

## Phillip Cloudpiler Landis – AP

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Phillip Cloudpiler Landis was raised Mormon in western Washington and didn't think much about what he considers his American Indian heritage until he went to prison.

"What better place to have to sit and reflect upon what motivates you," he said.

Landis now leads the Nemenhah Band, an Internet-based group recently thrown into the spotlight when one of its far-flung members fled with her cancer-stricken son to avoid chemotherapy.

Landis, 47, has never met Colleen Hauser or her 13-year-old son, Daniel, and urged them to return home. But he supports the Hausers' decision to defy the recommendations of doctors, who "may be the high priests of the medical religion, but who are spiritually bankrupt."

The attention on Landis concerns some in the field of alternative medicine.

"A lot of people are attaching themselves to the alternative medicine field," said Lorenzo Cohen, director of the Integrative Medicine Program at the MD Anderson Cancer Center in Houston. "It does give quote-unquote alternative medicine a bad name."

Cohen said most people seeking alternative therapies use them in combination with conventional therapies, such as chemotherapy, and called the Hauser case "particularly tragic" because Daniel has a "very curable pediatric cancer."

American Indian groups also have expressed misgivings about Landis and his group.

"There are a lot of sham artists around like these guys, and they ultimately disrespect Indian people and Indian nations and Indian organizations like the Native American Church," said Steven Moore, senior attorney for the Native American Rights Fund in Boulder, Colo.

Landis describes his group as a healing-based religion open to people from "all walks of life, and all tribes, nations, kindreds and tongues ... who set their foot on the healing path."

Colleen Hauser joined the Nemenhah a few months ago as her son dealt with cancer, which is "not inconsistent with how a lot of our members join," Landis said.

"They're thrown into a medical situation, the medical hierarchy hasn't too many real answers for them, and they begin to search," he said.

On its Web site, the group suggests members pay an initial \$250 fee, then \$100 annually, plus "regular, monthly offerings." The site does not appear to espouse any particular type of alternative therapy.

The group's rituals include the use of sweat lodges and sacred breaths, said Landis, who does not advocate the use of peyote, which is used by the Native American Church of North America. He said the Nemenhah Band is an affiliate of another group called the Native American Church.

Moore, however, said Landis does not have "any affiliation with a legitimate, valid, Native American Church chapter or organization anywhere in the United States."

The Nemenhah Band came together about 10 years ago in central Utah by a group of women who felt they had a calling, Landis said. He said he was elected principle medicine chief in part because of his claim to be related to Chief Joseph of the Nez Perce.

But Julie Kane, managing attorney for the Nez Perce in Idaho, said Landis is not Nez Perce and the tribe asked him to stop using references to it a few years ago.

“He is not at all Nez Perce. He is not even a descendant,” Kane said.

Colleen Hauser left Minnesota on Monday with Daniel, who has Hodgkin’s lymphoma, a highly curable cancer when treated with chemotherapy and radiation. The Hausers preferred alternative remedies, and Daniel and his mother fled a day before a court hearing that could have resulted in a judge ordering chemotherapy.

The Hausers, who are not American Indian, were seen in Southern California on Tuesday, and were thought to have headed to Mexico. Authorities said Friday that Interpol had joined in the search.

While Hauser leads authorities on an international search, Landis has been left answering questions about the Nemenhah.

“We can support her desire to seek alternative medicine,” he said. “But we cannot support her committing a felony.”

He speaks freely about his past and his move from Utah last year to southern Missouri when his probation ended after serving several months in prison on fraud charges tied to the sale of natural remedies.

“Trees brought us here,” he said, throwing his arms open wide. “We are not a desert family.”

Landis, his wife and four children started in Weaubleau, which has a population of about 500. The family has since moved about 30 miles away to land north of Stockton, a southwest Missouri town of about 2,000 where Landis says he is building a “lodge” for his family and for the Nemenhah Band, which he claims has about 4,000 members.

He said Western medicine has its place, describing a time when his daughter knelt on a nail that went under her kneecap. The nail came out, Landis said, but there was no way to see what, if any, damage had been done. Landis did what many parents would do: He took his child to the hospital and had her knee X-rayed. She also received a tetanus shot.

“Our main tenet is ‘First, do no harm,’ not ‘First do nothing,’” Landis said.

He said he lost faith in most traditional medicine after a bout with bubonic plague, a broken back and cancer, which he said disappeared thanks to a tea-like concoction made from a mushroom. He still drinks the mushroom tea daily, 15 years after his diagnosis.

Landis described Daniel as a youth minister.

“The fear was so great that she broke,” Landis said of Colleen Hauser. “But it pales in comparison to what she and her family will go through if she goes to jail. I’ve been there; I know what she’d go through.”