The Canadian College of Homeopathic Medicine: An Epic Story; a Journey of Love

Interview with Joyce Edge, Vice President of the Canadian College of Homeopathic Medicine

By Narda Alcantara Valverde¹

n the North American homeopathic milieu it is well known that Raymond Edge founded the Toronto School of Homeopathic Medicine, now known as the Canadian College of Homeopathic Medicine (CCHM). In this interview, held between October 2021 and January 2022, Joyce Edge—wife, collaborator, and Ray's life partner—recounts her story, and how a series of fortuitous events took her on an amazing adventure that resonates with so many graduates and practitioners of the Art of Homeopathy, in and outside of Canada.

AH: Thank you for accepting this interview. The very first thing I would like to ask is: What inspired Ray to become a homeopath? There are many examples of homeopaths whose start in the practice was triggered by a sudden serendipitous event. What was Raymond Edge's moment of truth?

JE: It was 1984, England. Ray was a musician, trying to make a living as an artist. After a typical evening with friends, he was suffering from a hangover. So, a buddy gives him a homeopathic remedy called *Nux vomica*, and voilà, no more hangover. Ray says "What is this stuff?" At that time Ray starts reflecting on this, he's thinking to himself, "Here I am, 36 years old and I'm not making a great living out of my music, maybe it's time to find a new career," And off he goes to Misha Norland's School of Homeopathy in Uffculme, Devon. Meanwhile he's living in Wales, so he commutes for one fourday weekend per month for the next four years. After graduation he establishes his practice in Wales, works in a dispensary for underprivileged children, and volunteers as a DJ at a local radio station. His love for music never waned.

AH: We know that Raymond graduated and started his practice in Wales. How did he decide to come to Canada?

JE: In 1994, he was penniless and homesick for Canada, so he returned to the city of his birth, Toronto. Did I mention that Ray and John Struthers and another wonderful friend, Adrian, had all worked together at The Old Spaghetti Factory, a restaurant, in the late 70s and early 80s? Well, by now John has completed his law degree and is practising here in Toronto, and as the good buddy that he is, he sent Ray the *dinero* for his flight back to TO, picked him up on his motorcycle, and whisked him downtown to see The Toronto Maple Leafs. So Ray was back immersed in Canadian culture before he knew it.

AH: What was Raymond's initial motivation for creating a college of homeopathy in Canada?

JE: Another college of homeopathy in Toronto offered him a teaching position. Ray very quickly realized the deficiencies in that college, and thought to himself, "I can do a better job of this." So he placed an ad in Vitality Magazine, thinking that if he got five or six students, he could start a study group. Meanwhile, he is living in a spare bedroom at John's house. There was such pent-up demand at the time for homeopathic learning that he ends up with close to 50 students enrolling for first year. When some of the pupils at the other school learn that he is starting a new school, many of them decide to transfer. He literally launched the school with close to one hundred students from a standing start. And, thus, the Toronto School of Homeopathic Medicine was born in 1995, and his good buddy Adrian is the accountant. John and Ray used to joke, saying that Adrian had been their busboy at "The Spag" (The Old Spaghetti Factory), and that he continued to clean up their messes forever going forward.

¹ I wish to thank my colleague and friend, Brigitte Boucher, for helping me with the transcription and proofreading of this interview.

AH: Where was the School located, and how did Ray assemble a teaching team? It must have been difficult to find appropriate faculty.

JE: During the first year, students were taking classes at both The Toronto Healing Arts Centre and at Victoria College on the University of Toronto campus. Sometime before, Ray had attended a lecture on homeopathy taught by Dr. Paul Saunders. He asked Paul if he would teach for the new school, and Paul accepted. Dr. Joan Weir was practising from The Toronto Healing Arts Centre at that time, and Ray also prevailed upon her to teach. Joan taught at Ray's School for about 22 years until she retired. Also, Drs. Joseph Kellerstein and John Millar joined us, I believe by the 1996-1997 school year. Paul had asked Joe if he would like to join a discussion on homeopathy for potential students that was going to occur at the Brunswick Theatre. After that, Ray invited Joe to join the faculty. John had been teaching together with Ray at

the other college and accepted a position with the School as well. I understand our earliest teachers also included Dr. Marty Begin and Basil Ziv, I believe from 1996-1997. Paul, Joe, and John still teach

at the CCHM.

In 1997 The Toronto School of Homeopathic Medicine moved the clinic and admin-

istration to Yorkville Avenue in downtown Toronto. Ray held clinic there but continued lecturing at Victoria College, where we were still holding classes when the 2020 pandemic broke out.

AH: Let's focus on you. When did you get in touch with the College and in which capacity?

JE: I was led to homeopathy by a girlfriend that I met on a beach in Venezuela at Christmas of 1973. She was still in high school and she was practising English on the tourists. Years later she moved to Toronto to go to the chiropractic College, she got in touch, and my family became her adopted family while she was here. Ilda married a Canadian but she went back to Venezuela, where I visited her probably three times in the 13 years she was there. Ultimately she moved with her family back to Canada because of the prevailing economic and political climate there. She studied one more year of chiropractics in Toronto but she failed the chiropractor exam twice, what with four teenagers at home and trying to adapt to life in Canada. Besides, they had made the exam ever more stringent. Then she thought, "Well, I'm clearly not meant to practice chiropractics here and I've always been interested in homeopathy." So Ilda decided to become a homeopath and she enrolled at the TSHM. She went there for three years

without ever mentioning Ray's name to me. Then, I began to have all kinds of hormonal issues, so I said, "I want to see a homeopath," and she set me up with one of the faculty. I became a homeopathic patient in 1996. I met Ray three years

After being with Ray for six years, I was working a little bit part-time at the School with some management aspects and interfacing with prospective students. Eventually, I came to like working for the School and I ended up taking the challenge and doing the program myself while I continued to work full-time in commercial estate. I enrolled at the School in 2005 without really knowing what I was ultimately going to do with a diploma in homeopathy, and graduated in June of 2008.

In the fall of 2008, the day after Labour Day, I thought: "I'm just going to the school today instead of going to my real es-

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tate office, because classes are starting this Saturday, and I'm just going to go and play. I am going to have fun and spend the day helping out with whatever." In those days we were still giving the students everything in three-ring binders. There was a lot of photocopying and hole punching and all that sort of thing. So that's how I started working

at the School, and I never left. I kept my realtor license for the next two years but I didn't work at it at all. I focused on the School. It was so much fun and, in those days, we weren't bothered with regulation. It was just the sheer joy of running a school that was doing well and teaching people how to help people. The energy was so light and so wonderful that I just never left.

AH: So you did not find homeopathy through Ray. This was your own 'independent' discovery, so to speak. Would you mind talking about your 'discovery' of Raymond Edge, the

JE: It was 1999, at the very beginning of online dating. I didn't even have a computer in those days. I bought one for that purpose and I didn't know how to use it. But as a commercial realtor I had an assistant who put me on there, and so I sent my profile. Ray was the first person to reply and we arranged a phone call. In his profile he had put that he owned a small private school and I asked him to tell me about his school. Or course, these are the first words you use to engage in a conversation, and then he tells me the name of the school. And I go, "Oh! One of my best friends just graduated from your school!" And I could hear Ray's inner voice just thinking to himself, "Oh, really? You know, most people in Toronto

have never even heard of homeopathy and you're telling me that one of your very best friends has just graduated from my little school? I don't think so." And then I tell him my friend's name, and that she had invited me to the graduation ceremony. But I could not attend, because my father had just passed away and I did not feel up to the circumstances of meeting new people and so on.

Ray and I became engaged October 23, 2000, one year exactly after our first date, and we got married the evening of December 16, 2000. The date was picked by geomancer Paul Ng as it formed a golden triangle from the times of our respective days of birth, representing an unbreakable union, and that is what it turned out to be. We enjoyed a tremendous

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romance. Our union inspired many of the songs for Ray's award-winning CD in 2005. When I finally quit real estate we were pretty much together 24/7 running the School, but also for other reasons....

Ray's health challenges actually started three months before I was going to graduate in 2008, and just when I was thinking, "There's light at the end of the tunnel." Ray was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease and it was just so devastating. Then again, I think

of the good fortune of being with him, because Ray was a visionary and a good teacher; he saw what needed to be done, but the administration of a college, the dealings with regulations and bodies of health authorities, the negotiations, the lobbying that was needed to survive as a college and obtain recognition from the provincial government, those were not Ray's gifts. So I think that God put the two of us together the time that it happened.

AH: You were my first contact with the College of Homeopathy, and I remember your endless energy, your drive to make things work. I was already acquainted with homeopathy and I did not doubt the healing powers of homeopathy. I just could not believe that I could become a practitioner myself. You convinced me, on the phone, to get my diploma in four years. And I did. So your role at CCHM has always been instrumental to making things happen. Tell us about the transition from the School to the College, and to accreditation and regulation.

JE: Ray fought for the accreditation of our curriculum from the very beginning. It was always one of his major concerns. And our College obtained the ACHENA accreditation in 1999, so that we were the first homeopathy school to be ac-

credited by this body, and to this day, we are North America's longest continuous running homeopathic college.

Regulation is mainly about mitigating the risk of harm to the public—and, of course, there is very little risk of harm with homeopathy. However, there were other schools in Ontario that included homeopathy courses in their curriculum and were pushing toward regulation. So, in October of 2009, the Ontario Ministry of Health named a transitional council to move The Homeopathy Act that was passed in 2005 towards proclamation. At that time there were a handful of schools teaching homeopathy in the province, but they had differing views, and I felt that we needed a coordinating body where we could all meet together. In April of 2010 I had organized a

weekend with a homeopathic master lecturer. I had booked a room at the University of Toronto for two hundred people. We had one hundred students in class at the time and I planned for all to attend. The remaining one hundred seats I would sell to other homeopaths. I invited other schools, associations, and professional homeopaths. I would offer them tables to sell their products—medicines and books—during the event. So, Ι started

making telephone calls, telling them, "I am a newbie in homeopathy, and there's always things we're going to disagree on about homeopathy. However, there is one thing we can all agree on, and that is that there should be equitable representation on the transitional council for regulation. Would you come to a meeting to discuss that?" And they all agreed. That set about the formation of the coalition. The Act was finally proclaimed five years later, on April 1, 2015, bringing into existence the College of Homeopaths of Ontario. Homeopathy became a regulated profession in Ontario from that date forward.

AH: You were, then, instrumental in making the homeopathic schools and associations work together. But, I imagine that, like all bureaucratic processes, the impact of regulation had both beneficial and undesired effects on the practice and teaching of homeopathy. Tell us about that.

JE: The years between 2010 and 2015, when The Act was finally proclaimed, were very difficult. It was like going from the frying pan into the fire. Once we had finished one set of applications, we would have to flip into another set of applications. We lost students during that period because there was confusion about the nomenclature and the standards of the profession. For instance, only allopaths could call them-

selves "doctor," but some schools still marketed themselves by offering a diploma of "homeopathic doctor," even when The Act established fines of \$25,000 for the first offence and up to \$50,000 for a second offence. Some of the smaller schools were finally forced out of business during the regulation process.

What I did then was that I got support from schools of homeopathy in England and the US, because at that time we used to have quite a few correspondence students taking distance courses. I got the owners of those schools involved so that they could lobby with me by sending letters to the Health Minister, for instance. The fees became another problem because, after we were regulated, the Ministry of Health was proposing fees that were exorbitant for the practitioners, and so I lobbied to make them recognize that, for the College of Homeopaths of Ontario to survive, they would have to subsidize the fees for at least the first few years. Ultimately, we were successful in this respect.

But several things were happening concurrently. The College was accredited by ACHENA in 1999, but I was also lobbying the Council for Homeopathic Certification (CHC) for recognition of our distance programs. On September 28, 2016, the College of Homeopaths of Ontario approved our curriculum, and we received the equivalency from CHC in May 2019, so that students from the US were able to write the certification exam. So, in answer to your question, this was a period in which more people in the profession were interested in the governance of homeopathy than in the advancement of homeopathic knowledge, and it was just ludicrous the number of fingers in the pie from so many different places. Meanwhile, the enrolment had been decreasing every year, even after The Act had been proclaimed. People were driven away by too much bureaucracy.

AH: It is indeed impressive to see the effort and time you put into obtaining the recognition and accreditation of not only the College, but of the profession itself in Ontario. And then, after this epic adventure, we arrive at the 2020 pandemic. How did that affect the Canadian College of Homeopathic Medicine?

JE: The arrival of the pandemic was a real turning point for our College because, by the time the lockdown was imposed, we were ready to teach our program online—and that included all of our science courses. We had planned to go online in September, 2020 because more and more students were asking for distance education. All of our lecturers were working on writing the courses to replace the ones that were being taught in class. But, actually, we went online in March 2020, forced by the lockdown. At the same time, the profile of the students enrolling in our distance courses was changing. Now we had people from the health sciences: nurses; osteopaths; chiropractors; a few doctors; pharmacists; and nutritionists.

These students got exempted from taking the hardcore medical subjects, and concentrated in homeopathic philosophy and materia medica. We offered them the chance to graduate in two years, which made our distance program quite attractive. By September, 2020, our faculty was proficient and the enrolment was unbelievable. I think that Covid brought an interest in natural medicine, and the fact that we were fully online helped attract many students from the United States and other countries.

AH: Thank you very much for sharing your story and your experiences with Raymond Edge and with the College he founded and that you both ran for all these years. Would you like to add anything else?

JE: It has been a wild ride these past number of years working to secure not only the future of homeopathy, but also our wonderful CCHM. I am forever grateful for the opportunities for personal growth presented to me during these times. There is an inspirational passage many of our students and grads will recognize, as I have shared it with so many of them over the years. It's from Gregg Braden's "Secrets of the Lost Mode of Prayer":

The key to healing whatever tests life brings to us is that we can hurt only when we're ready to hurt. That is, only when we already have all the emotional tools to heal our pain can we draw to us the experiences to demonstrate our mastery. This is the subtle yet powerful secret to coping with suffering.

This passage gave me strength through so many of the challenges the last decade had presented, and continues to do so. I am staying on at CCHM in a consultancy capacity, enjoying our rightful return to the thriving environment everyone here has contributed towards. Our staff and faculty are the best of the best!

Joyce Edge, D(Hom), completed the 3-year class diploma program and the post grad program at the Canadian College of Homeopathic Medicine, where she spent many years answering questions from prospective students all over the world. As vice president of the CCHM she oversaw the day to day operations of CCHM including liaising with faculty and administration, assisting in curriculum development and in the organization of promotional activities. Joyce remains as the vice president in a consultancy capacity with the College, where she brings a wealth of expertise and warmth to anyone considering homeopathic studies.

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