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Alternative Healing

San Diego County's Optimum Health Institute

By Belle Tuckerman

I never realized how vitally important the color green is until I visited the Optimum Health Institute. Mr. Rodale discusses green in *The Synonym Finder* (c) 1978, Rodale Press, Inc. Emmaus, Pa.) as "young, vigorous, sturdy, sound, healthy, strong, active, robust, energetic..." And that is how I felt when I completed my self imposed, week long sentence at OHI, as it is affectionately called by its veterans. One well seasoned vet, Nina Howard, treks all the way from Ann Arbor, Michigan annually to give her body a good spring cleaning. She says, "OHI is where I go when I feel like I need a fresh new beginning. It is simple; no muss no fuss. I can stay with my thoughts and feelings as I clean my body - I get squeaky clean. When I go there I'm not very social. I keep mostly to myself. I journal and meditate and take walks and reassess my life. I like having a place to go where there are no distractions. As I clean out my body of the physical toxins that have accumulated over the years. I also give it a rest from the mental toxins that pollute my thoughts. I always leave there refreshed, once again in love with this holy temple called "my body". My eyes are bright, my skin silky smooth and my mental attitude in a state of gratitude. I am, once again, happy and in love with life."

Such a statement is easy to say, once you get through the first week. But, if you've never detoxified before, it isn't an easy thing. The following is the diary of a typical guest who arrives, full of the caffeine, smog, computer rads and freeway grime, deprived of sleep, jaws clenched and shoulders in the usual position of the Incredible Hulk: me!

On the day I'm supposed to arrive, my Jeep Grand Cherokee is loaded down with all the comforts of home: books, journal, laptop, cell phone, bottled water, clothing suited for a detoxifying week (i.e. sweats, tees, shorts and other baggy items). I also throw in a few granola bars in case I need a fix. I heard a rumor that they don't feed you very much. That worries me, so I take along a little security. I survey the rear end of the jeep and am amazed at all the stuff it takes to get a toxic person through a week. I'm ready to make my long journey to Lemon Grove and the Optimum Health Institute, just 65 miles down the 1-5 from my neighborhood of Laguna Niguel.

When I arrive I check in at the front desk and give the attendant a deposit for my accommodations. It is commonly known that OHI is the best bargain in health retreats in the country. Because they are a nonprofit, non-denominational organization, their weekly rates are amazingly low. You can pay a fortune for a stay in the hospital, and come home sicker, or you can pay a ridiculous weekly rate at OHI, ranging from \$450-\$750 and come home well.

My apartment is in the middle price range which I am sharing with my sister who is meeting me here. We have two bedrooms, two baths, a living room and a kitchen. Instinctively, I open the refrigerator door only to find it completely empty. I never realized, until that moment, how depressing an empty refrigerator can be. I think to myself, "Self, this is how your innards will look when you leave here." Since one does not cook for oneself at OHI, I wonder why kitchens are provided. However, I later find out that some guests arrive and virtually never leave.

They become what is known as "working guests". They live on the premises, dedicate some of their time to helping out with various chores and in exchange, get a place to stay and food to eat; all the while, they keep on getting healthier. Word has it that some of these guests arrive with catastrophic illnesses and achieve great states of wellbeing. Their gratitude then extends to wanting to assist in the healing of other guests.

My sister, Evie and I decide who gets the bedroom with the king bed and who gets the twins. Amazingly we do not fight over it. I decided to be the nice guy and take the two twins. She graciously accepts. Figures!

I look around for the TV No TV of course. Silly me. I'm supposed to be mentally detoxifying too. What could be more polluting to the mind than TV? Well that's another addiction I'll have to add to my list during my week at OHI.

Our experience begins with a tour of the facility. It is simple, clean, quiet and very much away from the hectic pace of life in which most guests live. The greenhouse is the size of a three story office building and it houses several shelved racks of wheatgrass flats, all in various stages of growth, from sprouts to a full 6-8 inch length blade. I'm told that 1500 flats of grass can be grown at one time. It is inspiring to see all that healthy green stuff growing just for us. Most of the guests probably associate green with money; but now we get a whole new perspective on this healing color.

We are shown the juicing room which is lined with counters that hold the 'Juicing machines.' In one corner is a large cooler filled with flats of cut grass. Our tour guide shows us how to handle the grass and how to juice it. It takes a special juicing machine to grind up this grass. It is extremely tough and hardy and a wheatgrass juicer is a heavy steel unit with a large and powerful blade. As the grass slowly disappears the juice drips into the cup. We are amazed at what a small amount of juice is produced by the large bowl of grass that was fed into the machine. Now I understand why they must grow hundreds of flats of wheatgrass at a time. Wheatgrass cannot be eaten. Because of its extreme toughness, it will eat you. But it produces a dark, rich juice that is said to contain all the nutrients needed for a human being to survive. After reading their pamphlet, Wheatgrass Nutritional Analysis Report, I am amazed to find out that it contains nearly every nutrient essential for optimum health in the human body and this is why the originally named Hippocrates Institute became the Optimum Health Institute. However, when I taste this dark green elixir I find its intensity and (to me) bitterness sending shivers down my spine. In that moment I think

perhaps I'd rather be taking a tuba lesson. So I toast my second sip to my sister and vow to make friends with wheatgrass 'Juice. Believe me, a vintage Chardonnay, it isn't!