



GENERAL ACUPUNCTURE

## Birthing a Cross-Cultural Acupuncture Profession In America: Part II

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It all starts in California.

It's a Saturday night, early 1973. On Monday, it will be the opening of the first medical school acupuncture clinic in the United States. Steven Rosenblatt and his buddy Gene Bruno are loading treatment tables into the back of a station wagon and taking them to the UCLA graduate school lounge. Rosenblatt is the vice president of the graduate student body and David Bresler, his primary political partner in this endeavor, the graduate student body president. That is why the space is available. They study in the psychology department exploring pain, which is why the anesthesiology department at UCLA medical school agreed to sponsor the clinic. From that point on, for many years, the clinic will be a hit with lines out the door. It's reasonable to consider that you are reading this piece and well educated and licensed and in your field because of it.

What Happens in Vegas ... Spreads

That same year, Rosenblatt and Bill Prensky, who later founded Mercy College Acupuncture program in New York and served as head of our national association, were invited to Nevada to help pass a bill that was written by the Nevada state legislature allowing acupuncture treatments to be administered by licensed acupuncturists. This was the first time such a concept was ratified into law in the U.S.

They were to testify in front of the state legislature on behalf of the bill. They wore their Sunday best; jeans and sports jackets, fancy attire for grad students but still way off the norm at the Nevada state capitol building.



Steven Rosenblatt and staff on the opening day of the California Acupuncture College in 1977

With the new Nevada bill, one had to be able to document having practiced for 10 years to become licensed and if you met that criteria, you were grandfathered into the license. Nevada gave licenses to Asian practitioners only and held no exam.

In September 1974, licenses were first granted in Oregon. Now well-seasoned in speech making and with appropriate attire, Rosenblatt and Bill went and met with members of Oregon's legislative body to promote the bill. Oregon was the first state to hold an exam. Steven and eleven other people took it including Dr So, the founder of the Hong Kong Acupuncture College, who was a fellow practitioner at the UCLA clinic and founder and primary teacher of the school later to become New England School of Acupuncture in Boston. Bill didn't have to take the exam because he, and other Oregon state board members, were grandfathered in. Rosenblatt has license No. 8 in Oregon. Bill has 20. They were the only non-Asians to be licensed in that first group. These two distinguished men still enjoy arguing about who was the first non-Asian to get licensed in the country.

Over the next two years, Rosenblatt left Los Angeles for Boston where he opened an acupuncture school with Dr. So. In 1976, he moved back where his adventure with acupuncture had begun and continued his graduate degree at UCLA. It ultimately took him 10 years, with assorted breaks to set up acupuncture colleges and change the medical landscape in America, to finish the first Ph.D. in the U.S. on the subject of acupuncture. Rosenblatt's degree, granted by the UCLA psychology department in 1978, was titled "The Electrophysiological Correlates of Acupuncture Points."

"I measured the electrical characteristics of several acupuncture points and how changes in the electrical activity correlated with changes in physiological functioning such as heart beat and breathing rates," said Rosenblatt.

Clearly, he was a man ahead of his time.

The licensing in California took Rosenblatt, his colleagues and state legislators several years to finalize through multiple steps and configurations. By 1978, California acupuncturists were licensed by the same board as medical doctors, needed no referrals to practice and could legally include herbal medicine, massage and manipulation in their practices. An exam was in place, as was a college curriculum, upon which many schools and later exams have been built. They are both substantially comprised of Rosenblatt's organizational ideas and Dr. So's materials.

The basic premise that Rosenblatt brought to the licensing process was simple.

"Chinese medicine has an energy all its own. When people find it, it sends them in a new direction. We were going to go center stage, not back alley. We weren't going to create our own board like the chiropractors did. We would be main stream," Rosenblatt said.

As a result of this philosophy, he fought to have our licensing process set up in the Department of Medical Licensing, now the Department Of Health Services, a subdivision of the Medical Board.

"We want to be the middle of medicine." Rosenblatt told me. "We wanted to be inside the tent, not standing outside."

Our bill was linked to an interesting bit of American history. George Moscone was the 37th mayor of San Francisco. As he prepped for his bid for the governorship, he considered how to obtain the large Asian vote. Sponsoring and introducing the successful acupuncture bill was his ticket to winning their favor. Shortly thereafter, Dan White, a former policeman and member of the San Francisco Board of Supervisors, assassinated him and his campaign for governor never got started. You may know of this bit of history as White also killed Harvey Milk, the first openly gay member of the San Francisco Board of Supervisors. Their murders were both portrayed in the feature film by Gus Van Sant, entitled MILK, with Sean Penn in the role of Harvey Milk and Victor Garber as George Moscone.

### Schools and More Schools

Rosenblatt's next adventure began while he was still a UCLA graduate student. The California Acupuncture College (CAC) officially opened its single, large door with eight students in Gene Bruno's West Los Angeles garage in 1977. It was later to meet in a studio space next to Junior's Delicatessen. Classes were often held over pastrami sandwiches and New York egg creams. It's official campus opened on Westwood Boulevard in 1978.

Rosenblatt opened CAC campuses in San Diego, later to become PCOM, and Santa Barbara, California. This was our first school in the U.S. with sister locations. Always on to new endeavors, Rosenblatt sold CAC in 1988 when its Los Angeles school had 100 students and the other schools also thriving.

He was also very involved in helping Gene Bruno and his wife open the Oregon College of Oriental Medicine.

### Moving to The Center of Medicine

Though he was running his own practice, Rosenblatt got a job at Kaiser hospital as a physical therapist in 1987 under his acupuncture license. No one was sure if this was legal but while they were researching it, he worked there for several months. He left because he was offered a job as head of physical therapy services at Westside Hospital. It was while working at the hospital that he had an epiphany that he should become a medical doctor (MD) because, he said simply "MDs run everything. It was also time to learn some new thing and if you want to understand the nature and

composition of our physical tissues, our biochemistry and physiology, go to medical school."

So in 1989 at the age of 43, he sold his private acupuncture practice, picked up his family and moved to Montserrat in the Caribbean for medical school. Hurricane Hugo destroyed the school in his first month there and he and his family almost lost their lives. Never to lose spirit, they moved on so he could complete his medical education on the island of Grenada. He graduated in 1993 and completed his residency in Family Practice at Kaiser Hospital in Riverside, Calif. from 1993-96.

Once finished with medical school and residency, Rosenblatt moved back to West Los Angeles where he opened an office at Cedar Sinai Medical Towers, next to the hospital of the same name. He went on to open the Complementary Medicine Department at this prestigious hospital, one of the first in the country.

Rosenblatt continues to support our field through his work on the accreditation commission, insuring that our colleges uphold high quality standards and provides well rounded education.

When I asked him to tell me what he wanted you to know, what message he hoped to convey, he said: "I want the young people to refocus their aim. Where are we going as a profession? We must become the axle of the wheel, the center of medicine. See your work as a continuation of a proud tradition that began in the 5th century BCE and continues beyond the 21st century. We are introducing the idea of energetics to medicine, that the body has force fields and electromagnetic properties. Life is *qi*. Energy is a force that can be defined and manipulated. That is the core of healing. Stopping disease before it develops, creating new health models is what this field is built upon, not the treatment of advanced disease as much as the focus on stopping disease before it becomes advanced. That is what we bring to the medical and cultural conversation of our time. *Qi* is a brand new idea in Western medicine. Because of this, we are changing the medical conversation, moving it to the left, to healing, to healthy prevention of disease, to energetics. Our profession is based upon the manipulation of energy with energy paradigms. This is now a primary form of treatment licensed by state medical boards. This is what I want them to focus on, to be proud of and to pursue. We have tremendous impact on the entire nation if we focus on going mainstream, on being central in the dialogue and if we approach medicine from inside rather than outside."

That is, from my perspective, a message worthy of serious consideration from a man who has committed his life to creating a profession stable enough to become your life's work.

### Getting Personal

I have to conclude this two-article series with a personal story about my relationship with Steven Rosenblatt. I met him when I began as a student at CAC in 1981. I had been practicing for about 11 years at that point and believed that I had to keep my abilities a secret. The arrests for practicing without a license were very scary and because my teacher could not get licensed through the grandfathering process, I assumed I wouldn't be able to either. Once I believed that I had to have a diploma from a school to take the exam and get a license, I played dumb and waited for a school to open. CAC was my pass out of secrecy and into legitimacy. Rosenblatt didn't know this until I interviewed him for this article. He was shocked. I guess my playing dumb worked.

It was many years later, in 2001 at the AAAOM conference, that my most special moment with Steven occurred. I played a historical role in his life that I am proud to share with you.

Though I didn't know it at the time, this was the day on which I was to receive my *Acupuncturist Of The Year* award from the AAAOM. I was in Hawaii teaching a full day intensive at their conference

on the subject of gender and sexuality. For the late afternoon session, students paired up, one man and one woman, to do exercises. Each pair sat back to back to do a *qi gong* practice together. This was to facilitate their experience of gender and its relationship to *qi*.

I had paired almost every one up and had only one single woman needing a partner. Instantly I ran out into the hallway to see if I could find an extra man to sit in my class for the 30-minute exercise. There was Steven Rosenblatt on his way somewhere important. Because he is such a gracious guy, he let me grab him and pull him into my class to ensure that my last female student had a partner for the exercise. When we were all done, I asked for comments. The woman I had paired with Rosenblatt shared all kinds of enthusiastic remarks that I remember to this day.

"I felt an explosion" she said enthusiastically. "There was so much energy flowing up my back that I felt like fireworks were going off inside me." I know it's a good exercise, but I had never heard that it was that good before. Still, I had a fleeting thought that something important may have just happened for her. Interestingly enough, when I spoke with Rosenblatt on the flight home from Hawaii a few days later he described the exact same sensations and experience during the exercise as my female student had described.

Wouldn't you know it but that exercise was the beginning of a great love affair. Now, they own a home together in Hawaii and run the Kohala Clinic together. Rosenblatt has recently opened an acute care medical clinic on the island at which he works (with three other MDs) one week a month. I was blessed to play the role of bringing them together on that sweet day long ago.

I hope you have enjoyed learning a bit about our history and the amazingly powerful role of one man, Steven Rosenblatt, MD, PhD, LAc. He didn't ask me to write this piece. He never would. But it was important that you know of him because many of the laws, licenses and most influential people in our industry, owe their beginnings to him. Famous names, founders of schools and organizations, people who have built successful, life-long careers and are now, like myself, influential senior practitioners, owe their beginnings to him. As a result, indirectly, you may, too.

In my last article, I began a wonderful story, one which I hope, will be written into a history textbook for all colleges of acupuncture and Oriental medicine. It reflected our beginnings, our history and one colleague who was and is pivotal in launching our profession. I urge you to read Part I of this story on the *Acupuncture Today* website, April edition.

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