

“Developing a resilient mindset begins with positive thinking and avoiding anxiety through mindfulness.””

Bob Nees Jr., p2.

## Cleansing & Strengthening the Mind



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# Cleansing and Strengthening the Mind – New Way Forward



**Bob Nees, Jr., Senior Pastor  
& Chairman**

**G**reetings to our OHI community; I wish you a sunny and warm spring as we leave the cold season behind. It feels wonderful to get outside and feel the sunshine on our faces and the warm air on our skin after a long winter. Getting outside once again is an apt comparison to the way in which we are emerging from our two years of Covid-19 precautions.

You may recall from our January newsletter, I wrote that after two years of restrictions it was time to move forward, and a great time for re-evaluating our purpose, vision, values, and goals. It's a time to reflect on where we've been and where we want to go. I also wrote about how to recognize and deal with limiting beliefs. In this issue, I wish to address spring cleaning of the mind and how to strengthen our mental resilience.

### Cleaning with Meaning

*Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.*  
Romans 12:2

The return of spring always reminds me of spring cleaning. Spring cleaning can apply to cleaning the home or cleansing the mind of negative thoughts about ourselves and other people. At OHI, our tradition for “cleansing the mind” is our Wednesday Release Ceremony. During this sacred ceremony, our guests are encouraged to reflect on limiting thoughts, words, or deeds. Then, on a slip of paper, they write a list of things that no longer serve them. The entire community forms a circle around a fire, and each guest symbolically releases their limiting beliefs by burning their slips of paper with the full unconditional support of their fellow guests, staff, and missionaries at their side. By releasing these limiting items, space is created for future positive intentions.

### Moving Forward in the Face of Adversity

*We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.*  
2 Corinthians 4:8-9

As we begin to emerge from the restrictions of the past two years, it's time to plan how we are going to forge ahead. Meanwhile health experts are predicting either another wave of Covid variants or an entirely new pandemic; war has erupted in Eastern Europe; and inflation is causing prices to rise dramatically.

How are we going to handle the next crisis? We will handle it by developing mental toughness and mental resilience.

The American Psychological Association defines resilience as the process of adapting well in the face of adversity,

trauma, tragedy, threats or significant sources of stress, and that it is a trait that can be learned by anyone.

Humans are creative creatures, and when adversity strikes we adapt and find new ways of thriving. We are resilient, but it takes practice and planning. Developing a resilient mindset begins with positive thinking and avoiding anxiety through mindfulness. It means staying focused on your goals, even when circumstances force you to find a different path to reach them. Regularly visualizing the achievement of your goals will reduce anxiety and build self-confidence. A high level of self-confidence gives you control over your emotions and how you perceive and react to them. And, your commitment to your goals will help you overcome the challenges to achieve them.

### Snap Back from Setbacks the OHI Way

On a practical basis, here are some things you can do to build your mental resilience:

**Life is a learning process.** Manage your self-talk by catching negative thoughts and replacing them with positive ones. Acknowledge what you did correctly, what you learned from the mistake, and remind yourself that life is a process of learning. Just think of the old saying: "If you aren't failing; you aren't trying hard enough."

**Accept life on life's terms.** If something is frightening you, find its source. Identify the cause, investigate it, analyze it, and determine if it's real. Knowledge and understanding quell fear, and help you determine what you can do within your power to resolve it. Dale Carnegie, in his book *How to Stop Worrying and*

Start Living, suggests that you ask yourself, “What is the worst that could happen?” Then he says to either accept that or seek out the answers you need to fix it.”

**Build up your skillset.** Nothing is more empowering than developing your abilities. The better you get at a particular skill the more your confidence and self-esteem will grow. Mastery and competence also enhance your problem-solving skills and enable you to handle challenges as they arise.

**Limit your exposure to anxiety producing situations.** If you know you're not ready to move to the next level, don't force yourself. However, there is sometimes a fine line between feeling ready and being ready. Many times our fear of failure keeps us from trying even when we are fully competent. This is a good time to have a friendly colleague help you determine if you are indeed qualified; someone who will give you a push if you're holding back when you needn't be.

**Practice self-care by eating well, exercising, and getting enough sleep.** Following OHI's healthy holistic diet and taking regular walks outside in the sun and fresh air will do wonders to keep you mentally strong and resilient. Make sure you are including fun in your schedule. Do something on your bucket list. Alternatively, take on a chore you've been putting off, there's nothing more fortifying and energizing than the sense of accomplishment that comes from finally doing something you've been putting off.

**Cultivate community.** Develop a support network; start with your cohort here at OHI, the people who truly understand you and your goals. When you talk out your problems, fears, and challenges with others, it helps you put them in perspective and come up with solutions you may not have thought of.

**Engage in self-discovery to identify your strengths and weaknesses.** I like to do this first by meditating to clear my mind. Next by journaling: I inventory my talents and accomplishments to set a positive tone, and then I vent about my struggles. I find that the very process of writing often brings an idea for the solution I need.

**Accept that change is inevitable.** Helen Keller wisely observed, “Security is mostly a superstition. It does not exist in nature, nor do the children of men as a whole experience it. Avoiding danger is no safer in the long run than outright exposure. Life is either a daring adventure, or nothing.” One way to accept change is to see it as the advent of opportunity - for creating new business or making new friends. For many people change causes fear and anxiety, but when you live mindfully (one day at a time) and patiently, you find that most change is not nearly as bad as you anticipated, and oftentimes it turns out to be better.

**See your life as a journey.** Don't let the bumps in the road upset you, see them as new experiences from which you can learn.

This spring, I highly encourage you to come to OHI for your own personal retreat. Our program classes, cleansing diet, and the warmth of the OHI community will undoubtedly support you in your journey to optimum health.

### **OHI, The Safest Place to be Outside of Your Home!**

We continue to make upgrades to both of our facilities. At both locations, our OHI for Life Wellness Rooms are outfitted with a Molekule air purifier and 100% organic cotton linens and towels (including fitted sheets). We also brought Covid-19 testing in-house. At OHI San Diego: every guest room has wood flooring, high-speed internet, black-out shades, our guest room bathrooms have been renovated, and 80% of our food is from local organic farms. At OHI Austin, we added new wood flooring

and carpet to our exercise classroom. We hope you come to experience our OHI for Life Wellness Rooms – designed with your safety and comfort in mind.

**Inside this edition:** Read further about how to strengthen your immune system and change your wellness habits. Get to know our staff member, Danielle Demko; Natalia Eric, an OHI San Diego missionary; OHI guest, Paula Hansen; and Armelda Byrd's story of how the OHI Scholarship helped her. We remain humbled and grateful to all those who contribute and help people like Armelda. Please also consider contributing to the OHI Scholarship Fund which helps OHI community members in need. And finally, be sure to turn to page 10 for details on your Optimum Spring Cleanse.

Here's wishing you health and wellness in this spring season.





Yours in prayer,



Robert P. Nees, Jr.,  
Senior Pastor and Chairman  
Optimum Health Institute of  
San Diego and Austin

### **Stay Connected with your OHI cohort, share contact info before you leave:**

Join OHI Facebook pages for San Diego and Austin.

-  Start a Facebook Group Page for your cohort.
-  Share food videos.
-  Keep writing “Daily Gratitudes.”
-  Pledge to support your “Buddies.”

As your transformation grows arrange to return to OHI with your friends from your cohort.



# Boost Your Immunity

## How to Strengthen Your Immune System

You can't live through two years of a pandemic without having heard the phrase "boost your immune system." Just what exactly does that mean? Why should we do it? And how do we accomplish that?

### What Is Your Immune System and Its Function?

Your immune system is a large network of organs, white blood cells, proteins (antibodies) and chemicals. This system works together to protect you from foreign invaders (bacteria, viruses, parasites, and fungi) that cause infection, illness, and disease. The immune system includes:

#### Skin, Mucus Membranes, and Other First Line Defenses:

Your skin is the first line of defense in preventing and destroying germs before they enter your body. Skin produces oils and secretes other protective immune system cells. Mucus membranes line the respiratory, digestive, urinary, and reproductive tracts. Germs stick to mucus, and are moved out of the body. Tiny hairs in your nose catch germs. Enzymes found in sweat, tears, saliva, and mucus membranes as well as secretions in the vagina all defend against and destroy germs.

**White Blood Cells:** Serving as an army against harmful bacteria and viruses, white blood cells search for, attack, and destroy germs to keep you healthy. There are different white blood cell types. Each cell type either circulates in your bloodstream or resides in a particular tissue, and each cell type has a specific mission in your body's defense system.

**Lymph Nodes:** You have hundreds of lymph nodes all over your body, including in your neck, armpits, and groin. These small glands filter and destroy germs so they can't spread to other parts of your body and make you sick. Lymph nodes contain immune cells that analyze the foreign invaders, then

activate, replicate, and send the specific lymphocytes (white blood cells) to fight off that particular invader.

**Bone Marrow:** Stem cells in the spongy center of your bones develop into red blood cells, plasma cells, and a variety of white blood cells and other types of immune cells. Your bone marrow makes billions of new blood cells every day, and releases them into your bloodstream.

**Stomach and Bowel:** Stomach acid kills many bacteria soon after they enter your body. You also have good bacteria in your intestines that kill harmful bacteria. The good bacteria in your gut are essential to a healthy immune system.

**Spleen:** Your spleen stores white blood cells that defend your body from foreign invaders. It also filters your blood, destroying old and damaged red blood cells.

**Tonsils & Adenoids:** Located in the throat and nasal passage, tonsils and adenoids can trap foreign invaders as soon as they enter your body. They have immune cells that produce antibodies that fight throat and lung infections.

**Thymus:** This small organ in your upper chest beneath your breast bone helps mature a certain type of white blood cell whose task is to recognize and remember a specific invader so that an attack can be quickly mounted the next time that same type of invader is encountered.

### Why Is The Immune System Important?

When your immune system is working properly it prevents germs from entering your body, and destroys them or limits their harm if they do get in. Your immune system can tell which cells are yours and which substances are foreign to your body. It learns about germs after you've been exposed to them,

developing antibodies to protect you from those specific germs. When your immune system is not working properly, it can't mount a winning attack against an invading germ, and an infection develops. You need a healthy immune system to create white blood cells to attack and kill bacteria, viruses, parasites, and fungi.

### What Weakens The Immune System?

Diet affects the immune system to a great extent. "70% of the immune system is located in the gut," said David Heber, MD, PhD, professor emeritus of medicine at UCLA Health. "Nutrition is a key modulator of immune function."

Immune cells in the gut interact with the microbiome, the diverse array of bacteria and fungi that live in the gastrointestinal tract and are directly influenced by an individual's diet and lifestyle. The foods we eat affect the diversity and composition of bacteria in the gut, which in turn affect immune cells. Those gut bugs are healthiest and support strong immunity when their hosts (that's us) consume plant foods that are high in fiber.

"The microbiome and the immune system are critically intertwined," says Jonathan Jacobs, MD, PhD, a professor of digestive diseases at the David Geffen School of Medicine at UCLA. "What's present in the gut determines what education immune cells get. Dietary diversity and microbial diversity go together. The typical Western diet, which is high in animal proteins, sugar, processed foods, and saturated fat, results in less-diverse gut bacteria and promotes inflammation and chronic disorders. Healthy gut bacteria subsist on complex carbohydrates and fiber that our own cells are unable to digest. Those fibrous sources are plant foods, from apples and broccoli to yams and zucchini."

### What BOOSTS The Immune System?

Just like the rest of your body, your immune system needs nourishment, rest, and a healthy environment to stay strong.



Certain lifestyle changes can BOOST your immune system and help you avoid illness. To keep your immune system healthy, you should:

- Get plenty of sleep
- Drink LOTS of water
- Exercise regularly
- Eat nutritionally rich whole foods (fruits & veggies)
- Focus on fermented foods
- Maintain a healthy body weight
- Manage stress

### How OHI's Program Can Help BOOST Your Immune System?

OHI's program directly supports better immune system health in so many ways:

#### Cleansing and nourishing the body:

Wheatgrass juice and a plant-based, organic, raw food diet at OHI set the foundation for a strong immune system. A healthy diet is absolutely essential to a healthy immune system, and a diet plan that focuses on plants and fiber will help your immune system heal the body faster when it gets sick. By eating a raw plant-based diet and eliminating sugar, your immune system is purged of toxins and has all the fuel it needs to produce white blood cells to fight off illness.

**Include fermented foods:** A fiber-rich diet supports your gut's microbiome, and fermented foods packed with live bacteria are great for your gut health. OHI's Fermented Foods & Recipes class and Sauerkraut Instruction class are terrific ways to learn how easy it is to make fermented foods like sauerkraut and seed cheese. YUM!

**Regular exercise:** The gentle exercise and stretch classes stimulate the lymphatic system to eliminate toxins, boost the immune system, and contribute to the healing process.

**Reduce stress:** The Mental Detoxification and Emotional Detoxification classes are absolute musts to help reduce stress. Developing a mindfulness practice of gratitude, affirmations, visualization, journaling, and living in the present all contribute to a healthier stress-free life. And OHI's weekly Wednesday Release Ceremony gives you a transcendent moment to purge your life of whatever stresses have been plaguing you.

Overall, the immune system is integral to your body's efforts to stay healthy. The more we can do to support a healthy immune system, the stronger our body will be when under attack from bacteria and viruses. So eat your veggies, include fermented foods, drink your water, and get lots of sleep, and you'll be doing your part to NATURALLY boost your immunity!

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*"6 Ways to boost your immune system naturally before you get sick," Allina Health, [www.allinahealth.org](http://www.allinahealth.org)*

*"5 Ways to Boost Your Immune System," Gundersen Health System, [www.gundersenhealth.org](http://www.gundersenhealth.org)*

*"6 Immune System Busters & Boosters," Web MD, [www.webmd.com](http://www.webmd.com)*

*"If you want to boost immunity, look to the gut," by Sandy Cohen, March 19, 2021, UCLA Health, [www.connect.uclahealth.org](http://www.connect.uclahealth.org)*

*"How to boost your immune system," Harvard Health Publishing, Harvard Medical School, [www.health.harvard.edu](http://www.health.harvard.edu)*

*"Immune System," [www.myclevelandclinic.org](http://www.myclevelandclinic.org)*

## OHI Program Tip

## Change Your Wellness Habits to Change Your Life

**W**hat does “wellness” mean? “Wellness” is a personalized approach to living life in a way that allows you to become the best person you can be, balancing physical, mental, and spiritual well being. Achieving that complex balance means going beyond diet and exercise to include other health touchpoints like managing stress, reducing the risk of illness, and more. “Wellness” is the process of actively choosing to change individual habits to achieve a truly healthy and fulfilling life.

### Types of Wellness

Let’s break down “wellness” to study each dimension — occupational, spiritual, physical, and intellectual wellness.

**Occupational wellness** means finding your calling in life by participating in activities that are meaningful and provide purpose to your day. Your job encompasses so much of your time and energy, so it’s important to pursue something you love. So how do you feed your occupational wellness? First, focus on the benefits and positives of your current job, and create connections with your co-workers. Not every day will be a great day, but there are great moments to be celebrated in each day when you work with people you care about. Second, increase your skills and knowledge to expand what you’re able to give of yourself while at work. And finally, establish a healthy work/life balance so every wellness dimension gets your attention.

**Spiritual wellness** represents your personal beliefs, principles, and values, and how you integrate them with action toward bettering yourself and the world around you. It is a self-reflective practice that asks you find joy in everyday life as you look inward to discover the deeper meaning life should hold for you. So how do you feed your spiritual wellness? First, analyze patterns in your life to help you see that you have control over your destiny, and that your choices directly impact your ability to lead a happy and healthy life. Second, make time for self-care to relieve the physical and emotional tension that can block your path to spiritual wellness. Try meditation, journaling, or yoga to cancel negative thinking and leave space for positive change. And finally, take time for travel. Being in a new space that allows you to relax will increase your ability to connect with your inner self on your journey to find the deeper meaning in life.

**Physical wellness** means caring for your body through regular physical activity, proper nutrition, and supportive mental health practices. So how do you feed your physical wellness? First, make daily exercise a goal. Whether you take the stairs instead of the elevator or workout at the gym, the point is to move your body frequently. The proven benefits of physical activity include strengthened bones and muscles, reduced risk of disease



and stroke, and more energy. Second, nurture your body with a well-balanced diet packed with fresh, healthy food. A diverse diet with foods rich in vitamins and nutrients will not only help prevent illness, but also keep your body functioning at its best. And finally, make sure you get enough sleep and enough water each day. Rest and hydration are the very foundations for maintaining good physical health.

**Intellectual wellness** means engaging in creative activities that expand your knowledge and skills — embrace life-long learning! When you open your mind to new challenges and experiences, you improve your existing skills as you learn new concepts and ideas. These new understandings help you become more mindful, more well rounded, and better able to understand the relationship between yourself, others, and the environment. So how do you feed your intellectual wellness? First, read, read, read! Reading improves your memory and vocabulary, and increases your capacity for empathy. Second, explore the world around you. When you put the book down and go to a museum or take a nature walk, the experiential aspect of learning deepens your understanding. And finally, create something. Whether it’s playing an instrument or painting a landscape, tapping into your creative side helps anchor your emotional stability so your mind is free to learn new things.

At OHI, our entire program - including our classes, diet, and community fellowship - supports all dimensions of wellness. Remember, wellness is a life-long pursuit. Strive for balance, control what you can (diet, exercise, stress), and surround yourself with supportive care for the rest of it. May the changes you make to your wellness habits change your life for the better!

## Meet Paula Hansen, a “frequent flyer” at OHI San Diego!



**Paula Hansen**

**S**ometimes your life takes a fortuitous turn by the smallest of chance encounters. “I went to a personal growth workshop, and spent a lot of time talking to this other workshop participant,” said Paula Hansen. “OHI happened to come up in our conversation. We both knew a little about it, but neither of us had ever done the program. He and I kept in touch over the

course of the next year, texting every now and again. One day I texted him to say hi, and he texted me back just two sentences. ‘I’m at OHI. YOU SHOULD COME!’ I felt like those words just reached out and grabbed me. I had been thinking about how to take better care of my body and my life, and I was really drawn to the OHI program. Now here was someone that was actually on the OHI campus telling me to come. I felt like I just had to do it right then. So I did.”

Paula made her first visit to OHI San Diego ten years ago in 2012. “That first visit was amazing,” enthused Paula. “I really felt like I had been struggling with an addiction to sugar and white flour, and even though I knew how bad it was for me, I just couldn’t kick the habit and eat healthily. Being at OHI for a week made everything click for me. I didn’t feel like the detox was difficult. The cleanse made my body feel so much better, and the raw food diet just made sense. It was such a relief not to feel bad about what I was eating. And the OHI program was about so much more than food. The classes helped me feel more connected to a spiritual life. I was filled with gratitude. My heart was more open and loving. I just felt more at peace than I had in a very long time.”

Paula has been back to OHI 20 times. Wow! Now that’s a true OHI Frequent Flyer! “I go for a week whenever I feel like I need a healthy reboot,” said Paula. “I absolutely love the classes on digestion and elimination. Doing the cleanse helps my body reorient toward health – I actually crave salad instead of pasta, and the classes help me understand why! The science information in the classes helps keep me in a healthy groove.”

Paula also appreciates the mental health support at OHI. She was already experienced in using journaling, meditation, and imagery in her practice on her personal path of healing, so the positive thinking and alpha state exercises really appeal to her. “OHI has helped me grow to be my best self” said Paula.

One of the things that Paula loves most about OHI is the amazing people she meets. “I don’t feel like I’m struggling on my own anymore,” Paula said. “OHI has my back, and the other guests that I’ve met there are like my family. OHI community members have such open hearts, and are so loving and supportive and accepting. They’ve all taught me to love myself. I am truly happier because of OHI.”

Paula has two favorite ceremonies she looks forward to during every OHI visit. “I absolutely love the Wednesday release ceremony,” said Paula. “I feel so much stronger every single time I go through it. And the Friday morning testimonial where healings are revealed and celebrated is such a blessing to be a part of. Every story is a triumph of the human spirit. I feel truly inspired with every testimonial that is shared.”

Paula acknowledged that her sugar and white flour addiction may have been the impetus for first coming to OHI, but it wasn’t the only challenge she was meant to overcome. “Through OHI I have learned so much about healing from trauma,” Paula said. “Just as the body can heal, your psyche can heal as well. I would never have thought that possible before now, but my journey has revealed that truth to me. What a gift!”

Paula was eager to share some closing words of advice. “I would never have been able to grow as much as I have if it weren’t for OHI,” she said. “If I have one piece of advice it’s to have the courage to do something you’ve never done before. Be open to opportunities. If I hadn’t listened when my friend said ‘YOU SHOULD COME,’ I can’t imagine where my life would be right now. All the help and resources are just waiting here at OHI for you. Say yes to it all, and be willing to be vulnerable. When you open yourself up to healing, your life will change for the better!”

**“I use my weeks at OHI as a healing retreat to connect more deeply with my true nature.”**

## Missionary Spotlight

## Get to Know OHI Missionary, Natalia Eric

**N**atalia Eric has experienced adversity... over, and over, and over again. And yet here she is, with a big smile on her face. “I have seven grandchildren,” Natalia said. “Cancer can come and knock at my door, but I am not going anywhere. I intend to be here to watch them all grow up. And OHI has given me that chance.”



Natalia Eric

Natalia was born in Moscow. She got married in 1984, and moved with her new husband back to his childhood home in Serbia, Yugoslavia. They started a family, and lived there for ten years. In 1994, Natalia and her family made one more big move, this time to Toronto, Canada. The family all became proud Canadian citizens in 1997, and Natalia worked in a hospital as a labor and delivery clerical coordinator. The years went by, and Natalia watched her three children grow up. Then in 2008, her life was turned upside down. “I was diagnosed with thyroid cancer,” said Natalia. “Two years later, I was diagnosed with Non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma, stage 4,” said Natalia. “They had to remove my spleen and lymph nodes. In 2012, the Non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma was back. This time I had to undergo six rounds of chemotherapy, and then do chemo every three months for two years. I had nothing left to give. I was bald from all the chemo. My life expectancy was five years at best. I asked God for a sign that everything was going to be OK. I went outside to get the mail, and when I turned around I saw a double rainbow over my house. It was a sign, but what did it mean? I was watching YouTube videos on healthy eating, desperate for some new options, and one of the YouTubers I was watching mentioned OHI. It was just a passing mention, but it piqued my curiosity. I looked them up, and immediately booked a 3-week stay. The detox that my body went through that first week at OHI after holding all the toxicity of three years of chemo was terrible. But after my body detoxed, it was like a light switch went on. The grass was greener. The sky was bluer. I felt something that I hadn’t felt in a long time — hope.”

Natalia immediately applied to the OHI Missionary Program, and started in May 2015. “I wanted to be a missionary because

my body needs a full reset that only a 3-month stay can give,” said Natalia. “I now understand what my body needs to be healthy, and I teach my grandchildren to eat healthily. I want them to value the good health they have now, and to honor their bodies as they age. OHI has taught me how my body can heal itself as it’s intended to in nature, through the power of whole raw foods.”

Natalia finds the OHI Missionary Program to be incredibly rewarding. “Being a missionary allows me to meet different people every week,” said Natalia. “For guests who are new to OHI, they are assigned a missionary as their buddy for the first week. We spend a lot of time together. They share their stories. I share mine. We learn from each other. The experience is never the same, but the outcomes are always so positive. Just watching the healing power all people experience in that first week of detox is nothing short of miraculous to me.”

As a missionary, Natalia’s favorite thing to do is lead the exercise classes for guests. “It is such a joy to stretch my body, and feel the power that it now holds,” said Natalia. “I survived having Non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma twice, then thyroid cancer, and then high blood pressure, and my body was broken. I weighed over 200lbs, I had lost all my hair, and I didn’t have an ounce of strength left. I came to OHI looking for anything positive to take hold in my body, after having so much negativity reside there. Seven years later, I have lost 60lbs, I’m cancer-free, my blood pressure is under control, and I feel so ALIVE! I tell everyone I know about OHI. I have been a missionary five times, and each experience has been so valuable. They have helped me so much, and that makes me want to help others. I am so grateful to be here, and feeling this healthy.”

Natalia has simple words of advice for anyone considering a stay at OHI. “Be willing to be open, and change yourself,” said Natalia. “Go to the Friday Morning Testimonials, and open your heart to people’s stories of change. Every class will change your perspective, and help you on your healing journey. Practice conscious breathing. Learn alpha state mediation techniques. Take the fermented foods class. All of it will come together for you, so you can successfully continue the program on your own at home. You will love your life!”

**But after my body detoxed, it was like a light switch went on. The grass was greener. The sky was bluer. I felt something that I hadn’t felt in a long time — hope.”**



## Armelda Byrd's Journey to Wellness

# Scholarship Recipient Finds Hope in the Eyes of OHI Staff



**Armelda Byrd's**

**A**rmelda Byrd looked at the pandemic as an opportunity to improve her health. "I thought I'd use the break from work to exercise and lose some weight," said Armelda. "I lost 35lbs, but the uterine fibroid I'd had for many years started to give me pain. Surgery revealed the shock that I had rare Stage 3 Carcinosarcoma uterine cancer that had spread to my ovaries and some lymph nodes. The mass weighed more than 15lbs. I was in the hospital and rehab for over 4 weeks. When I finally went home, I was in a wheelchair, and not sure what to do next. I live alone, I was in pain, and I was rapidly losing weight. My doctor recommended chemotherapy immediately, but I didn't feel I could endure it. My sister, a nurse, suggested OHI, but the program was out of reach for me financially. I reached out to OHI, and by the grace of God, they awarded me a scholarship! I combined that

scholarship with my savings and financial gifts from my friends and family, and was able to book a stay at OHI San Diego for five weeks. It literally changed my life."

Armelda came to OHI walking with a cane. She could barely participate in classes during the first week because she was so weak. "I know the program at OHI was pivotal to nourishing my body," said Armelda. "But the staff at OHI was what I needed to nourish my soul. The love, understanding, and care they lavished on me made me confident that I would get better. They give me the strength to keep fighting."

Armelda doesn't use a cane now. Her pain is manageable, and her muscle tone is improving. "Without the OHI scholarship, I wouldn't be here," said Armelda. "Before OHI, cancer consumed me. My father always taught me to face my fears and with OHI's program, I could feel the life force returning to me. My doctor made me feel like I needed to prepare for the end. OHI helped me prepare for the beginning of the rest of my life. Thank you OHI!"

## Share the Gift of Healing



### Three Ways to Give

- 1 MAIL** newsletter donation envelope
- 2 ONLINE** [www.OptimumHealth.org](http://www.OptimumHealth.org)
- 3 PHONE** (800) 993-4325

## Share the Love, Share the Feeling, Share the Gift of Healing

Please consider contributing to the OHI Scholarship Fund to help those in need experience the benefits of the OHI program. Over the course of our 45 years, OHI has provided scholarships to individuals who could not afford to otherwise attend. In most years, we have been able to fulfill all requests for assistance through the generosity of our community. OHI invites you to join with us in celebrating our healing mission with a tax-deductible gift. Your contribution will help to make our community stronger, healthier, and more vibrant. Thank you so much for your generosity!

Provide the Gift of Healing today by supporting the OHI Scholarship Fund with a tax-deductible:

- One-Time Donation, or
- Sustainable Monthly Contribution

**Thank you for your generosity!**

Optimum Health Institute is a non-profit, religious organization. Your donation is tax deductible.

## Get to know Danielle Demko, new Executive Director at OHI Austin!



**Danielle Demko**

**D**anielle Demko is making the leap to Austin, TX. “I have been on the OHI San Diego campus since January 2019,” said Danielle. “I absolutely love it there, but when the chance to transition to the OHI Austin campus presented itself, I just had to say YES to the opportunity. The team at the Austin campus has done a great job. I can’t wait to jump in.”

Danielle had a long and prosperous career prior to OHI. She spent 14 years at a non-denominational mega-church in San Diego where she started in accounting, then moved over to spiritual counseling, leadership training, and teaching. Her last five years at the church were in HR as the Director of Training & Development. “I have a master’s degree in Industrial-Organizational Psychology which is focused on the psychology of developing people and building teams,” said Danielle. “Whether I am teaching, training, mentoring, or leading, my heart is full when I can offer another perspective and encourage growth physically or emotionally through life’s opportunities.”

When Danielle joined OHI, her talents and skills made a big impression, and she naturally took on numerous responsibilities. “When I first joined OHI, I was a Senior Facilitator, teaching and counseling guests,” said Danielle. “Four months later, I took the reins of the OHI Missionary Program. I am certified to teach 27 of the 40 different classes in the OHI curriculum. I am passionate about the contemplative classes, Emotional & Mental Detox, Alpha I & II, Conscious Breathing, Stretch, etc. Everyone is on their own journey in life. These classes get to the heart of the healing journey, peeling back the layers and opening up how guests see themselves, life, health, even food. It is such an honor to be a part of this.

As part of her interview process in 2018, Danielle went through the program at OHI Austin, where she fell in love with the campus and staff. “I always wondered if one day I’d end up there,” said Danielle. “OHI Austin holds a special place in my heart.” In 2021, Danielle was brought in to cover classes for Cheryl Green, OHI Austin’s current Executive Director, while she was out of town.

“Cheryl is just amazing,” said Danielle. “It’s easy to see why the OHI Austin guests, missionaries, and staff love her so much.”

Cheryl decided to take a sabbatical from her OHI position, and Danielle has stepped up to fill her shoes. “Cheryl won’t be gone for long,” said Danielle. “She’ll return to OHI Austin and continue her connection with the guests in spiritual direction and teaching classes part-time.”

While Danielle is connected to her “OHI family” in San Diego, Austin is quickly becoming family as well. As she gets to know the culture at OHI Austin, she is enjoying bonding with the staff and greeting each new guest on Sundays. “My goal is to simply enhance what is already working so well at OHI Austin,” said Danielle. “I feel like I’ve been called to help others through OHI, and it is my honor to be able to contribute to the OHI Austin campus. I have every intention of embracing the current culture and traditions, while looking ahead to see what the future holds for us here. We intend to expand the staff so I’m able to get out in the community and raise awareness of all that we have to offer at OHI.”

As OHI Austin’s Executive Director, Danielle will be responsible for overseeing the OHI Austin community of guests, missionaries, and staff, the program classes, and the property. “I am also in a 2-year ordination program,” said Danielle. I will graduate as an ordained minister in 2023. As both a teacher as well as a minister, I hold a safe and sacred space for guests. I look forward to teaching them, being an advocate for them, and counseling them with an open heart. Every guest that walks through the OHI doors comes in with an opportunity for growth. I try to meet each guest in the space where I am most needed, and support them as they learn the deeper meaning behind how they got to where they are in life. It’s an honor to help them figure out that they can take charge of their own outcomes. The transformation that guests undergo when they change their mindset is nothing short of miraculous.”

Danielle recently bought a house in the neighboring town of Bastrop and is already in love with her new community. “What a gorgeous place to live,” said Danielle. “The people are super friendly, the historic homes are breathtaking, and the downtown has so many things to do. I couldn’t be more proud to join this community, and I look forward to spending many happy years here. Thanks for extending me such a warm welcome, OHI Austin! I feel like one of the family already!”



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Spring2022

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### CONTACT US: (800) 993-4325

We'd love to hear from you. To receive special offers and updates, email us at [newsletter@optimumhealth.org](mailto:newsletter@optimumhealth.org) or call us at (800) 993-4325. For more information about the OHI Program, please visit our website at [www.optimumhealth.org](http://www.optimumhealth.org)

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