

Illness as Initiation

An Unlikely Heroine's Journey



Jann McGuire, D.Min.

Illness as Initiation

An Unlikely Heroine's Journey

Jann McGuire, D.Min.

Copyright © 2010 Jann McGuire

ISBN 978-1-60910-589-1

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, recording or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the author.

Printed in the United States of America.

BookLocker.com, Inc.
2010

*This book is
In memory of*

*Fred McGuire,
Who journeyed with me on all levels of consciousness for 53 years.*

And

*Suzanne, our million-watt daughter,
Who was my greatest teacher.*

Acknowledgements

My family is a profound blessing. I rely on my three sons and their wives, Scott and Rachel, Patrick and Tami, Barry and Roxanne, for emotional support. They've never failed me.

My grandchildren, Sam, Sid, Jaimee, Rory, Joseph and Courtney McGuire, Jonathan Bautista, Bryan Chenowith and his wife Lacy Daniel, give me joy and hope.

My mother, Willie Mae Hale, still open-hearted at age 98, shares her good humor in the face of ever-increasing dependence.

My intimate spiritual circle grew from energy healing classes at the Sequoia Center for Holistic Studies. They support and enrich my life. I'm grateful to those who are introduced in the book, as well as Mia Beale, Betty Luceigh and Megan Taylor.

The global family that was birthed by the Ecumenical Institute, made close now by the internet. continues to feed my mind and spirit. Within that large family, the women into whose sisterhood I retreat annually are a huge blessing in my life. You'll meet them.

Thanks to my writing group for their patience in listening to and helping to shape this manuscript through several forms. Shirley Skufca Hickman, Marilyn Meredith, Kristi McCracken and Brent Gill brought considerable writing gifts to this task.

Matthew Fox's books and the doctoral program he established at the University of Creation Spirituality, gave me a roadmap for the journey. Lynn Woltjer's support and encouragement kept me on the path to the degree.

I send profound gratitude to the Divine for every person mentioned in this book. Each one crossed my path as a blessing. If he or she wasn't received as such, it was due to my limited vision at the time.

Underlying all is that mysterious One, Father/Mother of the Cosmos, within and yet beyond all creatures. All praise to Thee.

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
Chapter 1: Warning Sign.....	3
Chapter 2: Prayer Request/Diagnosis	9
Chapter 3: Past Life Journey/Applied Kinesiology	15
Chapter 4: Staging/Family Celebration.....	22
Chapter 5: Playmates' Interlude	30
Chapter 6: Chemotherapy/Hair Loss Ritual.....	42
Chapter 7: Troubling Doctor Visit/Healing Childhood Wounds	49
Chapter 8: Confronting Resentments, Old and New.....	59
Chapter 9: Sensitive, Responsive Doctors/Healing Community	67
Chapter 10: Wind Dancer's Story.....	73
Chapter 11: Treatment Midpoint/Art as Meditation	81
Chapter 12: Healing Passive Aggression/Mother's Care	88
Chapter 13: Final Treatment/A New Abyss.....	98
Chapter 14: Blessing, Loss, Creativity and Transformation	110
Chapter 15: Rehabilitation/Thanksgiving	116
Chapter 16: Lucid Confusion/Normal Scans	125
Chapter 17: New Millennium/Caretaker Role	135
Chapter 18: Spring's Promise/New Life.....	142
Epilogue	151

Introduction

LABYRINTH

*Come, it is a miracle!
A tortuous passage, yet clearly marked,
That recalls our Journey.
The journey that began in a time/place when/where
We and they and all of space-time were together in one tiny center,
All potentiality.*

*Winding toward the center,
Mundane orientation falls away.
The Minotaur waits to devour dark daily habits.
A new realm reached, I'm delivered to my own sacred story,
Circling out like Ariadne's thread,
Secrets totally revealed.*

*From the still point at center,
All my relations gather round and dance,
Rippling out like water from the place through which
I have fallen into dark radiance.
Blinded, now I see clearly what to leave behind
For the moment, I rest safe. Secure in Now.*

*The moment delivers me back to awareness
Of sweet Earth's support, bearing me all my life.
Here I undertake to pursue the outward path,
Lightly, dancing unburdened as I return,
Prepared to meet the challenge that waits:
To serve the immense Journey.*

I'm a cancer survivor. Eleven years ago I completed chemotherapy for non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. I wrote about this experience with the

hope that others facing cancer diagnosis might find my story helpful for fully living their lives at such a time. I pray it lessens a reader's fear.

I knew from the time of diagnosis that having cancer would lead me to deeper insight, no matter what the outcome. Though I aspired to be a healer, I hadn't suffered a serious illness since childhood. I knew that this event, and how I chose to relate to it, would provide valuable learning coming through direct experience.

As if Life wanted to deepen the lesson, on the day I endured my last treatment, and was celebrating that it was over, my husband Fred suffered a cerebral hemorrhage. He needed full-time care for four months following his stay for ten weeks in the hospital and rehabilitation center. His illness altered our lives much more profoundly than my cancer had. I include my struggle to come to terms with the changes in our relationship, in my life and work.

For six years prior to my diagnosis, I studied holistic healing methods such as bio-energetic (hands-on) healing. Now I researched lymphoma, the western approach to treating it, and possible alternative methods, including nutrition, to assist healing. I wanted to integrate my doctors' treatment with these other modalities. Maintaining this approach and a good relationship with medical personnel was at times a challenge. I wanted them to focus on me as a whole person, not just on the disease.

I had the good fortune to belong to a spiritual community with fellow energy healers. We met regularly to worship and meditate. We shared and celebrated events in our lives with rites of passage.

From my youth, I was religious. I attended church, prayed daily, studied the Bible and other sources and kept dream journals in an attempt to stay open and responsive to Divine guidance. These practices became more important to me as I faced cancer.

My book describes in detail the medical and alternative resources I accessed and the personal rituals I observed while on this journey. For me, it was important to bring my whole being to this challenge: body, mind, emotions and spirit. I hope my practices will be clear for anyone who might benefit from their use.

Chapter 1 Warning Sign

AFRAID

*Like a small burrowing animal,
Safe in its cozy earth home,
Feeling the first tremor, my heart pounds.
Hearing the roar of approaching doom,
Time slows and only terror remains,
Forming a hard lump in my throat,
Girdling my belly like steel.
Not knowing what is coming,
Unable to flee or fight,
I wait.
Knowing only the inevitability of change.*

The April morning held all the beauty of spring's promise. I rejoiced in it as I exercised in my small backyard pool. After showering, I glanced at the clock to calculate how much time I had before my pacemaker checkup with the cardiologist.

Drying my hair in front of the mirror, I noticed that a large lump had risen above the right collarbone at the base of my neck. With my fingertips, I gently probed it. This same thing had happened a month before. That frightened me into consulting my primary physician, Dr. Reddy. He was concerned by its size and location and ordered a chest x-ray and blood tests. The results were normal, and the lump went away.

I felt no fear this time, only wondered what was causing this. I decided to ask my massage therapist to lighten up a bit on deep tissue work. The sessions with Teresa over the last two years were excruciating, but I always felt marvelous afterwards. The treatments

alleviated the chronic neck and shoulder pain I'd suffered for decades, so I continued.

Eating breakfast on the patio, I enjoyed the wild poppies and larkspur bursting with gold and blue where they proliferated in the back part of the garden. My husband Fred previously grew vegetables there, but now spent his gardening time at our mountain cabin and maintaining our daughter's house.

* * *

In the cardiologist's office I sat on the end of the examination table with a cord draped around my neck. One end held a small electronic device that rested above my left breast. The other end of the cord led to a computer that beeped as Dr. Sagerreddy read the print-out it emitted.

He turned with a smile, appearing to enjoy this technology and his expertise, and told me everything looked fine. I enjoyed being in the presence of this handsome, dark-skinned young man, and was glad that it was he who had solved the problem of dizziness and fatigue caused by my slow heart rate three years earlier.

We were exchanging pleasantries when the doctor's sharp eyes fell on the lump at the base of my neck. He inquired about how long it had been there.

"I just noticed it this morning. It happened once before and it went away."

He asked, "Are you having any night sweats?"

Laughing, I replied, "I stopped taking hormones, so I have hot flashes, but not what I'd call night sweats."

He kept pushing. "How is your appetite? Have you lost weight?"

It occurred to me that his demeanor was more serious than it had been three years earlier when he came into my hospital room to recommend that I have a pacemaker.

"You need to see Dr. Reddy as soon as possible. Why don't you stop by his office when you leave here and see if he can work you in today? In fact, I'll have Eunice call him right now."

Passage: Illness as Initiation

When I stopped at the counter to arrange for my next pacemaker check, the young woman handed me an appointment card. “Dr. Reddy can see you now if you go right over.”

“Thanks, Eunice. I’ll see you in July.”

I thought this was a waste of time, but since the two doctors’ offices were in the same medical complex, it was an easy walk across the parking lot to Dr. Reddy’s office. There were three people ahead of me, and I inwardly groaned that I hadn’t brought my novel. Picking up the local newspaper that I’d perused earlier, I turned to the puzzle page, and started filling in the crossword.

After half an hour, the nurse called me through the door to a hallway with a scale next to the receptionist’s office. Doors on the other side of the hall led to examination rooms. Stepping on the scale, I was surprised that I’d lost five pounds. “Guess those workouts are doing some good,” I thought.

A young, beautiful Hispanic nurse took my temperature and blood pressure. As usual, both were lower than the norm.

Dr. Reddy, a specialist in internal medicine, past middle age, looked tired. I imagined him being called to the hospital during the night. Bald on top, with a graying moustache, he was so soft-spoken that I had to listen to him with undivided focus. I liked the fact that he almost always touched me on the back behind my heart as he said hello. To me, it meant that he was a natural healer who got information through his hands as well as his head. With the same serious expression as the cardiologist’s, he said that he was arranging for me to see a surgeon to schedule a biopsy of the lump.

“But Doctor,” I said. “This happened a few weeks ago, and it went away.”

“Yes. But it came back. Swelling in this particular place rarely happens for benign reasons. I thought maybe it was just a transient condition, but since it came back, we really need to find out what is causing it.”

I reluctantly agreed to see the surgeon and to go to the hospital laboratory for another blood test.

As I stopped by the desk for the lab order, I mused on the number of Indian doctors who had settled in Porterville. Reddy was a very

common name in southern India. Dr. Sagerreddy had combined two of his names to distinguish himself from my primary doctor and his wife, a pediatrician. I wondered that there was no Hindu temple in town.

The blood test required an eight-hour fast, so I had to wait until the next day to go to the lab. I decided to stop by my daughter Suzanne's house before driving back home to Lindsay, ten miles north.

As I drove into Suzanne's driveway, I felt a surge of regret at the sight of the yard that my mother-in-law had kept beautiful for so many years. The grass in front was dead. Fred had sterilized the soil and filled the space with wood chips.

As I climbed out of the car, my mood lifted at the beautiful sight of the Sierra Nevada in the distance, still bearing some winter snow. The back of the house was less depressing. Pecan, walnut, orange, peach and pomegranate trees still bore good fruit year after year. There were weeds, but everything was green, and it looked nice.

I found Suzanne in the small vegetable garden she kept at the back. She sat on a low chair, its webbing frayed and its aluminum frame dented and scarred. We'd celebrated her fortieth birthday a few weeks earlier. Suzanne was present in a new way but it probably wasn't because of the birthday. For five months she'd been having seizures again after twelve seizure-free years..

The epileptic attacks first began when she was four. They were mild and fairly well controlled by medication until she began puberty. After that, Suzanne had grand mal seizures that were never well controlled with medication. When she was twenty-eight she opted to have brain surgery. The seizures stopped, but she suffered from auditory hallucinations and paranoia and was hypersensitive to sound. These symptoms interfered with her sleep and appetite. She attempted suicide several times, and lost weight until she was skin and bones.

She was barely in touch with reality when the seizures started again. On Halloween night, she ran out on the street to try to escape the old dreaded aura of an imminent epileptic attack. Fortunately, someone saw her collapse and called an ambulance. The next day, Fred and I found her still unconscious and on life support in the intensive care unit, registered in the hospital as a Jane Doe.

We grieved the return of her seizures, but welcomed Suzanne's personality back. It seemed that the terrible attacks were the price for having our daughter in touch with reality.

I was glad to see that she was continuing to gain weight.

Suzanne looked up and smiled as I approached, shaking her heavy golden-brown hair off her face. She put out her cigarette and stood to give me a hug. Her blue eyes matched the clear sky, and didn't hold the fearful look that characterized them before Halloween.

Stooping to hug her smaller frame, I lifted my shoulder against the tickles of her kisses on my neck. The dogs, Blackie and Curly, excited to see me, clambered for pats, tails wagging furiously. I stroked them as I made small talk about the plans she had for her garden this year. Suzy loved being out there, and didn't seem to mind the heat that would send me fleeing for air conditioning when summer arrived.

As we turned to go in the house, I said, "Why don't you go home with me? Your dad should be back from Blue Ridge soon, and we'll go out for Mexican food."

Her expression brightened, "Good! I'm starving!"

While Suzanne showered and changed clothes, I gathered dirty laundry and cleaned the kitchen, mentally acknowledging a compulsion for cleanliness and order. In this and many other ways, my daughter and I were very different. I looked around the house that my parents-in-law, Fred Sr. and Rosa, had built with their own hands in the 1930's. Fred was born in what was now the dining room. He and I bought the place from the other heirs after Rosa's death. Fred had spent a lot of his time here since he retired from teaching, maintaining it and making improvements.

Suzanne emerged, fresh and sweet-smelling. "Can you bring me home tonight, or should I take clothes and medicine for overnight?"

"Plan to stay, if you don't mind getting up early tomorrow. I have to come back in the morning to have blood drawn at the lab." I went into the bathroom and got the clothes Suzanne had removed, and put them in a laundry bag. I used the facilities, washed my hands and quickly cleaned the lavatory.

When we arrived home, Fred was already there, wavy gray hair still damp from the shower. His bushy beard dripped as he gave me a

greeting peck. He'd worked hard that day, raking leaves from around our cabin to comply with the fire code. He was delighted to see Suzanne.

We walked the few blocks from our house to downtown Lindsay. La Hacienda's food was inexpensive and very satisfying.

At dinner, I showed them the lump and told them the doctor wanted me to have a biopsy. Fred looked surprised. "Really? Are you worried?"

"No. You know I'm in good health. I've never felt better."

"And how was Dr. Ever Ready? Is your battery still going and going and going?" Fred's memory device for Dr. Sagerreddy's name had stuck in his mind as an amusing substitute, and that's what he always called him.

"He's perky as ever. He practically forced me to see Dr. Reddy. I think he's convinced this lump is Something Serious." With my fingers, I made quotation marks in the air.

Suzanne chimed in. "I have an appointment with the neurologist tomorrow. Can one of you take me? "

"Sure, I will," I answered. "Since I have to go to the lab anyway you can go with me. It shouldn't take long. Then I'll go with you to the clinic."

I took another homemade tortilla from its wrapping, mentally counting calories. Then, remembering that I'd lost weight, I decided not to worry about that or anything else while I enjoyed my shrimp in garlic sauce -- *camarones al mojo de ajo*.

Chapter 2

Prayer Request/Diagnosis

NARROW PATH

*Is there an end to this tunnel?
Is there a way out?
Which direction leads there?
Should I ascend or descend?
From what am I being birthed?
Into what new world?
Am I the mother or the child?
I perceive only the narrow passage.
Now I sense the path spirals: a labyrinth.
Relief, to know the journey is both inward and outward!
That which draws me in also pushes me out:
Not to know.
Not to do.
Not to be.
But to become.*

Two weeks after finding the lump at the base of my neck, I lay on the massage table, feeling Chris Faulconer's warm hands holding my feet. Warm waves of energy flowed up the tense muscles of my legs and torso. My friend and healing teacher was sixty, a year younger than I. Chris's gray curls, pleasant smile and large bosom gave her a wise fairy godmother appearance.

After a time, I felt myself relax as I concentrated on the physical sensations. Chris said, "It takes awhile for you to get your energy grounded into your feet, doesn't it? That's the way it is with people who love being in their minds." She moved to the side of the table, holding my right foot with her right hand, her left hand on the side of my hip.

“Imagine fresh clear red energy flowing into your foot and pushing all staleness out of your entire leg through imaginary holes in the back of my left hand.” I enjoyed the warm waves that emanated from Chris’s hands.

After a few minutes, Chris murmured, “That feels complete,” and walked around to the other side of the table. She repeated this procedure on the left leg.

The healing went on, with Chris moving up my torso, her hands channeling warmth from the hip joints to the middle of the belly, from the belly to the center of the chest. She moved to my hand and swept energy up the arm to the shoulder on each side. Finally, she sat at the head of the table and slipped her right hand under my neck, her left hand hovering above my throat.

The heat in Chris’s hands increased, and she said, “Put your attention on the lump at the base of your neck. Listen for a minute, and see if it has anything to say to you.”

I felt a familiar constriction in my larynx, feeling inadequate to express what I wanted to say. I spoke without knowing what was going to come out. “It wants to scream.”

“Well, then, go ahead and let it scream.” From above my head, Chris put both hands under my neck, pulling with enough tension to stretch it slightly.

A sound more like a growl than a scream came from my throat. I felt I needed to clear something that almost gagged me. I continued forcefully clearing my throat, until finally a high shrill scream burst forth, releasing the constriction.

“Good, good!” Chris murmured in her beautiful, low voice. “Keep listening.” She cupped one hand over the swollen lymph node and made a scooping motion. Because I had studied with her, I knew she was imagining taking the energy that emanated from the scream and depositing it in an imaginary vessel of fire at my side. Her hands moved underneath my neck, overlapping and supporting it on either side. “Is there anything else?”

Tears flowed down my face, more from straining my throat than from emotion. I rested, waiting, enjoying the warmth of Chris’s hands, “Even though I believe I’m healthy, I need to find out what this lump

is. And I need to pray and ask other people to pray for me.” My voice sounded strange to me, like I’d been drinking.

Chris laughed. “That seems obvious, doesn’t it?” She took her hands off my neck, walked to the foot of the table and ended the energy healing session as it had begun, with her hands on my feet, grounding me back in the present.

I laughed, too, feeling the shift back to ordinary consciousness. “Thank you, Chris. Your sessions always make me feel better. I realize I haven’t wanted to go through with the biopsy but haven’t been able to say that. Now I can just do it.” I got up and reached for the two glasses of water I’d put on the side table before the healing began. I sipped from one and handed Chris the other.

Chris, who had been working in her stocking feet, was putting on her shoes. She stopped long enough to take a drink. “Yes, you have the common problem of not being able to talk about your feelings.”

“Half the time, I don’t even know what my feelings are! How can I talk about them?” I snorted. “It’s amazing. I’ve been in Twelve Step recovery so long and still this comes up! Thirteen years ago, I wrote in the front of my *One Step at a Time with Al-Anon* book, ‘Recovery is being honest about my feelings,’ a quote from my first sponsor.”

Chris flashed her bright smile. “You know that we learn in spiraling cycles. What goes around always comes back around, only on a deeper level. Just do what you said you’d do.”

“Okay. I’ll pray. Asking other people to pray for me is harder. It takes a little more humility than I like to exhibit, but I’ll do it. Thanks, Chris.” I handed her a check for the session, and we hugged goodbye at the door.

Chris was part of an intimate local circle, the only ones who knew that I was facing a biopsy. Fred and I studied energy healing and Native American Spirituality with this group. When we first met Chris, she was our teacher, coming from southern California for weekend courses. Recently she’d moved to the area to take over as director of the Fernald Center, where we met and studied. Having a spiritual community had always been important to us, and we were grateful for this group that supported our newfound interests.

* * *

As I sat at the computer to write an e-mail to my far-flung family and friends, I felt great. Smiling wryly, I remembered that the first and most important step in any healing is for the one receiving to ask for it. I knew that my prayer request would be honored by hundreds of e-mail correspondents of various spiritual traditions.

I heard the front door open and Fred came in. He stood behind my chair and read over my head, rubbing my shoulders. Smiling up at him, I noticed how tired he looked. His face was streaked with dirt.

I shot a barrage of questions. "How was your day? How is Suzanne? How'd you get so dirty?"

"I rented a tractor and turned under the weeds at the back of the property. Suzanne felt well enough to help some by hoeing near the house. How are you feeling?" He studied my eyes.

I hated to see him look so worried. "I feel great. Chris gave me a healing. I'm announcing to the world that I want them to pray for me. What do you think?"

"Good idea." He turned toward the kitchen. "What's for dinner? I'm starved."

* * *

The response to my prayer request was overwhelming. I was on an e-mail list that served colleagues with whom Fred and I worked as community organizers in the seventies. They lived all over the world, but stayed in touch because of friendship and shared values. Good wishes and helpful suggestions arrived in message after message.

I created a paper sculpture to display these written encouragements, spiraling curls of rainbow colors cascading from around the top of a lamp. I copied the e-mails in colored pens, and attached them along with get-well cards, to the spirals. To me, these good wishes formed a net to surround and support me as I faced what was to come.

Like a sponge, I soaked up all the suggestions for prayer and healing practices that came my way, and continued to play with my usual spiritual practices: journal writing, dream recording, tarot readings, meditation, celebrating the phases of the moon, inspirational

reading. A tinge of desperation entered as time for the biopsy approached.

One suggestion I received through e-mail was that I take a friend with me to medical appointments, to take notes and ask objective questions. Kristi McCracken, who was on the Fernald center board with Fred and me, went with me to talk to the surgeon who was scheduled to perform the biopsy. She sat nearby as I listened through a fog and struggled to respond to the doctor.

Since making this appointment, another lymph node on the left side of my neck had become swollen. The doctor touched it, asking questions about it.

Kristi got out of her chair, pointed to the much larger lump on the right side, lower and more toward the front of my neck. "Isn't this the one Dr. Reddy ordered the biopsy for, Jann?"

"Oh. Yes, it is." I was amazed that I wouldn't have noticed if the surgeon planned to biopsy the wrong lump. How grateful I was for Kristi's presence and objectivity.

* * *

Chris met Fred and me at the surgery center on the day of the biopsy. She said a prayer, and laid her hands on me, transmitting healing energy. Then the nurse said she and Fred would have to wait outside.

The surgery was out-patient, with local anesthesia, so I listened as the surgical team talked about last night's television show, feeling the pressure and pulling at the base of my neck, very near the jugular vein. I knew that I was fortunate to live in an advanced society with advanced medicine, but something in me resented everyone and everything about the hospital.

When Fred and I arrived home, Patricia Roome, another Fernald colleague, was waiting with hugs and smiles.

"Hey, Patricia." Fred said. "Did you come to mow the lawn?" It was an ongoing joke between them.

"No, Fred." she said as she got a picnic basket out of her car. "I just thought you might like some fried chicken before you come to mow

mine.” Her short blonde hair framed her agreeable face. Though she had health problems of her own, she looked for ways to be helpful on her good days.

Still shaky from the anesthesia, I made my way to the couch. Fred and Patricia’s voices came from far away.

* * *

After answering the ringing telephone, and hearing the surgeon’s accent, I concentrated on understanding his words. “The pathologist’s report isn’t complete, but you do have lymphoma. The tumor I removed was a primary tumor, not spread from somewhere else in your body.”

My vision sharpened as I listened to his words and looked out the window at the back garden. The roses were suddenly brighter. The leaves on the orange tree appeared greener and shinier. I took in a large breath, thanked the doctor, and wondered why I felt so well.

Fred looked grim when I told him, but he wasn’t surprised. We both had sensed this was coming. “Don’t worry. I feel perfectly well. This can’t be far advanced.”

Fred took me in his arms and stroked my hair. “But you have to admit it’s scary.”

I nodded into his chest and grimaced. “It’s just so hard to know how to approach this. One of my teachers had lymphoma on her leg, and they burned it so bad with radiation that she was crippled. It’s not the cancer I dread. It’s the treatment!”

The dream I had the night before popped into my head. It was about me and our oldest son, a scuba diving enthusiast. I pulled back from my husband’s embrace and smiled into his eyes, feeling excitement and hope.

“I dreamed I was diving in the ocean with Scott. I wasn’t afraid at all, just awestruck with wonder and anticipation. The ocean wasn’t cold and I wasn’t afraid.”

Looking puzzled, he asked. “What do you think it means?”

“This is going to be an adventure, Fred. I’m going on a journey of the deep.”

Chapter 3

Past Life Journey/Applied Kinesiology

LETTING GO

*This is the way we must let go in life.
The terms of surrender are given
And we're obliged to accept them.
Night follows day. We let go of the light
And give thanks for the darkness.
The colors and softness of spring
Brighten into the heat of summer.
We let go of the flowers,
Accepting the radiant heat.
We pass from childhood,
Yielding gladly, embracing our youth.
When it is time to relinquish youth,
We are powerless once again.
Acknowledging the signs of age,
We let go.
It is no wonder we want to stop
This continual surrender,
This unceasing goodbye.*

As the news of my diagnosis spread among our friends, I received many suggestions for alternative treatments. They recommended special diets and gave information about holistic health clinics all over the world, offering corroborating evidence for their approach. I listened, read the books they sent and prayed for wisdom as I considered options..

After the surgeon removed the stitches from my biopsy incision, I met with Dr. Reddy again.

“Doctor, I understand that Stanford University Hospital is one of the leading research centers for lymphoma. Would you give me a referral to go there to consult them on the best treatment for my case?”

“Yes, I can do that. First, though, you need some scans and other tests to stage your cancer. Stanford will need that information. I’ll refer you to Dr. Baloch to arrange the tests. He’s the medical oncologist at the local cancer center.”

Puzzled, I asked, “What does 'stage' mean?”

“In lymphoma, it indicates how many tumors you have and where they're located. In Stage One, there are cancer cells in only one site. In Stage Two, tumors are found in two or more lymph glands. In Stage Three, tumors have developed in tissues far away from the original site. Stage Four means cancer cells have spread as far as the bone marrow.”

My fear level rose as he explained each level. Besides the original biopsied lymph node, more knots had arisen on both sides of my neck. I mentally calculated Stage Two.

The next day, I took the advice of my friend Mia Beale, an energy healer and registered nurse, and called Kim O’Dell, an applied kinesiologist. I wanted her advice about nutrition. Kim would get information from my body/subconscious mind through asking yes/no questions and testing whether a muscle in my arm was strong, indicating a *yes* answer, or weak, meaning *no*.

When we met, I said, “I don’t have any symptoms of illness, other than swollen lymph nodes. I feel well. I want to find out what I can do to strengthen my immune system. Is there a dietary regimen that will help me fight this lymphoma?”

“I understand. Here’s how we’ll find the answers. Hold your left arm straight out from your body. I’ll pull down on it after I ask a question. First, we’ll practice. Don’t answer this out loud. Is your name Jann?”

My arm held as Kim tried to push it down with gentle pressure.

Then Kim asked, “Are you a mother?” Kim didn’t know the answer to this.

My arm held strong again.

Kim said, “Do you have your own business?” Again, Kim didn’t know that I was retired, but my arm gave way under her light touch.

Kim went through a protocol of diagnostic questions. She read them silently, and then tested. I wasn't even sure what questions my muscles were answering.

At the end, Kim said, "You probably know how very important food is to rebalance your chemistry. You need to completely avoid wheat and dairy products. You have a raging allergy to both, clogging your system."

"That won't be easy, but I'll do it," I answered, thinking how difficult it would be to find substitutes for wheat bread and cereal.

Kim was writing. "I'll give you a list of vitamins and herbal supplements to take and places to find them. Call me again after you've followed this regimen for six weeks. Eat as many green vegetables as you possibly can. Here's the name of a book with meal plans and recipes that don't have wheat or dairy products. It'll help you to change your diet."

Leaving the office, I felt empowered. My fear lifted somewhat. At the health food store I found the supplements and the book that Kim had suggested. The store had bread, cereal and pasta made with grains other than wheat as well as soy and rice milk.

I thought, "Maybe this won't be so hard. Thank goodness Fred isn't a fussy eater. He'll go along with this change if I give him a good steak once in awhile."

The medical procedures proceeded quickly after that. I had a CT scan the day after my consultation with Kim.

That night at dinner, Fred asked, "How did the CT scan go?"

"Wow. That was some experience. I felt like I'd been kidnapped by aliens, going through a narrow tube with a mechanical voice telling me when to breathe and not to breathe. It's good that I'm not claustrophobic."

The next day, I met Dr. Baloch at the local cancer treatment center.

He said, "The scans show that you have enlarged lymph nodes, presumed to be cancerous, in your chest and abdomen, as well as your neck. The next step will be a bone marrow biopsy. I'll draw the bone marrow here at the cancer center. Can you come on Thursday for that?"

"Do you think it has reached my bones?" I was filled with dread.

His voice was very kind. “No, I don’t think so. But we want to know for sure and get a base line for future reference. We’ll also do a bone scan at the hospital for that purpose. Our office will call you when we’ve made the appointment.”

I walked out of the cancer center into a beautiful June day, and my mood lifted. I was amazed at how well I actually felt.

The next day, I called Kim again. “This probably sounds crazy, but I’m going to have bone marrow drawn for a biopsy. As I was falling asleep last night, I heard my Tibetan chime ring, and it came to me that that vibration would help to make the procedure less traumatic. Can you test that for me?”

Kim tested with her own muscles, and said, “Yes, it would help. What do you think the doctor will say?”

“I don’t know. Patricia and Fred are going with me. That, along with your opinion, will give me courage to ask to use the chime. Why would he object? Thank you so much!”

That evening, I consulted another alternative healer. Sharry Lachman, who lived in Oregon, was a close friend and an energy psychologist trained in past life regression. She also used muscle testing to tap the body's wisdom for guidance and feedback during hypnotherapy. Dialing the hands-free telephone I used for our sessions, I felt nervous, waiting for her to answer. We had set this appointment by e-mail. Sharry had my test results, and knew what medical procedures were coming up.

“Hi, Jann. You’re punctual. What’s up? What are we working on tonight?”

I swallowed, trying to dispel my feeling of dread. “Sharry, I think my cancer may be related to a rage I felt a few weeks ago when I was writing a paper for a course in my doctoral program. It was on the feminine aspect of God, and as I wrote of my experience growing up in a very patriarchal church, I was almost overwhelmed with anger. It literally nauseated me.”

“Okay. We can work on that.” Sharry’s calm voice asked, “Are you lying down? Comfortable? Good. Take a few deep breaths. Just be aware of your breathing.”

She waited for awhile, and then continued with an invocation of healing energy, asking permission of my spiritual guidance to do this healing. She muscle tested to assure herself it was all right to go on. "Now, think back to that time when you were overwhelmed with rage at your church. Where did you feel that in your body?"

After a few breaths, I answered, "In my stomach, to the left of my diaphragm, in my throat and in my groin. Those places felt very tight, even painful." The pain and tightness were present again as I spoke.

"Okay, Jann. We're going to a past life relating to this feeling. I'll count and muscle test to see how far to go. I want you to keep breathing deeply, close your eyes and visualize fields of color as I say each one. Indigo . . . Fuchsia . . . Yellow-green . . . Black."

"Now we have arrived where the being we call Jann was living, 29 to 30 lifetimes back. What do you see in your mind's eye?"

My words came slowly. "I'm wearing ugly clunky brown leather shoes, with laces missing and the tongue turned down. . . . I have on a long, black dress that is gathered at the waist. . . . I'm in a barn, I think, with loose hay all around."

Sharry spoke in a soothing tone. "Good. Are there other people there?"

I gasped. "Yes, there's a man behind me, holding my arms. Another angry man is in front of me, hitting me in the face. I'm extremely strong and defiant. I'm yelling and screaming. It's a test of wills. I'm determined not to go gently. My sons have been murdered. I'm next."

I stopped talking for a minute, moaning and crying, "He's raping me. Now he has a knife, and is stabbing me. In my throat. In my left side. And then he thrusts the knife up my vagina, and keeps thrusting, making many wounds around my groin."

Sharry's voice calmed my weeping. "What are your final thoughts?"

"This is too painful. One of my children, a daughter, is left alive. I'm worried what will happen to her. This is a betrayal. It happened because someone I trusted, who was supposed to protect me, betrayed me. He was my clergyman, and wanted something I had: the farm my husband left me. He hired these men to kill me."

I was sobbing. "The next time I'm going to be a man!"

“All right, dear Jann.” Sharry’s voice soothed. “That life was over a long time ago. Relax a minute. Breathe deeply, and visualize coming into the present. When you’re ready, tell me what you learned from this journey.”

I answered with seemingly random thoughts that entered my mind rather slowly. “The Earth is sacred. Spilled blood has made it even more sacred. ... The wound in my side has pulled the second and third energy centers off to the left. They need to be realigned. ... None of the aspects of the ego self are important. The higher self is all that matters. ... Music is very important to my well-being.”

After bringing me back to ordinary consciousness, Sharry said, “You’ve done a difficult but helpful piece of work, Jann. I’ll write this up and send it to you. Your creativity needs to incorporate the three wounded areas. It has to do with voice and feminine theology. What you’re learning needs to get out to the world. Counter past violence with new creativity.”

I was in awe. “Sharry, do you think that was true? Do the memories come down in the DNA? How did this story happen?”

“I don’t know, Jann. You’ve read Dr. Brian Weiss’ books, and know what a skeptic he was even as he found the method useful. It’s one of those things that help people without anyone knowing whether it’s literally true or how it works. I learned this from Andy Hahn, Psy.D.”

The next day, I received Sharry’s notes by e-mail. They concluded, “Don’t be afraid. This experience, the cancer, is for your learning as a healer and for transforming medical situations and practices. Don’t be shy about doing that.”

* * *

Patricia met Fred and me at the cancer center the morning of the bone marrow biopsy. In the waiting room, Fred rather self-consciously led me through a neurolinguistic procedure that Sharry had recommended. He stood in front of me, holding his crossed index and third fingers about eighteen inches in front of the bridge of my nose. He repeatedly traced a large infinity symbol in the air, beginning at the center point and moving up and to his right each time. I followed with

Passage: Illness as Initiation

my eyes, five to ten times, while saying, “This medical procedure is a healing intervention and not intended to wound me. Therefore my body can receive this as a healing and not be traumatized.”

Fred and Patricia entered the examination room with me, hoping that the doctor would allow one of them to stay. He said the space was too small for even one extra person, so Patricia tied the Tibetan chime to the arm of a chair next to the table where I would be for the procedure, and asked the nurse to move the chime regularly to keep it ringing. The nurse seemed a little embarrassed, but she gamely kept the air vibrating with the wonderful sound. As I followed the delightful tones, I hardly felt the large needle enter my sacrum to withdraw bone marrow.

Chapter 4 Staging/Family Celebration

MAIDEN FLIGHT

*The Night-Sky-Horse comes for me
In broad daylight, barely visible.
I spread my arms, now wings,
And fly with him.*

*Alone, I could not do it,
But transported by this Vision,
Lifted in a spiral,
I circle high.*

*Exquisitely sensitive
To the sweet currents that carry me;
Sustained still by the One
Who upholds all.*

*Time is gone, past and future,
There is only now, this moment of
Release, of freedom from
Hours and history.*

*Each detail below is mine,
Broad valley and life-giving river,
Borne, not by my power,
But by my powerlessness.*

I was happy when the weekend arrived, and medical offices closed. Medical appointments consumed my life during June weekdays. Friday

night signaled time to be with Fred and to contemplate what I was learning about lymphoma.

The day after my bone marrow drawing, Fred and I retreated to our cabin on Blue Ridge. Precious to us, it was a place to commune with nature and to play with each other, as in the early days of our marriage.

I took candles, sage and tobacco to offer to Mother Earth. I meditated in my favorite place, a circle of more than thirty live oak trees that grew from one root system. As I lit the candle on a rock altar and sat in the center of the circle, I imagined drawing energy from the roots, as the trees did.

Reading on the deck in the sunshine, a cool breeze riffled the pages of my book, *Healing Words*. It was about the power of prayer, written by a medical doctor, Larry Dossey. Though he cited statistics to show that prayer made a difference, he acknowledged that the results didn't always answer specific requests. I was surprised and delighted that he urged a playful approach to "the science and prayer game".

"Okay, Lymphoma," I thought, "Let's play!" Then I had a feeling of dread, thinking of my first playmate, my older, bigger, stronger brother, who was not always kind or gentle. I shook it off. That rough play prepared me for the game I now faced. I went back to my reading.

That night, Fred and I took foam pads and sleeping bags out to the big granite dome near the top of Blue Ridge to spend the night. I awoke several times to the wonder of star-filled heavens. Once, I saw a winged horse covering the entire central part of the sky, with lines drawn between the stars to outline it, as in astronomy books. A perfect circle of many other animals, also outlined, surrounded the horse.

As Fred and I awoke, I told him about the dream. "It was so real. I thought my eyes were open."

Fred said, "Well, it *was* real, in your consciousness. The important thing is that you have a powerful ally, willing to carry you through."

"Yes. That's a wonderful way to think of it, Fred. After all these years, your wisdom keeps surprising me."

Grabbing me, Fred said, "You know what surprises me? The way you can still turn me on."

I laughed. "We'd better go inside. We don't want to make a spectacle of ourselves: old people doing it."

* * *

On the following Tuesday, Dr. Baloch gave me the good news that no cancer cells appeared in the bone marrow sample. I celebrated arriving at a “cancer-free zone.” My lymphoma was placed at Stage Three. Tumors grew in my neck, chest and abdomen, and on both sides of my body.

Dr. Baloch assured me that the local cancer center was well equipped to administer the optimal chemotherapy treatment for this type of cancer. If I still wished to go to the Stanford clinic, he would gather the x-rays, biopsy slides and pathology reports to send ahead of my appointment, so that the oncologists there could study them and be ready with an opinion at the time of my consultation. He implied that going to Stanford was unnecessary, but I persisted, and he made the arrangements.

My birthday fell on the following Friday. Our three sons on the coast wanted to host a celebration there. Fred, Suzanne and I drove to Shell Beach where the whole family met at a steak house that featured an outdoor playground where the younger children could play while we waited for everyone to arrive. Suzanne and I settled on a bench while Fred went for soft drinks.

As our sons and their families arrived, my heart expanded as I noticed the subtle changes in everyone since the last time we'd been together. I sensed each of them observing me in the same way, but with fear of the changes that might come with cancer.

Our oldest son, Scott, and his family arrived first. It still surprised me that Scott's hair, golden blonde as a child, had turned dark as smoke, like Fred's had been before turning gray. Like his dad, he was tall and slender but strong.

Scott smiled broadly as he greeted us, carrying Rory, a wiggling blonde toddler, on his shoulders. Rachel, small and dark-haired, with olive skin that suggested her Italian heritage, walked beside them, holding hands with her eight-year-old daughter Jaimee, who looked a lot like her mother. Scott had recently signed papers to complete his adoption of this beautiful child. After being single for six years

following a divorce, Scott found happiness with Rachel. Jaimee was a precious extra bonus.

As we stood in anticipation, Scott's sons from his first marriage, Sam and Sid, ran ahead of their dad to hug Fred and me.

"Happy Birthday, Grandma."

Returning Sam's hug, I was shocked that he had grown taller than I, in just the few weeks since I'd last seen him. "Wait a minute, Buster! Twelve year olds are not supposed to be taller than their grandmothers!"

Sam laughed, extremely pleased with his new height. "I wear a size twelve shoe, Grandma."

Fred chimed in, "If your shoe size keeps matching your years, you'll wear a size 67 when you're my age."

Sid hugged Fred. "Hey, Grandpa, have you wrestled any bears lately?"

They loved the stories Fred told them of his mountain exploits. Sid, just seventeen months younger than Sam, but now below his shoulder in height, was clearly having a hard time adjusting to Sam's growth spurt. I hugged him, ran my hand over his buzz cut and whispered, "You're so handsome." I loved every freckle.

Embarrassed, he ducked from under my arm and left to explore the playground. Scott handed Rory to Sam. "Stay close to your little brother."

"Okay, Dad. Come on, Rory. Want to swing?"

As I watched them go, someone covered my eyes from behind. I put my hands over the rough fingers, square on the ends like Fred's.

"Barry's here. Oh, good." I turned around and hugged my youngest offspring. I'd been concerned about him since the breakup of his long-term relationship a few months earlier. He was off-balance and quite depressed for awhile, especially missing his girl friend's two children. He seemed happier since moving here to work for Scott and our other son Patrick in their small manufacturing business.

Looking over his shoulder as we hugged, I caught sight of our middle son Patrick and his wife Tami approaching. Their thirteen-year-old, Bryan, headed straight for the playground, bypassing the grandparents. I thought, "Uh-oh. Adolescence has struck Bryan."

It wasn't just that, though. He was Patrick's stepson, and since his biological father had won partial custody in a court battle, he held himself a bit aloof. Patrick, tall and slim, held his son Joseph's hand. Tami, carrying the baby, was a brown-eyed blonde. Patrick loved to tell that the first time he saw her, when he was seventeen and she was fourteen, he knew immediately she was the one he wanted to marry.

Joseph, three years old and shy, squirmed in my arms as I hugged him. When I picked him up, he relaxed and said, "Are you going to the beach with us tomorrow?"

"Yes, yes, yes," I answered, nuzzling his neck. "I wouldn't miss it."

Bryan came when Tami called him, endured brief hugs from Fred and me and took Joseph to play with the other children. I turned to Tami and beautiful six-month-old Courtney in her arms, enfolding the two of them in one embrace.

Pulling back, Tami said, in baby talk, "Say, happy birthday, Granny."

Courtney beamed a gorgeous smile and held out her little arms for me.

"What better birthday greeting could there be?" I asked, taking the baby and kissing her.

Last to arrive was Rhonda, the office manager of Mid-State Precision, Scott and Patrick's business. I relied on her when I wanted to reach my sons by phone. She was the one person who always knew where they were during the week. I hugged her and shook hands with her husband just as we learned that our table was ready.

The noisy steakhouse reflected the proper mood for our party. I laughed at the boisterous singing of "Happy Birthday" by the wait staff and my family, with Fred purposely singing off key. We went to Rhonda's for birthday cake and ice cream after dinner.

Fred and I stayed in a beachfront motel that night. "I can't remember a better birthday celebration among the sixty-two I've had. There are so many ways that this cancer diagnosis is making me aware of how blessed my life is."

The entire weekend was an affirmation of my family's love for me and for each other. I'd never felt more appreciated.

Being spoiled by my family gave me an inkling of the temptation to be manipulative as a cancer patient, as I tried to make the fear in my children's eyes go away

The following week a lump rose on the side of my face in front of my ear. Noticing it, I felt angry. Powerful feelings of ambiguity about whether or not to go through chemotherapy continued, but lessened with this visible reminder of cancer cells growing all over my body.

I went for an echocardiogram to be sure that my heart was strong enough to withstand chemotherapy.

Later that day, my massage therapist gave me an audio tape by an herbologist known for curing cases of cancer that had been diagnosed as incurable. He was vitriolic in his assessment of allopathic treatment of cancer. He referred to surgery as slashing, chemotherapy as poisoning and radiation as burning.

This tape intensified my dread of treatment but some of the speaker's approaches to treatment made sense to me. He suggested a water therapy, alternating hot and cold water in the shower seven times. I incorporated this practice in my daily bath, imagining the lymph channels contracting with the cold water and expanding with the warm. I imagined a pumping action that moved the lymph and expelled the cancer cells. I added a prayer from our days in a family religious order:

*Thank You for the heat and the cold,
Thank You for the fire and the ice,
Thank You for the giving and taking away of my life,
I lift up my heart. Amen*

* * *

One morning at breakfast, I said, "Maybe I should wait and not get chemotherapy until I have symptoms."

Fred looked incredulous, "You have tumors all over your body, your neck and now your face. What kind of symptoms would you wait for?"

"Pain. Or illness"

“It’s up to you, Jann. But you’ve always taken pretty good care of yourself, and still these tumors developed. I think the best defense is a good offense.”

So I kept taking the next step toward chemotherapy.

To make our trip to the Stanford Oncology Clinic less intense, Fred and I visited our dear friend Lynn Woltjer in Berkeley the weekend before my appointment on Monday. On Father’s Day we had brunch out and attended an outdoor art festival. I was delighted to find a small print of a man soaring over a green landscape with the ocean in the distance. I bought it for Fred’s Father’s Day gift. I was little envious that he often flew in his dreams, free spirit that he was.

Dr. Renschler, at Stanford, agreed with all the diagnostics done by my local doctors. He said he had no doubt that the local oncology center could administer the optimal chemo program. He gave me new information, that my lymphoma was follicular and diffuse small and large B-cell type. The small cells could have been around for years; the large cells were more aggressive and develop tumors in months. Small cell lymphoma was considered incurable. He said that I had a better-than-even chance of long-term survival.

“But you should have a will, power of attorney and a living will, just in case.”

I heard Fred take in a sharp breath, just as I did.

Back home, we participated in a sweat lodge ceremony with the rest of the Fernald Center community. The prayer ceremony was followed by a board of trustees meeting. I had been president of the board for two years. During this time attendance at our courses declined. Chris had recently taken the position of Director at the center, and she spent a lot of time in this meeting moralizing about the failures of the recent past.

The next morning, I said, “Fred, I hardly slept. I thought Chris was awful yesterday, and I kept replaying what she said in my mind. I’m having a hard time with this.”

“Look, Jann. This is not something you should even be worrying about. We’ve all done the best we could. You’ve done more than your share. If you can’t get a little distance from this, I think you should resign from the presidency.”

Passage: Illness as Initiation

I knew he was right, but I couldn't bring myself to go that far. Still, what Fred said helped me feel more detached from the situation. I couldn't understand why what Chris said bothered me so much. I started to consider ways to withdraw from this obligation and others that were taking my focus off the healing journey ahead.

On June 29, I was injected with gallium citrate, a radioactive material. I returned the next day for a full body scan to map the tumors for comparison at the end of treatment. The x-ray film showed dozens of tumors as bright spots where the gallium citrate gathered.

As grateful as I was to have good health insurance, when the medical bills started to arrive, I thought of ways I'd rather spend the twenty percent co-pay. That reality chipped away at my ongoing denial. The month ended with me proceeding toward conventional chemotherapy.

In the meantime, I confronted the reality of having lymphoma in other ways. My diet now excluded wheat, dairy and red meat. I ate as many servings of dark green vegetables as I could. I took herbal supplements. I asked family and friends near and far to support me with prayer and healing energy. I kept up solitary practices of prayer, meditation, journal writing and dream work. I explored and attempted to make corrections in underlying mental and emotional patterns that might be problematic. I finally concluded that these would be complementary, not alternative approaches to my healing.

After consulting with a leading research center on lymphoma and completing the necessary tests, my first chemotherapy treatment was scheduled for July 14.

I was almost ready. First, though, I had a wonderful obligation to fulfill.

Chapter 5 Playmates' Interlude

THE CALL, THE BATTLE, THE RETREAT

*Nestled near the Sierra's upward thrust,
Safe in our dream home,
Our four young ones were secure,
Our childhood fantasies fulfilled.*

*Each image on the news made a crack in our fortress:
Young ones bombed in Sunday school, fire hoses turned on innocents,
Our leader's riderless horse and fatherless children,
A little girl burned by our bombs, running naked, trying to escape pain.
After the mule cart pulled a peaceful warrior to his resting place
And we saw Bobby dying on the kitchen floor,
Our dream ended.*

*When one dream ends, Life affords another to take its place
Called to action, we left without a backward glance.
Finding comrades-in-arms, we waged war on old images.
Labored for a future when all children, not just ours, would be secure,
But an enemy lurked within.
Grandiosity feeds addiction; addictions defeated this dream.
We retreated to await another,
Once again near the Sierra's upward thrust.*

Beside myself with anticipation, I prepared to host my women's retreat. Calling ourselves "Sister Soul Friends," we were meeting for a long joyful weekend, as we'd done each July for years. The previous year, we'd met on Whidby Island near Seattle. This retreat would be in Lindsay.

We'd known one another since we lived and worked together in an ecumenical religious community thirty years previously. Our common experiences were profound. In those days, we rose before dawn for worship and serious theological study. Our mission was to renew and motivate churches to care for their surrounding communities, especially in poverty-stricken inner city neighborhoods, where most of our houses were. Some of us worked at secular jobs, turning over our paychecks to free up time for the others to work with churches and fill support roles in the houses. We drew stipends based on the size of our families. Our houses all over the world shared a common discipline. "All time," we said, "is assigned time."

Fred and I volunteered with this group full time for five-and-a-half years. I loved the work, the daily worship and singing and our wonderful colleagues, but our children were in structures that didn't give them adequate emotional care. We lost our closeness as a family. Suzanne was raped on the street and victimized by a sexual predator on the staff. She dropped out of school at age 17. Fred was freefalling into alcoholism and I was lost in my relationship with the Order, suffering a full-blown addiction. When Scott got into trouble with the law at fifteen, Fred and I woke up enough to leave the group to try to save our family. By that time, I'd lost faith in God, thinking our fate was all up to me.

Twelve Step programs eventually put us back in touch with ourselves and the Divine, restoring us to sanity. But it was the Sister Soul Friends that healed my shame at having abandoned my children. They understood and had also followed the glorious vision that led us to leave our children with others when it was expedient for "The Mission." They understood the depth of the disappointment when the vision turned to ashes as our children suffered. Sharing both what we loved and what we regretted about our common past formed a powerful bond.

After I was diagnosed with lymphoma, the other women suggested a change of location for our annual retreat, worried that hosting the event would be too stressful for me. I felt well and convinced them to go ahead with our plan. I could hardly wait for their arrival.

Joan Knutson and Maxine Butcher came early to help me prepare, driving from southern California.

It was early afternoon on Tuesday when I saw Joan approaching my door. I ran to meet her. She enveloped me in a warm hug. Joan was one of the few women who made me feel small, although I was taller. She carried a lot of weight on her large frame, but was always energetic and full of joy. I loved her deep, beautiful speaking voice and her wise counsel. Joan taught me the meaning of friendship.

Maxine followed. Joan and I opened our arms and made it a three-way hug. Head nurse at a large hospital, Maxine epitomized calm efficiency. Short and plump with beautiful white hair, she was losing weight in an attempt to alleviate chronic knee pain.

“Let me help you get settled and we'll have some iced tea. Then you can tell me what you think of my menus. Feel free to suggest changes. We'll shop for groceries in the morning and deliver them to the Villa Waddell. I can hardly wait to show you.” I was very pleased with the old mansion where we'd meet. It was in the country near Lindsay, surrounded by orange groves.

I'd arranged to trade my old Volvo for a friend's van for the weekend. On Thursday, Maxine and I headed the van north sixty-five miles to the Fresno airport to meet the other seven women. Joan followed in her car.

Sharry arrived first on a flight from Portland, Oregon. Emerging from the plane onto the hot tarmac, she was resplendent in a new straw sunhat, tall, slim, blonde.

“I can't tell you how good the heat feels to me,” she piped, hugging me. “I'm bursting to tell you about my latest healing technique.”

“The past life regression was profoundly and mysteriously healing,” I said in her ear. “Thank you again.”

She responded with a pleased blush.

Sharon Fisher, Martha Dempster, Dorothea Jewell, Carol Crow, Claudia Cramer and Nancy Lanphear arrived on a flight from Seattle. Other people in the airport smiled as we, all well past middle age and mostly plump, squealed and hugged each other like pre-teens. Our party had begun.

At lunch in a Mexican restaurant near the airport, we planned our afternoon agenda. Claudia, a quilt artist who made specialty pieces for clients to commemorate significant events, spoke up. "I read online about a wonderful quilt shop in Clovis I'd like to visit."

"Let's go." I said, responding to her excitement, I remembered how stressed and uptight she was when we worked together on community organizing. Now that she was following her bliss, her freckled face glowed beneath her russet-to-gray hair.

Then we visited a New Age store. Sharry held up a small wire-wrapped quartz crystal on a chain, and announced, "If you'd like to learn to use a pendulum for a healing technique I want to teach you, get one of these."

Nancy and Carol huddled to choose beautiful stone beads to make into jewelry for gifts. They lived in a co-housing project their families had started, where birthdays were celebrated every month. Nancy's son had married Carol's daughter, so they had grandchildren in common.

We finished our shopping adventure and drove to Lindsay. Sharon rode in the van beside me. Her dark eyes danced as she admired the pink oleanders in full bloom in the median strip of the freeway. They flourished for forty miles along our way.

"What huge shrubs. The flowers are beautiful. What are they called?" She repeated the question several times before "oleander" stuck in her mind.

"People who live here are so used to them, we take them for granted," I said. "It's just amazing how they can keep living under such stressful conditions. I guess they consider carbon dioxide a feast."

Every time Sharon spotted a white horse, she licked her right thumb, stamped it into her left palm, saying a rhyme from her childhood:

"Lucky, lucky white horse, Lucky, lucky Lee,
Lucky, lucky white horse, Bring some luck to me."

Then she closed her eyes and made a wish. This brought about a discussion of travel games we played as children. I made a mental note to teach my grandchildren the white horse game.

Arriving in Lindsay, we went by our house to visit Fred, who basked in warm hugs and fond remembrances. Fred showed the women around, pointing out the distant Blue Ridge, where we had a small cabin, the large hill near town called Elephant Back, and a little farther north, Lindsay Peak, a small cone-shaped extinct volcano. We all hugged him again, said our goodbyes and excitedly drove to our destination.

When we arrived at the Villa, Sharon said, "Oh, this year we're on the Spanish Riviera." The Mediterranean-style mansion with its brilliant white walls and red tile roof brought excited responses from everyone. As we toured the premises, Joan posed, fully clothed, in the shower made of brass pipes that wrapped around her body, imagining warm water spraying on multiple levels. Each bedroom was beautifully appointed. We were thrilled with our accommodations. After deciding on rooms and roommates, we settled in.

I shared the old carriage house, now a guest suite, with Dorothea and Martha. Dorothea was the elder of our group, and the most reserved, with beautiful white hair and a soft face. She still worked full-time as a community organizer and one weekend every month at a state prison, teaching mediation skills to inmates.

I asked her how that work was going. "Are you ever nervous that you could be taken hostage by inmates?"

Dorothea was fearless. "No. We have very good security for our program. The inmates we work with aren't violent."

Martha and Sharon were at least a decade younger than the rest of us. They were the only ones with children still at home.

Martha, an occupational therapist, had worked with Fred in a Chicago hospital in 1971. She said, "It was so good to see Fred. We used to skip out after work to go to movies instead of reporting for evening tasks at the House."

I laughed. "Did I tell you that he confessed to me that he tried to seduce you when you were twenty-one and single?"

Martha blushed. "Thank goodness I resisted and didn't ruin my friendship with him. He lifted me out of a deep depression."

Her life journey since then had brought marriage to an Englishman and the birth of a son, now a teen. After her husband left her, Martha

met her present partner, Shakti, a beautiful older woman. They'd established a loving, serene home.

As happy as I was to be hosting the group, I worried that the hot weather in the San Joaquin Valley would be uncomfortable for my friends from the northwest. It turned out to be a treat for them, especially the pool, where we played before breakfast. Our noisy games of tag and shouts of "Marco" and "Polo" rang out in the country air and sheltering orange trees.

We built an altar in the sumptuous parlor. Nancy arranged a brilliant purple and turquoise shawl on the hearth, declaring, "This altar is dedicated to the feminine aspect of the Divine."

Everyone brought at least one treasured item to place there. It was hard for me to choose from my collection of goddess figures which one to bring for the altar. I decided on clay rendering of Mother Earth, a hole in her belly where a small rock nestled like a fetus.

Claudia and Dorothea brought two cloth dolls they had made. "Maude" had wild gray hair. "Gert's" was curly and red. Rather skinny legs stuck out from under bright dresses. Each doll brandished a mug of mocha with cotton foam boiling over the top. With them was a bright stuffed coffee pot. Dorothea placed them on the altar, saying "Claudia is teaching me to sew and quilt, and we invited these ladies to join our group this year. They want to stay with Jann to bring humor and a healing presence to her home during cancer treatment."

We added more goddess figures to the dining table centerpiece. All of us relished the journey we'd made away from patriarchy.

We circled comfy chairs around the altar. This is where we'd sit and listen to one another's stories of the past year over the course of the weekend.

Maxine, Joan and I prepared dinner for the first evening ahead of time. We filled out a chart for meal tasks for the rest of the weekend. We drew numbers to see in what order we'd tell our stories, and filled in the time slots for outings and other activities. My masseuse was to come with several of her students to give us massages on Saturday afternoon.

Our dear Leah Early was absent, hospitalized in Reno following a hysterectomy. We called her to say we missed her, a brief conversation

because she felt very ill. She'd sent a beautifully written document of five single-spaced pages reporting on her family, her year as a high school English and drama teacher. It ended with this, about her hysterectomy:

I have been wondering about the surgery:

Will the removal of my voluptuous ovaries and my glamorous uterus create a hole?

Will it be a small hole --fist-size say?

Or a big space --more like a large foot with generously wiggling toes?

Will it be smooth and round or lumpy and delightfully irregular?

Will I have a small mysterious cave way down inside of me?

Will the cavern be dark and luscious?

Will there be room for something new?

And I have been thinking:

Why, this entire surgery just may be about weeding out, clearing away,

And making room for my soul to grow . . .

Perhaps

and just maybe . . .

The space will be an ideal environment

For my more outrageous qualities

To flourish

to dance

and even

to glow in the dark.

Yes, that idea pleases me immensely!

Surely, and without a doubt,

The experience creates the space

for a new kind of loving and nurturing,

just perfect for a precious grandchild

arriving in January to Steve and Diana.

Passage: Illness as Initiation

With confidence I know that I am held tenderly - as each of you is held - in a female network of love. Gratefully, Leah

This was how we learned that Leah was to be a grandmother for the first time. This poetry made me want to respond to my own illness with a search for its gifts.

At dinner, Joan announced, "I brought Japanese rice paper and pictures of us from last year. You'll get one page each to create a book for Joyce's family."

For the previous two years, Joyce Reese had shared the story of her valiant struggle with ovarian cancer. The struggle ended in February.

I called my entry "*An Admiration.*" I wrote:

As respected and honored wife, Joyce was an anchor. I know this because of the way David spoke of her as he and I made long drives through California's central valley, setting up town meetings twenty years ago.

As warm and caring mother, she instilled passion and compassion. I observed her son's youthful intensity and later his powerful healing presence. When they were adolescents, her daughter befriended Suzanne, who was much younger and needed friends.

As courageous colleague, Joyce stayed the course. Three years ago she and I taught a summer workshop for Teach for America. The calm, methodical way she approached her role made me a better teacher.

In the final drama of her inspiring life, she made us laugh.

Now she's gone, and like the bug on the side of the toilet, I'm pissed off. This joke she told a famous oncologist in Houston.

Having Joyce share with us her experience with cancer prepared me for my own journey as I begin chemotherapy for lymphoma next week.

I am deeply grateful for the blessing of Joyce's friendship. Memories of visits with Fred to Joyce and David's home in Oklahoma warm my heart.

Sharing what we wrote for Joyce's family helped us grieve our loss. Tears flowed freely as Nancy, who traveled to Oklahoma to be with Joyce at the end of her life, described the awe-filling event. We also

laughed, recalling the corny jokes Joyce loved to tell, such as the one about the bug on the side of the toilet.

Not having Joyce and Leah with us, along with my impending treatment, gave the gathering a darker color that year, but made our time together even more precious.

Every year a theme emerged to make the gathering unique. We had been *Goddesses, Crones, the Moon Lodge and The Republic of Women*. At the Villa Waddell, we were *Playmates*.

We burst into singing the children's song time after time. We laughed and talked non-stop as we prepared meals. We ate breakfast on the terrace in the cool mornings, and other meals in the opulent oak-paneled dining room with its splendid view of the Sierra Nevada, feeling like we were playing house.

I told the story of my year on Friday. It followed a medicine wheel format. Beginning in the east, the direction of enlightenment, and of air, the mental element, I recalled the courses I took in my doctoral program. A course in cosmology reminded me of the vast history of the Universe and of the destructiveness of humans that threatened our descendants' survival.

Clarissa Pinkola Estes taught my course on understanding evil and moving beyond its influence. It wasn't the course content, but her warm presence that impressed me. She led a ceremony to heal anyone who had been wounded by abortion. I sat next to her in the circle, praying for Suzanne, who had more than one abortion because her medication wouldn't allow proper fetal development. At one point, Dr. Estes put her hand on my back, and whispered, "Remember, just because you're in pain doesn't mean you're being punished." That was a profoundly healing moment for me, releasing a flood of tears.

In the south of the Medicine Wheel, the direction of fire, I reported on my spiritual life. I shared my disappointment that Fernald Center programs were floundering under my leadership, and my struggle to detach from my role there. This is also where I placed my cancer diagnosis, since the south is the direction of the Warrior.

"Being with all of you the week before I begin chemo is the best preparation I could have for going into this battle." My voice trembled

as I tried to express my gratitude for their support and the love I felt as they surrounded me.

For the west, the direction of emotions, the element of water and introspection, I talked about my relationships with Fred and Suzanne.

This group knew all too well that Fred and I gone through some very rough passages in our marriage. We'd come to a place of deep cherishing. The previous summer, he went on a pack trip into the back country with our son Scott and grandsons, Sam, eleven years old, and Sid, ten. They had a wonderful time, and the boys gained memories and stories about their grandpa on that trip to recall for the rest of their lives. I met them at the trailhead when they came out. Fred had ridden horseback for twelve miles without a break. I almost had to catch him when he got off the horse. He groaned and whimpered in my arms. It was partly that he was in physical pain, but I thought he was crying because it was his farewell to the back country. He knew that I understood. It was a painful but precious moment. I was so glad we'd weathered our storms so I could be there for it.

Though they knew, I rehearsed the story of Suzanne having seizures again. "We fear that she'll hurt herself, but she's much more grounded and present than she was. She's gained weight and looks healthy," I said. "You'll see when she goes to dinner with us Saturday night."

The north of the Wheel, the place of earth, of the physical body, of wisdom, was where I dumped everything else I wanted to tell my friends. I passed around pictures of our children and grandchildren, especially celebrating the birth of Courtney.

I told about the tour of Greece Fred and I took the summer before. We went with a group led by my professor of dream work. Evenings, the group met and shared our dreams, relating them to the myths and history of the places we visited.

My story ended with tales from the first grade class I taught on Fridays the previous school year, the wedding I officiated in November and my New Year's trip with Joan and Maxine and our husbands to Desert Hot Springs.

As each one finished her story, the group responded by spontaneously singing a song from our common past. Each song fit the story of the year. In response to my story, the group sang "The Lord of

the Dance.” It was perfect to give me a new vision of the journey ahead: not a fight with cancer, but a dance of victory, whatever the outcome.

On Saturday evening we traveled to the picturesque town of Exeter, famous for its murals, to have dinner at the Wildflower Cafe. Everyone was happy to see Suzanne. When she came in, she headed straight for Claudia, who also had epilepsy. “Hi, Claudia. How are your seizures?”

They sat together at dinner, talking intently the whole time. The following year, Claudia would tell me that Suzanne’s greeting that evening changed her life. Claudia had always tried to keep her condition a secret. Suzanne’s openness at first shocked and then inspired her.

On Sunday, we drove the ascending road to Sequoia National Forest to picnic under giant redwoods. On the way, we stopped in Springville for the weekly meditation gathering of the Fernald Center community, including Suzanne and Fred. After meditating, we walked the labyrinth in the garden. I knelt in the center, and the others gathered around and laid hands on me, a spontaneous and silent ritual for my healing. It was one of the more special moments of my life. No hero, embarking on a difficult journey, ever felt more supported and loved by community and by God than I did in that moment.

As a salute to the women from Seattle, it turned out to be cold and rainy for our picnic in the high mountain park. A drop of 40 degrees in an hour felt quite chilly. However, nothing could dampen our awe and enthusiasm at being under the giant trees and smelling their delicious aroma. The ten of us tried in vain to reach around the base on one, posed for pictures on stumps and compared this relatively dry forest with the lush rain forests of Washington.

* * *

Every year, to complete our time together, each of us drew an animal card from Jamie Sams' and David Carson's *Medicine Cards*, based on Native American spiritual teachings. This animal was to act as spiritual helper and guide for the coming year. I drew Wolf.

Maxine read to me from Jamie Sams' book. "Wolf is said to be the tribe's greatest teacher, with an emphasis on family solidarity and a strong individualistic urge."

Always a dog person, I felt delighted to welcome the strength of wolf into my life, to teach me what I needed to learn in the coming year.

The previous year my animal was Bat, a symbol for death and rebirth, who teaches that the universe is always asking one to grow into the present moment, dying to the past. Indeed, my personal identity, as one who never got sick, had died. Bat's approach made my experience more objective, thus less frightening. I was grateful for this, but said goodbye to Bat without regret. We all welcomed our new animal guides, promising to call on them for wisdom in the coming year.

On Monday morning, Fred joined us for breakfast and a final conversation reflecting on the weekend. Afterwards he took Maxine to Bakersfield to catch a flight home to Los Angeles. Joan and I took the others to the Fresno airport. Sharry was first to board her plane. Much to her chagrin, we sang the playmate song to her at the gate. We all hugged goodbye, the Seattle contingent boarded their plane and the Playmates' glorious event was complete.

In Fresno, Joan and I went to a wig shop where she helped me choose a light brown short do with a strawberry tinge. Fred wanted it to be bright red, but I preferred one nearer my natural hair color.

As we drove home, Joan and I sang songs from the weekend, anchoring the feelings of the gathering. I loved singing "O, You Beautiful Doll" to Joan, who blushed and giggled every time. My song, "I danced in the morning when the world was begun/and I danced in the moon and the stars and the sun," struck me again as perfect. I felt surprisingly light as I faced the prospect of beginning cancer treatment.

Energized and renewed, I was very grateful that Joan was staying to baby me and Fred through the first round of chemotherapy. Every cancer patient should have such loving and flawless care.

Chapter 6 Chemotherapy/Hair Loss Ritual

FUNNY ABOUT FEAR

*I find fascination at the center of fear,
A thrill in the knotted stomach, the sweaty palms.
I think, "Aha! I knew this was going to happen to me someday."
And that strikes me as funny.*

*Laughter pulls my mind back from irrationality.
Blood pumps into my paralyzed limbs.
I draw upon what I know, what I can do to respond to the crisis,
And that strikes me as wonderful.*

As Fred, Joan and I ate dinner the evening before my first treatment, I remarked, "Isn't it fitting that the new moon is tonight? It signals a new phase in my journey of healing."

Joan and Fred spontaneously raised their water glasses and said, "Hear, hear!" in unison. We all laughed.

"I brought my beautiful rune stones." Joan said, "Let's each draw one for guidance in the new moon."

Fred raised his heavy eyebrows, "What are rune stones?"

"Runes are the letters of an ancient northern European alphabet," Joan answered. "Mine are painted with gold paint on polished stones. They're used as a personal oracle to guide one's spiritual journey."

With a straight face, Fred said, "Uh-oh. My mother wouldn't like that."

"Your mother isn't here." I answered, and added, "Bless her heart." We laughed again.

We cleared the table, leaving the flowers and candle in the center as an altar. Joan brought her stones and a small volume, *The Book of Runes* that went with them. I drew first, *Dagaz*, a broad X with vertical line closing each side. Joan read, "This signals a major shift or

breakthrough in the process of self-change, a complete transformation in attitude. Rely on radical trust, even though the moment may call for you to leap empty-handed into the void. With this Rune your Warrior Nature reveals itself. Considerable hard work can be involved in a time of transformation. Undertake to do it joyfully.”

This reading filled me with awe. My life was taking a 180- degree turn, and this little symbol revealed to me in a new way what I already knew in my gut. My head spun as Fred and Joan drew their stones. I didn't hear any of their readings.

The next morning, remembering mine, I really did feel as if I were leaping into a void. I wrote in my journal, *I both anticipate and dread this day. It feels like a huge event that will change my life forever, like a wedding day, or the beginning of a vision quest.*

Later, Fred and Joan followed the nurse as she led me back to the small crowded room where the intravenous therapy was administered. Three recliners for patients left no extra space, so Fred quickly led me in the eye movement exercise that reminded my body that the treatment was for my healing. Then he and Joan went back to the waiting room to read and keep each other company.

The process took about three hours. My treatment protocol was called CHOP. Each letter stood for a drug. First, I was given an intravenous solution to be sure I wasn't dehydrated, followed by the first three chemo drugs. Jeanne, the competent nurse-administrator of the chemotherapy program, carefully explained the prescriptions she gave me to take at home. Prednizone, the fourth drug, with which I came to have a love-hate relationship, was to be taken for five days. There were pills for nausea, pills to sleep, magnesium, because my blood test showed I was low on it, another drug to make the chemo absorb better, and an antidepressant if I needed it later. I hoped I wouldn't.

When I emerged from the treatment room, Fred asked, “Are you hungry? Joan and I have been fantasizing about the Nippon Kitchen's sukiyaki.”

I was game, so we picked Suzanne up and had lunch before driving back to Lindsay.

When we stopped at the drug store to get the prescriptions, the prednisone wasn't ready. That meant that I took the first dose at four in the afternoon, and had to wait to take the second until eight o'clock that night. The drug acted as a strong stimulant. Not only was I unable to sleep, I couldn't even relax, tossing and turning throughout the night. At two o'clock in the morning, I decided to read, but couldn't focus my eyes. My mind was a blur. I felt nauseous and dizzy, with swollen fingers and aching muscles.

The next morning Joan prepared a lovely breakfast. When she asked how I had slept, I answered with a shaky voice. "I didn't. I feel like I've been hit by a chemical freight train. From now on, I'm going to fill that prednisone prescription the day before treatment so I can start it in the morning and finish the dosage by early afternoon. Maybe that will improve my odds of getting some sleep." I took a sip of orange juice, but didn't think I could stomach any food.

"I have a surprise I think you'll like," Fred said. "Scott called. He and the kids came out of the back country this morning. They're going to stop by on their way home."

My heart always soared when I saw one of my sons and their children. Still, I felt relieved when the four of them departed after a brief, high energy visit. I went to bed, realizing how ill I was.

That evening I yelled for Fred to come into the bathroom, where I was studying my face in the mirror. He rushed in, looking alarmed. "Look! The lumps on my face are almost gone." Fingering my neck, I continued, "It's like they were snowballs on a hot day."

Fred looked, felt and marveled with me, as did Joan when we went to show her.

Four days later, the day after Joan went home, I was hit with pain in my thighs and hip joints, a terribly sore throat and ears, and diarrhea. I went to Dr. Reddy, thinking I had the flu. He said the pain was caused from dead cells being rapidly shed by cancerous lymph nodes. He prescribed some ear drops and pain medication, which helped.

The next day, I received an energy healing from Chris. I was amazed that in my awareness, my abdomen seemed as spacious and timeless as a galaxy. I surrendered to the pain I was feeling and was ecstatically lost in space, lost in time for the hour of the treatment.

When I returned, the pain was gone. I said, "Chris, you have such a gift. I wish more people knew how effective the laying on of hands can be."

For the first time since I was in sixth grade and had rheumatic fever, I stayed in bed for several days in a row, enjoying my pleasant lavender-and-green bedroom. Once, I dreamed of floating above my sacred circle of live oaks at Blue Ridge, seeing myself as a child, playing alone. In the dream, I sang "My Little Playmate," and awoke realizing how blessed I was with friends after my solitary childhood.

* * *

Answering the ringing phone, I heard an unfamiliar voice, "Jann? This is LaDona Wagner, in Eugene. Sandra True is visiting me from New York, playing the role of my resident nurse. She just told me you were going through chemotherapy. I recently finished treatment for breast cancer, and thought we should compare notes."

"Hi, LaDona. What a surprise. It's been years, but how wonderful to hear from you. Yes, I'm having a lymphoma experience. I had my first treatment ten days ago and I'm feeling pretty well today, since I've been off prednisone for five days."

"How many treatments are scheduled?"

"Six treatments, three weeks apart."

"Hi, Jann. It's Sandra, eavesdropping on the other line. I hope you're taking it easy."

"Oh yes. I had a part-time teaching contract, but school is out now. I only need one more course to complete my doctorate, and I'm hoping to take that in August. The courses are one-week intensive seminars, ten hours a day."

I thought I heard both of the other women gasp. After an awkward silence, Sandra, a registered nurse, said, "No, Jann. Please drop that idea. You need to focus on this one thing and eliminate everything else. I thought from your reports on our community's e-mail list that you were taking this a bit too casually."

I was shocked. I hadn't been in personal contact with either of these old colleagues for years, and neither of them had ever been a close

friend. However, I deeply respected both of them, and something about Sandra's tone broke through my denial of the seriousness of my situation.

I realized LaDona was speaking. "Jann, this experience is going to take everything you can muster, believe me. You can take your seminar later. Put your attention on getting well."

They talked awhile longer, sharing information about diet, exercise, meditation, prayer and helpful books. I thanked them for the call and hung up, thinking about how support sometimes just came out of the blue, even when I didn't realize it was needed. I decided to follow their advice. The moment I let go of the idea of taking the seminar, I felt a tension I'd been holding in my body release, and I marveled at the whole incident.

The next day, as I combed my hair, it came out in handfuls. I felt surprised when I burst into tears, since I'd known this was going to happen. Taking a deep breath and drying my eyes, I reached for the phone to call Stephanie Pires, a healing colleague who had taken a number of clients through cancer treatment. Stephanie's mother was in the fifth round of chemotherapy for lung cancer. Most important to me was Stephanie's impeccable sense of ceremony and ritual, and her clairvoyant ability.

"Good morning, Steph. I need your help. My hair is falling out." My voice trembled, but I breathed deeply and went on. "I knew this was going to happen, but I feel overwhelmed. I hate this feeling of helplessness and loss. I need a ritual to help me cope."

"Oh, Jann, this often happens with cancer patients. Losing your hair is an outward sign of *everything* about having cancer, very fraught with emotion. Though it's not such a bad thing, it almost always brings a lot of tears."

"I had thought that it wouldn't be a big deal at all." My voice was now steadier, but my throat tightened, and tears were close. I pictured Stephanie's chubby face surrounded by a halo of curly white hair. Though I was at least a decade older, I felt naïve in Stephanie's wise presence.

"Cancer demands so much of you. I hope that you are focusing all your attention on this experience. You need to withdraw somewhat

from public life in order to honor your situation and cultivate your inner fire. Let's plan a ritual that will enable you to be consciously present to your interior process with all your instinctual energies. You want to dramatize to yourself that losing your hair is inconsequential in the larger picture, though it looms very large in the imagination. Ritualizing it will bring it into proper perspective."

Stephanie listened to my thoughts about how to observe this event and made some suggestions. We finished speaking and I called my friend, healing colleague and hairdresser, Carol Guillory, and then Patricia. The two women agreed on a time to come to my house. I felt relieved that Fred was working at Blue Ridge for a few days. An all-female gathering felt right for this.

The ceremony was a small one, a transitional piece of a transformational process, like a butterfly shedding its cocoon. Its purpose was to honor myself as being open to all experiences of life. To prepare, I placed an altar cloth from Africa on a small table on the patio. The cloth was printed with many animal images, to represent the spirit given to all living creatures. On it I placed a candle to represent the element of fire, my small clay Mother Earth, and a bowl of water. I wanted to invoke the energy of Horse, who accepts a yoke that is not martyrdom, so I used a gourd rattle I'd made that was embellished with horsehair.

When we gathered, Patricia led a prayer asking for the presence of the energy of my ancestral lineage, my children and the future when I would experience all things healed and made new again. After Carol clipped my hair, we burned it in a small cauldron fueled by alcohol. While it burned, Carol gave me a hand mirror, and I was astonished at how blue and prominent my eyes appeared. Then I put on the wig Joan and I had chosen the month before. Carol and Patricia agreed that it looked just like my own hair. We laughed and talked while we had tea and cookies.

* * *

When Fred got home from Blue Ridge that evening and saw me, he looked for a moment as if he might cry. "It's okay, Honey," I said. "I

feel good about the ceremony we did today.” I told him all about it. “It was such a powerful ritual, Fred. I’m energized to keep moving forward. And there were just the three of us!”

“No, Honey. Don’t forget Jesus’s promise to be with even two or three people when they come together in His name. It wasn’t just the three of you.”

“Of course, you’re right. Patricia did an invocation that called in a whole multitude of witnesses. We prayed in the name of Jesus Christ, but she also called in the spirits of ancestors and descendents, not to mention horse energy. It was awesome.”

“Actually, Jann, you don’t look half bad as a Buddhist nun.”

After that day, being bald was not a problem for me. I’d laid that burden down.

Chapter 7

Troubling Doctor Visit/Healing Childhood Wounds

WHAT IS HOLDING ME BACK?

Nothing.

No thing.

Nothing is holding me back!

Not back. Nothing is holding me.

Holding me, as a mother holds her child.

I was in the kitchen, brewing an herbal tea. A number of sources had recommended it as an aid in healing cancer. I'd finally located it at the health food store. Today was the first time I had the energy and initiative to tackle the complicated and time-consuming process of brewing it. I hoped that the investment of my energy would strengthen the tea's efficacy.

I heard the front door open and close, and called, "Fred? I'm in the kitchen. How did your dentist appointment go?" I felt some guilt that I hadn't insisted on going with him to the oral surgeon. I offered, but he said he didn't want me to go.

He came in to the kitchen, looking paler than usual. "It was no big deal. What's that smell?" He wrinkled his nose.

I picked up the box, labeled *Essiac Tea*, and read, "Burdock root, sheep sorrel herb, watercress, Turkish rhubarb root, kelp, blessed thistle herb, red clover blossom." I looked up. "I got it at Betty's Health Food Store. It costs \$26.95 to brew three quarts, and is an ancient concoction believed to heal and prevent cancer."

Fred laughed. "The smell reminds me when my dad used to make his own chicken feed. I don't think any of his chickens ever had cancer, either."

"I want you to read the e-mail I got from Alicia today. I printed it out for you. Read it out loud. It will do me good to hear it."

Fred took the paper I handed him, and read, "Dear Jann, I did it. I shaved my head. The kids helped in the ceremony. I am truly honored to have done it. I dedicated the event to your healing, your liberation from disease, my liberation from what my hair means to me, and the liberation of all sentient beings."

Fred looked up. "She's taking her Buddhist practice pretty seriously, isn't she?"

"Isn't that wonderful? Not having hair does feel liberating."

The phone rang, and Fred answered it, spoke briefly and came back in the kitchen. "It was Sharry. She said you had a phone appointment with her at four o'clock."

We turned to look at the clock. I hit my forehead with the heel of my hand. "I forgot! Well, I'm only ten minutes late. Can you stir this to keep it from boiling over? The timer's set. When it rings, just turn off the burner and cover the pot. I'll finish it later."

Fred said, "Sure. Should I do anything about dinner?"

"No. We have leftover black beans and rice. I'll make a salad and we'll be set. Thank you, Honey. You probably need to rest after your dental ordeal."

"I'm feeling okay so far. They gave me good drugs." Fred chuckled wickedly.

Going into the bedroom, I put on my headset phone, dialed Sharry's number and apologized for being late when Sharry answered.

"It's all right, Jann. I don't have any more clients this afternoon, but Wes and I are going out this evening, and I didn't want to get into a time crunch. What shall we work on?"

"My psychic healer friend, Stephanie, helped me plan my hair divestment ritual." I said. "She works with a lot of cancer patients. I told her about the work that you and I did to help me come to terms with my rage against the church. Stephanie agreed that was very helpful. As she put it, rage is instinctual and suppressing it is very hard on one's health. She sensed that I still need to clean up the feelings I have toward my older brother."

Sharry said, "That's interesting. Tell me what else she said. It might be helpful for me as I work with other cancer patients."

I opened my journal, which I had put beside me on the bed, and turned back to the notes I'd made during my conversation with Stephanie. "She said every cancer patient seems to have the energy of someone close wanting them to die, which interacts with their own death wish. Many patients are actually willing to be martyrs in those relationships, so the death wish is a reciprocal thing. People with cancer seem to think they can solve something in their family, something that's out of their control, by dying. Wanting to control is really deep in all of us, and when we have cancer, we get manipulative with it. She said part of my healing is taking my own death process, and putting it in God's hands rather than submitting to subconscious anger, either mine or that of others."

"Interesting," Sharry said. "It seems right as I think about my own work with cancer patients. Tell me a little about your relationship with your brother and why it's the one you want to work on."

"Where do I start? He's almost four years older than I, and looms large in my imagination, though I've hardly seen him for thirty years. He recently said he'd like to visit soon and bring our mother with him. He doesn't understand or condone my leaving the church we grew up in. The moment I hear his voice, I regress to a four-year-old."

Sharry took her cue from this. "Okay, Jann, just close your eyes, relax and breathe deeply. Let's go back to when you were four years old. Tell me when you can see something from that time."

I did as I was told and felt my surroundings fall away. On Sharry's prompt, I described what I saw. "I'm in the kitchen with my mother. She's pregnant and working at the sink with her back to me and Joe, my brother. I can hear my grandfather Pop's radio in the next room. Joe is teasing me in a sing-song voice. He says I'm not really part of the family. He says they found me on the doorstep. He tells me this all the time." My voice trembled, sounding like a child.

"What are you feeling in your body, Jann?" Sharry's voice seemed to come from far away.

"I'm a weak little girl. My throat hurts. If I try to talk, I'll cry, and he'll tease me more. My head is full of pressure. Everything looks red. My feet and legs are restless. I want to kick."

Sharry's calm voice, said, "Go ahead and kick if it would help. Clear your throat and see what the four-year-old wants to say. Just keep breathing deeply."

To my surprise, I didn't have anything to say as the child. As my breath deepened and my body became calm, I spoke in my grownup voice, still full of emotion, "How wonderful, to witness this so intimately, to feel it so deeply. It all seems precious to me now, this long-ago scene."

Neither us spoke for a few moments.

Sharry said, "I really need to call this session to a close. Please spend some time now writing your reflections, and e-mail them to me tomorrow. Let's talk again a week from today."

That was fine with me. I could express myself better in writing than talking, and it would give me time for reflection. I told Sharry goodbye and hung up. I took out my journal and wrote, *This session was fascinating. I felt I was standing in the future, looking back and praying for the past, and thereby healing my entire family.*

My father, who worked so hard in the service station he managed, was in the early stages of the alcoholism that caused us all much suffering as it progressed. Daddy is loved and forgiven.

Mother always worried about Daddy and was so dependent on him that it caused her to be distracted and sometimes neglectful. Mama is loved and forgiven.

Joe loomed big and strong in my imagination. I now see he was just a little boy who often had to assume responsibility for my care. Joe is loved and forgiven.

Kyle hadn't been born yet in this scene, but his arrival took Mother away to the hospital for ten long days, my first separation from her. I was left with a family I didn't know, and was miserable. Baby Kyle is loved and forgiven.

It was 1942. Pop, who seemed stern and distant as he listened to the war news, is loved and forgiven.

I see myself as the whiney little sister, the cruel older sister.

As the witness of all this, I didn't pronounce absolution. I experienced it coming upon us all from a source deeper than my own

pronouncements could ever reach. Even I, the witness, was healed, forgiven and loved.

* * *

I began each day with a workout in the small pool in my backyard where I gave water shiatsu treatments. I was reading *Remarkable Recovery* by Caryle Hirshberg and Marc Ian Barasch, stories of seemingly miraculous recovery from cancer. One of the tales was about Wally, a World War II veteran, whose inoperable and presumed terminal liver cancer had surprisingly healed. Even when he was in his most debilitated state, he insisted on walking three miles a day in the hospital corridor, pulling the pole with his I.V. and catheter bags attached. This story convinced me of the importance of exercise to build and maintain a strong immune system. Dancing in the water every morning was a gentle way to fulfill this important obligation to my body.

In the heat of August, I found my wig to be uncomfortable, even painful. Scarves and turbans added to the warmth. I enjoyed the coolness of going bare-headed and felt amused by shocked looks or remarks directed my way when I went out. The checkout clerk in the grocery store said, "My husband would kill me if I shaved my head." I laughed and enjoyed thinking that I had made the impression of being a woman not bound by my husband's taste in hairstyles.

Three weeks after my first treatment, I returned to the cancer center for an examination to be certain I was strong enough for the second treatment the following day. When I entered, feeling fine, the reaction of the receptionist, nurse and office manager to my bare head surprised me.

They all seemed to be near panic when they saw me. The office manager said, "We need to arrange for you to attend a *Look Good, Feel Better* session. They teach you ways to tie scarves and turbans and how to do your makeup."

I felt rebuffed. It seemed to me that the personnel wanted to hide the effects of their work.

In the examination room, I told the doctor, "I went ahead and called in my prescription for prednisone. I want to pick it up this afternoon."

Dr. Baloch said, "I know, and I told them not to fill it. The nurse will call it in tomorrow while you're getting your treatment."

I felt speechless with insult. Did he think I would abuse it? Was he even interested in why I wanted it early? I hated the restless, sleepless reaction I had to it and had asked Diana, my e-mail lymphoma expert, about not taking it next time. Diana cautioned me that the side effects of the other drugs would be unbearable without it. She knew because she had tried going without it once.

I realized the doctor had continued talking as my mind wandered. He was saying, "This cancer is treatable, but not curable."

I wondered if it was absolutely necessary for him to tell me that. Surely the doctor knew what a profound effect a patient's belief system had on her health. As he was about to leave the room, I asked him if I could read the report of my gallium scan. He stopped, found the report in my chart and scanned it. "It showed that you have many cancerous lymph nodes in your torso and neck." He closed the file and left the room. I fumed.

The nurse came in, and seeing my face, said, "Is everything all right?"

"Not really. The doctor said I couldn't pick up my prednisone prescription until after Jeanne calls it in tomorrow. We only have one pharmacy in Lindsay, and they are so busy that I couldn't get my pills until four o'clock after the last treatment. I wanted to start the prednisone earlier so I'd be able to sleep." I stopped as my voice failed and I let the tears flow.

"Don't worry," the nurse said. "I can ask Jeanne to call it in immediately. The doctor feels he has to be especially careful with this drug because many people abuse it."

I took a deep breath and dried my tears. "I can't imagine anyone wanting to take it if they didn't have to."

That night I reflected on the visit in my journal. *Everything the doctor said to me today struck me as both aggressive and defensive. I get the feeling he responds to every patient in exactly the same manner. There probably isn't a way for nurses and doctors in cancer treatment*

to prevent their patients from feeling wounded. The patients are wounded. Perhaps support groups for medical professionals would help them to be more sensitive to the people they treat. It must be difficult to care for so many very ill, frightened people without putting a protective shell around one's heart.

The next night, I was disappointed that taking the prednisone earlier in the day didn't really help me sleep better. I moved to the couch at midnight, fearing I was disturbing Fred's sleep. I finally slept at two in the morning.

The following day, a cool ocean breeze made it over the coastal mountains to the Valley and lifted my spirits. My oldest son Scott arrived with his wife Rachel, Sam, who was twelve, eight-year-old Jaimee and Rory, almost two. The high temperature was a cool ninety degrees, and they spent much of the day on the patio, with Scott playing in the pool with the children. I joined them for awhile, but took a nap in the afternoon, lulled by the happy sounds of the family.

Suzanne joined us for dinner that evening. I thought she was more present in her body than she had been for years. Scott took Suzy home at the end of the evening and came in saying, "It's wonderful to have my sister back. She says she's no longer bothered by auditory hallucinations and she looks so much better."

"Yes," I answered. "She's able to focus on reality now, but I'm so sorry that she's having seizures again. I hope we can figure out a way she won't be alone for long periods. Her roommate, Dawn, isn't home often."

I felt better than I had following my first chemo treatment, thanks in part to a supplement I found at the health food store that maintained my normal intestinal flow. Still, I endured several nights of manic sleeplessness. On the third evening, I drank a glass of wine, which gave me a flushed hot face and a headache, but didn't help me sleep. Muscle testing kept indicating that I shouldn't take the latest form of valium that I had on hand, so I told myself I was supposed to go through this experience in a wakeful manner and tried to relax into it.

On the fifth day after chemo, I answered the ringing phone. "Hi, Mom. This is Barry. I'm at Suzanne's house. Is it okay if we pick up Chinese food to bring over? Suzanne wants to shop for quilt fabric, so

we'll stay with you tonight and go to the mall tomorrow. How does that sound? Are you up to having company?"

I smiled. Barry and Suzanne, the youngest and oldest of my children, were almost seven years apart in age, but emotionally close. Suzanne had been a watchful big sister for Barry when they were younger. Because of her poor health, he had often returned the favor.

"Sure," I answered. "I was just wondering what Dad and I were going to eat. I'm not sure I'll feel like going to the mall, but if I do it might be fun. I haven't even thought of shopping for ages."

That night, with muscle testing finally indicating a "yes," I took the prescribed tranquilizer and had a good night's sleep for the first time in a week. As I swallowed it, I still felt some misgivings. Because of my father's alcoholism, I didn't like to take mind-altering drugs.

The next day was Sunday, and Fred drove us to a large mall in Visalia, twenty miles from home. I bought fabric and a pattern to make a turban to wear during cooler weather. Mostly Fred and I sat and people-watched while Suzanne and Barry shopped. I was elated that Suzanne, who had avoided crowds for twelve years, enjoyed her shopping spree. She was enthusiastic about her purchases. Besides quilt fabric, Suzy bought two lizards with a heated habitat.

When it was time to go home, our faithful old white Volvo, Pegasus, wouldn't start. We called for a tow truck, and were discussing whom we could phone for a ride when the truck arrived. It turned out to be the kind that hauled the disabled car on its bed, so Fred and Barry rode in the car and Suzanne and I rode in the cab with the driver. He was a Vietnam veteran who had graduated from Lindsay High School in 1967. I enjoyed small talk about the town on our ride. When we arrived at the auto shop in Lindsay, the driver offered to take us home, but we declined and walked the few blocks.

I was delighted that my energy had been equal to the day, less than a week after my chemo treatment.

The next day, a woman from the American Cancer Society called to invite me to a *Look Good, Feel Better* class later that week. I was glad I went. Local volunteer beauticians taught us how to tie scarves and turbans and gave us makeup and wigs. My eyebrows and eyelashes were falling out by then, and I especially appreciated a gold-colored

pencil that gave the illusion of brows without looking stark with my light coloring.

I'd assumed that the majority of the women attending the class would be breast cancer patients. That wasn't the case in the dirty air basin of the San Joaquin Valley. The other three women all had lung cancer. One was in her early thirties, and the cancer had metastasized to her brain. An older woman said she was getting chemo just to buy a little more time, since she knew she was terminal. I left the session looking good, but not feeling better.

When I arrived home, my healing teacher and mentor, Bob Goings, was waiting to lay on healing hands. He worked to energetically expel old dead cells and chemicals, while filling the spaces where they had been with new vitality.

After the treatment, Bob and I sat down with Fred for a cup of tea. "That was a very interesting session," Bob shared. "Jann, you are undergoing initiation as a priestess/guardian of the covenant between the Divine and the people of the Earth."

"My, that sounds quite grandiose." I blushed.

Fred broke in. "When you think about it, that's a role any of us can play whenever we learn a truth about life and attempt to communicate it on behalf of others."

Bob said, "That's helpful, Fred. Jann, you need to go to bed for the rest of the day. Do you have any bay leaves?"

"Yes. I brought some mountain laurel leaves from your place."

"Okay. You need to cocoon with bay leaf."

I was puzzled. "I'm not sure what it means to cocoon."

"I'm not either," Bob laughed, his voice deep and musical, his bright blue eyes crinkling behind his glasses. "That's what came to me as I was running energy on you. I trust it as spiritual guidance."

When he left, it was the middle of the afternoon, but I obediently put on my nightgown, wrapped the laurel leaves in a soft handkerchief, and went to bed, cradling the bundle between my hands.

I drifted into sleep.

A deepening path spiraled down, like the entry to Carlsbad Caverns. After I followed the path for a long way, ever downward, it

opened into a large room with the "Rock of Ages," a huge lighted limestone stalagmite.

My fingers tingled as I knelt before the rock that had been built over ages by single drops of water. I prostrated myself.

Could the rock be a lymph node, grown large by cancer cells, multiplying one by one? It had grown so large that it demanded my entire attention. Before its power I felt helpless and surrendered.

Energy capable of liquefying the rock came welling up. I felt it in my abdomen. First it dissolved the deposits that were formed first, the center base of the rock, working its way up and out until it made a hole in the top and spilled down all sides of the exterior, while continuing to destroy cells from the center out. In this way, the hole at the top grew larger until the walls melted from the top down, leaving the spring coming out from deep within the earth.

This rock was not just a cancerous lymph node. It was also formed from my patterns of thinking and behavior, the structures built of long habit.

In this period, the old is changed and washed away, that I may walk in newness of life.

Chapter 8 Confronting Resentments, Old and New

FORTIETH ANNIVERSARY

*Your presence was like yesterday's bread,
Gone stale and unappreciated.
I needed to fast, to cleanse my senses of habitual indulgence.
I took pleasure in the severity of my fast,
My solitude, the space around my body.
The snugness of seclusion comforted me.
I learned, perhaps for the first time, of my Self,
And began to feel at home in my solitary form.*

*Now once more I savor your nearness, your warmth and wit.
Separation brought again the desire to draw close to you,
To treasure the freshness of each day's bread with you.
There is newness in this hunger, this desire to be close,
Yet the Self I discovered still needs a solitary sphere.
As we enter the forty-first year of our covenant, let us add a vow:
To love, honor and cherish the boundaries that separate us
As well as the ties that bind.*

*I promise to succor and surrender you,
To reinforce and relinquish you,
To enable and emancipate you,
To nurture and release you,
As long as we both shall live.*

February, 1996

I had a lump in my stomach as Sharry and I talked on the phone. The session began with Sharry asking if I wanted to continue the work to clear perceived death wishes from loved ones. I was close to tears.

“I guess it’s time to work on my relationship with Fred.” I sighed. “It seems like it should be easy for us to communicate with each other after forty-four years, but it’s not. Yesterday, he went to work at Suzy’s house, and said he’d pick up some sample medications Dr. Reddy had for me while he was in Porterville. He forgot. Before he left, he said he’d cook dinner, but when he got home, he sat in front of the television and didn’t move. After I ate a bowl of cereal, he warmed some leftovers for himself. Then I cleaned the kitchen, which hadn’t been done for several days. He didn’t mention the backrub he promised me in the morning.”

I stopped, embarrassed. Sharry waited, and after a moment, I continued, “That sounds pathetic; feeling sorry for myself.” I reached for a tissue, wiped my eyes and blew my nose.

Sharry said, “It’s all right, Jann. Thank you for being honest about your feelings. Stop criticizing yourself for the way you feel. This is a difficult time you’re going through, but it’s a great opportunity to heal old wounds from the past.”

“You know, Sharry, when Fred went through treatment for alcoholism, we did couples’ group therapy every week for a year. You’d think by now I wouldn’t have any old issues with him.”

“Let’s think about it like Stephanie suggested, as a subconscious death wish agreement between you and Fred. No moralizing about the way it ought to be or the way you ought to feel, okay? We’ll get started. Lie back and relax. Breathe deeply and go over your long journey with Fred. I ask for Divine guidance for both of us. May you allow old issues between you and Fred to surface and may I facilitate their healing. When you’re ready, tell me what comes up.”

After a few breaths, I said, “It’s the summer of 1956. We’d been married a few months. School in Texas was out, and we came to California to take care of his dad’s chickens and cows for several weeks while his parents visited his sister in Georgia. It wasn’t easy for Fred to keep up with all the farm work.

“I was nineteen years old. This was the first time I’ve been outside of Texas. I worked in my mother-in-law Rosa’s kitchen and tried to take care of her garden. I made jam and canned peaches from the trees in their small orchard. It was hard work, and extremely hot, with a

swamp cooler on the roof blowing into a central room. Cool air never reached the sultry kitchen.”

I paused, watching the scene unfold in my memory. “As soon as I finished canning the peaches, Fred brought in boxes and boxes of Concord grapes, and empty bottles from the cellar. From a cookbook, I figured out how to juice them. He showed me how to use his mother’s capper to bottle the juice, and left me with another enormous job to do. It went on like that all summer. As soon as I finished one kind of fruit, another mountain of it would be ready to can.”

I stopped again. When I continued, it was in a shaky, childlike voice. “I’m sick and tired of working in the boiling kitchen all day every day, but somehow can’t tell Fred how I feel. Or if I try, he just laughs and brings more produce the next day. I feel trapped.” I sighed.

“One day after Fred finished the morning farm chores, we drove to the mountains to have lunch with his sister Caroline and her husband Chuck Fike. They were married two months before we were. Chuck worked for the Forest Service as a firefighter in the mountains. They lived in a government trailer in the High Sierra.

“I grew up on the plains of west Texas, and had never driven on such a steep, narrow winding road. Fred drove in the middle of the two lanes. Several times, we came around a curve to meet a huge logging truck, its bumper even with my terrified eyes, just feet away. As we headed for our own lane, it was on the edge of a yawning canyon below. Though the terrain was even scarier, it reminded me of the terrifying trips of my childhood, riding in the back seat as my drunken dad drove ninety miles an hour through the dark night. Here I was again, holding on for dear life, every muscle tense as I tried to see around the next bend of the road. Fred laughed at my fear.

“When we came to Camp Nelson Resort, Fred turned off the road and showed me the cabin owned by family friends. He had arranged for us to stay there for a few nights after his parents came home. This would be our delayed honeymoon. It was beautiful, but the deep canyon and high mountain walls felt confining to me. I was used to seeing the far-off horizon in every direction. Still, I was definitely ready for a change from Rosa’s kitchen, so I tried to be enthusiastic.

“We went back to the main road and continued climbing until we reached the Western Divide. My clenched stomach relaxed and my nerves settled as we got to the gorgeous setting for Caroline and Chuck’s trailer. It was Chuck’s day off, and Caroline had prepared a picnic. As we ate outdoors, I saw the sun glint off of something on a distant ridge. I pointed and asked, ‘What’s that over yonder?’ The other three howled with laughter at my choice of words, which revealed my Texas background. I picked up accents quickly, and few people in California commented on my twang. When I occasionally used Texas expressions, they were a source of great amusement, to my extreme embarrassment. To top that off, Fred teased me about my large feet and my large nose. Those memories make me feel sad, even ashamed.”

Sharry waited awhile, and when it was clear that I had finished my story, she said, “Jann, as you recall the sadness, embarrassment and shame of that first summer of your marriage, where do you notice those feelings in your body?”

“My stomach feels like it’s tied in a knot, just under my ribs on the left side. My lower abdomen is also tight.”

“Focus on those places and amplify the feelings if you can. I’m going to give you phrases to repeat as you are tapping on acupuncture meridian points. Remember to breathe deeply as you do this. Tap the side of your hand, the karate chop point, and repeat, ‘Even though I have pain and tension from this memory, I deeply and completely love and accept myself’.”

Sharry went on after my repetition. “Now tap the points near the center of your eyebrows, and repeat, ‘I am eliminating all of the sadness and the deepest root causes of this pain’.”

I followed each direction. Using the same basic phrase, I tapped below my eyes to deal with fear, my little fingernail to deal with anger, my eyebrows again for emotional trauma, below my lips for shame, the top of my head for guilt, the center of my chest for grief.

Sharry continued. “Tap the inside nail base of your index finger.’ I forgive myself for ever taking this on. I love and accept myself. I was doing the best I could. I forgive Fred. He was doing the best he could. I forgive everyone involved. They were doing the best they could. I am

letting go of anything that would make me keep this pain or allow it to come back in any way.”

After a few moments of silence, I felt perfectly calm and at peace. I murmured, “Thank you, Sharry. You are such a magician.”

Sharry chuckled, “I got everything I know from my teachers. This is Larry Nims' technique. I hope it works.”

“It already has. I'll call you again soon. I'm sure something else will surface. This lymphoma experience seems to be bringing up all my old baggage.”

“Well, that's a good thing if you can let it go.”

“What I really need to work on is not forming new resentments.”

Sharry exhaled with a little snort. “Don't we all.”

I was suddenly very sleepy. “I'm going to take a catnap. Thank you so much, Sharry. Talk to you soon. ”

That evening I told Fred about the healing. “Remember the first summer we were married, when you brought me so much fruit to can? I felt like I was going to die from the heat.”

Fred chuckled at the memory. “I sure do. Can you believe you were ever that shy and compliant?”

“No.” I smiled ruefully. “I also can't believe what I learned today. I still resented you for that summer after all these years. It became clear that I was holding those feelings in my body. The healing methods Sharry has picked up are quite awesome.”

Fred came to stand behind my chair and kneaded my shoulders. Leaning over, he murmured in my ear, “I'm sorry for everything I've put you through all these years.”

I reached up to pat his hand. “The apology is mutual, dear. It's been quite an adventure, hasn't it?”

I awoke the next morning feeling energetic, and decided to clean house. To my utter amazement, Fred pitched in, taking the vacuum cleaner from my hands.

“Thank you, Honey. I really appreciate your help. While you do that, I'll start cleaning the bathrooms.”

“Not a problem. In your weakened state, I should help you more. I know I'm a slob.”

I kissed his cheek as he bent to vacuum under the bed. “You’re a lovable slob. Actually, I feel quite well today.” I stopped, remembering how quickly I tired.

He smiled. “Don’t overdo the cleaning. Stop before you get exhausted.”

“Okay. I confess I’m compulsive about order. It’s important to me. I think of our home as sacred space. I’m learning, thanks to you, that detachment is also a value.”

That afternoon, I wrote a letter to Dr. Baloch. Ever since my last appointment I had obsessed about his attitude toward me. Now, wanting to get past those feelings, I explained three ways I felt offended on my last visit. First, he didn’t approve filling my prescription ahead of time, and wasn’t interested in why I wanted it early. Second, he read portions of my scan report to me rather than letting me read it. Third was his remark that my particular cancer was incurable. I felt a sense of relief after I mailed the letter along with a copy to Dr. Reddy. I remembered the great lesson from my first psychotherapist. I’d made a poster of the most significant thing I learned from that first session: “Recovery is being honest about my feelings.”

Patricia came in the evening to give me a healing session. The emphasis was on draining out toxins through my hip joints, a major lymphatic region of the body, and allowing new energy to bubble in.

“What an amazing sensation, Patricia. It feels like I have fountains there.”

With her hands on each side of my hips, Patricia smiled. “Bubble, bubble. I can feel it.”

Patricia stayed for dinner. Afterwards, we drew runes for the new moon. When I read from Ralph Blum’s book the meaning of the symbols I picked, I felt a sense of dread.

Later that night I wrote in my journal, *The runes say that I am making a passage into darkness, and should prepare for “opportunity disguised as loss.”* A shiver ran down my spine. *I am to “commit a year to tend and bring in the harvest that has been planted.” How can I tend a garden in darkness? The answer given by this reading is that I must “maintain modesty, patience, fairness and generosity.”* I groaned,

thinking of the petulant letter I had mailed to two medical doctors that very day, then went on copying in my journal. *“This is an unexpected message from The Trickster.”*

I stopped a moment, thinking back over the evening with Fred and Patricia. When I turned over The Trickster rune, Patricia laughed, “Fred, you’ve got to stop doing magic with the rune stones.” Because of his unique sense of humor, the friends in our group called Fred “Coyote,” the Trickster in the myths of several Native American groups.

I also reflected on my session with Sharry, and how old, petty grievances toward Fred had affected my health and our relationship for years.

I went on writing. *My most important challenge is to “surrender, submit and be still. This is a call to new life, and the building of a foundation for major growth and rectification.”*

I’ve learned that I can bear almost anything if I have a story that makes the experience meaningful. Maybe this reading gives me a story for my cancer experience: It is a journey through darkness, a heroine’s journey. The reading further reinforces that what I’m going through is very important and needs my full focus.

That night, I dreamed of working with a young man. I looked at him and said, “You’re taller than I thought. My image of you was out-of-date. I thought you were a 12-year-old, and here you are, all grown up. That image is no longer valid.” The young man disappeared, and I went looking for him. I found him asleep in a bedroom that looked like the room I had as a teenager.

When I awoke in the morning, I recorded the dream in my journal. *This young man must be an aspect of me. This dream shows what a complete alteration I’m going through. Having a strong and mature young man to work with is comforting. Having him appear in my old room makes me think that he reflects my growth since that first summer I was married.*

Our middle son, Patrick, brought his family to visit the weekend before I was to go in for my third treatment. Bryan, who was a beautiful five-year-old when Patrick and Tami married, was having his fourteenth birthday. It was sweet that they celebrated the day with Fred

and me. Joseph, who'd just turned four, had a raucous time playing in the pool with his adored big brother. Eight-month-old Courtney and I basked in each other's smiles. Fred took a photo of the two of us laughing at each other, Courtney not quite as bald as her grandmother. It became one of my favorite pictures. After a mid-afternoon meal, Bryan blew out the candles on his birthday cake. As soon as we'd shared it, Patrick's beautiful family departed for home.

My journal entry that night reflected how privileged I felt. *We had such a delightful day. Cancer treatment has sharpened my focus on the grace that abounds in my life. I am held up by my family, friends and people I don't even know. Sometimes it feels like I'm swimming in love. Thanks to the One whose essence is Love.*

Chapter 9

Sensitive, Responsive Doctors/Healing Community

WHAT IF ...

*What if Heaven is
Exactly the same
As the life I've known,
Only in that state
I can fully appreciate
And see the beauty in Everything -
Each moment,
Each person,
Each flower.*

*And what if Hell is
Watching myself live
My one precious life
In some trancelike state,
Distracted from the blessing of
All the beauty in Everything -
Each moment,
Each person,
Each flower*

I didn't sleep well the night before my appointment with Dr. Baloch. Writing the letter to him had helped me deal with my hurt feelings from our last meeting, but now I was quite nervous, wondering what his response might be and how the letter would affect our relationship.

As I finished dressing, the phone rang. It was Dr. Reddy, my primary care physician.

“Good morning, Jann. How are you feeling?”

“I’ve felt well for the last week, thank you. I’ll see Dr. Baloch today to clear me for my third round of chemotherapy tomorrow.”

“Yes, I know.” Dr. Reddy’s voice was almost a whisper. Though I had to strain to hear him, I felt soothed by the care he conveyed. “I got the copy of your letter. Dr. Baloch and I spoke this morning. He understands your concerns, and I’m sure he’s willing to work with you on them.”

I laughed nervously. “I was just thinking about that letter. I’m somewhat regretful about writing it.”

“I’m sure he appreciates your letting him know your feelings. I just wanted to tell you that you are welcome to call or come to see me anytime you have further concerns.”

“Thank you, Doctor. I really appreciate that and I’ll keep it in mind.”

After we said our goodbyes, I breathed a sigh of relief. I still didn’t know what the oncologist’s response would be, but at least Dr. Reddy was supportive.

To build my confidence, I used the makeup and wore the wig I’d acquired since my last treatment. The receptionist and nurse both remarked on how nice I looked. I thanked them for arranging the “Look Good, Feel Better” class.

When Dr. Baloch entered the examination room, he greeted me with unusual warmth. He handed me some papers. “This is a copy of your gallium scan report. I called in your prednisone prescription. You can pick it up this afternoon. How have you felt since the last round?”

I smiled, knowing that having the report ready for me was his way of responding to my letter. “Thank you.” I glanced over the report before putting it into my handbag. “I didn’t have the pain in my ears and throat like last time, but I had sores in my mouth that made me miserable.”

“I want you to come in next week for a blood count. Your white cell count must be low. If we can keep the count up, it will prevent the sores.” He got out a prescription pad and wrote. “This is for a mouthwash that will numb your mouth in case you get sores again.”

As he wrote notes on my chart, I studied him with a new appreciation. He was a small man with medium dark skin and a fringe of graying brown hair. He dressed impeccably, in a suit and tie and a starched white shirt. I wondered who polished his shoes. I somehow couldn't imagine him brushing them to such a shine. He handed me a slip of paper to take to the lab for the blood test.

"Do you have any more questions?"

"Thank you, Doctor. I can't think of any right now. Sorry about my grumpy letter."

"No, no. I appreciate your writing it. This is difficult and I want to make it as easy as possible." His hand was on the doorknob. When I made no further response, he walked out.

I sighed, dreading the next day's treatment and the illness that would follow.

The following night, I couldn't sleep despite starting the prednisone early. Afraid I'd keep Fred awake, I moved to the spare bedroom and tried to sleep there. Fred tiptoed in at three o'clock in the morning.

"Are you all right? Have you slept at all?"

"Not really. I didn't want to disturb you."

"Don't worry. You know me and my lentil-sized bladder. I had to get up anyway. Did you take the tranquilizer the doctor gave you? That helped you sleep before."

"No. I hate to add any more drugs to the load that's been dropped into my system. I thought about drinking some chamomile tea, but I have such a bad taste in my mouth, I'm afraid it would spoil chamomile for me forever."

"Let me bring you the tranquilizer. Then you can toss and turn, but not stress out."

I laughed. "That's a new concept. I'll get my earphones and listen to medieval chants until the pill takes effect. Thank you, Honey. You're a good nurse."

The treatment was on Wednesday. By Saturday, I felt well enough to attend a gourd art class. I made a rain stick, choosing the colors on the advice of my friend Kathleen, a color therapist. In her note, she had advised, "Color therapy works to rebalance the aura. Key colors for a lymphatic condition are yellow, yellow-green and magenta. Visualize

these colors moving through your system as you breathe slowly and deeply.”

The class took most of the day. I cut the top off a long thin gourd, drilled holes along a spiral pattern circling its length and glued wooden toothpicks into the holes. The toothpicks crossed each other on the inside of the gourd. I cut and sanded the outside ends of the toothpicks to restore a smooth surface. When I added grains of rice and small pebbles, they made plucking sounds as they fell, hitting the toothpicks. I glued the gourd back together and painted it yellow, with yellow-green dots that were the smooth ends of the toothpicks. Then I embellished it with a magenta linen cord and several fancy feathers to hide the cut.

I could count on Fred to appreciate my attempts at art. When I got home, I watched as he played with the rain stick, his head cocked to hear the tinkling sound. I concentrated on breathing in the colors. “I think the sound is just as healing as the colors.”

“I think you’re right.” Fred agreed.

The next morning, we drove to Springville for meditation with our spiritual fellowship circle. At the end of summer the garden looked bedraggled, but still welcomed us. We arrived early enough to walk the labyrinth, an exercise that never failed to calm and focus my mind. Bob and Kristi were winding their way out as Fred and I walked toward the center. We exchanged hugs and greetings. Patricia, Chris and Paul arrived as Fred and I finished our walk, and we all entered the small building.

The main room was lined with shelves holding a large collection of books from the world’s spiritual traditions. There were prints and tapestries representing different cultures, but the overall impression of the space was Native American. Handmade terra cotta pavers lined the floor. Turquoise, sand and brown colors were used throughout the room. Chairs circled a central altar that held white sage in an abalone shell, a candle and a sculpture that was changed from time to time. I placed a small bouquet of sunflowers on the altar.

Bob lit the candle and held the bundle of sage in the flame until the pungent smoke wafted up. He passed the smoking sage close to his own body, head to feet, front and back, to cleanse his aura. The rest of

us waited, and one by one, we lifted our arms to the sides and turned around as he passed the smoke through our energy fields. Thus cleansed, we sat in the circle and spoke for a few minutes about what called for our attention, either in our personal lives or in the news.

I thought, "This is like confession in the Christian tradition, an acknowledgment of our cares and powerlessness. There was no formal absolution, but each of us felt we were received, accepted and loved by the others, and by our Creator."

Bob rang a small chime and we sat in silent meditation for forty minutes. I focused on my breath. As usual, I had to bring my wandering mind back numerous times. I found it helpful to imagine my energy field melting into the group's, breathing in new life and light from the cosmos and breathing out a blessing for creation. The chime rang again, and I felt moved to sing, "Let there be peace on Earth." The others joined their voices with mine. We shared a few quiet insights and concluded our ritual.

We had lunch together in the small Springville café. Fred and I invited the others to go with us to Blue Ridge, but they had other plans for the afternoon, so the group scattered after lunch.

There were fewer birds on Blue Ridge at the end of summer than at any other time of year. The springs were dry, but it was much cooler than the valley. Being there always lifted my spirits. I was glad we planned to stay for a couple of days.

We ate breakfast on the deck the following morning. I said, "I can hardly believe that we were able to buy this place. Five years of doing volunteer work left us poverty-stricken, and only twenty years later, here we are. This place allows us to practice living without a care."

Fred gazed east toward the peaks at the south end of the High Sierra. "I agree it's a miracle. Not much snow left on Moses and Maggie."

He turned to look at me with a serious expression. "Are you sure you want to teach this coming school year? Maybe you should try to get out of your contract. The district probably wouldn't object, since the contract was signed before your diagnosis."

"Oh, Honey, it's only one day a week. Ellen is so happy to have me as a job-share partner. I don't want to let her down. This first week I'm

supposed to go Wednesday and Thursday to get acquainted with the children and the class procedures, but after that, it only on Fridays. I don't think it will be a problem. My contract allows me several sick-leave days just in case."

I rubbed my fingers across the lines between his eyebrows. "Don't worry. Being with children energizes me."

"If it gets to be too much, please promise me you'll quit."

"Okay, Fred. I promise. But that's for later. Today, I feel well enough to walk down the north side of the slope to see if the spring there is still flowing. There aren't any birds here. Do you want to go?"

"Sure, but I'm surprised you feel like it. This is only the fifth day since chemo."

"Yes. It is surprising. It seems like my cells have an amazing intelligence, learning to deal with the toxic drugs. I'm convinced that the more exercise I get, the more energetic I feel. I know one thing. I have a new, profound respect for everyone who has ever undergone cancer treatment, especially if they found out about the cancer after it made them sick. I'm learning so much about myself. This may be a little warped, but going through this gives me pleasure, in a way."

Fred looked puzzled. "What do you mean?"

"You know, for years I've played with various spiritual practices, and loved doing them. Now the discipline is paying off. It's like the feeling a body builder must get from being able to lift huge weights."

"Yep," he said, and grinned. "You're sick, all right. We'd better get started on our hike before it gets too warm."

I laughed. "Okay, Fred. That should bring me back down to earth."

Chapter 10 Wind Dancer's Story

TEMPLE

*Taking off her roller skates,
The nine-year-old entered the small empty church in silence.
She was a trespasser,
Overwhelmed by fear, drawn forth by fascination.
The candles glowed in the darkness, bidding her welcome.
The faces of the graven images invited her close.*

*She trespassed.
Yet it was her beliefs that were encroached upon.
Could the awe she felt truly be idolatry?
Could reverence for this sweet mother truly be evil?
This thought deepened the fear, filling her with apprehension.
She fled, retreating to the safety of familiar dogma.*

*Grown up, she learned to love
The upward rush of reverence, entering a cathedral.
The cordial hospitality of lavish imagery,
Warm brilliance of stained glass,
Fragrance of incense, all embraced her, body and spirit.
No longer held back by austere belief, no longer a trespasser.*

*Still there was more to the story.
In her older years,
She loved even more the simple sweetness of the sweat lodge,
Cool of earth beneath her, slap of steam upon her face,
Back in the womb of Mother Earth,
Trespass now impossible.*

At the end of my first day of teaching, I thought maybe Fred was right that I should resign my contract. I'd been at school since 7:30 a.m. My teaching partner, Ellen Jordan, had asked me to change my schedule this first week, to work on Wednesday rather than Friday. When I went over the day's lesson plans, I discovered that Ellen had morning recess duty on Wednesdays. That meant no break until my 35-minute lunch period. The intense level of engagement with second graders was exhilarating, but by the time they left at 2:30 p.m., I was so tired that the necessary paperwork seemed like a mountain to climb. At home, I collapsed onto my bed and fell into an exhausted sleep.

Two hours later, Fred's voice penetrated my consciousness. "Jann? Kathryn and Joan are here. Do you feel like having dinner with us or do you want to rest?"

"Actually, I feel good." As I stood, Joan burst through the door, laughing. She enveloped me in a warm hug.

"Oh, boy! The best nurse in the world arrived just as I needed her," I rejoiced, returning the embrace.

"Fred, tell Kathryn I'll be right out." I stepped into the bathroom. Joan sat on the bed to wait for me. After I washed my face and ran a comb through my hair, I came out, grinning at Joan. "I should have discovered the wonder of naps a long time ago. Let's go see Kathryn!" I was amazed that I felt so well.

Fred and I met Kathryn Allen Moray through classes in energy healing. She was a registered nurse who lived in San Diego and taught Healing Touch to other nurses. She reminded me of a pixie, with strawberry blonde curls. Freckles sprinkled the small nose on her pleasant face. She'd come to do a vision quest ceremony under Bob's guidance.

I bent to hug her. "I'm so happy you're here. Thank you for bringing Joan with you."

Kathy grinned and put down the ice tea Fred had served her. "I'm glad she was able to come with me. Thank you for calling and introducing us. Having such a good conversationalist in the car made the drive seem much shorter."

Fred surprised us by bringing plates to the dining table and announcing, "Dinner is served."

I was delighted at Fred's artful presentation of lemon chicken, rice and salad. Kathy and Joan enthusiastically expressed their gratitude. Fred beamed at our obvious appreciation. I knew he felt some anxiety about cooking. My heart swelled with pride at the care and effort the meal demonstrated.

The dinner conversation turned to Kathryn's ceremonial weekend. I'd celebrated my sixtieth birthday in a similar way two years earlier. Kathryn said, "I'd love for you to tell me about your vision quest, if it's not too personal."

"For one thing, Bob prefers the term fast, the name used by his native teacher. Each ceremony is unique. Mine was wonderful. Let's wait and compare notes after this weekend. Bob is a gentle guide and his place is beautiful. You'll have an awe-filled time. I'm sure of it."

After dinner, Kathryn made me an irresistible offer. "I need to get to Bob's house fairly early, but I'd be happy to give you a healing session before I go."

I gratefully accepted.

Kathryn began with one of her hands on the sole of my foot, the other hand on the knee above. She held this position until she could feel energy running smoothly between her hands. Then she moved her hands to work from the knee to the hip before moving to the other side and repeating the process. She proceeded to energetically chelate, or cleanse, my entire energy field, toes to crown. The warmth of her hands absorbed my tiredness and transmitted feelings of well-being.

"I've chelated from the bones out," Kathryn said. "Now I want to energize the thymus and peyer's glands, and to smooth out the knot in your intestines."

My knowledge of anatomy and physiology was limited compared to Kathryn's, but as her hands generated heat into the middle of my upper chest, I remembered that the thymus was in that area. Kathryn then moved her hands to my lower abdomen on the right side. I felt an easing of tension there. Between several cleansing trips to the bathroom, I slept very well that night.

The next morning, Joan said, "I hope you'll tell me about your vision quest. I don't think I'll ever do one, but I'd like to know more."

“All right. Fred is going to Suzanne’s, so we’ll have all morning. I was tempted to tell about it when Kathy asked at dinner. I was afraid it would change her own experience if she expected it to be like mine.”

I located the journal in which I'd recorded the profound event, to make sure nothing important would be left out. When Joan and I were comfortably seated in the family room, I took a deep breath and began the story.

* * *

Something that was different and special about my ceremony was that Lorindra Francis, a friend I met in my doctoral program, came. She had years of experience in the study of Native American spirituality, and had guided many people on quests on her land in northern California. I asked her if she would come and hold the feminine pole in guiding me through this experience. She asked me to clear it with Bob, and he was delighted to work with her. They found that the ways they had been taught by different tribal teacher were complementary. I was delighted to see that they were learning from each other and growing in their understanding of these teachings, even as they taught me.

Lorindra's medicine name was Moonstar. She came three days before the start of the fast, and helped me prepare. She visited my family and close friends with me to discern if any of these relationships had issues needing to be cleared. Then we went to Blue Ridge. She is a pipe carrier in the Lakota tradition, and prayed with me in a pipe ceremony to clear the issues she'd observed. She led me through a process to heal past wounds and gain self-knowledge.

She showed me how to make a prayer arrow. I wove things into it that I wanted to leave behind at this point in my life, such as thinking of Suzanne as a child. I did a solitary ceremony to burn the arrow that evening.

Early in the morning on the day of the fast, I drove up to Bob's. He and I hiked to a granite outcrop that hangs over his house on Bear Creek. We walked in silence, alert as to what might catch my attention and inform my time in the fast. A mother quail and her babies ran into the trail in front of us. As the chicks scattered, the mother turned and

confronted us with an aggressive-looking dance, jumping high with her claws toward us. I was awestruck. It reminded me that feminine energy and aggressiveness are needed to protect the young.

At the overlook where Bob went to pray every morning, he said, "It's a privilege for you to have this special time. You have nothing to prove. It isn't about striving or attaining but a time to rest in love and enjoy the luxury of being with the creatures of the mountains while other people support and pray for you."

Then he said a formal prayer, asking for clarity for me during the next period of my life. He scattered tobacco and corn meal offerings.

Back at Bob's house, I made sixty prayer ties. These are little squares of red cloth which I folded around a pinch of tobacco and tied off with cotton thread. My prayers were mostly for people, both individuals and groups.

Bob took me up to the fast site. It is on side of the hill above his house and below the granite rock where we'd prayed. It was a beautiful spot with a small stream running by. I took down the old prayer ties left there by the previous celebrant, and put mine around the borders of the site. I'd be sheltered by my own prayers. Bob took the old prayer ties to put in the sweat lodge fire that evening.

After lunch we cut two large bags full of river sage. We put some on the ground inside the sweat lodge, which is below Bob's house in a meadow. He took me to the fast site. There we set up a small dome tent in which I would spend the nights and put river sage under the pad inside. The plant's aroma was a wonderful comfort and companion during the entire ceremony. This preparation done, Bob left me at the fast site to pray and meditate.

In the evening, Moonstar came, anointed me with lavender oil, gave me a back rub and sang a wonderful new song to me, which sounded like a lullaby. Bob called us to come to the sweat. I followed her down the trail, feeling like a bride is meant to feel: totally loved and honored.

The opening sweat lodge ceremony was sweet, with lots of singing. Fred was there, and others from our healing group.

After the sweat, Bob allowed me to shower and treated me to a bit of watermelon, but I didn't participate with the others in the potluck feast. He took me up to the fast site and put me in the tent for the night,

instructing me to stay awake as much as possible. I know I slept some, because I dreamed of a friend from the doctoral program coming and sleeping with me. It was a nice surprise to see her, and seemed very real.

Bob came in the morning to bring me out of the tent, chatted about the dream, and left.

That day was truly magical. The morning sunlight sparkled on innumerable spider webs above me, more beautiful than a crystal chandelier. A hummingbird investigated the red prayer ties. Butterflies fluttered in and out all day. Squirrels chattered at each other while harvesting acorns in adjoining trees. Wild roses bloomed, their fragrance amazing, more from a single bud than from a whole bouquet of hothouse roses. I was happy to find several small mountain laurel trees growing there. I chewed on a spicy leaf, hoping that didn't count as breaking the fast.

I attempted to build a labyrinth with tiny stones in seven concentric circles. When Bob came at sunset, I hadn't solved the problem of a true labyrinth, where one enters, traverses all paths to get to the center, and then traverses all the paths to return to the outside.

Bob brought me a cup of water which I sipped slowly, with utter gratitude.

My assignment during the second night was to meditate on my true nature. I remembered reading that the buffalo and the horse descended from a common ancestor. I thought that ancient animal must be my ancestor as well, at least in spirit. I love the idea of running free across the plains, like the horse, yet I know myself to be a very stubborn creature, taking a stance and putting my head down, digging in my feet, like the buffalo.

As the night began, I heard a hawk hunting in the twilight, and then a screech owl sang to me for a long time. During the night I heard footsteps walking around the fast site. They sounded like two-legged creatures. Bob had warned me not to look if I heard something like this, so I didn't. I didn't feel threatened. On the contrary, the atmosphere felt benevolent throughout the fast and during this night especially. Moonstar told me later that the ancestors of a place feel honored to

have a ceremony such as this on their land and come to honor the one fasting. The idea was precious to me.

The footsteps seemed to linger around the tiny labyrinth. I half expected it to be scattered in the morning, thinking maybe I'd heard animals. It was as I left it, but as I looked at it, I knew the solution. I simply took out the center circle, and the labyrinth was easy to traverse. This was a lesson in compromising my conceptual models.

When Bob came in the morning to get me for the exit sweat, my face was veiled with a towel until a certain point in the ceremony when I was introduced as a new person. As he held my hand to guide me down the steep trail, I saw only a few inches of ground in front of me, yet trusted that I would come to where I needed to be. This was an important teaching for my future, and a mantra that serves me well: one step at a time.

My entry sweat was Friday evening, and the exit was Sunday morning, so it was about 36 hours. Traditionally, only men did these ceremonies and the fasts were much longer. They could have no water at all. Bob allows women to have a cup of water per day, in the evening.

Twelve people were in the exit sweat on Sunday morning. One of my most profound lessons came then. It was intensely hot. With a new kind of humble audacity, I asked for a drink of water in the middle of the sweat. Receiving that drink was one of the sweetest experiences of my life.

After the sweat, Moonstar insisted I soak in a warm bath. She shampooed my hair and scrubbed my back. Then I joined the others at a great potluck feast. I had brought gifts for everyone there, symbolic things that were still good but that I no longer used. I gave Fred a rattle given to me by our first healing teacher, Rosalyn Bruyere. Moonstar was delighted with a pair of garnet earrings.

The next day, Moonstar and I did one more process. She asked me to tell the story of my fast. We made a tape recording. Without that, there is much that I wouldn't be able to recall. Afterwards, it all seemed like a dream

Weeks earlier, Moonstar asked me to choose one creature in nature to learn from as I prepared, and I chose the breeze as this special friend.

The wind was more present that spring and summer in the San Joaquin Valley than I'd ever noticed before. After the fast, Moonstar revealed that as she had camped in a meadow near where I was fasting. She tracked me. She ate for me. She prayed for me all weekend. Now it was time for her to bestow my medicine name.

I thought perhaps my name would be Quail Dance.

Moonstar is very dramatic, and she talked as if she were in a trance. "Quail Dance is close. It's perhaps Quail Dancer. You move with such grace. It's really close. The wind moves you and shows you how to go. The wind is like a part of you. You sing with the wind. It was clear to me as we prepared, that the wind responded to you. *Wind Dancer* is your medicine name."

* * *

Joan had been holding her breath. Now she exhaled audibly and clapped her hands. "Perfect. What name could be better for a child born on the plains of West Texas under the air sign of Gemini? Thanks for sharing this story."

I stood. "Thank you for listening. It's good to remember that I'm initiated as a fully empowered elder, related to the quail, the squirrel, the horse and buffalo, the stream and the wind. Give me a hug. I have to have some blood drawn before noon, and I told Suzanne we'd pick her up for lunch at the Japanese restaurant. We'd better get a move on."

Joan laughed, and rose to my embrace. "It's a good thing you're sick, so I can keep up with you."

"Don't worry. When we get back, I plan to sleep for the rest of the afternoon."

Chapter 11 Treatment Midpoint/Art as Meditation

THE ONE

*All the lessons of my life are one:
I control nothing outside myself,
Yet my decisions affect all.*

*All the power of my life flows from one Source:
I exist in Love as a fish in water,
Wholly sustained.*

*All the decisions of my life are one:
To rest in Love and to forgive,
Accepting absolution.*

*All the time of my life is this one moment:
I affirm the past and await
The promise of the future.*

The Friday evening after Joan and Kathryn's arrival, Fred went to support Kathryn in the sweat lodge ceremony to begin her fast. Joan and I stayed home. At dinner, Joan and I said a prayer for Kathy. Afterwards, we relaxed in the warm pool, recalling other occasions during our twenty-five year friendship.

Joan said, "The first time we met was when we roomed together while teaching in the Ecumenical Institute Academy in Chicago. I thought I was going to have a room to myself during that eight-week program, and I wasn't in a receptive mood when you arrived. How could I know what a treasure our friendship would turn out to be?"

I grimaced, remembering. "That was such a difficult time for me. Fred and I were teaching in Japan. Suzanne, Patrick and Barry were in

Billings, Montana with colleagues. Suzanne was seventeen. Her seizures were out of control. She quit high school. I was called back to care for her. She was mentally and emotionally ill. Others wanted to send her to a mental institution, but I refused. I thought the academy would challenge and interest Suzanne enough to bring her back to reality. I requested that we both be assigned there." I enumerated on my fingers, "Fred was in Asia, Patrick and Barry in Billings, Suzanne and I in Chicago and Scott in California with Fred's parents. I felt torn apart. I was a mess."

I stopped, knowing Joan was aware of all of this but didn't mind hearing the story again. It's what old friends do.

"Our ideas about sending children to live with other families during adolescence sounded good in theory, but it didn't always work out well." Joan sighed.

"Rooming with you was like having a safe harbor. You've always been a natural-born healer."

"Well, the healing was mutual, believe me." Joan went on, "Here we are, twenty-five years later. What's on the agenda tomorrow?"

I took a deep breath, shifting mental gears. "Barry is on his way here to go fishing with Fred tomorrow. You and I can do whatever we want. I know you brought some beading to do. I'm weaving a pine needle basket. We can pick Suzanne up in the morning and she can bring one of her projects. We'll all work like creative bees while we visit."

"Great! I want to show Suzy the necklace I'm making Kristen." Joan's daughter Kristen and Suzanne were the same age, and had known each other since high school.

I continued to recite our itinerary. "When Fred and Barry get back tomorrow evening, we'll go to the Barn Theater in Porterville. The play is a mystery, presented in the lobby, which is set up like a restaurant. The action goes on around the audience. It's called 'Soup du Jour,' and dinner will be served."

"That sounds like fun. You actually have a lot of cultural activities here."

I snorted, "We couldn't have lived twenty-two years in a complete cultural desert."

Barry arrived in the middle of the night. Fred and Joan were in the warm pool as I poured coffee for Barry the next morning. When I showed him the latest beaded necklace Joan had brought me as a gift, he asked, "How do you get a friend like Joan, Mom?"

"You have to be very lucky."

* * *

By Sunday morning, I felt well enough to go with Fred and Joan to the sweat lodge to end Kathryn's fast. Witnessing her radiance and feeling the support she had from friends who gathered to celebrate with her was curative for me. I saw again, as on previous occasions, the possibility of transformation.

As I came out of the sweat lodge, my attention was drawn to a branch that had fallen off a small tree. I picked it up and put it in the back of my car. Joan said, "What do you have in mind for that? Are you going to make something?"

"I don't know. It just seemed to call to me. It fell off this mountain laurel tree." I picked a leaf, sniffed it and handed it to Joan. "It's one of my favorite spices. I like the name Laurel, too." We were walking arm in arm to Bob's cabin for the potluck feast. "You know I wrote newspaper column for a year under the name Laurel Clare Griffin. Claire is my real middle name. Griffin was my grandmother's maiden name as well as a mythological animal with the head of an eagle and the body of a lion. So my pen name was a prayer for spice, clarity and the power of myth in my writing. I don't know what I'll do with the little branch. Something will come to me."

Randomness was typical of my creativity. A few weeks later I went to a women's class our healing teacher Chris organized. Each participant was to make a doll that reflected her own wild nature, intuition, wisdom and strength. The laurel branch became the skeleton for my doll. It had a papier-mâché head. Its body was made with pink and red patchwork fabric stuffed with aromatic bay leaves from the stick's native tree. I'd loved dolls as a little girl, and now loved this one.

Artistic projects were important to my health. As I created a piece of art, I was recreating myself. My doctoral program required classes in

art as meditation equal to the number of seminars required. The presupposition was that creations flowing from a person's depth teach us of the Great Creator's process.

When Chris gathered a circle of twenty women to meet for ten weekly sessions to discuss themes of the book, *Women Who Run with the Wolves*, I'd been searching for a cancer support group. Chris's circle served as a substitute. "It's actually better," I told Fred when I returned from the first meeting. "In this group, we focus on our spiritual health and development, not being victims of disease."

* * *

The day after Joan and Kathryn's departure, Bob gave me an energy treatment. Afterwards, he said, "I imagined you in a small outrigger canoe in the middle of a vast ocean. You had no known destination, but were not drifting. You were intentionally making for some unknown place."

At first this startled me. "The last place I'd like to be is alone in the middle of the ocean. But you made me feel so relaxed and well that I'll reserve judgment about your insight."

As I meditated on the image, I came to feel at home with the unconfined space of the ocean that recalled my childhood on the plains of West Texas. Stories of Polynesian people migrating huge distances in outrigger canoes fascinated and awed me.

The next time I saw Bob, I said, "Thank you for that middle-of-the-ocean image. It has given me a new way to relate to this waiting and enduring time. I'm moving yet I'm unsure of the outcome. I trust I'll eventually come to a safe landing. I sleep peacefully at night, rocked in the cradle of the deep." I laughed at myself, suddenly self-conscious.

September brought the traditional opening concert of the county symphony orchestra. It was performed in a large park. Fred and I joined Jim Nanamura and his wife for a picnic before the concert. Jim was an old high school buddy of Fred's. We relaxed in lawn chairs through several musical style changes, ending with the deafening roar and pungent smoke of numerous cannons that served as instruments in the "1812 Overture."

We also went to a concert featuring Emmy Lou Harris and Linda Ronstadt at the county fair. Part of me was standing aside, watching myself participate in these diversions, surprised and delighted that life could be so full in the midst of a fearful fight with cancer. It was the other side of the coin of fulfilling my teaching contract. It was important to go on with both obligations and celebrations to my fullest ability.

For several years, Fred and I had gone with our friends from Lafayette, Gil Woltjer and Sheryl Anderson, on a kind of pilgrimage to Mineral King, our favorite place in the Sierra. Three decades earlier, Fred had been a fire guard there for six summers. I loved remembering those years. Suzanne was a toddler the first year we were there and big sister to Scott and Patrick by the time the last season rolled around. We'd hiked every steep trail out of the deep canyon, over the passes leading to the back country. Every beautiful vista held a memory. It was a sacred place in our lives, the Eden of our 43-year journey together.

The previous year, we'd camped there for two nights with Gil and Sheryl and Gil's son Jesse. This year, they came four days after my fourth treatment. I didn't feel very well, so we decided to make a day trip to Mineral King and spend the rest of the time at our house.

We drove to the upper part of the canyon, the source of the middle fork of the Kaweah River. We spread a picnic on the canyon floor, our eyes taking in the mountains surrounding us. In the spring, waterfalls roared down the side of these steep slopes from the high lakes above, but now most of them were just a trickle. The autumn colors of the aspens made up for that. It was a beautiful day. Every scene held a memory for Fred and me. Overcome with those recollections, gratitude for our journey and the uncertainty of the future, we both wept repeatedly.

After walking a short way up the canyon with the others, my energy was low. I decided to drive back down to a favorite spot on the river beside a small waterfall. Fred, Gil and Sheryl wanted a real hike, so they agreed to meet me later. I set up a small altar, and when the others came, we offered sage and tobacco with our prayers of gratitude for my healing as if it were already so. I'd never experienced a more

meaningful Sunday worship. Our outdoor cathedral was lit by golden autumn light, fragranced by dozens of aromas wafting on the clear mountain air.

The following day I went off prednisone and experienced a drastic crash in energy and an upset stomach. I began to see why people became addicted to the drug.

Bob came on Wednesday to do an energy healing session. He began by asking, "How are your spirits?"

"Okay," I answered. It was lame and inadequate, considering all that I was feeling. Physically, I was exhausted. Emotionally, I was depressed. Mentally, I was unclear and confused. In spite of all that, I believed my answer was true. My spirits truly were okay.

Bob went on. "Spirit is another word for the energy matrix out of which all things manifest."

As I considered the great mystery of that statement, I knew that everything about me was okay, not just my spirits. I had always been okay. I would always be okay.

I was in a great deal of pain and discomfort, but Bob's hands, generating heat as he placed them on the energy centers of my body, were very soothing. The doll Laurel Clare was in the room, providing another source of solace.

"What quality do you feel you need?" Bob asked.

"Clarity and compassion," I said after a pause.

"Can you make it into a mantra?"

I eventually came up with, "Surrender into clarity and compassion."

Bob pointed out that nothing was required of me except surrender.

As I breathed the mantra, and Bob continued to run energy, I felt strong currents moving in my body. I turned face down, and worked with toning through the throat center, trying to release the sensation of a blockage in my throat. It felt like Bob and I were both working very hard to move the illness out of my body. Finally, something that felt very vile and ugly was released with a loud groan from my throat. Immediately, I felt much better. Bob smudged the room with sage smoke to clean it of negative energy.

He advised me to eat elk meat for dinner. He knew I hadn't been consuming red meat, and thought I needed those nutrients. He also

knew that Scott was a hunter. Sure enough, I was able to find a package of elk in the freezer, and Bob stayed with Fred and me for a feast of rich and hearty stew.

I said, "I think this healing may be a turning point in my illness. Fred, you should have been here. It was like Jesus casting out demons."

Autumn equinox arrived, and for the first time in several years, Sequoia Center for Holistic Studies planned no celebration. I marked the end of summer, the season of growth, with a solitary creative ritual. I lit a candle and wove a new autumn wreath from grapevines hung with seed pods and wheat. It was a celebration of being beyond the halfway point in my treatment as well. My prayer and hope was that no new cancer cells were forming in my body.

I wrote to a friend: "My experience with lymphoma has opened me to a new clarity, even as the dark time of the year approaches. What is clear is that this is an unknowable time of total trust and no real control. It seems that the chemo may actually be helping to regenerate new cells by killing the diseased ones. I enter the seasons of darkness with hope."

Chapter 12

Healing Passive Aggression/Mother's Care

THE LOST CHILD

*Loving friends, advisors and teachers surrounded the child.
When they talked to her, she answered them aloud.
One day her mother heard, and asked,
"Who are you talking to?"
Blushing, she answered, "Them."
At supper her mother told the family that she had imaginary friends.
They laughed. The child burned with shame.
She stopped talking to her friends aloud,
And could no longer hear their counsel and comfort.
She was left alone.*

*When she grew old, loving grandchildren surrounded her.
They taught her to play again.
They healed her blinding, deafening shame.
She and the children sang and painted pictures.
They banged on the piano, danced and ran outside in the rain.
She even wore suns and moons on her clothes.
Her invisible friends, advisors and teachers returned.
Surrounding her once again,
They counseled her and she answered them, aloud.
The child that was lost is found.*

As October began, I was sitting on the patio eating breakfast when Fred joined me. He put his cereal bowl and coffee cup on the table and stood behind my chair for a moment, rubbing my neck.

"M- m - m. I'll give you just half an hour to stop that." I smiled at my corny joke.

“I don’t feel any swollen lymph nodes in your neck. That must mean the treatments are working.” Fred beamed as he sat beside me. “Any good dreams?”

“I don’t remember any, but an interesting shift in consciousness happened to me last night. As I was falling asleep, my heart center seemed to open in a new way. A prayer came to my mind with this feeling of expansion: May I receive the love of Jesus and the compassion of Buddha. In the middle of the night, Loba, the dog next door, barked and woke me.”

“Oh, no, not again. That’s the best thing about having my hearing loss. That dog’s barking during the night has irritated you for three years now.”

“Yes, but last night I had a different response. Usually, having her awaken me makes me so mad I lie there stewing and get wider awake. This time, I didn’t even come to full waking consciousness. The Lakota prayer, ‘All my relations’ came to me, reminding me that we are fellow creatures and that my totem animal this year is Wolf. My heart expanded with sympathy. Miraculously, I went right back to sleep.

“Then early this morning Mr. McPhetridge was working in his yard near the fence outside our window. He had a coughing spell that interrupted my sleep again. Once more I felt sympathy for him and his lung disease. I am definitely not my usual irritable self.”

“Good. I just don’t want you to get too far ahead of me in your moral progress.”

“Don’t worry, dear. It’s probably a passing thing, but it felt wonderful.”

* * *

That night, I rode with Dawn, a young woman from Porterville who was participating in the women’s group that Chris organized to explore the book, *Women Who Run With the Wolves*. I was grateful that I didn’t have to drive the twenty miles to the meeting in Visalia. Dawn, who’d also studied energy healing with Bob, offered to give me a ride for every meeting. The extra bonus for me was that Dawn was a delightful

person, and the ride gave us the opportunity to explore our common interests, centered on alternative healing methods.

When we arrived at the home of the medical doctor who hosted the group we sat in a circle on the floor around an altar. After an introductory conversation, Chris led us on a guided imagery journey to meet our inner wild women.

I'd studied shamanic practices for several years, and equated guided imagery with the journeys I'd taken in that study, and knew the healing potential of stories that unfolded from the subconscious mind. One type of healing I remembered was known as soul retrieval, in which a wounded, runaway part of one's self was found and returned to the psyche. I felt a thrill of anticipation that I was going to enter that vast interior space under Chris's expert guidance.

We lay on the floor, following Chris's melodic voice as she led us down a spiral staircase until it came to a dirt path, continuing downward into a dark, swampy place. I could smell decomposing vegetation, not an unpleasant aroma. Her voice faded as I came to a dark, lone hut in the middle of a thick forest. An old hag dressed in black appeared. She looked like the witch in "Hansel and Gretel." Her narrow eyes peered out from a mass of wrinkles. I wondered if she'd fattened my lost inner child to eat her. The old woman seemed to know what I was thinking, and cackled with laughter.

"That story you've heard about me isn't correct. I don't feed children in order to eat them. I simply take care of them until they are welcomed back by the one who let them get lost."

The old woman went on, "You know, this part of you has always been and will always be with you when you truly need her. She loves being here in the wild with me, but you can call her when you need her. Just don't attempt to tame her."

I realized that the old woman had been caring for a part of me who was bold and audacious, prominent in my personality before adolescence. At first I didn't get a clear image of the little girl, just a sense of her being there.

Then a beautiful glowing child came out of the shadows, her long blonde hair in tangles past her shoulders. She ran to me and we tearfully embraced.

“I won’t forget that you’ll be with me when I’m afraid or need to be bold. Thank you for not changing.”

I turned to the crone and bowed. “I’m grateful to you for caring for this precious part of me.”

The hag inclined her head in response. “I’ll be waiting for you to catch up with me. Be quiet and listen for my voice in order to stay on your proper path.”

Chris’s drumbeat slowed. As it stopped, the circle of reclining women stretched and sat up. We wrote our experiences in our journals before sharing. I wrote a description of my journey, and then reflected, “This child probably took refuge with the hag in the wild at the time I decided to go along with the pious ideal image of women in the 1950’s.”

On the ride home, I told Dawn, “No wonder I chose Fred for my husband. He was never tamed. That part of me always admired him, even when his wildness complicated our family life.”

Dawn laughed. “Yes. Life would be so boring if we were actually as rational as we think we are.”

“There have been times when I would have enjoyed boredom, believe me.” Even as I said it, I wasn’t sure it was true.

* * *

The next day during my healing session with Bob, he asked, “What meaning does Pan have for you?”

My thoughts spun with images. “I know that Pan was an ancient Greek god that was half-man and half-goat, sensual and lusty, like Puck in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. The medieval church modeled Satan on the image of Pan, with horns and hooves. It really doesn’t have much meaning for me.”

“I see a new matronly energy coming into your psyche, to counteract the violent aggression of Pan energy. Does that make any sense to you?”

I was puzzled. “That’s surprising. I’m not aware that I embody Pan energy. I’m not violently aggressive. Am I?”

Bob didn't answer. He continued to channel energy through his hands. One hand was under my lower back, the other on my abdomen. Finally, he said, "Think out loud about masculinity."

My altered state was reflected in my slow speech. "Masculinity is competitive and combative. It always wants to be in control. I used to wish I were a boy." I stopped speaking for awhile, then continued, "Now that I think about it, when control over my own life is threatened I am aggressive."

I became quiet and thought of the crone I'd met in my imagined journey of the night before and the crone's promise to wait for me to catch up. As I accepted the truth of my aggressiveness, and what "a new matronly energy" might mean, I experienced a sudden release of muscle tension. I felt barriers in my body dissolve, freeing a powerful flow of energy throughout.

It brought me back to waking consciousness. "This is amazing, Bob. I've struggled all my life with being a female in a male-dominated culture. For ten years, ever since I started studying Goddess spirituality, I have made mental and verbal war on patriarchy and its power over women. This healing revealed that in making 'war,' I was embracing patriarchy within myself. What you said about matronly energy coming in to counteract violent aggression in my psyche makes sense to me now. Did you know what it meant?"

Bob's blue eyes sparkled as he gave a deep throaty laugh. "I didn't have a clue."

I stretched, enjoying the warmth of Bob's hands, now on my feet. "I imagined the Green Man peering out of a forest. Maybe that's the inner male I need. He's beautiful."

"Your energy feels more balanced than when we started. I think you're reaching for that Buddhist mantra that goes, 'I am both male and female in balance'."

I smiled. "Or it could be, 'I am both aggressive and receptive in balance.' May it be so."

* * *

On the night of the new moon, Fred and I drew rune stones. My reading reinforced the images of Chris's guided journey and Bob's hands-on healing, which both revealed passive-aggressive patterns in my personality. I hoped to go forward with access to the wildness of the child, the wisdom of the matron, and the nonviolent assertiveness of the Green Man.

Fred's approach was different from mine. He took in information and then detached from it. He sporadically kept a journal, and treated the reading as a game. I admired his approach, but took the exercise more seriously, making extensive notes in my journal.

My first rune represented the past, the time of letting things gestate within. The Universe and my soul demanded that I grow in the present. The requirements for growth might totally disrupt what I had intended for the future. The next stone urged me to "draw from the well to nourish and give to yourself first. Then there will be more than enough to nourish others." I looked at Fred. "I hope so. I feel like I've been neglecting you and Suzanne. I want to be able to take good care of Mother when she comes to visit."

Fred patted my hand. "Don't let her hear you say that. She's coming to take care of you. You haven't neglected anyone. Just relax and plan to enjoy her visit. It'll be fine."

"Okay." I looked back at my book. "The next stone is the challenge, about the obstacles in our path. Do we want to go there?"

"We may as well. It just reflects real life, you know."

I turned over a stone. "I got *Warrior*. 'The battle of the spiritual warrior is always with the self. Act, stay out of your own way, and let the Will of Heaven flow through you.' So, my obstacle is me, myself and I."

Fred laughed. "That's true for all of us all the time."

I drew my last stone of the reading. "This is for the new situation. 'You may be called on to take a radical departure from old ways, old conditioning, old authority. Total honesty with yourself is required'."

Fred yawned. "That can be my last one also. Sounds good. I'm going to bed."

"Thanks for drawing runes with me. Hope it didn't bore you to death."

“No. They’re good. It’s just that I can’t take one more thing into my head now. Good night.” He stood up, kissed the top of my head and started for the bathroom.

“Good night, Fred. We need to leave for the airport by 10:00 in the morning to meet Mother.”

Fred paused. “Suzanne wants to go. We’d better leave by 9:30.”

* * *

My mother, Willie Mae Hale was 87 years old. Her plane from Dallas arrived on the tarmac of the small Bakersfield airport the next morning. Fred, Suzanne and I watched as my mother slowly and carefully descended the steps. A fellow passenger carried her bag into the terminal, and she thanked him profusely before hugging us. She supported her rotund body with a cane, a new addition since we’d last seen her in April. Her hair was white around her face, still light brown in back.

“It was a beautiful day to fly! The autumn colors were beautiful. Jann, you don’t look sick. Is that a wig?”

Mother was an upbeat person. She came to take care of me and I let go and allowed her to do so. She made us comfort foods such as cornbread and homemade soups. I in turn enjoyed caring for her, arranging for her to get a flu shot and a haircut.

On Sunday, Suzanne and I went with Mother to the church of her choice. Everyone there greeted us warmly. Being with the small fundamentalist congregation was like stepping back in time for me.

That night in bed, I told Fred, “Nothing about the worship service has changed since I was a kid. You won’t believe it but the subject of the Bible class was a lengthy, elaborate chart explaining why the apostle Paul’s teaching that ‘women should be in submission to men in all things’ is still in effect as Divine law, not subject to changing cultural practice. That doctrine and the social practices that grew out of it used to enrage me. Now I just find it amusing. I felt happy to sit beside Mother in worship. I still love the a cappella singing. The church gave me my primary education in community and ancient history. I’m grateful still to know that Jesus loves me.”

“What about me?” Fred asked in a mock-hurt voice.

I felt puzzled. Then I felt myself blush as I realized what he must be thinking “Of course, Fred. If we hadn’t grown up in that church and gone to Abilene Christian College, I wouldn’t have met you.” Laughing, I gave him a hug. “It was meant to be.”

The following weekend Fred and I took Mother and Suzanne to Blue Ridge. She walked with difficulty on the uneven mountain terrain. She'd lived most of her life on the plains and expressed fear of falling despite having her cane. She was in awe of the scenery surrounding the cabin, though. She spent most of her time sitting on the deck, repeating, “How beautiful it is. Look over there.”

I took a Bible, four hymnals, matzo and grape juice. On Sunday morning, we worshiped in an old familiar way. We each chose one favorite passage from the Bible to read and a few hymns to sing, which I especially enjoyed. The unique voice of each loved one touched me deeply as we sang with no self consciousness. We seemed to be singing to the high mountains east of us and the great valley to the west.

That afternoon, I slipped away to pray and meditate in the circle of oaks, grateful for the sacred relationship with my fellow creatures I'd grown to appreciate.

* * *

The next day was my fifth chemotherapy treatment. During the quiet week that followed, I sank into misery and allowed Mother, Fred and Suzanne to care for me. Bob administered a healing on Thursday. It felt like he moved tons of sludge from my body. It occurred to me that from now on, my recovery would shift from cancer to the toxic effects of chemotherapy.

The following weekend, we took Mother to visit her grandsons and their families on the coast. I spent most of the time lying on the couch, relinquishing all responsibility, allowing my family to care for me.

On Monday, I accepted my daughter-in-law Tami’s invitation to visit her kindergarten classroom. I sat on the sidelines, encouraging children who needed help to consult with me. I read a picture book to the class at story time. At the end of the half-day session, I hugged

Tami and thanked her for the invitation. "I'm so pleased to have another primary teacher in the family. You do a great job."

Tami glowed in response to the compliment. She was the first in her family to finish college, which she accomplished with little help or support from her family. She had reason to be proud of herself. Teaching was her dream-come-true.

Fred did all the driving on this trip. By the time we arrived home on Tuesday, my body felt totally depleted.

After Bob's treatment the following day, I said, "I don't know how people get through cancer treatment without a healer like you, Bob."

"They probably don't get through it with the level of activity you maintain. How's your teaching job going?"

"It was hard last week but I learned something very valuable the day I taught. I was running late when I arrived in the parking lot and found that I'd forgotten my classroom key. I had much to do in the classroom and hated to go to the office for a key. As I got out of the car, I became aware that my energy rushed out ahead of me toward the office. I could feel it leave me. I realized that if I were going to make it through the day, I had to keep what energy I had firmly with my physical body. I stopped, consciously grounded through my feet, calling for all my strength to stay with me. Instead of hurrying to the office, I walked with deliberation, my attention on my feet. I hope I'll remember this vivid experience anytime I feel called to go in more than one direction at the same time. It's another of many valuable lessons I'm learning from my lymphoma journey."

* * *

The night before Mother's early morning flight to Dallas, Fred decided that it would be easier for us to stay in a hotel near the airport. Suzanne went along. Patrick and Barry met us for dinner and told their grandmother goodbye, a surprise I greatly appreciated.

The next morning, I bent to hug my mother as I patted her on the back. "Your visit has been a blessing, Mom. Thank you so much for taking care of me."

Passage: Illness as Initiation

Mother laughed. "I think you took care of me. I hope I didn't set you back."

My eyes filled with tears as Fred and Suzanne hugged her goodbye. I watched her walk away under a white canopy. She wore a bright fuchsia and turquoise top over black pants that were short enough to show her white socks. The image tugged at my heart.

Mother turned to wave as she got to the steps of the plane. A man behind her took her bag and cane. He walked behind her, holding his hand near the small of her back as she made a slow ascent.

"She's so sweet. She can always rely on the kindness of strangers." Fred smiled.

"Let's hope so." I noticed tears in Suzy's eyes, and gave her a hug. "Don't worry. We'll probably see her again next summer."

Chapter 13 Final Treatment/A New Abyss

COVENANT

*This is a poem to you, Fred,
Whom I have tried to control a thousand ways.
You retreated into an unreachable place
To escape my manipulations,
Athlete's body running away
From my need to be enmeshed.*

*A part of you needed that, too,
But a part of me always trusted
That you would not be controlled,
Could not be pinned down,
A mountain man, you left me to my plains-ness
And my freedom.*

*No one can control another:
That you have taught me well.
You have led me on many adventures,
Exploring the space of our glorious planet home.
Now I would be your partner on
Adventures of the spirit,
Exploring the inner world.*

*Let us continue our quest side by side
In every realm possible.
Let us go forth with courage
To finish the journey we began in love,
As children,
My husband, Fred.*

Halloween came on Sunday. Excited, Fred and I drove up the mountain road to Bob's place. There we met with our spiritual community to observe what our pre-Christian European ancestors celebrated as the New Year, the midpoint between autumn equinox and winter solstice.

After a sweat lodge ceremony and a potluck feast, we gathered in the tiny front room of Bob's cabin to share what the coming dark and cold season meant to each of us.

When it was my turn, I began, "Halloween reminds me of the journey I've made from fear of feminist spirituality to appreciation for it. Millions of European women were labeled as witches and burned at the stake because of their knowledge of folk remedies and midwifery. When I learned that history I understood my fear and it diminished. After studying with the Wiccan author, Starhawk, I dared to imagine God as our mother as well as our father. As my devotion to feminist spirituality grew, I rose in the early morning darkness to bathe and pray by candlelight in honor of all the earth-based religions that were forced through the centuries to go underground and into the darkness. I relished the dark time of year for the first time in my life."

Fred told about his childhood fascination with exploring old mines and caves in the hills near his home. "My mother absolutely forbade me to do it, but I kept on until I got stuck one day, just as Mother feared I would. I slid into a deep pit I couldn't get out of. I was trapped in a very dark place. The friend I was with got my dad, who brought a rope and pulled me out. I've been mildly afraid of the dark ever since. I think that's part of the thrill of the sweat, being in that absolute darkness with my fellow supplicants."

I loved the intimacy of this group. Fred and I probably wouldn't have this conversation on our own. This is one purpose of a spiritual community. It allows us to be wiser than we are as individuals or families.

Chris brought out her drum and led the group in a shamanic journey. When the drumming stopped, we came back from our vivid internal images and shared our experience. I recalled, "I saw a man hanging upside down in a tree. I guess I'm going to get a new perspective in the coming season of cold and darkness."

* * *

The next day, I was at my computer, catching up on e-mail. When the phone rang, Fred answered it. I heard him say, "Oh, no. I'm so sorry. Yes, we'll be there."

My stomach clenched, wondering if something had happened to one of our children. It was an automatic response, left over from the kids' wild adolescent days. But from the formal way Fred spoke, I knew it wasn't family. I closed my eyes and breathed deeply. When Fred came into the room, I felt calm.

He stood behind my chair, rubbing my shoulders. "It was Don Zuckswert's daughter Kathy. Don died this morning." His voice broke.

I rose to embrace him. "Oh, Fred, I'm so sorry."

He put his head on my shoulder as we swayed in a sorrowful dance. Don and Fred had taught together at Porterville College three decades earlier and had been friends ever since. For long periods, we were out of touch, but each time we met, the two men picked up their conversation where they'd left off as if they'd not been apart. I liked and admired Don's brilliant and talented wife, Shirley, but she and I never formed a close friendship. During our infrequent visits, I enjoyed observing Fred and Don's interaction.

Fred drew back and wiped his eyes, "I knew his emphysema was getting worse. Wish I'd gone to see him."

"Don't say that." I rubbed Fred's back. "He knew how much you valued his friendship. Is a service planned?" Don and Shirley were secular scientists. I had been surprised years ago when they'd joined a large influential church. Their two daughters were in early adolescence and Shirley had confessed that she and Don didn't believe in the denomination's doctrine, but wanted their girls to have the moral teaching and social support of the congregation. After the girls left home as adults, Don and Shirley withdrew, but their daughters remained devout believers.

I pulled my mind back from the images of our long history with the Zuckswerts to hear what Fred was saying.

Fred's voice trembled. "There will be a memorial service at the children's fishing pond in Bartlett Park Thursday. Don was active in

the River Trail Foundation; that group will facilitate the service.” He smiled. “Don fished in that pond with his grandchildren. Adults aren’t allowed to fish there unless they’re with a child. Don called it ‘Duffers’ Pond.””

* * *

The day of the memorial was sunny and warm for November. Shirley and her daughters greeted us with hugs. I felt the familiar shock of seeing the girls, who were still children in my imagination, approaching middle age. As we settled into folding chairs overlooking the pond, a pair of red-tailed hawks screamed, spiraling upward almost directly overhead. I smiled. “All our relations know that one who loved them has passed,” I whispered to Fred.

After Don’s older daughter read the eulogy, a number of people told stories of their memories of Don. I told about the time he came to our house in Springville thirty-five years earlier, with two rattlesnakes in a glass case from his biology classroom. They were in the back of his pickup. Don wanted Fred to go with him to release the snakes into the foothills. By the time they arrived at a good spot, darkness descended. The snakes didn’t want to come out of the cage and the men had no flashlight. They succeeded in their mission, but always enjoyed telling the story and making it scarier with each subsequent telling.

On the ride home, I said, “Fred, I wanted you to share the story of the trip you and Don took to Alaska.”

That was the summer, ten years before, when I’d gone to Japan on a teacher exchange program. Fred flew with Don to Seattle. The two of them took a ferry up the inside passage, camping on the deck, disembarking to explore places of interest. They sometimes stayed in youth hostels, which fit their young spirits perfectly. The trip had been a dream-come-true for Fred.

“I knew I couldn’t tell it without crying.”

“But tears are healing, Fred. In Africa they say that departed spirits go to heaven on a river of tears.”

“Yes, but this isn’t Africa. Grown men don’t like to blubber.”

* * *

The following Monday, Fred and I met Patricia at the cancer treatment center for my sixth and, we hoped, last chemotherapy treatment. Patricia and I embraced. I whispered in her ear, "Thank you, dear friend. You've been here for every treatment."

Fred hugged Patricia. "I'm going to harvest pecans at Suzanne's this morning. She has an appointment with the neurologist this afternoon. Thanks, Patricia. Don't forget to mow the lawn. You can leave your new car in our driveway. Just take our old Volvo with you."

"Sure, Fred. You know I'll do that," Patricia smirked.

Fred gave me a husbandly peck and turned to leave, but I pulled him back for a bear hug.

After Patricia led me in the hypnosis routine reminding me that this procedure need not be traumatic and that I could accept it as a healing, I settled into the recliner.

Before Jeanne, the nurse, started, she showed me the numbers from my recent blood test. "Your white cell count is very low. I can't proceed with the treatment unless you agree to come for the next seven days to get an injection to stimulate white cell production." I agreed and signed the waiver authorizing treatment despite the low blood count.

Jeanne had a hard time finding a vein strong enough for the needle to enter without collapsing. "If you have to have more chemo after this round, you'll need a stent inserted in your chest. It makes I.V. treatment much easier."

"Easier for you," I thought, grimacing as the nurse stuck me again, finally succeeding.

Despite Jeanne referring to the possibility of more treatments, I felt confident that I had completed chemotherapy. When Patricia and I arrived at my house, I said, "Let's celebrate! I made a Chinese chicken salad for lunch. Can you stay, Patricia?"

"Sure. How could I refuse?" Patricia grabbed my shoulders, steering my away from the kitchen and to the couch in the family room. "You just lie here while I get lunch together. Your color isn't good. After we eat, I'll give you a foot rub. That should fix everything."

I didn't argue. As we were finishing our salads, the phone rang. Patricia answered, and then handed me the receiver. "It's Suzanne."

I took the phone. "Hi, Suzy. What's up?" There was a lot of background noise and the phone connection was poor. "Where are you?"

"I'm at the hospital emergency room on the pay phone. Dad's ladder broke as he was flailing pecans. He seems to be all right now, but I called an ambulance because he landed on his head and was confused when he came to. He didn't want to get in the ambulance, but the driver and I talked him into it. Oh, Mom. I was so scared. He wasn't breathing, and I wasn't sure I remembered how to do C.P.R." Suzanne's voice was unsteady.

"I'll be right over, honey. Sounds like you did fine. You say he seems okay now?"

"Yes. He's answering all their questions. They took him to do a CT scan on his head."

"Thank God. You sit tight. I'll be over as soon as I can get there." I hung up the phone and told Patricia what had happened. "I hope I can find the key to Fred's pickup." I rummaged through my purse while stepping into the loafers I'd shed by the front door.

"I'll drive you, silly." Patricia said. "You don't want to have two vehicles over there. I hate to have you anywhere near the emergency room, with your white cell count so low."

"I'll be okay. Thank goodness you're here, Patricia. You're my guardian angel."

Fifteen minutes later, Patricia let me out near the emergency room entrance, and went to find a parking space. The receptionist behind a glass partition directed me to the room where I found Fred lying on a gurney, his long legs extending over the end. He was talking to a doctor on his right. Suzanne was standing on his left. I stood next to the doctor, and said, "Hi, Fred. Are you all right?"

The doctor stood back. I stepped close and bent over to kiss Fred.

To my surprise, he stuck his tongue into my mouth.

I laughed. "You seem to be all right." I moved back to let the doctor continue his conversation with Fred.

The doctor smiled. "Fred, who is this lady?"

"That's J. C., my wife."

"I'm Dr. Smith." He shook my hand. "How do you do, J.C.?"

“Call me Jann. J.C.'s my initials. Fred sometimes calls me that, a small tease.”

Dr. Smith turned back to Fred. “Can you touch your nose, Fred?”

“Sure.” Fred did so. “What do you think I am, an invalid?”

The doctor asked me to step out into the hallway. He followed and lowered his voice. “The CT scan shows that there is a bleed in Fred’s brain. Since the nearest neurosurgeon is at the University Medical Center in Fresno, I’m ordering him transported there by ambulance. We’ll intubate him for the trip.”

“What does that mean?”

“It means he’ll be sedated and placed on a respirator. It’s a precaution for the ambulance ride. If he were to stop breathing in the ambulance, it would be difficult to get him on life support in such cramped space.”

“But he seems fine,” I protested. The relief I’d felt since Suzanne had told me he was talking rationally melted in an instant.

“It seems to be a small hemorrhage, but there might be some brain damage. We don’t have the expertise here to handle this problem.” He patted my shoulder. “I know you’re going through chemo. You need to take care of yourself through this. There’s a quiet waiting room down this hall, if you and your daughter want to wait there. We’ll let you know when we’re ready to move him.”

I numbly went back to tell Fred that I would see him in Fresno. A nurse had started an I.V., and already Fred was groggy. “Bye, Fred. I love you.”

His response was a mumbled, “Love you, too.”

I asked Suzanne to find Patricia in the waiting room. The three of us sat on the comfortable couches in the smaller room. I told Patricia what was happening. We silently contemplated the situation.

A balding man with a fringe of white hair opened the door. He was wearing a clerical collar. “Hello. I’m Chaplain Pierson. The emergency room staff reported Mr. McGuire’s condition to me, and I came to see if you’d like me to pray with you.”

I stood to shake his hand and introduced myself and the other two. “Thank you, Chaplain. We’ll take all the prayers we can get right now.”

The simple prayer he led seemed to push back the walls I'd felt crushing in on me. I was able to breathe calmly and consider what my next step should be. Patricia proposed that we take my car to Fresno with her daughter Dawn following in her car to give Patricia a way home later. Gratefully, I accepted this as a workable plan.

We walked into the hallway in time to see ambulance attendants pushing Fred's gurney out the back door. We followed to say goodbye once more, but Fred was unconscious, a tube leading from his nose to the portable respirator carried by an attendant at his side. We stood on the sidewalk, watching as he disappeared into the ambulance. Suzanne sobbed. I was crying, too. I put my arm around her shoulders and pulled her close as we watched the ambulance drive away.

"You're my heroine, Suzy," I whispered.

Patricia drove us to Suzanne's house and then went to pick up her daughter. I called Scott. Since our three sons all worked together, Scott would pass the news to his brothers.

"I can't come to Fresno," he said. "Rachel's having laparoscopic surgery early in the morning. Barry can go and I think Patrick can get away. One or both of them will be there this evening. I'll come as soon as I can."

"It will be such a relief to have them there, Scott. You take care of Rachel. I'd forgotten she was having a tubaligation. Give her my love." I looked around and saw that Suzanne had gone out to turn on a sprinkler in her garden. "Suzanne doesn't feel well enough to go to Fresno. Would you call and check on her later tonight? She's devastated and seems to feel responsible for the accident, even though she saved her dad's life. A call from you will help."

* * *

It was dark by the time we arrived at the University Medical Center in Fresno. Most of the small homes in that part of town had security bars on the windows. Patricia found a parking spot for my Volvo in the hospital parking lot. Dawn, following in her mother's car, stopped behind us.

“I’ll go with Dawn to get something for us to eat,” Patricia handed me the car keys. “It’s been a long time since that salad, and I’m feeling a little shaky. Does soup sound good to you?”

“I have no appetite, but I probably should eat something,” I said. “Soup will be fine.” I opened my purse and reached for my wallet, but Patricia waved me off.

“We’ll be back as soon as we can.” Patricia got into her car with Dawn.

“Be careful. This doesn’t seem like a safe neighborhood.” The other two women drove off as I turned to enter the emergency room.

As the door closed behind me, I was shocked to discover that I had to go through a metal detector, reinforcing my feeling of dread. My mind felt so numb that I hardly noticed the nausea and swollen hands, now familiar side effects of the chemo I’d had ten hours earlier.

The receptionist, who sat behind bulletproof glass, told me that Fred was in the x-ray lab for an angiogram. “As soon as the radiologist reads the results, he’ll call and I’ll let you know where to meet him. Have a seat.”

I thanked her and called Suzanne from a pay phone. Even though I didn’t have any news, I wanted to let my daughter know I was thinking of her. “You did such a good job taking care of your dad, darling. I hope you sleep well tonight. I’ll keep in touch.”

After the call, I found a seat near the entrance where I could watch for Patricia to come in.

I closed my eyes and concentrated on my breathing, wondering where in this massive building Fred was lying helpless. I prayed a silent plea for his life and wholeness.

I jumped when I heard a masculine voice speak my name. Gratitude flooded me when I opened my eyes and saw Bob. He and two of his healing apprentices, Cindy and Wanda, came through the metal detector.

I hugged Bob fiercely. “How did you know I was here?” Before he could answer, I turned and hugged the two women. “Hi, Cindy. Hello, Wanda. It’s wonderful to see you.”

“Suzanne called just as I was leaving to come to Fresno to teach my Monday night healing class.” Bob’s warm hand ran energy into the

back of my heart center as he talked. “We decided to take a chance on finding you here to see if there’s anything we can do.”

Tears sprang into my eyes. “Just having you here is already helping. Let’s find a quieter spot to sit.”

We moved to an out-of-the-way corner where Patricia could still see us when she returned. I sat in the end chair in an empty row. The other three remained standing.

“We’ll do some healing work, if you’d like,” Bob said.

“It would be most welcome. Like a lifeline to a drowning person, actually,” I smiled ruefully.

Bob stood behind me with his hands on my shoulders. Cindy brought a folding chair, sat in front of me, and patted her lap. I took off my shoes and put my feet there. Wanda sat sideways beside me. She slipped one hand behind my heart and put the other on my upper chest.

Bob prayed in a low voice, “We call on all our spirit guides for help in bringing energy and love to Jann and also to Fred. We know that we exist in Infinite Love and pray that we may be in touch with that in every moment of our lives, but particularly now as we feel the vulnerability of our dearly beloved ones. We are mindful of Suzanne, Scott, Patrick and Barry in their concern for their parents, that they may also be comforted. Ho.”

I blinked away tears and whispered, “Amen.” I kept my eyes closed and felt warmth spread from my friends’ hands to my body, mind, emotions and spirit. I was almost asleep when I heard Patricia’s upbeat voice.

“Hi, guys! What a wonderful surprise to have you here! Anyone for soup?”

“Good timing, Patricia,” Bob said as he and the other two healers patted me before breaking their physical contact. They exchanged pleasantries with Patricia and Dawn. Cindy said she would return the following day to see Fred. I hugged each of them. “Thank you for being my angels.” The three departed.

The Mexican meatball soup smelled delicious, and I sipped gratefully from the Styrofoam container. As usual after chemo, there was a bad taste in my mouth, and I was not able to eat much.

The receptionist called my name over the public address system. I went to her counter, and was told to go to the third floor to speak with the radiologist. It was almost eleven o'clock. Patricia had hoped to stay until my sons arrived, but decided that she and Dawn needed to start their long drive home.

I thanked them and reassured them I would be fine. As they walked toward the door, my heart lifted with relief as I saw Patrick and Barry come in. Patrick, tall and slim, was in the lead. His curly dark hair had grown out since his summer buzz cut. Barry followed, shorter and stockier than his brother. They both looked grim. Patricia greeted them as she got to the door.

"That's what I call impeccable timing. I'm so relieved you're here! Your mom is right over there." She turned and flashed me a thumbs-up sign.

My desolation was somewhat relieved as they enveloped me in warm hugs and returned my kisses. My feeling of relief told me how much I'd dreaded talking with the doctor alone.

"Thank God you're here! The radiologist is waiting to report the angiogram results."

After we made our way to the radiology waiting area, a young man in green scrubs introduced himself as the doctor on duty. "Unfortunately, the angiogram didn't give a detailed picture because of clotting. The hemorrhage was deep in the center of the brain, not where I'd expect to find an aneurysm. Trauma wouldn't normally cause a bleed there either. We just can't be certain why this happened.

"The good news is that the bleeding has stopped. We're placing him in the intensive care unit. The trauma team will need to do a study to be sure there were no spinal cord injuries."

My head swam. "Did you get the x-rays and scans from the Porterville hospital? My husband was on his feet after the accident. The emergency room doctor there wasn't concerned about a spinal injury." My voice trembled. Patrick and Barry stepped forward, as if to shield me.

The doctor smiled. "This is the trauma center for all of central California. Anyone who comes here after a bad fall gets a complete study. We don't want any surprises to show up later." He looked at my

Passage: Illness as Initiation

scarf-covered head, and I was sure he noticed I had no eyebrows or lashes. "I suggest you get some rest. We'll take good care of your husband. He's still unconscious."

The doctor was ready to leave, but Patrick stepped forward, saying, "Thank you, Doctor. Can you show me the way to the I.C.U.?" Turning to Barry, he said, "You and Mom go ahead and find a motel. I'll stay with Dad until he's settled. Call my cell phone to let me know where you are and I'll come later."

Though devastated, I felt as if a burden had been lifted. I handed Barry my key, hoping I we could find the car. Barry put his arm around me. Tears finally flowed and I sagged against him as we walked out, my arm around his waist. The longest day of my life was coming to an end.

Chapter 14

Blessing, Loss, Creativity and Transformation

CHANT TO THE SEVEN DIRECTIONS

*I in Thou, and Thou in me,
Thou in all and all in Thee
Letting go and letting be,
I in Thou, and Thou in me.*

*Thank you, East and thank you, South.
Thank you, West and thank you, North.
Thanks, Above, and thanks, Below.
And thank you, Sacred Self Within.*

Patrick stayed with his dad all night in the intensive care unit. When Barry and I arrived midmorning, Patrick met us in the family waiting room adjacent to the I.C.U.

“They finally took Dad off life support in the last half hour. That’s a relief. He’s breathing on his own, but hasn’t regained consciousness.” Patrick sighed and rubbed his eyes. “I’ll go to the motel to sleep awhile. Will you be all right, Mom?”

“I’m fine,” I said, but my stomach tightened when I caught sight of Fred. He lay flat on his back with a tube in his nose and a thick cervical collar around his neck. He looked so uncomfortable that I was glad he was unconscious. A nurse at his side checked the tubes and machines measuring his vital signs.

“Should he be flat on his back?” I asked, alarmed that Fred’s breathing was so labored. “His lungs sound congested.”

“We have to keep him flat until the orthopedists complete a spinal study. It’s routine for trauma patients.” The nurse turned to walk away.

“How long will the study take?”

Scowling, the nurse answered curtly, "I already told your son that it will be done as soon as possible. Your husband will have an M.R.I. Then the radiologist has to read it, and the orthopedist will let us know the next step." Turning away, she walked to the nurses' station a few steps away and sat, disappearing behind the high counter.

I looked at Fred's face, so dear to me. He squeezed my hand in a vice-like grip. At first I thought this meant that he recognized my voice, but now my fingers tingled. I tried to free them with my other hand. Fred held on tighter. I tried teasing him about his grip, but finally understood that this was a reflex response and he wasn't consciously aware of me.

I left my fingers in his as Barry and I did small things to make him more comfortable, wiping his face with a damp cloth, rubbing his feet and hands and spreading ointment on his dry lips.

By the time an attendant came to take Fred to the x-ray department, Patrick had returned. Barry drove me back to Porterville for my injection at the cancer treatment center. The doctor there urged me to stay away from the Fresno hospital. "Your immune system is very low. I'd like you to isolate yourself as much as possible."

"I'll do that," I said, knowing that I wouldn't stay away from Fred's side for long.

On our way home, Barry and I stopped by Suzanne's house. She looked pale and shaken.

"I had a bad seizure this morning, Mom. Luckily, I had an aura before it hit and was close enough to the couch to lie down, but I bit the inside of my mouth." Suzy's sky-blue eyes were moist and her voice trembled. "I'm scared about Dad. I want to see him."

"I'm so sorry my darling. Why don't you go home with us?" I hugged Suzanne, rubbing her bony back and shoulders. "We'll see your dad tomorrow. I'll gather some clothes for you while you write Dawn a note. Ask her to feed Bear, and we'll take Curly with us."

Dawn, Suzanne's roommate, worked long and ever-changing hours as a nurse's assistant, but she was willing to care for Bear, Suzy's large and serene wooly black dog. Curly, named for her tail, was a Chihuahua mix I didn't mind having in the house.

* * *

Later that afternoon, I lay on my bed trying to relax. Suzanne snored softly in the next room, Barry more loudly from the couch in the family room. I'd hoped to nap when I lay down, but Prednisone prevented that, keeping my mind busy. As tears coursed down the sides of my face onto my pillow, I concentrated on my breathing, praying silently for ten thousand angels to be with each member of my family.

Praying for my own help and support, I heard a voice say, "Just because you're in pain doesn't mean you're being punished." I shook my head to clear it of the victim image.

I'd handled my lymphoma as well as I could. Fred's condition was still largely unknown, though clearly he was gravely ill. But Suzanne! My cancer and Fred's situation couldn't compare with Suzanne's extremely difficult life. I had a constantly nagging feeling that as her mother, I should have been able to help her, to have found better doctors or *something*. That was the source of my pain. That was the reason I felt I was being punished.

Wiping tears from the sides of my face, I smiled, thinking of a corny country song about tears in the ears eventually leading to death.

I sighed, rose and went to the kitchen to prepare dinner.

* * *

For several weeks, I'd planned a ceremony to celebrate completing cancer treatment. Rather than cancel, I sent invitations for the Sunday following my last treatment and Fred's accident. I knew many of the invitees wouldn't be able to attend, but asked them to take a moment to rejoice for my healing, and to pray for Fred, who was seriously ill, but stable.

On Sunday morning, ten friends sat in a circle with me in the Sequoia Center's main room. An inner circle of four small tables served as altars in the cardinal directions. We started with playing drums and rattles to unify our group energy. Kristi led an invocation and I led a conversation reflecting on my journey through lymphoma treatment, using the metaphor of a passage through a deep valley.

In the east, a gold cloth printed with images of galaxies and stars covered the altar. A cornucopia of fruit symbolized the abundance of life. I began our conversation there, reading, *“The passage I’m completing was a journey through a valley of benevolence. My daily healing prayer began with an attempt to enumerate the blessings in my life and offer thanks for them. Each time, my heart swelled in gratitude for my family and you and your support. Deep as it was, the valley through which I passed was filled to the brim with spiritual abundance.”*

Looking around the circle of dear faces, I asked, “When have you been acutely aware of life as a blessed passage?”

Clearing his throat Paul answered, “My work as a handyman is a pain at times, in terms of job security, low pay and no health insurance. This week I was working outdoors, repairing a fence on a sunny day and it occurred to me how much freedom I have to experience my own creativity. I was filled with gratitude.”

“Since my divorce,” Kristi added, “I’m especially grateful for my children and my teaching job so I can support us.”

In the west, the direction of dark mystery and loss, a purple cloth printed with gold ankhs covered the altar. A small fountain bubbled. A clay figure of a woman wrapped in a blanket represented the Divine Mother. A wooden plate and chalice holding bread and wine symbolized the sacrifice of her son. To focus the group’s attention there, I read, *“As soon as I named my blessings, they flowed away through my fingers. The blessings which fill this valley could not be grasped or held. My old belief patterns, emotions and desires were taken from me, burned and purified, washed and hung out to dry. This is the Valley of Letting Go”.*

Looking around the circle, I raised my eyebrows. “Have any of you experienced having to let go?” To my surprise, everyone laughed.

Chris spoke. “I was sure my move to Tennessee three years ago, was meant to be, and that I’d live there forever. Then, just as I’d felt compelled to go there, I felt compelled to return to California. It seems it was all an exercise in getting rid of *things*, to show me I didn’t need them.”

Staying in the west, I continued, “*Yet all that I released was transformed, re-created and given back to me in new ways. The person I was, the family I had, the community that enriched my life, are no more. We are new and different in each moment, renewed and rehabilitated. Even as I was compelled to let go of the old, the new flowed in as a miracle. This is the Valley of Letting Be.*”

Turning back to Chris, I asked, “Is this true of the experience of your move?”

After a moment, she answered, “It wasn't just things I had to let go. At the time, I felt humiliated; now I'd use the word humbled. Letting go of pride brought me help and support from all directions, especially from this group.”

In the south, I'd placed things that I'd created during treatment: the rainbow cascade with the good wishes of friends and loved ones, several pieces of gourd art, a pine needle basket and the doll Laurel Clare, all representing the birthing that comes from darkness. Nodding toward this altar, I went on, “*In the darkest part of the valley, there is a spring of creativity. As I sat beside the well, attempting to learn from and embody it, I was taught to take one step, one stitch, one brush stroke, one word, at a time. New patterns emerged from the ongoing process of letting go and letting be.*”

“When has loss or pain triggered creativity for you?” Looking at each beloved face, I waited to give them time to consider how to respond.

Sighing, Pam answered, “Chronic fatigue syndrome and fibromyalgia forced me to retire early from my counseling career but gave me the freedom to be of service in smaller ways. I've created my home as a peaceful sanctuary for Spirit.”

I smiled into her eyes as tears sprang to mine. “Those smaller ways are significant, Pam. You were with me at every treatment. What would I have done last Monday without you to take me to Fresno?”

The north altar held a beautiful wolf-head sculpture on a burgundy and white cloth that symbolized my aspiration, as an untamed woman, to create peace and justice. “*Now it is time to bear witness to this transforming experience so that others may know that transformation is possible. This valley is my home, my family, my community, my*

blessing. From this experience I hope to proclaim the good news of the Deep Valley. May Spirit live in and through me as I emerge from this passage. ”

I sat down, suddenly feeling very tired. “I appreciate your time this morning. I needed this ritual to convince myself on every level that my lymphoma experience is over. I’d like to hear your feedback on it.

Bob stood. “I know you structured the ritual on the four paths of creation spirituality. I was impressed with its congruity with the four directions of Native American spirituality. Thank you, Jann.”

“It was my privilege. Do you have ideas of how I might begin to share my experience with the public at large?”

“This ceremony is the beginning.” Bob smiled. “As a second step, you can rewrite it as an article for our newsletter.”

He led the group to the labyrinth in the garden. As we walked, we sang a chant inspired by my classes with Matthew Fox and my reading of Meister Eckhardt. It was to the tune of “Just a Closer Walk with Thee.”

“I in Thou, and Thou in me;

Thou in all and all in Thee;

Letting go and letting be;

Oh, I in Thou, and Thou in me.”

I sat in the center of the labyrinth as Chris anointed my forehead with oil and the others laid hands on me. We prayed that my healing was indeed complete and that Fred would be restored fully to our community. As we walked out of the labyrinth, I was amazed at how well I felt, less than a week after my chemo treatment.

Kristi served warm nut bread with tea and coffee. We reflected on the ritual and chatted about other news. My lymphoma experience was complete.

Missing Fred, I realized that his own passage through the dark valley was underway, and that I was powerless over it. Anxious to be at his side, I told the group goodbye, relieved that I could sleep in the car while Barry drove me to Fresno.

Chapter 15 Rehabilitation/Thanksgiving

TRANSFORMATION

*Resisting inevitable change,
she clung to familiar discomfort
rather than enter the new unknown.*

*Her old skin, faded, dry and scarred
could constrict her growth
for only so long; it split.*

*Emerging into the new day, she flowed,
resplendent in tender, glistening, pliant color,
leaving the old behind.*

*Transformed, she rarely thinks
of her former self, content now with the new,
which seems each day to grow a little tighter.*

Arriving to see Fred on Monday morning, I found he'd been moved from I.C.U. to a transitional unit.

Cindy Hoopes, one of the healers who came with Bob to the emergency waiting room that first night, was there. Identifying herself as Fred's daughter, she got in to see him in I.C.U. and followed as he was moved to his new room. She did an energy healing when he was settled. Fred was sleeping peacefully with Cindy seated at his bedside when Barry and I arrived.

Hugging her, I introduced her to Barry. "You're sweet to come. What's your assessment of Fred's condition?"

“I think Fred is going to be fine. His aura is intact. I get the distinct feeling that he's just taking a break. That's so like Fred, the old coyote trickster.” Cindy laughed.

I chuckled with her, but was still alarmed by how awful Fred looked. “I am so grateful for our circle of healers. I'm not sure I could take this without you all.” I felt tears well up. “Thank you' sounds so lame.”

She hugged me to her. “It's a privilege, Jann. By the way, you look much better than you did the night they brought Fred in. You must be taking care of yourself.”

“Bob gave me a healing this morning. That's why I'm late arriving. He stayed at my house to work with Suzanne. What a blessing he is in our lives.”

“I agree. He's also a great teacher.”

After Cindy left, Barry and I took Fred for a wheelchair outing down the hall of the hospital. It took a mechanical lift to move him from the bed to the wheelchair, where he slumped against the safety restraints.

Without Cindy's assessment of his intact aura, I would have despaired at his physical appearance. His face was drawn and blank. His eyes lit up briefly when we entered the room. That was his only response. He hadn't spoken.

At home that evening, I answered the ringing phone. Dr. Nowak, the neurosurgeon, called to tell me that Fred's blood pressure had spiked again, causing another cerebral hemorrhage. He was back in I.C.U. The doctor wanted my permission to put a shunt in Fred's brain if the bleeding got worse. “It's my opinion that high blood pressure, not Fred's fall, caused these ruptures.”

I gave my assent for the surgery. “I hope this means that Fred will finally be moved from the trauma team to the internal medicine team. His blood pressure is the primary problem, but my family and I have been unable to convince the trauma doctors of that.”

Dr. Nowak agreed to follow up on my concern with the hospital staff.

Thankfully, the bleed was brief, so surgery wasn't necessary.

* * *

Several days later, the hospital staff informed me that Fred was ready to go to a skilled care facility for therapy. I requested Cypress Rehabilitation Center in Visalia, only twenty miles from home. Cypress sent a team to evaluate Fred's condition. He was accepted. After sixteen long days in Fresno, I felt elated when he was moved to Visalia the day before Thanksgiving.

The stress of the move caused a setback. Dr. Prince, the receiving doctor, said, "Fred is too ill for this facility. Our aim is to get people back on their feet, not treat acute illness. He has a fever. I'm afraid he's developing pneumonia. I'll treat him for that, but if he doesn't improve right away, he'll have to go back to the hospital."

This hit me like a blow. As he left, the doctor focused on me. Painfully aware of my bald head and tear-filled eyes, I looked away from his handsome face beneath his own balding head. His voice softened as he put his hand on my shoulder. "We'll just take it one day at a time, okay? You get some rest."

With good care, pneumonia didn't materialize. Antibiotics cleared Fred's lungs. His color improved. The nursing staff at Cypress did a comprehensive assessment of his condition. This was a contrast to University Medical Center's laser-like focus on trauma injuries. A kind nurse gave him an enema for his impacted bowels, showered and shaved him and treated him with respect as a person, not just a patient. Fred's color and presence improved almost immediately, which brought me to grateful tears.

The next day, Scott and his family arrived to check on us and celebrate the Thanksgiving holiday. Barry, Suzanne and I met them in Fred's room at Cypress.

Scott wore a native-design wool Pendleton jacket with a white shirt and Levis, as dressed-up as he ever got. For a moment his hug transported me back to the comfort of being in the warmth of Fred's young arms. Rory perched on Scott's shoulders, and patted my head as I held on for a long moment.

Rory was the only stocky child among our children and grandchildren. His legs looked like sturdy tree trunks; his hands like

starfish. His eyes, the light blue of glacier ice, missed nothing. I held up my hands, offering to take him from Scott's shoulders, but he leaned away, looking grumpy. The three-hour car trip must have exhausted his patience.

"Come on, Rory. We need to practice before your birthday." I held up two fingers. He frowned and did the same.

"I can already do it."

"All right. Good for you. At least give me a kiss." He smacked his lips on my offered cheek.

Relinquishing his hug, Scott asked, "How's Dad?"

"He's better." We turned to look at Fred, whose eyes were crinkled with a broad smile. Rachel leaned over him and patted his shoulder. At twenty-eight, ten years younger than Scott, her luminous skin and big brown eyes showed her Italian heritage. A heroine in my eyes, she'd entered Scott's complicated family situation as a true helpmate, becoming a good stepmother to his two sons.

"Where are Sam and Sid?" I looked out in the hallway to see if they were coming.

"They're with their mother this weekend," Scott answered. "Sorry. It was her turn." The two boys were at their dad's house most of the time, and I couldn't keep up with their schedule. I shrugged off my disappointment.

Scott leaned over Fred, gave him a kiss on the forehead. "Hi, Dad. Blow Grandpa a kiss, Rory."

Rory looked solemnly at Fred, kissed his little palm and blew the kiss. Fred's smile broadened and the fingers of his right hand waved from where they rested on his belly.

Jaimee, Rachel's daughter, and Scott's, by right of adoption, was eight and already a beauty, with wide-set brown eyes, curly dark hair and beautiful features like her mother's. She gave me a hug and waved at Fred, seemingly reluctant to go near him, "Hi, Grandpa."

I was thrilled to see him lift his hand to wave back.

By early afternoon, Fred looked tired. He seemed relieved when we hugged him goodbye and headed home.

Our friends Bob and Mary Crane met us at my house, bearing a roasted stuffed turkey. "It's just about as easy to make two," she laughed. "Thankfully, I have a large oven."

Tears sprang to my eyes as I hugged her. "This is way above and beyond the call of duty, especially after driving me to Fresno twice in the last week. Thank you, Mary."

Scott hugged her and shook Bob's hand. "You've been generous friends ever since I can remember."

Mary blushed. "The generosity has gone both ways. How's Fred?"

"Yesterday he was quite ill and running a fever when he arrived at Cypress. He looked better today since they started antibiotics almost as soon as he arrived." I paused. Because Bob was an internist, I was self-conscious about giving medical information. I took a deep breath and went on. "Truthfully, I can't imagine that Fred will ever be able to take care of himself."

Bob spoke up. "Don't be discouraged. I've seen incredible things happen through therapy. It will take time. When we visited him last week, he was improving."

Mary patted my arm. "The move probably wore him out."

After a brief conversation with Scott and Rachel about their respective families, the Cranes left, anxious to get back to their own holiday gathering.

Rachel and Scott unpacked their prepared side dishes from a cooler while Suzanne and I set and decorated the table with a cornucopia of autumn leaves, fruits and vegetables on a rust-colored tablecloth. After the seven of us sat down, I offered a prayer of gratitude for a beautiful meal.

Scott spoke up, "Rory, let's sing the Johnny Appleseed song for Grandma. That's what *we* do at mealtime." He started singing. Rachel and Jaimee joined him, and finally, Rory lisped along, "Oh, the Lord is good to me, and so I thank the Lord, for giving me the things I need: the sun and the rain and the apple seed. The Lord is good to me." Rory crowed with pleasure as everyone clapped and said, "Amen".

I clapped along. "Wonderful. Now let's sing it again so that Aunt Suzy, Uncle Barry and I can learn it." A new family tradition was born.

Thanksgiving was my favorite holiday. I loved preparing the family feasts. Now Fred's absence burned like physical pain. We all missed his good humor, love of food and hearty appetite. I led the conversation that he usually started, asking each person to name something for which they were especially thankful this year. My completion of treatment and the fact that Fred had survived his accident were at the top of our list.

The next day the doctor left orders that Fred should get up three times daily to prepare for therapy on Monday. Fred was markedly more awake and aware when he was upright in the wheelchair, and seemed to enjoy having the family coming and going throughout the day.

Saturday morning as Scott and his family got in the car to go home, Dr. Prince called to inform me that he was sending Fred by ambulance to the hospital emergency room to be treated for high blood pressure. Barry and I hurried to the Visalia hospital. We found Fred on an uncomfortable-looking gurney, too short for his tall frame, back in an unresponsive state. Scott came by briefly on his way home, looking depressed at this setback.

Barry and I sat in the emergency room with Fred all day. Reading the monitors, I could see that his blood pressure normalized before noon. They took him for a chest x-ray and a CT scan of his head. Finally, he was sent back to Cypress in the late afternoon. He'd had no food or fluids. Uncomplaining, he slept most of the day while Barry and I read.

As we followed the ambulance in the car, Barry's volatile temper was barely contained. "I think Dr. Prince is just trying to get rid of Dad. He wanted them to admit him to the hospital."

I had to agree with my youngest son. "It's because Fred isn't really up to doing the therapy program. If Dr. Reddy were on the staff here instead of in Porterville, Fred probably would have been admitted."

After a pause, I added, "It also has to do with the intricacies of Medicare and insurance billing. It seems that insurance payment has a greater influence on health care decisions than what's best for the patient."

We stayed until Fred's feeding tube was reconnected and he was hydrated and prepared for a night's rest. We drove home, silent and discouraged.

Sunday I went to Springville to attend a group meditation. I felt disappointed when no one else showed up, but decided to walk the labyrinth in the garden as a solitary spiritual exercise. With each step toward the center, I asked for wisdom. "Help me to give up expectations. Help me to live in the present moment." I became aware of each breath and each step, and paused to acknowledge each turn. "Now I'm facing east, the direction of enlightenment." Breathe. Step. "Now I'm turning south."

Indigenous spiritual teachings comforted me. This labyrinth was patterned after one in the Chartres cathedral in France, probably a pagan European design reflecting belief in Nature as sacred. In concept, it fit neatly with the Native American medicine wheel.

Arriving at the center of the labyrinth, I knelt in each of the six lobes of what I saw as a flower design, rehearsing the children's count I'd learned from Hyemeyohsts Storm, a Native American teacher. "One is the Sun." Facing east, I felt the warmth of the winter sun on the right side of my face and expressed a prayer of gratitude for all that the sun's energy brings forth and sustains, every living thing we know.

"Two is the Earth." As I knelt in the next lobe, I bent and kissed the hard winter ground.

"Three are the plants." Now I faced southwest. I turned to look at the profusion of autumn colors around me, grateful for the beauty and sustenance of the plants birthed by Father Sun and Mother Earth.

As I moved to the west and recited, "Four are the animals," a hawk flew out of a distant tree and circled over my head. My breath caught. "Oh, you're just in time, Brother."

On my feet facing north, the direction of wisdom, I held out my hands, palms up and finished the children's count. "Five are the humans." I stretched to my full height and imagined the sun, the earth, the plants and the animals applauding me and my fellow human beings.

I moved to the last lobe, knelt again and said, "Thank you, Great Mystery, beyond yet within all your creatures, for giving me my life, just the way it is."

I walked out with the answer to my questions. How could I live in the present moment? With gratitude. How could I give up expectations? With gratitude.

When I arrived in Fred's room, I was delighted to see our middle son Patrick. He stood to receive my hug. "I'm so glad to find you here. Where are Tami and the children?"

"They went shopping, and to pick up Bryan. His dad brought him to meet Tami downtown. They'll be back soon."

Pat's dark blue eyes sparkled with pride when he spoke of his family. His brown hair was cut almost as short as a Marine recruit. He wore a light blue short-sleeved dress shirt with Levis.

Fred's strained expression of the previous three weeks had eased somewhat. He sat in a wheelchair without a safety restraint, watching television with Pat.

I bent to kiss my husband. "Hi, Honey. You look like you feel better today."

For the first time Fred attempted to reply verbally.

I hugged him and pulled up a chair to look closely into his eyes. "Oh, Fred, I'm thrilled you're talking to me. I'm sorry I'm not getting it, Honey. Don't worry. Keep trying. It'll come." I kissed him again.

Pat said, "I think he said he's feeling better. Right, Dad?"

Fred nodded, looking pleased. I felt elated.

Tami arrived with the three children. Bryan, fourteen, had spent the holiday weekend with his father's family in Springville. I hugged him, "Hi, Bry. Did you get enough turkey?"

I grinned and returned my hug. "I don't like turkey. I filled up on ham and pie." He patted Fred's shoulder and sat beside him to watch the muted Nascar race.

Joseph was four. As always, he grinned to see me, which lifted my heart. A flash of the dimple he'd inherited from his dad gave me inordinate joy. Pat picked him up and held him close to Fred. "Give Grandpa a kiss." Joe did, and patted Fred's cheek, causing a lump to form in my throat.

I held my hands out to Courtney and, to my great pleasure, she came into my arms. I buried my nose in the fragrance of her soft baby neck. "Happy Birthday, Courtney. Tomorrow you'll be one year old." I

held up one finger for emphasis, and she responded in kind. “Very good counting.” She grinned into my eyes and wrinkled her nose.

I turned to Tami. “Are you hungry? The food in the cafeteria is quite good. The nurse said Fred could go with us while we eat.”

“We just have time for that. The holiday weekend has been great, but I need to finish a paper tonight.” Tami was going to school full time to complete her teaching credential.

“Let's wait a few minutes for Barry and Suzanne. They planned to be here about now.”

When they arrived, we wheeled Fred and his I.V. pole to the cafeteria. Tami had a birthday cake for Courtney. By the time the baby blew out the candle and made a mess with her share of the cake, her grandpa was exhausted.

Pat's family departed with hugs all around. Suzanne, Barry and I helped the nursing staff get Fred settled for the evening, hoping he'd be well rested to start therapy the following morning.

I embodied gratitude.

Chapter 16 Lucid Confusion/Normal Scans

SAFE HARBOR

*I long to escape this reality,
Feeling trapped,
Being responsible.*

*To retreat to a safe harbor,
A hideaway,
A sanctuary,*

*To seclude and anchor myself
Away from here,
Away from care.*

*In my imagination I run away
To a guarded nook,
Any life but the one I have.*

*Yet I know before I set out,
That my care-filled vigil
Is the only place for me.*

*And so I come home
To my heart,
My sacred place.*

On Monday, Fred's fifth day at the rehabilitation center, he started doing three hours of physical, occupational and speech therapy each day, with a feeding tube in his stomach and an IV in his arm. Unable to

move himself, he cooperated as the strong young therapists helped him through the motions of getting dressed and going to therapy.

I arrived in the therapy room as one especially attractive young woman lifted Fred by a gait belt from his wheelchair during his first session of physical therapy. He stood between parallel bars with the therapist beside him, holding his belt. "Come on, Fred, you can do it!"

Once on his feet, he said, "Oh, yeah!" The two words, spoken plainly, were music to me. The smile that lit up his face thrilled me. Seeing him on his feet brought tears to my eyes. I cheered him on from the sidelines, caught up in the enthusiasm and encouragement of the therapists. He took eight steps before he rested. He stood up and sat down two more times, after which he was totally exhausted.

To me, this seemed as difficult for him as running the marathon when he was twenty-two and on the Navy track team. He was my hero, then and now.

We went on to speech therapy, which started at a very low level. Thao, the therapist, gave simple commands, such as, "Eye. Touch eye." After the first session he told me, "Anything more complicated would confuse Fred at this point."

The next morning, the staff family liaison person called and asked me to come to her office. When I arrived, the woman behind the desk introduced herself as Karen Elliott. "A new C.T. scan shows that fluid is collecting on Fred's brain. The doctor wants to send your husband back to Fresno to consult with the neurosurgeon there."

Despair swallowed me as I thought of returning to the Fresno nightmare. *To consult with a neurosurgeon there* sounded simple. I knew from experience that it wouldn't be. I told Ms. Elliott I didn't want Fred to return to Fresno, but realized she was just the messenger. I thanked her and went to Fred's room, hoping to speak to the doctor, but I didn't see him all day.

As I left to go home that evening, I met Dr. Prince in the lobby. He said, "I've arranged transportation for Fred to go back to Fresno in the morning."

I felt like a ton of bricks had been dumped on me.

He seemed surprised when I asked tearfully, "Can't Dr. Bhati, the local neurosurgeon, look at his scans here?"

It seemed Dr. Prince hadn't thought of that, and really didn't want to deal with a change of plans. "I'll call Dr. Bhati in the morning, but I doubt that he'll agree."

As soon as I arrived home, in crisis mode, I called Dr. Nowak, the Fresno neurosurgeon. My voice trembled as I appealed to him. "Going back to Fresno will be hard on Fred. On the trip to Visalia, he developed a fever. There's a neurosurgeon, Dr. Bhati, in Visalia. Could you write a referral for him review Fred's scans to see if a move is necessary?" To my relief, Dr. Nowak agreed to call Dr. Bhati the following morning with the referral.

It was after 9:30 when I called Dr. Reddy, our primary care physician, at his home. Thankfully, he was willing to take my call. I explained the situation, and asked, "Are you acquainted with Dr. Bhati?"

"Yes," he answered. "We're from the same area in southern India."

"Could you call him in the morning to see if he could consult with Dr. Prince about Fred's case?" I pushed on. "And could you call Dr. Prince? I don't think I can stand it if they take Fred back to Fresno."

Playing my cancer card, I added, "My own health is at risk." It may have been manipulative, but it was true.

"I'll try." His soft voice was a profound comfort in that moment.

It seemed like a miracle the next day when Dr. Bhati looked at Fred's scans and said he didn't think it was urgent to put in a shunt. Though he never actually saw Fred, I felt immensely grateful to him for his consultation.

* * *

A line from a Rumi poem perfectly described my state of mind. "*I do not know who I am. I am in astounding lucid confusion.*" Clearly, Fred and I would never be the couple we had been. Considering the future, I saw a dark field surrounded by blinding light. Among many good wishes from concerned friends, a long letter arrived from a former colleague, Ken Gilbert, a psychiatrist. His mother had suffered traumatic brain injury several years earlier. He wrote: "I'm hoping that my experience with my mom in a head injury rehab unit

will bring some measure of hopefulness for you.” He described how remarkably far she had come in her recovery, now living on her own at age 77. He urged me to withhold judgment about how permanent Fred’s condition was. “You don’t know how it’s going to end until it’s over.” This was helpful and comforting. At the time I feared that Fred might need permanent nursing home care. Ken’s letter brought a ray of hope into that dark field.

Dr. Prince met with Barry, Suzanne and me on December 8.”The good news is that Fred doesn’t need a shunt. However, he’s too sick to take advantage of a full therapy schedule. He’ll move to the transitional care unit where his time in therapy will be cut in half. This will maximize his time in Cypress relative to Medicare payment.”

“Thank you, Doctor.” I shook his hand. “I really appreciate your response to our needs. This seems like a good plan.”

* * *

Fred’s sister Caroline and her husband Chuck came to visit the following Sunday, driving the 300 miles from their home in Grass Valley during the busiest time of year for their retail business. When they entered Fred’s room, his face lit up in the most animated response I’d seen since his stroke. He and Caroline were the sole survivors of their original nuclear family.

“Who is this?” the nurse asked. The staff was trained to help with the therapy programs.

Dutifully, Fred answered, “My sister and her husband.” He told her their names, demonstrating how far he’d come in two weeks.

Suzanne, Barry and I enjoyed and deeply appreciated their brief visit. We wheeled Fred to the dining room with us. Sharing a meal made the visit a celebration. Looking at Caroline’s square face and cleft chin, so much like Fred’s, I felt my heart open with love. Chuck was tall, blond and handsome when they married. Now he was gray and still handsome, with pleasant laugh lines around his eyes. My gratitude for their visit wiped out the sibling rivalry I’d felt since we first met.

“Do you remember the first year we were married when Fred and I visited you two at the firefighter camp at Quaking Aspen?” I groped for

an opening to illuminate the long journey of our relationship and to express my new feeling of appreciation.

Caroline smiled. "No, but I remember how much fruit you canned that summer and how hot Mother's kitchen was. You and Freddy worked so hard that summer taking care of the farm so Mother and Daddy could visit Patricia in Tennessee."

I continued. "I was thinking recently about the day we drove up to see you at Quaking Aspen. It was my first High Sierra trip. Meeting logging trucks coming around blind curves on the narrow road terrified me. At your house, I made a remark with the phrase 'over yonder' in it. Everyone laughed uproariously at my Texas accent. Fred teased me about my big feet. I felt put down and miserable. Anyway, I've recently discovered that I've held some resentment against you three all these years." I looked at Fred, Caroline and Chuck. "That was such a waste. I feel compelled to apologize, for what it's worth."

Caroline and Chuck laughed. Fred looked confused. I leaned over to kiss him on the cheek. "You didn't know how sensitive I was to teasing."

"We were such babies, weren't we? I guess Freddy, Chuck and I should be the ones to apologize, since we were so mean to you." Caroline smiled. "It's all water under the bridge now. I'm just grateful we can be together today."

Staying until Fred's bedtime meant they'd arrive home after midnight, but the time flew as we reminisced. Suzanne enjoyed recalling stories of childhood adventures with their sons Tim and Terry. Before the couple departed, I hugged them gratefully "I can't thank you enough for this visit. It was good for our whole family, especially Fred." Suzanne and Barry agreed as hugs went around.

* * *

A few days later, Fred said, "I hate waking up in the morning so confused."

"Oh, Honey, I'm so sorry you're confused. But you're getting better every day." I took this remark as a major marker for his recovery, his first words of a reflective nature.

Gil and Sheryl came the following weekend, less than three months since their visit when we went to Mineral King on a beautiful autumn day.

After greeting Fred, and looking around his sterile room, Cheryl said, "Let's decorate this room for Christmas."

I hit my forehead with the heel of my hand. "I've been in such a trance, I hadn't even thought of that. What a great idea."

Gil shopped for a tiny live fir tree that fit on the window sill. We decorated it and covered a bulletin board with family pictures. Shocked that I hadn't done it sooner, I realized again the priceless value of friends in trying times.

* * *

To care for myself, I took time to rehearse and sing in the Lindsay community choir's presentation of Handel's "Messiah." The music and fellowship richly nourished my spirit. I decided to worship with the congregation that sponsored the choir as long as Fred was in Visalia, since the meditation center in Springville was twenty miles in the opposite direction.

At an earlier time, I'd worry about what the congregation might think of my unorthodox beliefs and practices. Now, with less need for the approval of others I was able to stay in the present moment. The change of Sunday practice met two pressing needs: to participate in meaningful group worship and to simplify my life.

All the runes of my December reading emphasized the importance of surrendering my will, letting go of everything, relinquishing control to the creative power of the unknown. Since my energy level was still low, this came as a comfort, encouraging me not to make plans or strategize for the uncertain future. My old life was gone. Hanging on was not an option.

As a follow-up to cancer treatment, I spent hours in December getting scans of my body: a bone scan, a mammogram, a series of gallium scans, CAT scans of my chest and abdomen. For some of these tests, the barium injections required were difficult to accomplish because most of the veins in my arms had collapsed from so many intravenous procedures. My weekly energy healing sessions with Bob

continued, with the intention to remove the radiation and toxic dregs of chemotherapy from the energy hologram of my body.

One night, arriving home tired, I failed to push the garage door high enough for the spring to catch, and it fell on my head. Pain released a flood of tears, which passed quickly. The phone rang as I entered the house. I answered it on my way to the freezer for an ice pack.

“How’s everything going?” It was our son Scott’s daily call.

Laughing sheepishly, I answered, “Well, your dad looked better today, but I have a headache. The garage door just beamed me.” He groaned in response.

“Don’t worry; it’s not serious. My energy level is rising and I’m generally feeling well. Barry cleaned the house today and will take Suzanne to her doctor appointment tomorrow.”

The next day, Scott ordered a new garage door, which was installed immediately, complete with an automatic opener. Our oldest son, who’d been an angelic small boy, then a drug-dependent juvenile delinquent, had changed back to his loving and giving nature in maturity.

* * *

Our oldest child and only daughter, Suzanne had worked as a home health care aide after college. It seemed to me she could sense what Fred wanted and needed before he did. Always thin, she’d recently filled out and looked healthier than during most of her life. Her long, straight brown hair was held back with a band. Her round wire-rimmed glasses magnified her beautiful blue eyes. Suzanne and Fred were especially close at this time. Fred’s face never looked more content than when she was massaging his shoulders or holding his hand, watching television. They didn’t talk much, but their communication seemed complete.

After ten days of recovery in transitional care, Fred moved back to a heavy rehabilitation schedule before Christmas. The feeding tube was removed from his stomach, and he started eating pureed food with the speech therapist watching and coaching him on how to swallow. I read to Fred in the evenings, a book about the nearby mountains, written as a journal by a pioneer forest ranger. After his death, his

daughter, Eleanor Norris, discovered and edited the journal. The stories were about places where Fred had worked and camped for forty years. He often wept as I read, and my voice quavered in response. We feared that we'd never be able to visit those beautiful, beloved places again.

On the winter solstice, I drove to the mountains to join our healing community in a sweat lodge ceremony. Everything I did without my partner seemed to have a Fred-shaped hole in it. Yet the prayers of the ritual worked their healing magic, accepting my sadness, pronouncing life good and reminding me that the future is always open and that anything is possible.

The next day I told Fred about the sweat. "Everyone missed you, Honey."

"What, my snoring?" he asked. Fred's wry humor was returning. I laughed as my heart soared.

All our children and grandchildren met at Cypress the day after Christmas. Since leaning on them so heavily for seven weeks, I saw them in a new light. They were parenting Fred and me.

In Fred's room, the adolescent cousins had a great time playing with vinyl hospital gloves. They blew up the fingers, stretched the wrist part onto their heads, and played "chicken" games, then pulled the gloves over their faces to be monsters. This amused their grandpa, still a boy at heart. Fred didn't talk much, but his eyes danced as he watched their mischief.

All fifteen of us went for a walk around the hospital grounds with Fred in his wheelchair, and then sat in the sun on the patio for awhile before he asked to return to his room. He was tired, so we kissed him good night, went home to Lindsay for a low-key Christmas dinner, and shared gifts. My best gift was their presence, support and love.

* * *

The last week of the year, I sent the following e-mail to my support community:

Yes! The many scans I underwent the last two weeks all read "Normal." I'll have blood tests and an oncology examination every

three months to monitor the lymphoma. For now, there is no evidence of tumors.

Fred is improving day by day. He is walking to the dining room for meals in the rehab center, working at getting up, sitting and lying down unassisted. Grace abounds!

This message brought a deluge of electronic celebration back to me. Bob came to give me a healing session that week and affirmed my new state of being. "Your journey of the last six months has left you energetically softer, more vulnerable and undefended."

"Your healings and our community have served me well on the journey, Bob. I can't even express the gratitude I feel."

"Give yourself credit, too, Jann. I've wondered at how you were able to keep going without self pity. I'd really like you to respond to that. It's a gift you have that could benefit other people."

I reflected on Bob's question, struggling to find an answer. Finally, I grasped at my history in the Order:Ecumenical as part of the answer.

"I grew up with fall/redemption theology, which left me carrying a ton of guilt. In the Order we reminded one another several times a day at mealtimes and worship that the way we showed up was perfect, loved and forgiven. That was our understanding of the gospel."

"Gosh, with that understanding, I might still be in a church." Bob chuckled with his mouth closed. The irony came out his nose as a small snort.

"It took me a long time, but I eventually absorbed the concept. As inadequate as I feel, I'm loved and forgiven in every moment by the One who created my life. It doesn't leave room for blame, judgment or self-pity."

Bob nodded. "Yes, I can see that. Your self-understanding has been a wonderful contribution to our community, Jann. Thank you."

"The gratitude is mutual. Because you introduced me to energy healing, I didn't feel solely dependent on western medicine to treat my lymphoma. Taking positive action on my own lowered my stress. Old fear-based mental structures died along with cancer cells, allowing me to respond to what is real in the moment. Thank you for your help with that."

“It has been my pleasure. Most of my cancer clients collapse into a hopeless place. I don't remember that you ever did that. It was wonderful to watch.” He paused. “And you're still teaching us courage with your response to Fred's stroke.”

Tears sprang to my eyes. My heart melted further as we embraced to end the session.

Chapter 17

New Millennium/Caretaker Role

IN THE FLESH

*Nexus of infinity,
My consciousness a galaxy,
Each atom a solar system,
I am an astronaut
Exploring all that is.*

*Elements that form my body
Have ventured extravagantly,
Have ranged for thirteen billion years,
Coming to rest for a moment
Within the boundary of my skin.*

*Without moving, I am able to
Trace that perfect pilgrimage,
Project a future just as vast
And return again to repose
At home, embraced in flesh.*

Although mathematicians kept telling the world that it was not technically the beginning of the new millennium, the change from 1999 to 2000 on the Christian calendar was a spectacular event around the globe. Suzanne and I spent the evening with Fred in the patients' lounge at the rehab center. Our friend Ellen came earlier with gifts: party hats, horns, chocolate, sparkling cider, wine glasses and confetti. We decorated the lounge and invited other patients, but Fred was the only one who was there to mark the occasion with Suzy and me.

The three of us had a good time watching the big screen showing wondrous celebrations from each time zone around the world.

Fireworks, music and dance were common everywhere, small out-of-the-way places, and major cities alike. Catastrophic computer breakdowns had been predicted, but nothing of the kind was reported.

Fred felt tired by nine o'clock. When the ball dropped on Times Square in New York, Suzanne and I tucked him in and wished him a happy New Year with hugs and kisses, grateful that he seemed to be up to the challenge ahead.

Returning to Lindsay, I dropped Suzy off to meet a friend at a New Year's dance, and went home alone. I'd received word by e-mail that groups were coming together for unity around the globe, and I joined in from midnight to one in the morning, solitarily drumming and chanting, "As we drum, we are one." This worldwide prayer for the new millennium gave me a sense of connection even in my loneliness. I intended to drum until five in the morning, when the last time zone on Earth would usher in the new era, but I kept falling asleep. I gave up and went to bed.

As difficult as it was to go to the hospital every day, I knew that life was going to be even more difficult when Fred came home. I dreaded taking on responsibility for the level of care he'd still need. To help myself come to terms with this, I asked my friend Sharry for a hypnotherapy session. On January 6, the first new moon of the year, Sharry called. Suzanne was with me to help facilitate the healing.

"What is your intention for this healing?" Sharry asked.

I had my response, written in advance. "My intention is to heal the trauma I experienced from Fred's accident and illness. To heal anything that prevents me from being in the moment; to disperse any resistance to this. Fred supported me through my cancer treatment, but not as well as I believe I could have supported him. I feel furious that he ignored his doctor's advice to lose weight, stop using tobacco and take medication for high blood pressure. It haunts me that after Barry put that ancient ladder into a load to go to the dump. Fred retrieved it. It broke under him, causing his fall. I know my feelings of anger, resentment, superiority and regret are destructive. They keep me in the past, unable to respond to the present moment in our relationship. I want to heal all of that."

Sharry chuckled. “Wow. Great intention statement, Jann. It seems that if you can't respond perfectly, you think you're a complete failure. Let's see if we can get you past that way of thinking.”

Sharry had a protocol of questions to narrow my focus to the underlying issue. Finally it came down to, “I *feel* I have no choice. I have choice.” She instructed me to repeat this phrase for two full minutes while tapping the pressure points around my ears and following with my eyes the infinity-symbol pattern that Suzanne made with her crossed fingers in the air in front of my face.

“When you make a choice, there are many degrees of possibility; it's not just this or that.” Sharry went on, “What do you think you learned from this healing?”

“Blaming Fred for the accident was my way of resisting reality.” I struggled to clarify my thoughts. “Resistance is the way life operates. It gives traction. The heat generated propels one toward the next step. Judging myself for resisting keeps me from moving forward. I need to accept what happened as well as my feelings, without judgment.”

“That was good work, Jann. Thank Suzy for her help. I have to scoot to another client. We'll talk again soon.”

I shook my head to come out of trance. “Thank you, Sharry. You're a heroine. I think I can hear the Mighty Mouse song playing in the background as you go to save the day for someone else.”

Sharry laughed and hung up.

This session helped me to proceed with more internal grace and self-forgiveness. Acknowledging the paradox that is present in all life situations helped to resolve contradictory feelings. I didn't *have to* care for Fred. I freely *chose* to do so.

The single rune I drew that day to celebrate the new moon urged “modesty, patience, fairness and generosity.” It seemed that these four qualities held all that I was aspiring to in my life, a lens through which to focus my energy. I wrote the words on a pink index card and taped it to my bathroom mirror as a reminder to be patient and fair with myself as well as others.

I'd made plans to travel to Oakland on January 15, to take my last doctoral seminar at the University of Creation Spirituality. I wanted to meet with my certification committee to discuss my dissertation

*project. I regretfully gave that up when it became clear that Fred would be discharged to go home that week.

Suzanne and Barry joined in a duet, "Go ahead, Mom. We can take care of Dad." I knew they probably could, but I also knew it would be impossible for me to concentrate on the seminar. So I didn't go.

When I called the registrar to cancel my enrollment and the committee meeting, she responded that of course I should do what was needed for my family. Her graciousness brought tears to my eyes.

"At least I know I chose the right school for theological study," I told Suzanne. "They live and communicate love and grace." I laughed at my unintended pun. The registrar's name was Grace Hogan.

With Fred in the hospital, I was now taking Suzanne to her many medical appointments. She lived on social security disability, and received medical care through California's version of Medicaid. This was better care than some private insurance provided, but many doctors and dentists wouldn't accept the low co-pay. Suzanne went where she had to, to find good-hearted doctors willing to care for the poor. In January, I took her to the dentist in Tulare and then to a dental surgeon in Kingsburg. That was almost 200 miles round trip. Fortunately, I was regaining my strength and energy.

On January 13, an occupational therapist from the rehabilitation center brought Fred home for a visit and to survey what equipment and modifications would be needed when he was discharged.

The next day, Paul, our handyman and friend, installed a handrail by the front steps, an extra step outside the back door, and a grab bar in the shower. I shopped for a high recliner that didn't rock so Fred could manage to rise from it.

Seventy-one days after Fred's fall, January 18th was his last full day at Cypress Rehabilitation Center. We celebrated as Suzanne and I participated in his therapy sessions, practicing how to help him get in and out of bed, the shower and the car. We went along as three vibrant young therapists took him to lunch to see how he would do in public. He did well, eating an enormous amount of food.

That afternoon, my massage therapist came to my home. She gave me a good massage, but it must have released chemotherapy toxins still

stored in my muscles. I had a chemical taste in my mouth and felt nauseated, but felt it was worth it to be rid of the toxins more quickly.

* * *

The day Fred came home, hospital paperwork and doctor's instructions took more than two hours to complete. After Fred was settled at home, it took me all afternoon and trips to three pharmacies to fill his eight prescriptions. Dinner was delayed and I worried that his medication was late. Fear that I couldn't adequately care for Fred in his state of disability overwhelmed me. My anxiety felt like physical pain. It was one of the most trying days of my life.

Bob came after dinner to give me an energy healing session. I felt I'd been thrown a life preserver in a stormy sea. Still, I was filled with self pity, which I loathed. I hated to even admit the feeling, but I tearfully did.

Bob said, "Pity for one's self is an important element in grief. You need to honor it as such."

His words and the comfort of the warm energy channeled by his hands untied the knots in my being.

Bob said, "In human evolution, the heart is destined to become the center of consciousness. The heart is a sanctuary for however we are feeling, whatever we are thinking. It is all received there."

I slept well that night, feeling absolved of all my failings and fears.

* * *

Caring for Fred at this stage consumed almost all day, every day. He had four home health care workers coming to the house regularly: a nurse and physical, occupational and speech therapists. He didn't have complete control of elimination, so there was much laundry and cleaning to do. He had lost some of his motor sequencing ability. When he wanted to stand up from a seated position, he had to think through what movement to do first, next, and so forth. At that stage, he needed help to verbalize this sequencing. I spent a tremendous amount of time just helping him stand up and sit down.

Every day we went for a slow walk around the block. Fred's lurching gait, combined with small obstacles, such as curbs or cracks in the sidewalk, struck terror in my heart. One morning, he managed to get out of bed alone, but stumbled and broke the window. Fortunately, he wasn't cut, but it was clear he needed someone with him all the time.

Thankfully I had solitary time for meditation and exercise early in the morning and after Fred was in bed at night. In spite of all the extra work, I was glad to have him at home and not to drive forty miles every day to see him. I continued reading to him before he went to sleep. We both enjoyed *The Education of Little Tree*.

Barry worked on the coast Monday through Wednesday, twelve hours each day. He drove to our house on Thursday. He and Suzanne cared for Fred while I taught on Fridays. Those days spent with eight-year-olds were a wonderful source of energy and re-creation for me.

On January 25, I resigned as president of the board of Sequoia Center for Holistic Studies. Letting go of the responsibilities of the office as well as the guilt I felt regarding the center's decline lifted a great burden from my shoulders. Taking this outward action validated a new way of being.

Years before, when we were each in recovery, Fred from alcoholism and I from codependence, we had decided to separate our bank accounts. I was eighteen years old when we married, and it became important to me to finally build my own identity. I wanted to focus on what was mine and let Fred take care of his business. Sleeping in Fred's energy field seemed to undermine my recovery from codependence, so I moved into my own bedroom. Intimacy had been compromised years before by the disease. The divorce rate of couples going through alcoholism recovery is quite high, and the accommodations we made possibly saved our marriage. Our relationship wasn't ideal, but it was what it was. We both still treasured it.

Now the dynamics of our relationship took another radical shift as I focused on his needs as well as my own. I cleaned out his closet and gave away clothes that no longer fit him. We went back to a joint bank account. Barry helped me clean out the garage and garden shed, and get

rid of dangerous tools and chemicals. I hired help for yard maintenance. I tried to simplify all areas of our life not having to do with regaining our health.

As Fred's recovery progressed, it was difficult to know his capabilities. I admired his attempts to do as much as he could on his own and the courage it took to risk the next new thing. I loved the sweetness and gratitude with which he allowed me to take over so much of his life, and his willingness to take it back when he was ready. Yet the impact of Fred's illness on my life was profound. I'd enjoyed a large degree of personal freedom the previous decade. I had traveled to study and teach water shiatsu and massage, sometimes with Fred and sometimes alone. I went to doctoral seminars semi-annually for the previous three years while Fred took care of things at home and gave Suzanne the support she needed. It felt like I'd reached the end of a tether and had been jerked back to close confinement.

Fred began a remarkable recovery. I acknowledged his serenity and great sense of humor as a rich gift in my life. We gained a level of emotional intimacy we'd never before achieved.

As for my "transformation" I decided that this would be the subject of my doctoral dissertation. The journey I had made to health was my project, with the research complete. I could hardly wait to write about the experience of newness and the softening of my heart.

Chapter 18 Spring's Promise/New Life

TOUGH KID

*She came into the world pink, sweet and vulnerable,
Full of light.*

*Her memories of the first years of life
Were largely those of a victim.
Disappointingly weak, easily put down.*

*When she was seven, she learned to ride a horse,
And was transformed.
The pink and white victim-child went into hiding.
A tough kid came out.
Thick armor hiding all weakness, taking on the world.*

*The Tough Kid willingly rode bucking calves,
All eyes on her,
At the neighborhood roping arena on Sunday afternoon,
Not minding the whip-lashed spine nor the
Grit in her mouth when she landed on her face in the sand.*

*Not only did she grow up tough, she had a mean streak,
And was proud of it.
The toughness, the pride and the thick armor
All grew up with her,
Protecting the vulnerable child within.*

*The child had enough of hiding.
She wanted her light to shine.
The protective armor smothered her.
She grew strong enough to come out.
Right through the Tough Kid's heart, which broke.*

Passage: Illness as Initiation

*A broken heart was nothing to the Tough Kid.
On those long-ago Sundays, she got up, spat out dirt,
Glared at the laughing men and boys around her,
And marched out of the arena.
This time her broken heart was in her hand.*

*I come to honor this dark part of myself,
My protector.
When I stand in awe of the difficulties I've endured,
And the strength with which I withstood them,
I am deeply grateful for the Divine gift of the Tough Kid.*

It seemed a miracle that I had enough energy to care for Fred in the time following his hospitalization. Getting him dressed, especially the prescribed support stockings, required a major effort. Establishing a routine was difficult, with therapists and nurses coming four days a week and many trips to see doctors.

When he first came home, Fred had an internal catheter. I felt relieved when it was removed because it caused irritation and infections. My relief changed to dismay when Fred was unable to gain bladder control, especially at night. He patiently let me experiment with an external catheter, diapers and pads. None of those things were satisfactory at keeping the bed dry. Desperate, I set an alarm for every two hours so I could wake and help him with a urinal. When I told Dr. Prince this, he said, "What? You can't do that. You're fighting cancer." This situation was a major source of stress for several months. Unable to hide my irritation when I had to change the bed in the middle of the night, I felt terrible, knowing Fred felt worse.

One morning, coming in from exercising in the pool, I found him sitting on the side of the bed, weeping. I sat beside him and put my arms around him. Supporting each other, we wept together.

He sat up straight and wiped his eyes with the tips of his fingers. "I feel so helpless."

“And I feel mean and impatient.” Reaching for tissues for each of us, I squared my shoulders and sighed. “Are you ready to get in the pool?”

His face brightened. “Yes.” Fred enjoyed our daily water shiatsu sessions in the warm pool. I floated him in my arms, stretched his muscles and did acupressure along the energy meridians of his spine and limbs. Holding him in my arms in the water seemed to attract all the love of the Universe to us. We had never been more intimate, even in our early years of passionate lovemaking.

After half an hour I gently released him to lean against the side of the pool. “Oh, that feels wonderful.” Fred’s gratitude was palpable.

I leaned on the wall beside him. “It seems like a miracle that we learned Watsu and built our own pool. I was disappointed that we didn’t build a larger practice, but it was worth it for the benefit we’re getting now.”

“Those trips to Hawaii for Watsu courses were an extra bonus ... in paradise.” Fred smiled and kissed my cheek. He picked me up in his arms to return the Watsu favor. His balance was better in the water than on land, but he tired quickly.

Knowing the session would be short, I relaxed and closed my eyes, remembering the warm water lagoon fed by volcanic springs within sight of the ocean in Hawaii. How blessed we were.

Later that day, when Fred walked into Dr. Reddy’s examination room, the doctor looked surprised at the progress Fred had made in three weeks. “You look like a walking miracle!” From that day on, he called Fred “Mr. Miracle.”

Following, I felt my face flush with warmth, as if I’d played a small part in that miracle.

* * *

Suzanne’s forty-first birthday on January 29, 2000, was low-key. I cooked the spaghetti and meat sauce that all my children had loved growing up, made a green salad and garlic sourdough bread, grateful that my family loved my simple cooking. I bought an ice cream cake.

Barry was there, and the four of us talked about the eventful year since Suzy turned forty.

“What was the signal event of your year, Suzy?” I repeated the traditional birthday question from Order: Ecumenical days.

“I have to say Dad’s fall at my house. Daddy’s illness, and yours, took my attention away from myself in a way I never experienced before. Finally, I had to grow up.” Suzanne flashed her million-watt smile. “I’m a grownup! And Daddy is here with me. And so is Mom. I’m happy. I never thought, growing up with the terror of epilepsy, that I’d live to be forty-one.”

Tears stung my eyes and I realized that Suzanne was more at peace with her condition that I was. “You’re a heroine, Honey. You saved your dad’s life and helped so much while he was in the hospital. It’s been a hard year. You did a great job.”

From his big chair, Fred opened his arms and Suzy moved into them, squeezing in beside him. He kissed her forehead and murmured, “Thank you, Suz.”

“Yeah, good work, Suzy, but you saved my ass lots of times, growing up. I’m not at all surprised.” Barry’s wisecrack lightened the mood.

We sang “Happy Birthday,” celebrating victory at the end of a difficult year.

A few days later I found Fred on the patio, smoking. I was furious. He confessed that he’d asked Suzanne to bring him a pack of cigarettes when she walked to the store to get some for herself. I knew yelling at him wouldn’t help, but I yelled anyway. “Why would you go back to smoking when you haven’t had tobacco for over three months? You don’t have to have it. You know how bad it is for you.”

Fred didn’t answer. I’d never understood this addiction. I never would.

That afternoon during my session with Bob, I stated my intention for the healing. I told him Fred was smoking again and that Suzanne had enabled him. “I’m angry with both of them. It feels like the rage that I believe brought on my lymphoma. I hope you can help me overcome this feeling.”

Bob chuckled. "You know their smoking has nothing to do with you. They are free to smoke, knowing the consequences. You are free to be angry or not. Trying to suppress it is what's harmful. Where do you feel the rage in your body?"

I traced the feeling from my solar plexus to my throat. As Bob worked with the energy in those centers, the rage melted into grief, and I was able to release it in tears.

When I could speak, I said, "I'm so mad at God, and sad that Suzanne has had such a difficult life, and that she's having seizures again. It's the big rock in my spiritual road that I can't seem to get around."

"We can't know Suzy's purpose in this life. Her consciousness is phenomenal. You know, if she were in a tribal society, she'd be in a special lodge, and people would bring gifts in exchange for her deep insight and unique perceptions."

I sighed. "I'm sure smoking makes her health worse, and she's enabling Fred's addiction."

"You just can't know everything, Jann. If smoking comforts Suzanne and Fred, and they can share comfort in that way, would you take that away from them?"

A fresh flow of tears delayed my response. "No. I guess it's really none of my business." Then, with more heat, "But it has consequences for my life too when they worsen their health."

Bob was sitting beside the healing table, one warm hand at the back of my heart center, one resting in the middle of my chest. "Just breathe in the energy that the anger generates." He waited awhile, and then went on. "Are the consequences of their smoking bad enough for you to break your bonds with Fred and Suzanne?"

"No, of course not."

"Then you are free to accept the situation just as it is and just as it is not." He paused again. "Is that right?"

I felt a melting in my heart space. "Yes. I love them both. We're in this together ... in sickness and in health." After a pause, I stretched and sat up.

"Thank you, Bob. It feels like I have a personal super hero who saved me one more time. You and the community you built around

Sequoia Center are such a gift to me and Fred. It's hard to believe eight years have passed since we met."

"You and Fred have been a gift the community," Bob said. "Thank you for serving as president of the board."

"It was a privilege. It taught me so much about myself and life with others on the spiritual journey. Bob, you allow us to follow the leadings of our souls without moralism, dogma or doctrine. That's your great gift. I especially appreciate the rituals that nurture our growth. It was great to have support and help to build a labyrinth and to make it the center of so many ceremonies."

"Again, that was a gift for all of us from you." Bob placed his hands in front of his chest, palms together, in the Hindu gesture of Namaste, meaning the divine in me greets the divine in you.

I mirrored the gesture with a slight bow. We hugged and went to find Fred. We sat at the table for a cup of tea and cookies.

Fred and I shared with Bob our excitement at making plans for our first overnight outing since Fred came home. I explained, "Five old Order colleagues are coming to stay at the Villa Waddell, where my women's group met in July. For the last five years, we've celebrated the New Year holiday together in Desert Hot Springs. This year the group postponed the celebration until Fred was out of the hospital and able to participate."

Fred grinned, "They're getting me out of the house."

Bob said, "Great. This brings closure to illness for both of you."

We clinked our tea cups in celebration.

* * *

On March 17, Linda and Milan Hamilton, Roger and Maxine Butcher, and Frank Knutson, Joan's ex-husband, came from southern California. We met at the old mansion. I was sorry that Joan, who usually joined us, couldn't come this time.

We seven old colleagues, now friends, conversed about family, community and global events. Fred and I lived in the same house with Milan and Linda in St. Louis twenty-five years previously. We all knew one another's flaws as well as gifts. The faces around the circle were as

familiar and dear to me as the aging faces of my two brothers. We laughed uproariously at remarks that would puzzle those who didn't share our common history.

We went out for dinner on Saturday, but mostly just sat around and talked in the comfortable parlor, colored in rich burgundy, gold and dark wood. The conversation was both light and profound, with a lot of emphasis on health care for the sake of what we'd all like to do with our remaining years. The brief gathering celebrated my recovery and cheered Fred on in his. I could never believe how wealthy we were in love and community.

On Sunday morning, Fred and I went for a stroll among the orange groves. I slowed to match Fred's halting gait as we walked down the country lane. We saw a rabbit run out of the grove on the right, cross the road in front of us, and run into the grove on the left. Not far behind followed two coyotes. We both exclaimed with sharp inhalations. When we were even with the row down which the animals ran, we paused to look. One of the coyotes stopped and looked back at us. We stood a long time acknowledging one another before the coyote trotted off. This encounter with Fred's totem animal was delightful, enlivening and meaningful.

"How long did he stand there?" I asked breathlessly.

"I don't know. It seemed like a long time. Maybe ten seconds." Fred grinned. "That was like so many dreams I've had, if only he'd said something."

"Didn't you hear him?"

Fred looked puzzled. "No."

"He said, 'Good job, Brother Fred.'" We laughed and I hugged my husband.

* * *

I was accustomed to having time in the morning to meditate, pray, exercise, read the newspaper and do a puzzle to stimulate my brain. Now, with Fred needing my help, I felt deprived. One night I dreamed of being in a large underground chamber that reminded me of Carlsbad Caverns. A medicine wheel was there. Wet, dripping crystals

surrounded everything. When I awoke, I lay still for a long time, thinking about the dream. To me, the medicine wheel represented the entire cosmos, with seven directions: the four points of the compass, the sky above, the earth below and my own sacred heart within. From this dream I developed an exercise/dance to do in my pool every morning, honoring the seven directions. It satisfied my need for meditation, prayer and physical exercise. The routine took half an hour and I loved it. At the end, I clapped a beat, turned in a circle and sang the *Chant to the Seven Directions*.

I wrote an e-mail to our beloved family and friends from several different communities on March 28:

This is Fred's 68th birthday. He and I feel very fortunate to have arrived at this milestone with body and soul still together. We anticipate with great pleasure the coming year and whatever joys and vicissitudes it brings. A year ago, we innocently looked forward to the year we have just completed, not dreaming it would bring cancer and a stroke and their accompanying changes. Had we foreseen the difficulties, would we have proceeded? Of course. While one would never ask for the kind of passage the last year has been, I am sincerely grateful for all that I have learned and experienced.

I had a three-month checkup with the oncologist yesterday, and everything appears fine. I feel great. My hair is about an inch long, mostly gray and curly.

One of my greatest blessings is the deep love I feel for Fred as I'm able to care for him. One gift I resolve to give him for his birthday is to stop spoiling him so that he can get back as much independence as possible. He grows stronger all the time. His balance and speech are greatly improved. This is the first week he hasn't had at least one doctor's appointment, though he'll still go for two sessions of physical therapy. I really look forward to becoming less familiar with our local health care providers.

Jann McGuire

We had a wonderful spring equinox celebration with our healing community at a camp in the foothills. The ceremonies and walks along the creek all reminded us that this is a time of birth, of new beginnings.

We hope all is well with you. We send love and blessings,

Jann

Epilogue

NEW REALITY

*For 52 years we sang our song:
In harmony and in dissonance,
In prosperity and poverty,
In sickness and health, we did our dance.*

*I confess it's tough to sing solo;
Your dear, clear voice anchored me on key.
But even mainstays can't endure
When Time gives way to Eternity.*

*My task is to learn to harmonize
With solitary reality.
I'm grateful you patterned the freedom
That allows me to sing authentically.*

*You can rest assured, my Beloved.
I am at home within my soul,
Joyful in Love, in community.
Just like you, I'm at One with the Whole.*

“Mr. Miracle,” as Fred's doctors called him, continued to improve following his stroke. We had another eight years to savor our grandchildren's growth and to enjoy travel again.

On August 3, 2002, Barry and Roxanne Bautista were married, bringing us another grandson, seven-year-old Jonathan. I was

privileged to perform the wedding. All our family gathered in a beautiful mountain setting in Idaho for the happy event.

On September 3, 2002, Suzanne died of a seizure at age 43. She'd said a few weeks previously that she'd never expected to live that long. I hope to gain enough serenity and objectivity to write of her life, for which I am profoundly grateful.

Fred and I called our entire fiftieth year, February 2005 to February 2006, our "Jubilee Year." In July we rented space in a rustic resort near Mineral King for a week. All our children and grandchildren and a number of friends joined us, to enjoy the place most sacred to our family.

We ended the jubilee with a trip to Copper Canyon, Mexico. Bob Goings had found a piece of property on the river near El Fuerte, Sinaloa. The Sequoia Center for Holistic Studies bought it to begin a conservation project. The entire board went to visit sacred sites and shamanic healers in the area the first week of 2006. Canyon-Paradise Tours grew from this.

A shamanic healing in Mexico took away Fred's nicotine habit. However, he fell ill later in the year, and surgery eventually revealed metastatic kidney cancer. He died serenely at home on January 31, 2008.

Fred, Suzanne and I loved to sing gospel songs. "Far Side Banks of Jordan" was a favorite. Its imagery comforts me. I love to imagine Suzy rising up with a shout and running to meet Fred. Then they both sat back down to draw pictures in the sand and wait for me. They often visit me in my dreams.



Printed in the USA
CPSIA information can be obtained
at www.ICGtesting.com
LVHW090757070224
771006LV00001B/218



9 781609 105891

In 1999, Jann was diagnosed with Stage III non-Hodgkins lymphoma and went through six rounds of chemotherapy. On the day of her last treatment, her husband Fred suffered a cerebral hemorrhage. Underlying these two crises was their daughter Suzanne's life-long struggle with epilepsy. The story tells of medical and alternative treatment choices, but emphasizes spiritual practices that guided Jann through this dark time after her doctor told her to get her affairs in order.

"Jann McGuire honored traditional western medicine while integrating alternative options to health, interweaving many approaches along her journey. Her courageous exploration is an inspiring and informative example to others seeking to embrace an integrated physical-spiritual outcome to full health."

— Betty Luceigh, Ph.D.



Jann McGuire, B.S., M.Ed., D.Min., was born in west Texas, where she met her husband, Fred, at Abilene Christian College. The Civil Rights Movement, Vietnam War and assassinations of the sixties shocked the couple out of their conservative mold. They uprooted their family to teach in Brazil, after which they worked in community development with the Ecumenical Institute/Institute of

Cultural Affairs. Jann then taught bilingual first grade and learning handicapped students for twenty years. After retiring, she studied massage, water shiatsu and energy healing as well as theology. She maintains a therapy practice in Lindsay, CA. She is a loving mother, devoted grandmother, gifted ceremonialist and community leader.

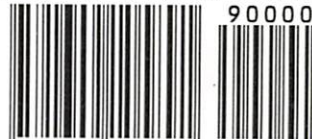
Author photo © Ginny Wilson

Cover images: © W. Krueger_Dreamstime.com(labyrinth);

© Igorkali_Dreamstime.com(peridot)

ISBN 978-1-60910-589-1

90000



9 781609 105891