

JILIAN SCARTH'S ACUPUNCTURE MEMORIES while living in B.C.

Extract: an account of Jilian's acupuncture training and practice.

An infection followed my spinal surgery in 1979, resulting in severe paravertebral spasm which was dramatically relieved by acupuncture. This sparked my interest in the discipline and I heard of the Acupuncture Foundation of Canada Institute. The organization had been set up in 1974 by 7 physicians whose acupuncture training came from various parts of the world. The aim of the AFCI was to provide competency-based continuing education in acupuncture for multi-disciplinary, regulated, health professionals.

I watched for courses in Vancouver and gradually worked through them during the 1980's and took their exams, even though I was working at Grace Hospital with no chance to practise what I had learnt. However, through Medtronic's MedTens Store I was also teaching professionals and patients about the use of TENS, or Trans-cutaneous Electro Neural Stimulation for the relief of acute and chronic pain. My knowledge of acupuncture points proved helpful in the placing of electrodes for pain relief.

Although we used traditional acupuncture points the AFCI approach was a western medical view. I wondered about the traditional Chinese approach. In about 1992 Dr. Steven Aung from Edmonton offered a course on Vancouver Island in Traditional Chinese Medicine or TCM. It would entail a three-day week-end about every 6 weeks for 2 years. There was to be an exam at the end of the course, practical and written, with an external examiner. Also, Dr. Aung planned to take a group of students to China for 6 weeks to work in an hospital, not a requisite, but it would be a valuable adjunct. Dr. Aung's course later became a University of Alberta course.

Before committing myself to a great deal of studying of TCM I decided to investigate IMS or Intra Muscular Stimulation. Dr. Gunn had set up the Institute for the Study and Treatment of Pain, or iSTOP, and was training physiotherapists and physicians in his approach. He was internationally renowned and was teaching in the USA too. Soon after my surgery I had consulted Dr. Gunn about my ongoing severe spinal pain and sciatica. He had given me 6 treatments with no change in pain, and a severely bruised posterior thigh. However, at the time we had not known that I had a disc space infection and not a musculoskeletal-skeletal problem. So, I spent two days observing in his Clinic, and then I struggled to decide which path to take. The challenge of investigating an exotic culture won and I registered for Dr. Aung's course.

About twenty physicians and physiotherapists assembled for the first week-end. At the end of it I almost changed my mind, the information seemed incomprehensible to me in light of the science I had learnt. However, I struggled to make sense of the notes and went back for the next week-end. We started by using needles on pears and progressed to putting them into one another. I practised at home on my husband, Dick!

Eventually, after almost two years, examination time arrived, and with trepidation I went in for my clinical test. Dr. Aung and the examiner from New York could not have been kinder, their concern was safety for the patient. I had to insert needles into Dr. Aung at the specified acupuncture points, and this appeared to have gone well. I think I was awake most of the night dreading eight hours of written answers the following day. We gathered, and then we waited, and waited and waited. Two hours later Dr. Aung and the other doctor arrived and handed out the questions! It was exhausting. When news came that I had passed Dick and I discussed

going to Beijing with the group and decided to both go in April 1994. We met up in Beijing, seven physicians and five physiotherapists and Dr. Aung.

Dick and I rented bicycles which we locked in the parking lot under our hotel. The first morning we went down and could not find our bicycles amongst the numerous others. The locks were clamps on the back wheels, and the two of us proceeded to try our keys on all those near where we thought we had left ours. Two policemen arrived, and they obviously thought these strangers were stealing bikes! Eventually we found ours and were allowed to ride off! Being angrily accused in a strange language by police is frightening!

Every morning Dick and I would cycle from our hotel to our hospital amongst hundreds of others going to work, often with the woman on a carrier behind her partner and dressed in heels and a business suit! Dick would then carry on to amuse himself exploring all day. One day he spent in a park with retirees and taught them to sing "Dona Nobis Pacem"! During the mornings we had clinics, then lectures after lunch. Our clinician was a middle-aged woman, and I suspect she lost face because she had to supervise five physiotherapists, not physicians. It was days after we started before she allowed us to use needles on patients!

The afternoon lectures were torturous as we struggled to stay awake - I think those Chinese lecturers had a remarkable ability to take an hour to say something we would say in 10 minutes; we were learning patience, a good virtue! I found meals difficult as I dislike fried food and don't eat meat. I think I subsisted on mostly white rice. We had a few banquets with the Chinese doctors, sitting around large round tables and many courses appearing, every type of meat and fish, and rice at the end as an after-thought.

One evening Dick and I were invited home by one of the doctors. He lived in a high rise. We waited a long time for an elevator, then found two thirds was filled by a large chair on which the operator sat, so only two or three people could be taken up at a time! The doctor's flat was tiny, with his dining table almost filling that small room. Doctors there are not highly paid and his ambition was to graduate from a bicycle to a car. Dick and I went sight-seeing together at the week-ends and sometimes excursions were arranged for us.

It was interesting working on patients who know acupuncture as the method of dealing with illness. Illness is an imbalance of Qi or Life Force and needles will restore balance and health. This gave us confidence to apply the knowledge we had acquired, since the patients were not questioning the effectiveness. At the end of 6 weeks we had a long, formal, graduation ceremony, with many speeches by our instructors, and our replies. It was an interesting experience for us all. We were each given a certificate to prove we had taken their training.

After returning to Vancouver I was unsure how to use my knowledge, acupuncture was still fringe medicine and not practised in hospitals. One day Lesley Spinks approached me. She was an acupuncturist trained in England and was working at West 10th Sports and Orthopaedic Physiotherapy Clinic. She was unwell and wondered if I would take over for her. I was delighted and began working there. Then the clinic moved to the mall at the corner of 4th Avenue and Alma, becoming Jericho Sports and Orthopaedic Physiotherapy Clinic. I found acupuncture a good adjunct to other physiotherapy techniques, and this clinic was most supportive. I also did some home visits while there. I continued until I decided it was time to retire and find volunteer pursuits.