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## A Feast With a Message

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FOXBusiness

One of the things I like to do at the end of a year is look back and assess things, such as whether I stayed true to my [career](#), finance, health, and spiritual goals. And then I think about any moments that feel like touchstones, the ones where I was out of my comfort zone and pushed through anxiety or judgment and just go with it.

Which brings me to the Bamboo Jacket Banquet hosted by Shelley A. Hainer.

I was invited by a trusted colleague to attend this experiential event, held at the Subud Center in New York City. It was a bit of a mystery; so many of us had no idea what to expect.

A decade ago, maybe even six years ago, this fact alone would have made this a no-go in my book. I would have opted out. A person who likes control needs information. What am I attending? A party? A séance? Will people be hanging from the chandelier? (One can only hope).

But trust I did. As instructed, I dressed comfortably. I opened myself up to the experience, mingling with others and taking in what Hainer laid out so carefully for 32 of us. There was a little breathing exercise and a toast of strawberries filled with champagne where we pledged to take a leap together.

Did someone say leap? Uh oh.

We moved to another room and there were some very focused food tasting and movement exercises, all of which gave us a chance to get comfortable with one another as a group.

And then, drumroll please, it was time for the namesake of the evening – the bamboo jackets. I had thought the name was a metaphor for something, but here we were, donning bamboo sleeves in ceremonial fashion. Here's the thing about bamboo sleeves – you can't bend your elbows. That means there's no tucking your hair behind your ear, fixing your glasses, or scratching your nose because you can't reach.

When the doors in the next room opened to tables set for dinner – a lovely meal of red lentil soup and quinoa with mixed peppers and broccoli and asparagus – it suddenly occurred to me what this was all about. If you're sitting in front of food and you can't feed yourself, what ensues?

For this independent free spirit who has a hard time asking others for help, it was a little jarring to be open to the idea of being fed and of feeding another person. The leap I had unwittingly signed on to wasn't exactly jumping out of a plane, but there was some freefalling involved nonetheless.

I know many of you are reading this and thinking, "Weird, this is too weird." Well, you'll get no argument from me. The looks I've received from friends when telling them about it has been interesting, for sure.

For an artist like Hainer, though, it's not weird but innovative because it draws from four different streams of art and science that she knows intimately: somatic education (to develop, enhance and harmonize the body, mind and spirit through education, holistic body therapies, and expressive arts), sensory awareness, theatre and community building. While Hainer is a trained dancer and actress, a certified somatic educator and a producer of transformational events like the [Bamboo Jacket Banquet](#), she was also an [executive search](#) professional in the non-profit sector.

"I want the Bamboo Jacket Banquet to be an education program for team building in business," Hainer said in our recent interview. "It really behooves a team leader or CEO to foster a congenial, amicable atmosphere where people communicate well. There's a human development side to be embraced. We're not robots."

On her blog, Hainer tells the story that was the genesis for her banquet idea:

Once upon a time there lived a king.

"Come! Dine at my table," he beckoned. "My only request is that you wear a bamboo jacket."

The peasants were thrilled to arrive at the castle and upon seeing the [dining hall](#) adorned for the auspicious celebration, a long table, overflowing with a cornucopia of foods, they gladly donned their jackets. Quickly they discovered that the jacket prevented them from moving their elbows. "How will we feed ourselves?" they shouted. Confused, they removed the jackets and left. The nobleman arrived, proud, to dine and eager to feast. When they put on their bamboo jackets to discover they could not bend their elbows, they were insulted, felt tricked by the King, and they, too, left. Then the wise arrived. They put on the jackets and began to laugh. As they laughed, they sat down to dine, happily feeding each other.

Seems like a no-brainer to be among the wise, even if you're uncomfortable.

"It's not your last meal," Hainer said with a laugh. "It's only one meal."

For this [life coach](#), who sometimes needs to be reminded that asking for help isn't a sign of weakness, it was a meal to be remembered in 2009, and beyond.

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