

# From Hollywood to Healer to Holistic Nurse Entrepreneur

by Annette Tersigni, RN, ERYT-500

*“If you can dream it, you can do it.” ~Walt Disney*

Once upon a time, I was far from being a nurse entrepreneur. When I was an adolescent, the last thing in the world I dreamed of being was a nurse. Nursing? All that blood and guts? No way! I dreamed of being a fashion model. I'd grace the pages of stylish magazines and be an actress in Hollywood, too!

A modeling agent told my mother, “Annette will never make it.” I looked bleakly upon that woman as a dream stealer. I was 14 years old and like most teenagers, I refused to listen. Later, I met a different agent who gave me a chance. *Defying the odds*, I began to get work and get paid.

I headed to Hollywood and studied acting at the legendary Actors Studio where stars like Marilyn Monroe and Marlon Brando learned their craft. I appeared in movies and was directed by Francis Ford Coppola, famous for *The Godfather*. I went to film premieres with famous actors and enjoyed champagne

at the after-premier bashes with stars like Paul Newman and Barbara Streisand.

Even with all the glam and success, Hollywood left me feeling shallow and unfulfilled. Ever since I was a child, I knew I had a calling; I was a seeker of health, peace, and wisdom.

After three years, I left LA and moved back home. I fell into a whirlwind romance with a kind man and got pregnant. It was the start of a long period of shattering heartbreak.

## **Julian**

In 1984, I gave birth to Julian, the perfect baby. He never cried or fussed; the fact is that he didn't do much of anything. Julian showed zero interest in toys and avoided eye contact. My gut told me there was something wrong, but no one listened. When Julian was two and a half years old, he was given an evaluation at a local hospital. The doctor told us it was very serious. Julian

was autistic with cerebral palsy. This was in 1987, long before I became a nurse, and I knew very little about medicine.

Autism, cerebral palsy – it was the start of *my dark night of the soul*. As Julian grew older, he became increasingly aggressive and frustrated, unable to achieve independent skills. He was still defecating in his pants at the age of nine. By then, I was like the walking dead. We crashed and burned, ending up on welfare, isolated, and devastated.

I became a buyer for a prominent women's clothing line in the fashion industry, made good money, and we got off welfare. I discovered a local yoga studio. The classes were a salve to my wounded heart and weary soul. It was there that I first dreamed of being a yoga teacher. I dreamed I might be able to teach others who were suffering and help them with yoga like it helped me. I began to shift from despair and hopelessness to a new inner state of optimism.

Although my inner life was improving, my outer life with Julian and his father continued to disintegrate. Julian became impossibly aggressive until the day, when he was 14, we made the heart breaking and painful decision to place him in a small institution. Every day I was tortured with guilt. It was then that I made a bold move, desperate to heal myself, and yes, to become a healer.

In 1994, at age 43, I became a certified yoga teacher at the Kripalu Center in Massachusetts. It changed the course of my life. I began to face my pain stories, meditate, and forgive myself, melting my guilt and self-hatred around my inability to take care of my son.

In 1996, I studied with Dr. Deepak Chopra. The training was packed with doctors and nurses eager to learn about holistic medicine. I envied and admired the nurses who were there and thought, "Wow, what if I was a nurse *and* a yoga teacher? Imagine how many more people I would be able to reach and help!" And so it came to pass. At the age of 48, I went to college and graduated three years later in 2002 as a registered nurse.

Julian is now in a caring, group home. He has learned new communication skills and rarely displays aggression. He is surrounded with love.

### **A New Chapter – Yoga, Nursing, and a New Beginning**

After graduating, I found a job at a hospital where my yoga and nursing practices merged. Numerous nurses, excited about my methods, inspired me to develop the YogaNurse® Model of Care in 2004. A holistic adjunct therapy, YogaNursing unites the ancient wisdom of yoga with the science of modern nursing to relieve stress for nurses and improve patient care (YogaNurse Academy, 2016).

The model includes seven essential seated postures that nurses can learn and teach patients, together with breathing and relaxation techniques. There is abundant evidence-based practice demonstrating yoga's efficacy to increase quality of life (Woodyard, 2011). Physiologic benefits for patients and nurses include improved immune system, reduced muscle tension and pain, improved sleep, increased cardiovascular efficiency,

and reduced blood pressure (Woodyard, 2011). Psychological benefits of YogaNursing include: improved concentration, attention, mood, and sense of well-being; decreased anxiety, stress, and depression; and increased self-acceptance and self-actualization (Sisk & Fonteyn, 2016).

Yoga is a complementary health approach that the NIH National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health (2013) researches and recognizes as an increasingly popular therapy for maintaining health and well-being. With training, nurses can incorporate YogaNursing into their practice as part of an integrated care plan. There is an enormous marketplace for stress relief and wellness programs taught by nurses.

Since starting my company in 2006, nearly 1,000 nurses worldwide have taken the YogaNurse training program and have been equipped with skills to move from nurse for hire to nurse entrepreneur. YogaNurse is aligned with and endorsed by the Watson Caring Science Institute and is practiced at the Mayo Clinic as part of their nurse wellness initiative. The program is approved for continuing nursing education (CNE)<sup>1</sup> and has been taught in nursing colleges, hospitals, conventions, and communities internationally.

"We cannot change the nursing culture without changing the nursing consciousness" (YogaNurse Academy, 2016). This is my message and creating health, peace, and wisdom for nurses and patients worldwide is my mission. I believe nursing is a calling – a lifework to give sacred service to uplift and heal other nurses, our patients, and health care. It's a long way from my life in Hollywood, but by amazing grace, I found my calling. I am a holistic nurse entrepreneur.

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<sup>1</sup> Yoga Nursing Essentials eCourse – This continuing nursing education activity was approved by the American Holistic Nurses Association (AHNA), an accredited approver by the American Nurses Credentialing Center's Commission on Accreditation.



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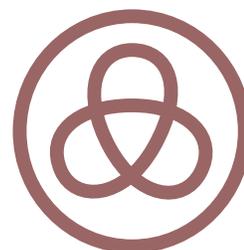
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