

## Lincoln Journal Star

### Cindy Lange-Kubick: Prem and Nancy Nathenson walking the simple path via the hard road

Jan 27, 2018



When Paul Nathenson was a young man, he moved to New Mexico and lived in an ashram and practiced meditation.

He adopted the Hindi name Prem.

A word that means love.

It was the word on his name tag when he went to work as a nurse's aide at St. Francis Hospital in Topeka, Kansas, and met a woman named Nancy, a respiratory therapist who strode through patients' rooms in her starched uniform looking like she owned the place.

A woman who made — makes — his heart flutter and who would become his wife.

By the time the couple and their three kids moved to Lincoln in 1994, most people knew Prem as Paul.

He'd given up meditation and taken up running years earlier. And biking. And swimming. He wore a shirt and tie to work as vice president of nursing and patient care at Madonna. Nancy worked at the rehab hospital, too.

They lived in a two-story stucco house in a neighborhood filled with old houses and shade trees. Paul trained for triathlons and traveled and spent time with those kids — Abe and Sophie and Lucas.

In 2002, he started noticing weakness in his left side and doctors diagnosed a mild stroke. When he lost fine-motor control on his left side, he moved all the gears on his bike to the right. He fashioned a palm-sized piece of plastic for his left hand to help his swimming stroke. He switched his shoelaces and bike helmet strap to velcro. He didn't want to believe his symptoms. "It scared me, because I worked in rehab," he says. "I was good at denial."

The seizures started a year later. His first grand mal seizure followed a 16-mile run and the triathlete was diagnosed with a malignant brain tumor.

He thought he'd sit up at the side of his bed and walk away after his operation in 2004, but to get the cancer, the surgeon had to take tissue that controlled movement on his left side.

And there was no bringing it back.

Paul became a patient at Madonna, where he'd worked for so long.

He began meditating again.

He became Prem again.

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Last week, I took a tour of Prem and Nancy's practice — Simple Path Health & Wellness — on South Street, with Lefty's Records on one side, a bike shop on the other. The walls are painted soothing shades and covered in round mirrors and photos from their travels to faraway places.

We passed a tiny kitchen and a nook carved out for the couple to eat lunch.

We toured the therapy rooms, where Prem and Nancy work with patients — high-tech machines alongside essential oils and supplements, candles and cozy blankets.

Prem pointed to a photo in his therapy room. Two boys on a balcony in Havana, where he'd traveled in the early '90s with a group of nurses on a State Department-approved mission to improve cross-cultural understanding.

He remembered grabbing his Canon camera to capture the curious youngsters. "I had two hands then," the 63-year-old says.

He's matter-of-fact about this. It's true. Prem can't use his left hand, and he wears a plastic brace on his left foot that ends below his knee.

But the man who was told he'd leave in-patient therapy at Madonna in a wheelchair in 2004 walked out the door six weeks later.

He was buoyed by his children. Sophie, who flew in to cheer him on. Abe, who came to hang out and watch TV. Lucas, who showed up with his skater buddies and wouldn't go home.

He used their love as fuel.

“He treated his therapy like it was triathlon training,” Nancy says.

He hadn't wanted to go to Madonna for rehab in the beginning — his role was on the other side of patient care — but he came to embrace it.

“He became an advocate for himself and his fellow patients,” Nancy says. When he noticed there wasn't a clock in the common area of the unit, he requested and got one. What? No music? A CD player and radio showed up.

Later, when he went back to work at the institution, he introduced aromatherapy and music therapy and massage, and drumming groups for patients with dementia.

Prem is a naturopath and nurse practitioner now. He's working on his doctorate in nursing. He'd been at Madonna for 19 years when he left in 2013 to help people who wanted to find an alternate path to wellness.

“Our mission, really, is to provide a place in Lincoln where you can get integrative health care,” he says.

Nancy still works at Madonna as a respiratory therapy education coordinator. But she's here, too, helping patients with edema as a certified lymphatic enhancer; helping people find their way as a certified holistic life coach.

People come to them for all sorts of health struggles. Chronic pain or fibromyalgia. Diabetes or complementary care for cancer. Colds and flu and sinus infections. Stress, insomnia, weight loss. “We use natural methods and whatever you want to do biomedically,” Nancy says. “We would never tell people not to do conventional treatments.”

Referred by his primary care doctor, Tony Acone came to see Prem after the side effects of post-surgery chemo left him depleted, and he'd stopped treatment.

“My first session with Prem, I can't tell you how comforted I was.”

The naturopath spent time listening. He formulated a treatment plan, suggesting a radical change in his diet, along with supplements and a series of treatments using resonant light therapy.

“He's so receptive. So authentic,” he said. “He and Nancy are terrific people.”

Vanessa Zobeck agrees. Prem and Nancy treated her for gallbladder attacks, irritable bowel syndrome and sinus infections when she came in search of alternatives to her traditional medical treatments.

“I am amazed at their individual and combined/collaborative level of knowledge and treatment options,” she said in an email.

She calls their outlook realistically optimistic.

“They are happy people who are happy with their lives and the services they are providing, and it shows.”

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Nancy calls her husband the Happy Buddha.

He calls her his best therapist.

“Nancy gave up a lot to help me recover,” Prem says. “My experience with cancer was really our experience.”

After Prem’s surgery in 2004, he underwent radiation to kill the remaining cancer cells, but the tumor came back two years later and doctors recommended surgery followed by chemotherapy. Prem and Nancy said no.

He had already been visiting a naturopath in Arizona to wean himself off anti-seizure drugs, taking supplements, modifying his diet, meditating twice a day — an hour every morning and 30 minutes each night.

Now he gave up sugar and white flour, rice and grains and meat.

When he meditated he visualized ocean waves washing away his cancer.

Every three months, Prem had an MRI. The tumor was gone nine months later.

He was able to stay off anti-seizure medications for 12 years. After two hospitalizations since 2016 — twice more learning to walk again — he is supplementing his natural approach with small doses of prescription medication for breakthrough seizures.

“It is what it is,” he says.

His daughter says this: “From the moment things first went awry, he adapted to it. He molded his lifestyle around his new condition pretty seamlessly.”

She talks about her dad in the days before she was born. The young man who meditated and became Prem.

He didn't have to reinvent himself after the surgery, she says. "It was more like a revival of that lifestyle."

Sophie Nathenson is a medical sociologist in Oregon. She remembers her dad’s mantra growing up: Do what you love.

“The wellness center is them doing what they love,” she says. “They’re really just supporting other people in a way that’s natural and being themselves.”

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After the tour, we eat lunch in the cozy nook off the kitchen.

Nancy heats up soup from Open Harvest and sets slices of sourdough wheat bread on a plate.

Prem offers me a small cup of kombucha.

They talk about the benefits of the fermented tea and why sourdough is good for you, and I listen.

I want to lie down on one of the therapy beds and listen to one of synchronized relaxation CDs and let my brainwaves slow down.

Instead, we sit in Prem and Nancy’s office and watch a slideshow from one of Nancy’s many talks on caregiving and wellness.

Photos flash by, set to music.

Prem and Nancy holding toddlers and mugging on park benches with three growing children and posing in the ocean wearing sunglasses and swimsuits.

Prem in a hospital bed, holding up his right hand in a wave. Prem on the telephone, a towel over his face to cover the tears. Prem in the Madonna therapy gym. Prem in a wheelchair learning to cook. Prem on two feet, learning to walk.

Prem and Nancy and the kids all grown up. Traveling through Europe. A man with a paralyzed left side, feeling lucky.

And Nancy back on the screen behind a podium, talking about the husband she still adores, explaining the hard path that led them to this simple place.

To learn more about Prem and Nancy Nathenson and the services they offer visit:  
[www.simplepathlincoln.com](http://www.simplepathlincoln.com)