



Putting Our Stake in the Ground

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FROM THE EDITOR



Putting Our Stake in the Ground

by Lee E. Mortenson, D.P.A.

A couple of years ago my wife, Carol Kirkland, and I went to Alaska. It's a great state...actually another state of consciousness. We spent two and a half weeks and saw enough to realize that we were in a special place. We realized that "soul" was there.

Now, soulfulness is something we're not very good at in the western European tradition. Soulfulness, of course, is not linear. It is not just above the neckline and, in many cultures, it is not an exclusive province of humans. It is often better approached through symbolism and metaphor. I've learned these few things by spending some time in places like Alaska and with members of other cultures that have a great deal to teach me, in a non-linear way.

Over the past several years, the home that Carol and I have built has come to reflect our sense that the space we live in, the people and animals that inhabit it and that spend time in our home, are important reflections of soulfulness in our lives. So the walls are funky colors, there's a great deal of art from Africa, from the Southwest and Alaska, and from Chicago and Kansas City. And, this last week, a piece of soulfulness from the Tlingit Indians in Alaska showed up, a 14-foot totem pole carved for my 50th (official elder) birthday as a present from my wife. We had a potlatch, or a giveaway, to thank her and the people, animals, and objects that inhabit our lives. The

pole, in many ways, is a stake in the ground for me.

In oncology, we've also put our stake in the ground. Whether or not we planned it. Whether or not we ever thought it would happen. To our surprise, oncology and cancer programs in hospitals and offices aren't just a wild experiment or a rash intrusion into a pre-existing system...we are a stable part of the infrastructure for care in communities throughout the nation! Wow!

And, we've made a contribution, adapted to change, and provided quality care. We have struggled, established, aged, matured, and caused trouble...as it should be. The patients that we've seen, the clinical trials that we've done, the hospitals, the oncology units, and practices that we've built, these are our "stakes in the ground."

As with other communities, our stake is a reminder of the ground that we have covered, the community that we have established, and the common purposes that we've joined together to undertake.

Certainly, culture, life, and surprises change the world we live in. We're an aging nation on this continent. We're players in a game so complex with moves backwards, forwards, and sideways that we can't fathom what will happen next or where it will take us.

In this non-linear world, our symbols, our stakes, are markers that we pass by. Sometimes an anachronism. Sometimes a symbol of hope. Often better seen and appreciated from a distance. ■