



The Healing Nest

The Official Newsletter of **Rising Bird Healing Arts**

A healing space for the mind, body, & soul.

Courtney E. Putnam, MFA, LMP, CRP

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"The Healing Nest" is the official newsletter of Rising Bird Healing Arts.

This newsletter is for clients and friends of Rising Bird Healing Arts. You may send all correspondence and newsletter contributions to Courtney Putnam at cputnam@rising-bird.com.

Rising Bird Healing Arts

Massage • Reiki • Holistic Healing

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Courtney E. Putnam.

Returning

I don't know about you, but often I end up sort of slip-sliding through the first few months of a new year without doing a big, fat reflection—you know, the kind that involves getting out the magic markers and butcher paper or sitting in a dark corner of a cafe filling 20 journal pages. Each year, I intend to spend some quiet time reflecting and dreaming big, but rarely do I get some substantial meditation and creative dream time in. I get too lost in the momentum of a year that is, well, new.

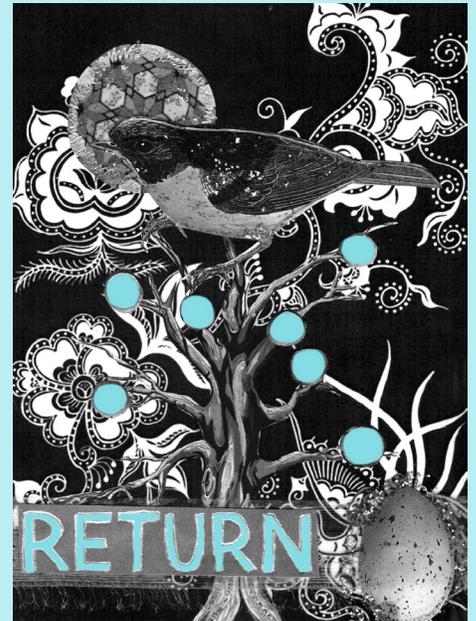
This year, I have given myself the time and space for creating intentions and making lists of things I'd like to return to. I tend not to like to use the word "resolutions" with this process, for it feels a bit too serious, too potentially punishing. So I have been doggie paddling in the waters of intentions and returning.

One of my intentions this year is to fully embrace self-care. For me that means getting bodywork at least once a month (preferably twice a month), taking long baths and even longer walks, and doing yoga in my pajamas. Is "self care" one of your intentions for 2009? If so, what might you do for yourself? What needs some attention? And how can you respond to your mind/body/spirit in a way that will inspire, relax, and recharge you?

In terms of returning, I am finding myself rekindling my inner poet, so writing poetry is something I am bringing to the forefront of my life again. While my writing life has not been absent, it has been a little elusive and ghostly lately. What would you like to return to? Is there something you've put on the back burner that you'd like to bring forward? Is there a state of mind or a feeling you'd like to bring to the surface? Is there an activity that brings you joy that you'd like to engage in again? Perhaps this is a good time to return to yourself if you've been focusing on others' needs more than your own.

May your intentions for this new year enliven you, not deplete you, and may whatever you return to give you fulfillment and joy.

Courtney



The Emotional Side of Bodywork



On the home page of my website, I have written: “By integrating massage, energy work, creative play, and whole-person wellness approaches, I invite you to experience a unique blend of healing modalities to support your body, mind, and spirit.” What exactly does it mean that massage supports your mind, body, and spirit? That mind-body-spirit trifecta is often used to describe how massage and bodywork may address not only physical issues, but also issues related to the mind, emotions, and one’s higher self. But how do we each experience this?

In the latest issue of *Massage & Bodywork Magazine*, I found myself immersed in an article by Stephanie Mines called “Whose Hand is This?: Attunement and Bodywork.” At one point in her piece, Mines writes, “The release of tension can never be solely a muscular event. In order for muscles to come out of contraction the mind must let go; with this letting go, memories are unleashed, along with the fear, anger, or horror that initiated the contraction.”

I can recall the first massages I ever received, close to ten years ago. I had a tremendously difficult time relaxing my arms during my sessions. I had sought massage to help relieve the tendinitis in my forearms due to computer work (I did a lot of layout and graphic design back then), but I somehow couldn’t let my arms go. I found myself helping my massage practitioner by lifting my arms for her as she was massaging them, and when she tried to jostle them, my arms were as stiff as bricks. It was clear that my tension and holding was not purely a “muscular event.” It became apparent to me that not only was my mind causing my arms to contract, but so were my emotions. I learned, after many sessions, that my stress and worry and need to stay “in control” were also contributing to my tense arms.

Mines also writes, “Our bodies are storehouses, veritable libraries containing volumes of life experiences.” What life experiences was I storing in my arms, which made them react in such a rigid manner? On a metaphorical level, what couldn’t I let go of? I had to explore these issues in conjunction with receiving good, therapeutic massage with a patient and mindful practitioner before I could relinquish control. Surprise, surprise: my tendonitis symptoms improved dramatically. And for the first time in my life, I could relax my arms so they were as soft as noodles.

Try This:

Think about a place where you hold tension in your body. Now divide a sheet of paper in to three columns. The first column is for listing the physical reasons for this tension (i.e. too much computer work, work injury, posture, etc.), the second column is for listing what emotional issues might relate to this tension (i.e. work stress, financial worry, past issues related to abuse, etc.), and the third column is for exploring the metaphor embedded in this tension (i.e. my hip pain is a little girl with low self-esteem, my sore arm is a machine without an off-switch, my jaw is a rusty can opener).

Next time you feel tension in these areas of your body, see if you can tap into the metaphors you created. Give that little girl in your hip a pep talk or see if you can find the off-switch for your arm.

Turning Inward Dialog

Find a quiet place where you can focus inward. Locate an area of your body that you are curious about. Perhaps this area causes you pain or maybe this area is just confusing to you for some reason. Whatever the case may be, ask this place some questions as if it were a close friend or loved one. Ask your questions with curiosity and compassion and be open to hearing whatever it is your body has to tell you.

You can follow up this exercise by writing down the dialog as if you were writing a short story or play. Feel free to give this body part a personality, too! Is your elbow crabby? Is your stomach an excited teenager? Is your neck shy and reserved? Make this body part come to life and give its voice a chance to speak!

Elongate Your Mind

“When I have a shock, I walk to metabolize it. Walking, seeking only to move and in moving “move” something through, I often come to an entirely different idea.”

—Julia Cameron, *The Right to Write*

My new friend Samar turned me on to a book by Gail Sher called *Writing the Fire!: Yoga and the Art of Making Your Words Come Alive*. (You know you’ve encountered a special and enduring friend when she gives great book recommendations.)

Sher begins her book with a quote by B.K.S. Iyengar, which reads, “Unless freedom is gained in the body, freedom of the mind is a far-fetched idea.” I resonate so strongly with this notion that the body and mind are inextricably linked. The mind and emotions cannot be free if the body is locked in tight. Without breath, for instance, the body withers and so does the mind. We may know this on an intellectual level, but how many times do we keep trying to transform our thoughts with other thoughts by engaging in a sort of cerebral gerbil wheel, when perhaps what we need is to breathe or get a massage or do some yoga? When we feel physical tension it seems only natural to receive some bodywork. But what about when you’re anxious or feel stuck creatively or when you have a hard time making decisions?

Sher writes about elongation as a way to create more flow both in the body and the mind. She writes, “Deep within the fibers of a muscle is a hidden door. It is opened by breathing and once opened, it allows the muscles to undo

themselves. Both lengthening and shortening muscles undo and ride the energy flow. There’s no danger, fatigue, or residue. The process of elongating comes about by rooting, connecting, and breathing in which breath is the link as well as the fuel that pulls the mind-body along. In elongating, the muscle relinquishes its effort to do. Then it extends. Other body parts pick up the impulse and let go too. When the mind in turn lets go, writing flows freely.”

Sometimes I feel like a broken record with this, but the phrase “when you’re stuck, move” has gotten me out of many a stagnant or perplexing moment. Sometimes I take a walk, other times I dance, and often I stop what I am doing and stretch. I breathe and stretch until I feel oxygen and blood flowing again—until I feel my body relax and my mind open. Sometimes something as simple as moving or stretching can feel so difficult to start. At times I resist and keep sitting, as if I am banishing myself to the “time out” chair. But once I move, take one little step towards attending to my body, my whole being sort of softens and succumbs to the flow. And after some time, I actually feel a bit taller, like there is space inside me—space for growth and transformation.

Try This:

When you are feeling stuck, stagnant, or in any way in a mental funk, try elongating your body. While taking deep breaths, do some gentle stretching (or yoga poses if you know them). Create space in your body for energy to move. After 10-15 minutes, return to your mental musings. Do you feel any different? Does your mind feel more elongated and free?

What Your Posture Might Say About You

In Johanna Putnoi’s book *Senses Wide Open*, she describes the “four unnatural postures”—postures that reveal the emotional states we inhabit. Putnoi unveils what she calls the “Going and Going and Going” posture (also called The Posture of the Overachiever). People who embody this posture “live life in the middle of an inhalation.” Putnoi describes, “They breathe in just enough, lock their diaphragm in neutral, and then go, go, go.”

Some aspects of this posture include: head jutting forward, eyes bearing down, narrow vision, shallow breath, intense focus ahead (not a lot of peripheral vision), disconnection between head and body.

Have you ever found yourself embodying these characteristics along with a go-go-go energy?

What does Putnoi suggest for those experiencing this Energizer Bunny persona? Putnoi recommends: “A deep tissue massage designed to soften muscles and open the joints of the entire body through breath and touch can make the world slow down and come alive with sensation and meaning for the Overachiever.”

Art Heals: Two Artists Show How Creating Art Can Be a Force for Healing

Karin Bartimole's Art

Karin describes how she came to create her blog Beyond Words and explores how her art-making has been a source of healing for her.

As with all things, it began as a seed, at least metaphorically speaking. I picked up an interesting looking used book at our local library's monthly book sale. I had no clue what language it was written in, but there were lists of English words and phrases, and I could tell they were being translated into this other language. The native text was beautiful to my eye, with its unfamiliar curly cues, patterns and overall rhythm created on each page. I was humored by the way the words were grouped, and often found images popping into my mind as I flipped through it. I paid the 75-cents and took it home.

Meanwhile, a couple of friends had encouraged me to start a blog. Why? Wouldn't that just be a stage for my ego to take off?! How could it serve any other purpose? It's not like I have a business to share, I'm not teaching, I'm not a writer.... Aren't blogs a little self-indulgent?!

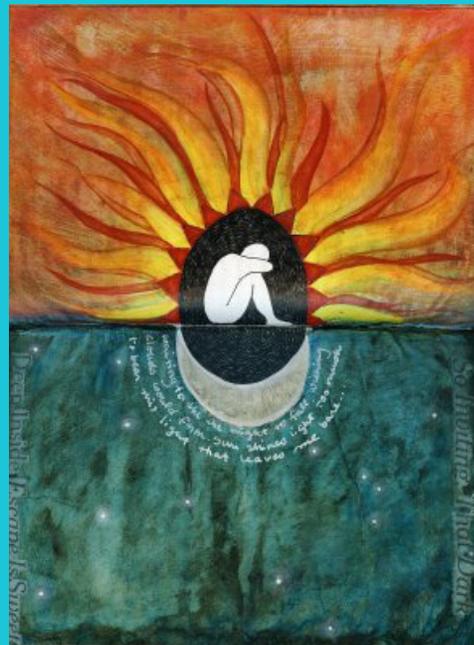
One friend said, "How else am I going to see what you're up to and creating? This would be a perfect way to show me!" As with most of my friends and all of my family, no one lives close enough to visit with any regularity or sees my art, or what I'm up to. The other friend said the same thing, as well as sharing that she had been learning from an art business coach that blogs make good career sense for artists. It's a place to network, to have your artwork seen by a vast audience, to get yourself out there....

Okay, but what was I going to post? A bunch of older artwork that no longer feels representative of who I am today?

You see, I live with chronic pain. A combination of a back injury that has led to three surgeries over the past four years, as well as the chronic challenges associated with lupus. I haven't been the working artist I once was, due to physical limitations.

In spite of that, art is my healer. No amount of pain medication, massage, acupuncture, biofeedback, hypnotherapy, etc. have brought the levels of relief I get from immersing myself in the creative process.

So I decided to start a blog as a way to document my creative process. My 75-cent book became my new journal, and I made a commitment to myself to make art daily in this journal which I would post at the end of my process on my blog. I promised myself I would not censor these entries, or the ideas that came asking to be created—I would work as if no one were looking and let it go.



Karin's Feb. 16 journal entry

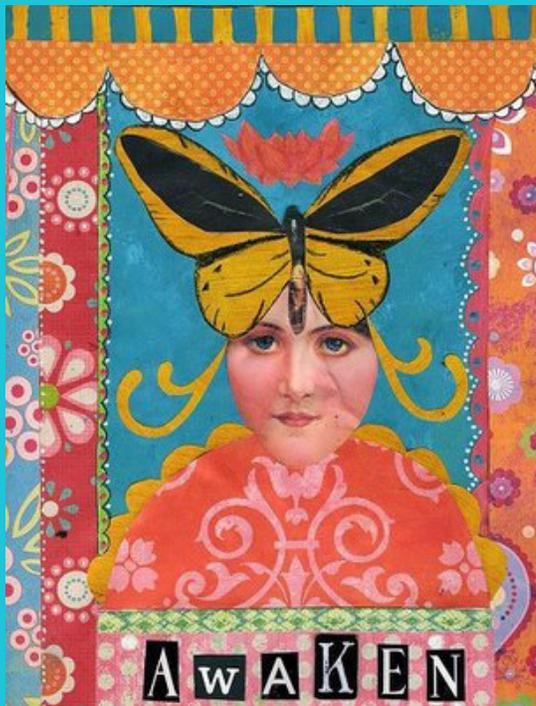
pleas from every non-profit I care about were pouring in all at once; and even contact with a friend left me feeling drained from the lack of balance I discovered in our relationship. I felt the light was just too dang light, highlighting the stressors in my life so vividly that I couldn't see any of the peace, the beauty, the joy available to me. I needed to go within—to ground myself and turn away from all the outward stimuli.

For me the darkness provides the space where this can happen with ease. Give me a cloudy day and my energy soars. Enter that time past 11 p.m. and my artist self comes alive. Darkness heals my sensory overload and creating art about it takes me there, no matter the outer conditions of my world. Creating this piece reminded me that there is always a dimly lit, quiet corner within, where I can take myself when the bigger brighter outer world becomes too much.

To view more of Karin's work, please visit Beyond Words at aviewbeyondwords.blogspot.com.

For several hours a day, each day, I enter that zone—my meditation. I release the surface awareness of my physical body, and delve into what reveals itself on the other side of pain. The day I created this art piece was a difficult one for me. All of my senses were in overdrive. Light was too harsh; sound too loud; headlines too tragic; email

Kathy (Alberta) McCullen's Art



Awakening Strength, Compassion, and Wisdom by Alberta

Alberta, who maintains the Amusing Muses blog with her sister Ava, reflects on the power of art in her life.

All my life I've been inspired to make art because of the healing and spiritual power creating gives me. I believe that it is through the act of creating I am closer to that self that I want to become. I've been a special education teacher for 27 years, and I am committed to helping my students find their own inner power. I want to teach them that each of us is responsible for our own healing and that we are all capable of creating the reality we've imagined.

*May all beings have happiness, and the causes of happiness,
May all be free from sorrow, and the causes of sorrow,
May all never be separated from the sacred happiness which is sorrowless,
And may all live in equanimity, without too much attachment and too much aversion,
And live believing in the equality of all that lives.*

Buddhist prayer

To see more of Alberta's work, please visit the Amusing Muses Blog, where she and her sister Ava post their inspiring creations: amusingmuses2.blogspot.com.

You, Yourself, and You: A Self-Portrait Workshop

When: Sunday, April 12, 2009: 1-5pm

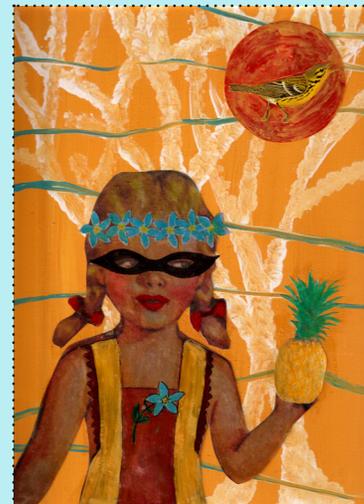
Where: Rising Bird Healing Arts

Cost: \$60 (cash, checks, and credit cards accepted)

To Register: Email Courtney at cputnam@rising-bird.com

In this hands-on art workshop, we will explore the self in three parts: past self, present self, and future self. Using mixed media collage as our medium, we will cut and paste together meaningful images to reveal who we once were, to celebrate who we are now, and to imagine who we might become with some nurturing and encouragement. Feel free to bring meaningful images you've collected. Otherwise, all art supplies provided! Light refreshments provided.

Space is limited, so register early!

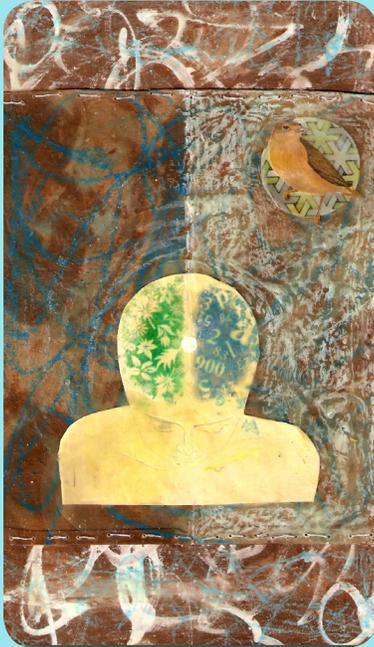


This is an excerpt from my work-in-progress divination deck and book called **Body Cards**.

Cerebrum: *balance*

“We come into this world head first and go out feet first; in between, it is all a matter of balance.”

- Paul Boese



Location: The cerebrum is the largest part of the brain and is divided into four lobes: the frontal lobe, parietal lobe, occipital lobe, and temporal lobe.

Function: The cerebrum (or cerebral cortex) controls higher brain functions such as thought, action, sensory perception, and emotions.

Unique Fact: The brain is divided into left and right hemispheres, with the corpus callosum, a bundle of nerve fibers, providing communication between the hemispheres.

Associated Chakra: Crown (Seventh Chakra)

We often use the terms “right brained” and “left brained” to describe our personality. We’ve deemed the right-brained person as creative, intuitive, and visual and the left-brained person as verbal, analytical, and sequential. The two hemispheres of the brain do in fact have different roles, which partially model this creative vs. analytical construct. But it is also true that no one is purely right- or left-brained; we are each a beautiful mixture of the two constructs. The trick is to find a balance between the two and to learn how to access the attributes of your non-dominant side. After all, you never know when your intuitive abilities might need a helping hand from your analytical side in order to solve an important problem. Or what happens when your skill at rational thought is not enough and you need take a leap of faith?

If you’ve drawn the Cerebrum Card, it may be time to gain some balance in your approach to problem solving. Whether you are dealing with a complicated mathematical problem or an argument with your partner, you may find that experiencing the situation through a new perspective is necessary. If your main mode for problem solving is organized and rational, but this approach gets you nowhere, try a more feeling-oriented, big picture approach. Perhaps a little creativity is needed to alleviate a situation, or maybe your more scattered, intuitive approach could use some organized, sequential energy. By accessing both sides of your brain a bit more equally, you may find that you start feeling a bit more balanced and integrated. The lesson of this card is to honor your way of being in the world, and not to forget that other ways of being are inside you waiting to be tapped when you need them.

Try This:

Brain-integrating Cross Crawls: This is an exercise from the *Brain Gym* system. Slowly march in place, lifting each knee, while simultaneously tapping your opposite hand to your opposite knee. Find a nice rhythm of crossing your arms over your body to reach your opposite knees. This exercise helps integrate and balance the right and left hemispheres of your brain.

Draw or write: Use your non-dominant hand when drawing or journaling. Notice how difficult (or easy) this is. Perhaps this process is easier than you thought. Also notice what you produce. Perhaps new and interesting images and ideas emerge by accessing the other side of your brain.

Self-Care: Fun with Fascia!

What exactly is fascia? Here's the well-described Wikipedia definition:

"Fascia is the soft tissue component of the connective tissue system that permeates the human body. It interpenetrates and surrounds muscles, bones, organs, nerves, blood vessels and other structures. Fascia is an uninterrupted, three-dimensional web of tissue that extends from head to toe, from front to back, from interior to exterior. It is responsible for maintaining structural integrity; for providing support and protection; and acts as a shock absorber."

I like to think of fascia as the cling wrap of the human body. The thin layer of tissue that wraps around every muscle in your body is called myofascia. When myofascia becomes "sticky," dehydrated, and adhered, we can feel discomfort. Sometimes the aches and pains we feel as muscle tension may actually (or also) be indications of fascial adhesions.

In addition to getting massage, what can you do to create soft, pliable myofascia yourself? Here are some of my favorite self-care activities with this all-important connective tissue:

Crinkle your fascia! When myofascia becomes sticky and adhered it can sometimes feel like bubble wrap under the skin. By doing some skin rolling, you can work out the kinks in the fascia and reduce pain.



Two areas of the body that are easy to access yourself

for this crinkling activity, are your forearms and knees.

On your forearm near your elbow crease, gently lift a roll of skin, without pinching it too hard, and roll it between your fingers in a back and forth motion. You can also roll the tissue across your arm like it is a wave (left to right) or down your arm to your wrist.

This rolling need not be painful. Just roll to your comfort level until that crinkly feeling is gone. Those who do a lot of computer work find this rolling quite relieving.

To do this same technique with your knees, begin by sitting with your legs relaxed and straight ahead of you. Grab a bit of skin above your knee and roll it between your fingers. Then explore the whole knee area in this way, rolling the skin in all directions above the knee and directly over the knee cap.



Roll a tennis ball to increase hamstring flexibility!

Using tennis balls is a great form of self-care for muscle tightness. The technique I am going to describe here is specifically related to creating flexible, pliable myofascia using the handy tennis ball.

Fascia is like a sheath inside the body, so when you change one area of fascia in your body, you invariably change others. The same fascial tissue exists at the bottom of your feet as in your forehead! Your fascia is all connected, which is why working with your fascia can create powerful—and pleasant!—results.

For this exercise, I want you to have a "before and after" experience, so first check in with your hamstring flexibility. From a standing position, bend over gently in an attempt to touch your toes. Make a mental note of how far you are able to reach toward the floor.

From a standing position, roll a tennis ball along the bottom of your right foot for about 3-5 minutes. The longer you roll the tennis ball, the greater the results you will get.

After this rolling, now check your hamstring flexibility again. Are you able to stretch a little further on your right side? Continue this exercise with the left foot. How far can you reach now?

To learn more about fascia and myofascial techniques, feel free to visit these sites:

Wikipedia: Fascia:
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fascia>

Wikipedia: Myofascial Release:
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Myofascial_Release

John Barnes, national myofascial expert:
<http://www.myofascialrelease.com/home.asp>

An Art Show Close to My Heart



Last December I hosted **An Art Show for a Good Cause**. This art show was especially meaningful one for me, for I donated 50% of the proceeds from my original art, art cards, and art prints to the **Kidney Cancer As-**

sociation in honor of my dad who died of kidney cancer this past August.

I was joined by talented jewelry artist **Kristin Stubbs**, whose jewelry creations sparkled and delighted all who encountered them. Thank you, Kristin, for joining me for such a special night.



Kristin Stubbs and Courtney.

I was delighted to see over 50 people pass through between 6:00 and 9:00pm, many of whom were new to my art show events. I sold 21 original art pieces, as well as several prints and cards of my work.

(At one point in the night, I was shocked to discover so many walls with lonely nail hooks and square and rectangular bare spots!)

Best of all, I was able to **donate close to \$600** to the Kidney Cancer Association in honor of my dad. That number is astounding to me (I would never be able to donate that amount of money to a charity on my own), and I feel so grateful that the result of my creative (and healing) hours with wax and found images and paint was able to generate money to this cause so close to my heart.

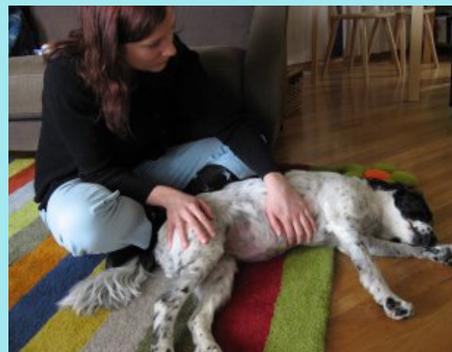


Thank you to those who attended to support my art (and my cause) and for those who weren't able to make it, yet sent their good wishes. I appreciate you all!

Courtney and her dad.

This is What Doggie Reiki Looks Like

This very relaxed dog is Bailey. For her birthday last year, Bailey's generous human companions gave her the gift of a Reiki session with me. Lucky me!



I love giving animal Reiki, and it was a joy to work with sweet (and energetic!) Bailey. Now to be clear, Bailey did not stay in this position for a whole hour. She circled and rolled around and scouted out sounds in the house and gave me kisses and wagged her tail a lot.

This behavior is quite common during sessions with dogs. I often give Reiki in doses, waiting until a dog is ready to receive the energy (a little Reiki here, a little Reiki there). Sometimes it takes a while for very energetic and active dogs to slow down. What seemed to calm Bailey the most was when I placed one hand on her chest over her heart and the other between her shoulder blades. This position is often quite comforting for dogs (it makes them feel safe and reassured), and in the case of Bailey, it let me feel her heartbeat slow from a racing to a resting pace. [Insert big, deep doggie breath here.]

I also think this hand placement is particularly effective with dogs because dogs are very heart-centered creatures. The love, affection, and acceptance they receive from humans is of paramount importance to them. I also believe their capacity for strong loyalty comes from this heart place as well. When we connect to a dog's heart center, we may well be connecting to their *raison d'être*.

Try this:

If you are a companion (or friend) to a dog who tends to be very energetic or anxious, try the technique I describe above: place one hand on the chest over the heart and one on the back between the shoulder blades. Breathe slow deep breaths so your dog can feel your energy shift to one of relaxation, too. Feel your own heartbeat slow as your dog's does as well. Not only does this exercise help relax your dog, but it also allows you to have a calm, connecting moment with your canine friend.

Creativity Corner

Art Prompt: "Harmony"

Where would you like to experience more harmony in your life? Would you like to feel more harmony in certain personal or family relationships? With people at work? Or what about more harmony with your very own self? We human beings can be very hard on ourselves. Begin your art process by scanning for images in books, magazines, or in your very own collage image stash and construct this harmony visually. Perhaps the harmony you seek is very specific so particular images are needed. Or maybe the harmony is more of a general feeling that can be expressed with color and texture. When you are finished creating, consider hanging your piece(s) in an important place in your home so you are reminded of the harmony you hope to attract in your life.

Writing Prompt: "Fabulous Feet"

Our feet lead amazing, adventurous lives! And they bear the weight of our lives (quite literally), too. When have your feet been most active? When have they ached? When have they felt most pleasure and freedom? Do your feet like to be wrapped warmly in wool socks or feel the soil on their bare soles? To connect with your feet, take a little walk before sitting down to write. How do your feet feel right now as you take a little stroll?

Submission Guidelines:

Submit your writing or art to me via email (cputnam@rising-bird.com) by May 15, 2009 to be considered for the Spring 2009 Issue of the newsletter. Subject line of email should read "Spring newsletter submission." Art should be in .jpg format, and writing may be in a Word document or pasted into the body of the email.

Next ART SHOW at Rising Bird Healing Arts:



Friday, April 24, 2009

Come celebrate springtime with me! I will be showing new mixed media collages and encaustic works.

As always, there will be **art, refreshments, heaps of merriment, and a winner** of a free one-hour massage!

More details to come...

A Wee Bit About Me:



Courtney E. Putnam is a Licensed Massage Practitioner and Certified Reiki Practitioner, who offers a holistic approach to wellness. With a strong belief in the mind-body connection, Courtney holds a safe space for her clients to experience emotional as well as physical healing.

By integrating massage, energy work, creativity, and holistic wellness approaches, she invites you to experience a unique blend of healing modalities to support your body, mind, and spirit.

In addition to her bodywork endeavors, Courtney is a poet and visual artist and holds a Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing.

Please visit her blog, **The Healing Nest**, for frequent articles on health, wellness, and creativity: thehealingnest.blogspot.com.

End Notes:

As a writer and visual artist, I find that incorporating artistic expression in the healing process is helpful and revealing. Feel free to visit [The Healing Nest Blog](http://TheHealingNestBlog) for writing and art exercises, stress reduction strategies, and bodywork you can do for yourself at home. Also, visit my [Sessions and Rates](#) page for detailed descriptions of all of my services, including full-spectrum light therapy, aromatherapy foot baths, and reflective journaling time. • Except where noted, I created all of the artwork in this newsletter. Feel free to visit my [Quiet Girl Gallery](#) art blog for more examples of my work.