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AS I SEE IT

The healing memory of Lenny Zakim

“As I See It,” a weekly photo column by Pulitzer Prize winner Stan Grossfeld, brings the stories of New England to Globe readers.

By [Stan Grossfeld](#) Globe Staff, Updated June 17, 2025, 5:53 a.m.



Cathy Esposito, a therapist at “Kids Kicking Cancer” partners with the Zakim Center to offer martial arts therapy to kids from ages 4 to teenagers. Emmett Dick, 6, of Franklin gets a kick out of it at a Jimmy Fund Clinic as he awaits treatment.

Lenny Zakim spent his whole adult life bringing people together.

They named a bridge after the civil rights leader in Boston in 2002. Imagine that today in this politically torn country.

Zakim was the executive director of the New England region of the Anti-Defamation League. He had no quit in him, despite battling bone marrow cancer for five years before his death in 1999 at 46-years-old.

“Cancer is a disease that doesn’t just affect your body, it affects your mind, it affects your soul, it affects your heart. It affects every relationship you have,” he told PBS “Body and Soul.”



Yash Krishnan, 17 (left back) of Raleigh, N.C., and Luis Carlos Diaz, 15, of the Dominican Republic take a martial arts therapy class given by “Kids Kicking Cancer” in partnership with the Zakim Center.

“To be told you have an incurable cancer means you’ve got to pull whatever strings you have. Some of it’s prayer and faith. Some of it’s very practical things like exercise and meditation and acupuncture. Certainly, some of it’s in the chemotherapy and radiation. I really believe it’s a failure of Western medicine not to integrate all of this.”

The Leonard P. Zakim Center for Integrative Therapies and Healthy Living at the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute now does all of this under one roof.

They’ve thought of everything here - acupuncture, massage, meditation, the expressive arts. Volunteers massage patients’ hands while they get treatment. The art cart rolls into waiting areas, bringing materials and supplies to patients, families, and caregivers.



Luis Carlos Diaz, 15, bows to therapist Cathy Esposito during a martial arts therapy session.

The center has the soothing vibe of a classy spa. An expressive therapist demonstrates a sound bath, crystal singing bowls that promote relaxation.

In the Young Adult lounge, Dongyan Yu, an oncology acupuncturist, places five red tipped needles into the ear of a patient using a 2,500-year-old Chinese technique. “This is the “Gate of the Spirit,” she says.

There is zero pain and within seconds, the patient relaxes.

“From the clinical study, we found it helps reduce anxiety, nausea, and pain,” says Yu, standing near a calming photo mural of a rocky forest.



Jie, who asked that only her first name be used, gets an acupuncture treatment from an oncology acupuncturist, Dongyan Yu.

“Drugs will have interactions. But ear acupuncture is not a medication . . . It’s your own body’s healing power,” says Yu.

The patient is thrilled with the treatment.

“It helps me to be more comfortable with the stomach and nausea, and also lower the anxiety level, and sometimes helps the sleep quality,” says Jie, who asked to be identified only by her first name. “Also, it’s important for the whole health system.”

Over in the Mind Body studio, Ramel “Rami” Rones, a gold medalist in martial arts, teaches Tai Chi, Qigong, and meditation classes.

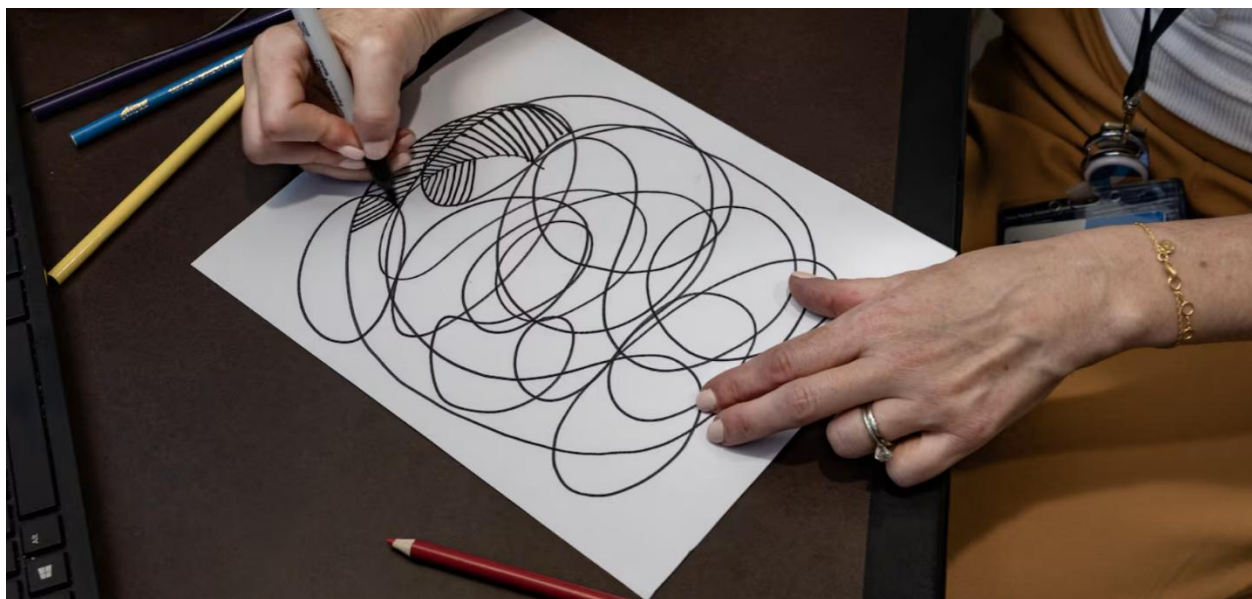


Megan Carleton, program manager of expressive therapy and mindful practices at the Zakim Center, performs a sound bath, a meditative practice in the Mind Body Studio.

“It really helps with the side effects and symptoms that go with the treatment and the cancer. So in Western medicine, they are not too keen to tackle them . . . Here, I, as a person, treat the person as a whole . . . a combination of the body and the breath and the mind and the energy and the spirit.”

Cathy Esposito, a therapist at “Kids Kicking Cancer,” in partnership with the Zakim Center, brings martial arts to patients during infusion treatments at Dana-Farber’s Jimmy Fund Clinic.

The classes teach traditional karate and mind-body techniques. Some of it is physical but more important are the breathing techniques.



Megan Carleton conducts an online class of doodling as a sign of mindfulness meditation practice.

“If they’re stressed, ” she says of patients, “we teach breathing in the light, and blowing out the darkness.”

Luis Carlos Diaz, 15, has just finished a lesson. He bows out of respect.

“It helps me with my mental health and I’m grateful every time they invite me. I’m not angry I have cancer. If this was something that God has given me, it’s to make me better because I can fight it,” he says.

Since forming 25 years ago, the Zakim opened a state-of-the-art center in 2017. Most services are free for Dana-Farber patients and their families. Their online programs have greatly expanded, too.



Diane Tarantino receives a hand message from a volunteer as she undergoes treatment at the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute.

“We have had almost one million views of our [online](#) integrative medicine and healthy living materials over the last four years,” says Dr. Jennifer Ligibel, the center’s director.

The website includes a video, “Music heals the soul,” that explains how the center helps improve patients lives.

Lenny Zakim loved music.

About 100 days before he died, Zakim sat in a weakened state through a Bruce Springsteen concert at the old Fleet Center, now TD Garden.



Ramel “Rami” Rones (right), a gold medalist, teaches Tai Chi, Qigong, and meditation classes. He preaches nurturing the five building blocks — the body, the breath, the mind, the energy, and the spirit.

He was friends with the Boss, who performed “Thunder Road” solo at the dedication of the Leonard P. Zakim Bunker Hill Memorial Bridge in 2002.

But on this night, when the Boss sang “Promised Land,” Zakim summoned the strength to rise up. He triumphantly punched his fist high into the air, smiled, and sang “And I believe in a Promised Land.”

It was the last time I saw him alive.

But his spirit endures. More than a quarter century later, kids in karate class share his same smile and drive. The human spirit, never giving up, and still reaching for the heavens.



A portrait of Lenny Zakim greets visitors at the Leonard P. Zakim Center for Integrative Therapies and Healthy Living at Dana-Farber Cancer Institute.

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