitude can put one into a positive heart space that can be deeply healing. I try to help people bring that in, feel it in their heart—experience, imagine what it feels like when they are surrounded in a positive emotion such as gratitude and with love. We do quite a bit of work around this in the cancer retreats.

We also have discussions around attitude. I ask them to keep a gratitude journal. I don't think a day goes by when we don't consciously identify an appreciation in some way—very important. Many times, a retreat participant will express gratitude for the cancer diagnosis that they recognize as a messenger of a need for a change.

IMCJ: I see that you call cancer a messenger. Could you describe that?

Karin Cooke: Along the same lines, if a cancer diagnosis is a wake-up call, something is begging to be changed. Many recognize they have had a lifetime of toxic living, whether dietary issues, unrelenting stress, smoking, the gamut; they get a sense they want to learn a new way of living. Often, we have guests asking for guidance toward that healthier lifestyle. They relate that without the cancer diagnosis, they would have continued on the same path that lowered their resistance to disease.

It's pretty amazing to see the transformation in people when they have that sense—when they take their empowerment back and accept that they have a responsibility in their own healing process. Whether or not an individual decides to go with Western medicine therapies is totally that individual's decision, of course. We don't try to sway people one way or another. We do try to

help our guests learn how to find the answers they need, and more importantly, perhaps, how to identify the questions they have. And, hopefully, this leads to better-informed choices.

A primary concept we strive to share is that there is always something one can do for his or herself, beyond whatever practitioners they are engaging. We share tools to that end, and it's really fun and beautiful to see people have that "Aha! I can do this" moment. They learn they have some control. It's very empowering for them; it's beautiful to watch.

IMCJ: And they wouldn't get that empowerment?

Karin Cooke: Without some big wake-up call? At least that is what we hear frequently from participants at our cancer retreats. Sometimes individuals just need to get away from everyday issues and focus totally on themselves! We talked about that earlier in this interview, too. We use the Einstein quote that essentially says issues cannot be resolved in the same consciousness in which they were created.

IMCJ: You take your guests on trips to sacred Hawaiian healing sites. What role does that play in the retreat's vision of healing?

Karin Cooke: Those trips are always fun. A particular site, down the road, was an ancient healing ground—preserved, not restored—right on the ocean. It feels so healing just to walk around there, and guests love that. We have a couple *Kahu*, Hawaiian spiritual leaders, who work with our guests as well. One of the concepts we share is a Hawaiian conflict mediation technique called *Ho'oponopono*. When there are unresolved emotions like anger, healing is impaired. This is the Hawaiian modality for taking care of this and it is quite effective.

When clients stay beyond the group retreat, or come for an individualized, personal retreat, we have more time to see other healing areas on the island also. One favorite among almost all is the release ceremony on the caldera at the volcano.

There are number of very special, local beautiful spots that we like to take people to. And while they are not considered holy sites, they are beautiful. When we get people out to go on a field trip together, it's very bonding; things come out and deep sharing occurs. People open up and say things that they tell us, over and over, they have never said to anybody before. It's about developing that comfort level so that people feel free to let out what they need to let out. And these field trips help them to do that.

IMCJ: In your therapy sessions do you confront the issues of death and dying as well as healing?

Karin Cooke: We do, and we certainly do when it's an individual, one-on-one retreat. We also approach this in group retreats, but it's a little trickier. We assess each group over the week, get a sense of where they all are, how open they are. I have had people tell me point blank they did not want to "go there" at that particular point in time. We try to bring in a spiritual component and open-ended questions they might consider. We gauge each retreat independently.

IMCJ: Do any of your guests choose to come to Kokolulu Farm during their end stages of cancer?

Karin Cooke: We try to get people to come when they don't need to be so heavily taken care of. We are not really a place for someone to come at the very end stage, but we have had that happen a couple of times. Although we can set that up, it's not what our group retreats are about. That would have to be a one-on-one situation. It's not what we are trying to become, so it's not our major focus. But, again, a few have really wanted that and we were honored to accommodate them.

IMCJ: Has a guest ever surprised you with a recovery over a mission?

Karin Cooke: Yes, a few. And I have a big smile on my face right now because I have one client, now a dear friend who I thought we were losing—a couple of times actually—and she sustained better than ever. It's just fun. A blessing! And, we have had many do so much better than expected.

IMCJ: What did you learn from your work at Kokolulu Farm?

Karin Cooke: I have learned that when we go through this dark night of the soul we come through with a new, much deeper wisdom and acceptance of life. We don't go through this and not have a deeper understanding to open your mind and your heart.

I have learned the joy of sharing what I, myself, have learned. Watching others learn and witnessing the joy it brings to them when they realize there are things they can do for themselves that contribute to their healing. I guess what I've learned is to open my heart and allow the joy to just be there. I feel very blessed to do what I'm doing and I am learning to just accept that.

IMCJ: How do you define your primary mission?

Karin Cooke: Our major focus is one of education and helping people to empower themselves in their own healing. Our mission and vision are:

Mission Statement: Kokolulu Farm and Cancer Retreats Inc is a nonprofit organization that provides education and charitable assistance to those affected by cancer by providing holistic healing retreats, research publications, and sharing tools that empower participants to take charge of their own healing journey.

Vision Statement: We envision a safe, healing, nurturing space where those affected by cancer are able to fully access a deeper healing, while nurturing body, mind and spirit through scientifically proven integrative techniques. An on-site organic farm provides the retreat participants with healthy food and medicinal herbs shown to boost the immune system and enhance the healing process.