

Depression



Floating Through It
Without drugs

An Alternative to

Anti-Depressants

Live a Life of Passion .com

By Gail Michael

DEDICATION

With deepest gratitude, I dedicate this book to my son for his undying love and support. I also want to thank my friends and loved ones who have been there for me on this long journey – both in the seen and unseen world.

I am forever grateful.

- Gail Michael

FOREWORD

I am a firm believer that everything in life serves a purpose and the purpose of the depth of my relationship with depression this time around was so that I could write about it. I am a writer who writes from my consciousness and my heart and not from my intellectual mind, because I cannot write about anything unless I can explain it through my emotional body.

When I first started this book, I believed that by the time the project was completed, I would have solved the mysteries of depression and that the demons I had wrestled with my whole life would be gone forever, never to return.

I was wrong in my assumption. I learned that depression is completely normal and that it comes and goes in our lives like the ebb and flow of the tides. I also learned that we have full control over it and how it affects us.

I learned that there are highs and lows in life, and “depression” is the word we use to describe the lows. They affect all human beings as we walk on this planet. They come and go and it is completely normal; and we need to know that there is nothing wrong with this except our judgment of it. It is all part of life and it’s something that we need to accept! On one end of the spectrum, we have happiness and joy, and on the other we have sadness and depression.

When we are facing difficult times in our lives or going through a transition, we feel as if we are being blanketed with depression against our will. It is okay that it’s happening and we need to give ourselves permission to feel it...because it is a normal reaction.

We will go in and out of it every time our lives change, or every time we change for that matter. And we do change...each and every day when we awaken we are different than we were the day before.

The key to my success in mastering my own depression, was – and still is - in learning who I am. I had to get to know myself intimately – my body rhythms, my moods, my diet, and my sleep patterns. I learned to know and

understand the things that change me, that bring me joy, that inspire me, that bore me, and that make me angry; and I also learned about those things I needed to clean up in my life so that I could move out of the lows and back into the highs...or at least the calm waters anyway.

I came to understand that being in calm waters is where we should be, because this is the balance in life – that place in the middle of the highs and the lows. And it is perfectly acceptable to be in that zone, for this is the place where nothing takes our energy from us. There are no distractions, so whatever we focus on, we can create.

I learned that I needed to be more forgiving of myself as if I was my own unconditionally loving parent. I learned that it was time to get over what I perceived was done to me and to start doing what I have always wanted someone else to do for me – to love me with such depth, and give me all that I want in this lifetime, for it is now my time.

And now is your time as well – to give yourself permission to have the life you want, whatever that means to you. One step toward this is to acknowledge when you are feeling low, when you are feeling depressed. Don't judge it.

Acknowledge it. Allow it. Accept it.

Understand it. Know it intimately, and come to understand when and how it started. Once you identify the reason for it, you'll be able to move through it more quickly and get on with the happiness in your life that you probably can't feel right now.

Hopefully, by sharing my stories with you and by sharing some of the alternative methods I have used and continue to use to get through the ebb and flow of my depression, it will help you get through those nights as you lie in your bed reviewing every dark recess of your mind that doesn't sleep.

Does it all sound crazy? Yes, but we are not crazy when we find ourselves in this place...only our runaway thoughts are. We can continue to keep pulling at that thread with our own judgment and watch the fabric of our lives and our sanity unravel; or we can make the choice to look at our situation differently and open up to another possibility.

So now is the time to FORGIVE your self and get off the spiral staircase of depression. You CAN and WILL be able to maintain a sustainable level of happiness in your life – once you UNDERSTAND YOU...just as I did.

And the next time you feel it calling to you to come out and play, you will relax into it, and find yourself swimming upward until you reach the surface and are floating on top...floating through it with ease.

During your journey through life, you have to remember that you are not alone and you are definitely not crazy. And if you are reading this book, then you have just announced to the universe,

“Enough! I will understand this and get through it!”

You can do this, you know. I have confidence in you.

Thank you for your courage, and let's get to it!

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PROLOGUE

I didn't want to write about this for the longest time, but knew I had to before I could move on with my life. The heaviness that had enveloped me wouldn't leave until I accepted the fact that I was depressed. I didn't want to admit this; for to me, it was like admitting I was an alcoholic or a drug user. I think it's a fear many of us have inside our heads that we will be punished because we have done something wrong, that we have failed, or that we are broken... funny how our minds work.

I stopped and contemplated the word depression and what it actually meant, and I came up with this:

“Depression is the condition that happens to us when we suppress or push down whatever is trying to come up and express itself to us. The dictionary defines it as: *a reduction in activity, amount, quality, or force, and a lowering of vitality.*”

Yes, not only are we pushing down whatever is trying to surface in our conscious minds, but we are also suppressing our life force energy and our vitality when we are depressing parts of our inner thoughts and emotions. So not only are we fighting the natural flow of thought and energy but we are also experiencing diminished life force energy and feel lethargic.

But we shouldn't beat ourselves up. It's a natural reaction that we all go through.

By sharing my own experiences with deep depression, my hope is that I can give you a different perspective on how to cope with yours. And please, I am not trying to come across as if I know everything. I am only trying to share what worked for me in each situation.

So please be patient as you read through all of this. Try and have an open mind in those places where it seems as if I've gone off the deep end. Maybe I have. But at least I have made peace with my own insanity and am happy with my life.

What do you have to lose?



My depression had taken me over, but I still couldn't deal with it and didn't have the energy to. I wanted it to go away so I could continue on with my life; but after months of fighting it, I finally let go and allowed it to take hold of me and get lost in it, for I needed to understand it. I also didn't have the energy to fight it any longer.

I had become terrorized by it...mesmerized...but not in a positive way. Getting out of bed in the morning was a chore now and sleep came way too easily. I preferred it to anything else in my life – even food. It had taken me over as if it was a greedy lover not wanting to share me with the world. I was trapped by its shackles and invisible walls that imprisoned my mind.

In my work and as a writer, I always thought outside the box, but now, that was no longer possible. It was as if my mind was trapped inside this haze that was holding me hostage. It wouldn't allow me to think or make decisions and my creativity was gone. It wouldn't let me smile or feel anything. It was as if it had its fingers wrapped around those tiny neurotransmitters inside my brain that were trying to send signals out to the rest of me.

I was in such a state...and wondered what had changed. Where had it come from? Nothing had really changed in my life except the way my mind processed things these days. Had life been tough lately? Yes, but it had been for a year now.

I knew it wouldn't be easy, for I had made the decision to move from one country to another...and I had come back to a much more chaotic lifestyle. I was missing the simplicity and the peace that I had created for myself in Italy.

It was a huge move. But I was ready for the challenge. I knew I could and would adjust because I had the ability to do so as I had done so many times in my life. Change was nothing for me! I had always had the ability to pull myself up by the bootstraps, but now – now this emptiness...this thing called depression. It had stunned me into inactivity.

I could no longer feel anything. Nothing outside of me could penetrate this hard shell I was encased in and I was emitting no emotion or energy to the outside world. It was as if I was disconnected from everything in my life.

I couldn't function, but I didn't want to take antidepressants because of the stigma, the judgment that came with taking them. I believed that I could conquer anything without drugs...except that one time...which is a story for another time...

The other day, I heard on the news that antidepressants lead to "artificial happiness"...what an odd description, I thought. I wondered if our society had gone mad! If the use of antidepressants had become such a trend, did that mean that many others were having difficulty trying to deal with their lives just as I was? So I wasn't alone after all...

I thought about the state of the world, the poverty, the hunger, the war, the fear of terrorism, the struggle. I thought about how we are all so connected and how if one person feels anxious, sad or depressed, than many of us feel it too because of our connection...our collective consciousness...the connection of human souls.

Ah...I realized I was no longer alone and I wasn't crazy after all, because depression had become a norm in our society. Maybe more people were starting to talk about it so there was no longer a stigma attached to it.

After months of feeling so low I could hardly get out of bed, I became desperate. I contemplated taking antidepressants for awhile, and rationalized that it would just be until I got a handle on things, and got to the bottom of it. I had this habit of always trying to figure things out, so I needed to figure this out. Why had it happened to me?

But quickly, I changed my mind about taking the drug. My justification was that I wanted real happiness – not the artificial kind. I thought that if I tried hard enough, maybe I could manifest it on my own – the happiness that is. But as hard as I tried, it never came.

I became crazy...contemplating becoming its lover...becoming one with it...diving into it and letting it take hold of me. Maybe if I stopped fighting it, then it would feel secure enough to let me go...set me free. What did I have to lose? It couldn't get much worse than this.

I didn't understand how I, a highly intellectual and successful woman could possibly have become depressed, spinning out of control. Yes, out of control. I no longer had control over my conscious mind or my body. Now, it was time to forgive myself by accepting it, and find a way to move through it instead of fighting it as I had been doing.

So I forced myself to do anything and everything that had once evoked emotion and passion in me. I walked outside into the night air trying to remove the emptiness inside me. I stood there forcing myself to feel – as the wind from the sea came up and tossed my hair so that it brushed across my cheek. I felt it on the surface, but I didn't really feel it...not like I had in the past.

You see, I used to be able to merge with the wind, become one with it. I felt it as if it was me and I was it, the wind. It was a love affair I had always known and participated in. *“The wind...he promised me he would come on the wind, and when he called, I would come and be with him...”*

But now this...I barely felt it. I tried, to remember the feeling. I thought that if I held my breath and squeezed my eyes shut, I would be able to bring it back to me somehow. But nothing came.

I looked upward and saw the stars. I used to speak to them and always heard them as they spoke back to me. I even shared our conversations with my closest friends. They knew I was a dreamer, an optimist, and a writer so they listened to me and understood. Where were these crazy passionate parts of me now? Where had they gone? They had existed once, really...but now...I hoped they were only sleeping and that they would awaken soon.

The stars sat there in the night sky, suspended...as if they were only lights hung on a string; their brilliance lost through my haze of depression. They barely spoke to me now as if they were drugged...or was I the one who was drugged? What were they saying to me? I felt groggy, only wanting to sleep.

Where had I gone?

I heard the waves crashing in the distance, against a shore that had waited for me breathlessly. I too used to wait breathlessly, for I was the lover once. Now, I was only a shell. I could feel nothing but emptiness...the void.

Ha! The VOID...They say that when you reach it – sit inside it, you become one with it and find enlightenment or self-realization or something. Ha! Whoever “they” are probably don’t even realize there are lots of caverns inside the VOID...so many of them...

And this place was one of them. Inside, it was painful without pain. Does that make any sense? It hurt, but it didn’t. It was quiet but it wasn’t. It was peaceful – or did I just confuse that with the lethargy that I felt?

If you have been depressed, I am sure you understand what I write.

My world was turned upside down. What was normal? What was real? What was I feeling? I couldn’t identify any of it, because I couldn’t really feel anything. I would have reached out, but I felt as if my arms were too short, or my loved ones were too far away. No energy... Oh, what’s the use? It’s not so bad being here – lying down here...in the VOID.

No one would understand unless they had visited this place before, at least once. And if they had, I bet they would have run like hell to escape it or push it out of their minds denying they were ever there as if it would brand them insane or unstable for life!

But the truth is, everyone becomes depressed at some point in their lives...and why? What does it all mean?

DEPRESSION MANIFESTS FOR TWO REASONS

It finally came to me that there are only two reasons for depression in my opinion: 1) imbalances in the physical body, and 2) those created by the mind. It's that simple. These two things (the mind and the body) are the seat of creation for all forms of depression.

Now that you know this, it will be much easier to deal with.

I know you are probably thinking, “*Okay. Why do I need to read any further?*” Because you need to understand how to change the course of your depression and take the reins to your life back.

I have listed thirty-two scenarios (of depression) into two categories: That Which the Mind Creates and Balance in the Human Body.

Some of these scenarios should be in both sections because they overlap. For example, if your depression is hereditary, your state could be worsened by your mind and your beliefs. You could believe you will have to live with this for the rest of your life, doomed to a life like your mother or father. This is so far from the truth because you can create or change anything with your mind...hence the reason for my title for this section: That Which the Mind Creates.

You will find the emotion called “anger” in the That Which the Mind Creates section because it is created by the mind. But it also belongs in the Balance in the Human Body section because if stuffed or suppressed and not expressed in a healthy way so that it can be released, anger will have a long-term negative affect on the body.

Let's move on for more clarity...

Reason I – THAT WHICH THE MIND CREATES

I) - LIFE

Did you ever think that maybe your depression was just how life is sometimes? You know, like the under-belly...the part we don't want to face? Maybe it's normal to feel so low that we can't feel the sun or the wind upon our faces. Maybe it's perfectly normal that we can't feel the passion of a kiss. Maybe... sometimes, our body, our mind, and our spirit...just want to shut down and take a break. Maybe we need to give ourselves permission to do so. Maybe if we went with it, we could give it a rest and then we would heal it more quickly and in a healthier way...

Then a thought came to me. Without contrast in the world, we can't truly understand, appreciate, and really feel the good things in life. I know it sounds too simple, but it's true. Sadness, grief, loneliness and depression are all expressions of life, just as happiness, joy, hope and peace are. And without these contrasting emotions, we wouldn't realize how good life is. Looking at it from this perspective gave me hope – just what I needed to get through this.

2. ANXIETY

This subject is so vast that it deserves its own book; but I am only going to touch on it from my own personal experience. Plenty of research has been done on anxiety by credentialed medical professionals and I am not one of them. The internet is a great resource for everything and I have added a few links regarding anxiety at the end of this book.

I have suffered with anxiety attacks throughout my life, although not to the extent that one of my loved ones is currently experiencing. But first about my own...

Ten years ago, I was taken to the emergency room because I thought I was having a heart attack. At that time in my life, it was triggered by a fear of intimacy because I was falling in love...funny how powerful our minds are.

In order to stop the attacks, I had to get to the root cause and try to heal the fear. I learned that we all have fears and it is completely normal. It is part of life. The key to my success in controlling or conquering them was to take the steps to understanding my fears and my self. Even if they were only baby steps, they were still steps nonetheless, and they led me to my healing at that time.

Was I cured 100% meaning that I have never had another anxiety attack? No. I had not experienced one for ten years, but recently started to have them again. Why? What was the root cause? Once again, it was my fear of intimacy...I was falling in love again. If you understood my background and my childhood, you would understand my fears. This relationship was deeper and more intimate than any I have ever experienced. Each time I allow myself to go deeper into a relationship and into love, my fears come up. But I have learned how to deal with them. The rewards are great and I am so fortunate that I am able to do the work.

At the time of these attacks, I went into the darkest recesses of my mind to find out where they had come from. And once I had identified and traveled back to that time and place when they first started, all my fears and the anxiety rose up. I prayed for strength and understanding. I went to that soft place I have where I feel comforted. It is with the angels, as they hold me in their arms comforting me like a mother does with her child. They tell me I can do this, talking me off the wire of anxiety.

And the attacks stopped. Once I became aware of what was causing them, I allowed myself to deal with my feelings with no judgment, and accepted who I was...a woman with intimacy issues...then I was able to love myself. I gave myself permission to work through them at my own pace. Once I surrendered to myself, my fears stopped, and I have not had one since.

Will I have another in my life? I am sure I will. Anxiety attacks are my body's way of shutting down when I come face-to-face with fear. But at least I have learned how to confront them and offer support to myself so that I can move through them.

As I write this book, I am supporting a loved one who is suffering from anxiety. Because of it, I have read and researched numerous articles and books on the subject. I was amazed to find out that there are so many different beliefs on the causes of anxiety and its relationship with depression.

Some believe that depression causes anxiety while others believe anxiety causes depression. I read that anxiety can be a side effect caused by certain medications or even the result of mixed medications. You would be amazed at the number of people in our society who are on more than one medication, and they have not been told, or are not even aware of how it is affecting their mood, behavior, hormonal balance, brain chemistry or the chemical balance in their bodies.

Our physical body is a miraculous machine that can rejuvenate and heal itself over and over again as long as we pay attention to its signals and warning signs. If we are having an abnormal reaction, then it is trying to get our attention – trying to tell us that something is not right.

After reading that anxiety is a symptom of depression, I asked my loved one if he was depressed. He contemplated this and admitted he was. We talked about the reasons why and how we could change it by making some decisions in his life. I also told him that he was going to be all right and there was nothing wrong with him. I reassured him that he was loved. Then we talked about ways to diminish the attacks which I speak about below. His attacks soon stopped and it has been over a year since he has had one.

I started to question people I knew and was amazed by how many had experienced anxiety in their lives. One woman told me that when she experiences attacks, the only thing that calms her down and stops them is to place ice cold water or a cold compress on her chest.

I talked with a man who had suffered for years from severe panic attacks, to the point where he could hardly function. With all the therapies and techniques he had studied and learned there was one in particular that had helped him the most. A therapist had taught him to envision something that made him feel warm and safe. He used a childhood memory. He envisioned himself sitting on his family's dock on the lake at sunrise when the water was calm and there was no sound. He had his pole in the water waiting for

the fish to bite, and that was the only sound he heard. This thought still triggers him into calmness immediately.

By the way, all of the people I know in my life who have suffered with anxiety attacks are extremely smart and many of them have high IQs. There's that mind thing again. We spend lots of time in our heads trying to analyze and figure things out. It is a human condition and it is completely normal. We just have to learn how to harness the energy.

There is also a technique called cognitive behavioral therapy that helps you change negative self-talk. Instead of saying, "*I can't handle this! I'm going to have an attack!*" Instead, you say, "*I can handle this. I feel perfectly calm.*" Ask your therapist about this technique if he or she has not already talked with you about its benefits.

During the time I was supporting my loved one, his doctor tried different medications that were commonly prescribed for anxiety attacks, (Xanax, Ativan and Klonopin). But they were so strong that all he wanted to do was to sit and stare into space or go to sleep. He made the decision that he no longer wanted to use these drugs because he didn't like the way they made him feel. We finally started using natural herbs. But you need to speak with your doctor or a naturopath before using them.

Diet is also important in treating anxiety. All those stimulants that they say are not good for you, are truly not and could trigger an anxiety attack: sugar, caffeine, alcohol, nicotine, food additives, etc. There are teas, essential oils and herbs that will support you through these times such as GABA, Kava, chamomile, valerian, B vitamins, lavender, etc. I have used most of these. I am also a huge believer in essential oils and there are many blends out there that work as well such as "Peace and Calming" and "Sacred Mountain." I put these on my heart and my neck where I can smell them and they soothe me.

Learning biofeedback or relaxation techniques for stress reduction and to stop an attack can help tremendously. I liken it to the breathing techniques they teach women for childbirth. Biofeedback also talks the mind into knowing that you can handle it.

Exercise is another key. It moves stuck energies out of the body, including the fear and the depression. It also reduces skeletal muscle tension and

metabolizes adrenalin and thyroxin in the bloodstream...all positive things that lead to balance in the body and mind.

Above all else, you must get to the root cause. Why are you feeling anxious? What can you do to change your mindset and your life? You are not alone in this you know; for you would be surprised as to how many people out there have suffered with anxiety.

3. DECISIONS

There could be other reasons depression is taking hold of you. Are you in a waiting mode these days? Are you waiting for your ship to come in? Are you waiting to be acknowledged by someone? Are you waiting for someone to love you or waiting for your lover to call, but he or she always seems to forget and you are alone for hours with your cell phone in hand waiting for it to vibrate? Are you waiting for your husband or wife to change and to treat you with more respect? Are you waiting for your job or your boss to change?

You could find yourself waiting forever, with nothing but wasted days to mark your time; and every day you live will feel the same as the last - filled with feelings of disappointment, despair, rejection, anxiety and ultimately, unfulfillment.

It's time to say "ENOUGH!"

Take your power back. How? Make a decision. I know it's not easy, but it is the only way. You have to get off the fence.

Maybe it's difficult and complicated – even life-changing because you're thinking about divorce, a move, changing your job, stopping a love affair, or something else that will impact you in a big way. Maybe it's too daunting to get your head around and it's bringing up fear for you. This is perfectly normal.

These are all really big adjustments so it makes perfect sense that you need to take your time in order to make the right decision. Just know that and accept it. Don't beat yourself up – give yourself some time. Maybe you can

put a timeframe on it and tell yourself that within thirty days, you WILL make a decision. Over the next thirty days, you will find some peace; and at the end of the allotted time, once you make your decision, your depression will turn into relief and all will be well.

But DO make the decision soon...for your own sanity. You have to get off the fence and choose what side you want to be on: someone else's or your own? I promise you, if this is what has caused your depression, it will dissipate as if it never really existed and was only your imagination.

Either way, be more forgiving of yourself. Remember, you are your own loving parent now.

4. LOSS

Maybe you have just suffered a loss which is enough to put anyone into a tailspin. This is a significant event that needs to be acknowledged and embraced. It could have been the loss of a marriage, a partner, a loved one, a child, a pet, a job, a home...anyone or anything that you loved. You could have been diagnosed with cancer or with a debilitating illness. You could have just had surgery. This too is a loss of not only consciousness through anesthesia, but also a loss of perfect health and balance in the physical body.

We will talk about some of these losses as we move through this book.

5. DEATH – A CHANGING OF FORM

If it is the death of a loved one, I am so sorry for your loss, for I have experienced this grief many times in my life. It changes you forever. You will never be the same and life will never go back to that place again, where he or she is with you and you can reach out and touch them or take them in your arms.

But there is hope...always hope. First, you have to believe that there is a force larger than you - a life force that all things come from and return to. I

know for some of you, it's a stretch, but I've been there – seen it – touched it, and the experience has saved my own life so many times.

When I have experienced grief from losing a loved one, I find myself in another cavern in the VOID – one where LOVE lives on inside me. Sounds confusing, but of course I believe the void is inside me...

And inside of it, there are beings of love, light and hope that are with me always. They hold my hands, catch my tears as I weep, rub my back and caress my heart as they whisper in my ear asking me to let them help. They can't help you unless you ask them for it is a law of the universe... **They need permission from you because they cannot interfere with your free will.**

You don't have to go through this alone. Many of us have been taught through religious misinterpretation, that we are alone - separate from God - because he is so divine that we need to win his favor by becoming the perfect being.

Some of us are also taught that if an angel or loved one comes to us from the other side, that he or she is the devil or Satan in disguise, cloaked in wings to fool us. These are the impressions that were seared into me through my own religious upbringing. But now I know that you have to believe in the devil, and you also have to believe that we are separate from God - to believe these things.

I believe we are one with God and that He is inside each one of us; therefore, we are divine energy. I also believe that not only are we NOT ALONE as we walk this path, but that we have legions of angels, ancestors, loved ones, guides, seers, and saints that walk with us on the other side of the veil, as I like to call it.

I like that term, **the Veil** because it is like a soft film where light seeps through similar to a thin mesh curtain. It blows in the breeze and many of us can catch glimpses of those beings as they come near us. They are all love and light. There are no evil ones from where I sit. And when our loved ones die, the only place they go to is the other side where only love and light reside. You can call it heaven. I call it paradise...paradiso. You see, I don't believe in hell because it is a religious belief.

I am a spirit in a human body practicing how to be human. I am not a human practicing religion.

Back to the loss of a loved one –

Besides your legion of angels or guides, you still have the loved one you have just lost. Whether they have ceased existing in the physical plane through death or just left your relationship and are still physically alive, they are still with you always – they have only changed form.

Yes, we are all connected. Even if they are still alive...you see we are so interconnected in the unseen realms, that little string-lets hold us all together. I know it's hard to digest, this new idea; but if you want to understand your depression, you have to try and open your mind to this fact.

We are so attached to one another that we feel their pain when they are suffering. We feel their depression when they are depressed. We feel all of it. Most times, when we are depressed, it's not even ours! Yes - it is not even ours sometimes. There is so much to understand.

6. WHEN IT IS NOT YOURS

Have you ever gone to sleep in a happy mood only to awaken deeply depressed? When you awaken in the morning depressed, **IT IS NOT YOURS!** The depression belongs to someone else! You are not crazy! It's just how the world and this life is.

Think of us as the Borg from Star Trek. I know it sounds creepy...but think of us all connected in a good way, not a bad way. If one of us feels weak, we all feel it to some extent. If one feels sadness or fear, than the rest of us feel it as well. It's just a matter of how tuned in we are to the energies of the rest of the world that defines how deeply it will affect us.

Think about the atrocities of war. There have been so many in our evolution. Remember September 11, 2001? It was a horrific and devastating time, not only for those families who lost their loved ones, but for the rest of the world as well. Why? Because we felt their sadness, their

grief, their loss, their depression...we buckled and fell to our knees. We felt their pain and sorrow.

I believe there were two positive things that came from that experience – if you move beyond your grief to try and make any sense of it. Those souls who died that day, not only brought all of us together in love and compassion, but they also assisted us – those of us who had closed hearts or maybe were too caught up in our own lives to notice the world outside of our own - and opened our hearts so deeply that all we felt was love for humanity for a time. That experience brought higher purpose and meaning to all of us and I thank them deeply for that.

But back to that day...do you remember how you were immediately struck, not only by horror, but by grief, loss and sorrow? Most of you, probably didn't even know those who gave up their lives that day. But you grieved as if you did. So you see...we are all connected.

That's why divorce is so hard. You are so connected that your ex-spouse is with you always it seems, even after you divorce. You can't seem to shake them. You feel their anger, their sadness and their fears of separation. You feel their loneliness...their longing for you at times, pulling at you as if they want to imprison you. And it is all normal - as crazy as it sounds.

You have to remember at these times, that we as humans are all doing the best we can. Most things are not intentional...they just happen. So your loved one that you have just separated from is doing the best he or she can to survive the trauma and live without you in his or her every day life. Knowing this will help you understand it and deal with it.

CLEANSING AND PROTECTING YOURSELF

So how do you protect yourself from this emotional barrage? It might sound hokey, but you are looking for a better way right...an alternative to taking anti-depressants or other drugs?

Open up your mind here...

When you start to feel as if you are taking on someone else's stuff, do the exercise below. It may seem like too many steps at first to memorize, but print these two pages. Once you practice them a few times, they will start to come to you easily when you need to use them.

Clearing Energies

1. Sit comfortably and close your eyes (unless you are sitting with someone in conversation and they are talking to you. Then you can keep your eyes open and do the exercise without them knowing).
2. Envision golden white-light raining down upon you, clearing out and washing away, any and all energies. (15 - 30 seconds)
3. Follow this with a lavender flame that engulfs you and the space around you burning off everything that is left. You are safe. (15 – 30 seconds)
4. See yourself lying down, and envision a cord attached to your naval area grounding you, coming out from your body and entering into the core of the earth. This is your grounding cord. Its color will come to you as you do it the first time. Just go with it. (15 seconds)
5. Now see yourself in a standing position with a waterfall of white light pouring down into the top of your head and emptying out through the soles of your feet. At the same time, there is another waterfall moving upward through the soles of your feet and out through the top of your head. No gravity... (15 seconds)

Expand your mind to all possibilities...no gravity...why not?

6. Now you see yourself lying down again, and there are beautiful roses everywhere in the skies and on the earth, above and below you. Envision yourself removing all the little string-lets that are connecting you to others, although you cannot see who they are. No mind...it doesn't matter.

Very gently, remove them from your back, your heart, your head, your torso, your sexuality, your hands and even your toes. Circle your entire body removing these string-lets, and send them into the air to connect with the roses. The roses will cover them and gently move them upward until they evaporate and disappear. (30-45

seconds)

7. Then, wrap yourself up in the colors that come to you...whatever color or colors you envision. They can be one, two, or three together, or even a rainbow of colors. They are swirling in and out and all around you, in through the holes that were left when the string-lets were removed. Now you are wrapped up and protected in a cocoon of color and light. (15 – 30 seconds)

8. Lastly, encase yourself in alabaster or granite or a stone of your choice. (10 seconds)

This will keep you protected from other people's energies as they naturally reach out to you. Sometimes, it is just an emotional conversation. It could happen at work with a co-worker or boss. Or it could be a friend or lover. And remember, it is never intentional when they do so. Sometimes, all it takes is a thought, a remembrance or a longing.

It takes me just a few minutes every day to perform this visualization exercise and it is so worth the time. It has given me back my sanity to know that I am not crazy and that when depression strikes, it is not always mine. I have even felt my spirit and my energy level lift within a matter of minutes after doing this exercise.

7. PHYSICAL DEATH

Let's get back to your loss if it is by death. I'm sorry for your loss. What do we say to someone who has lost a loved one? Telling you that the one who has passed is in the hands of God or that they are better off (if they were ill and in pain) doesn't cut it. It doesn't matter what we say, for you can't feel our empathy and concern anyway. You are numb, grieving, depressed, and suffering a loss in this, your physical reality.

Right now, you don't care to be told that they are still connected to you, and that they are only in another form which is their spirit body. ***“Who cares,” you cry. “They are not with me here and now in my physical world!”***

Yes, it's true. They aren't, and you will never go back to that place again when they were with you and you could touch their skin, feel their breath upon your face, or make love to them in the physical. And if it was your child that you lost to death, God help us, for this is far crueler. Can you survive?

Yes, you can. Will it be easy? No. Some days, you will want to give up. But don't. There are so many others in the world that have suffered the same as you. Reach out to them when you are ready. In doing so, it will not only help you, but it will also help them, for there is healing in the sharing. You need support and you need to talk about it to someone who understands. You need to share the depths of your loss; after all, you have to in order to survive it yourself. You can't face this one alone, for it is far too big.

So remember there are those in the unseen realms that you can call forth to be with you always, even as you lie in your bed at night. They will ease your pain and soothe your broken heart, but you have to ask them before they are allowed to come to you and comfort you.

You can also pray for your loved one to come to you in your dreams so that you can at least be with them there, where your human mind can bring the encounter into your consciousness when you awaken.

I have called forth my mother to visit me in this manner and she has come and supported me. When I awoke, I remembered her hug, her touch and her love as if she had been in my physical reality instead of my dream world.

And finally – grieve. Allow it to engulf you, for in order to get through it, it all has to come up and out. And when you are ready to talk to someone, gather your friends, your family close to you and talk with them. Find a support group or find someone who has had a loss such as yours. They will need you as much as you need them for there is comfort in this.

Write letters to your loved one, a journal of sorts, and just know that they will be looking over your shoulder as your tears write the story. They will be touched as they read your pages; and if you are open, you might feel their arms around you as they try to console you.

Plant a tree or a garden of flowers in memory of them. Hold a private ceremony for yourself – alone – just you, and call your loved one forth to be

with you as you acknowledge them during their transition into the next realm. And tell them you're scared to be left behind. They will comfort you, for they can't move on until you are accepting of their passage.

And yes, they are still here with you. The difference is that now there is a thin veil called time and space between you. They have only moved into the next realm we call Heaven, but they call it Life. To us, it is the Afterlife; but from where they now sit, it is the True Life.

I wrote a book once and described the transition we call Death as someone had described it to me:

“I believe we are born as humans to gain the power of compassion and perfect the ability to give love to all living things and receive love. Once these lessons are learned, we are ready to make our transition.

A baby bird is surrounded by a shell which protects his little body until he is ready to be born into the world. Similarly, a human body is a shell that protects the spirit until it is ready at death to be born into the spirit world.

Your spirit is captured in the human egg, until upon death you achieve consciousness, awakening, and compassion.

The meaning of death is to be born spiritually; so in effect, it is birth.

To be born as a human is our human birth and to die as a human is our spirit birth.

Heaven is about happiness and joy, compassion and peace. The reason we don't remember life after death once we are born, is because it is so beautiful and so filled with happiness, love, peace and beauty, that we would not stay here on planet earth; but instead, shed our bodies, die, and leave immediately.”

So you see – our loved ones are in a beautiful place now where there is no pain and no sorrow – only Love. And they can look down upon you and see all that you are going through. They know you are at a loss without them, so communicate with them - reach out to them.

In accepting that they are still with you and connected to you, makes it a little easier as you try to cope. Only time will help fade the scars that have been etched upon your soul, by their loss.

8. AGING

This is something we all go through in our lives, and some face it with much more dignity and ease than others. Although I am open and accepting of my age, it is still not easy watching my physical beauty fall, sag, wrinkle, and fade away. Where has that beautiful body gone that is now covered with a wrinkled old overcoat? Where has the color gone in those lips and on those cheeks? Where have those almond shaped eyes gone as they become rounded without shape? And why is everything sagging suddenly? It happened overnight! I didn't look like this yesterday!

You can laugh a little, but age is not for the faint of heart. I believe that the reason we lose clarity of vision is to remove the harsh lines from our sight. Without our glasses, we can't see the wrinkles, the sagging, or the changes. At least I can't! The only thing I can do is accept it and laugh. Did you know when you smile, your wrinkles don't show? Your audience is only looking at your smile and how your eyes light up anyway.

Seriously...don't try to be someone you're not. If you're fifty or sixty and still love twenty and thirty year-old girls or boys, just be aware that they might also be attracted to other twenty and thirty year-old girls or boys and not fifty or sixty year-olds. Youth, after all, is a beautiful thing. Don't be disappointed. Be a realist. I know it's hard because I too am a romantic and not a realist.

I don't go out with my girlfriends expecting the twenty and thirty year-old boys will find me attractive enough to ask me out! I would be disappointed and that disappointment would throw me into judgment and then depression. I no longer do this to myself. If something hurts, then don't keep doing it expecting a different outcome. And when you have finally mastered this, it is called the wisdom of the ages.

Seriously, instead, I have accepted my age and my aging body. I acknowledge it and accept that my outer beauty has changed. I now focus on my good qualities, like the way the backs of my hands and the wrinkles around my eyes show my life. I still have my blue eyes and they smile when I am happy with myself.

I love that I can walk every day without difficulty and that I can touch things with my fingers and feel them again. I love that I have come so close to death those few times in my life so that now I can love life and be thankful for my old age that I have lived to thus far. I am thankful for the knowledge I have gained and I feel its inner wisdom and beauty shine out like a beacon from deep within me – from that place in the VOID that I have grown to love.

I also love that everything has grown blurry and I can't see all the sharp edges in life without my glasses! That's why I hate to wear them all the time. Everyone looks beautiful from where I sit when I don't have them on!

You know, all you have to do to stop the aging is to change YOU. Change your attitude. Love your SELF.

And if you need a little reinforcement, hang around with the opposite sex your own age for a bit and look at yourself through their eyes. They will tell you how beautiful you are and how you look so young to them. They will love you like you dream to be loved. Why? Because they have been where you are and share your vantage point. And from there, they only see the beauty in things for they have all the beauty and the wisdom of the ages inside them as you do.

And once you master this – the changing of your own self, the twenty and thirty year-old men or women will smile at you as you walk by, because they want what you have. They will see beyond your wrinkles and your sagging body, and only see that light in your eyes, the smile on your face, the skip in your step, and feel the beating of your heart. Trust me on this one!

9. SIGNIFICANT EMOTIONAL EVENT

Another possibility that could lead you down the path of depression is an event that has jolted you like an electrocution.

I know this might sound a little strange, but have you had a significant emotional event rock your world lately or shake you to the core? These are more difficult to define, and many events fall into this category. Have you been ridiculed, publicly humiliated, rejected by someone you love, or fired from a job? There are so many more events that fall into this category, but we will only speak of these few.

The only way I can define it is by describing how you must have felt. Did you find yourself so shaken that you could not get over the incident for days...maybe weeks? And then you found that you weren't the same person afterwards. The way you relate to your world now is far different than before the event happened. You feel alone as if you have lost your best friend, your ally. You no longer feel strong enough and self-assured enough to fight the world. That's the kind of event that shakes you deeply enough to throw you into depression.

You see, I believe that our egos are a wonderful thing. It is part of who we are and it defines our personality. I feel it protects us when we need protection, makes us feel powerful, and aids us when we have tough choices to make. If our egos are attacked or assassinated, then we are left feeling emotionally helpless and alone.

Almost twenty years ago, I had someone show me my big ego and I was crushed, devastated, because I was so naive and somewhat innocent at the time. It changed me forever. I was lost and confused as I saw my identity crumble and fall away. It took years before I finally got over it. But it was also the best thing that could have ever happened to me. It catapulted me forward into the person I am today, open and secure in who I now am; and I am no longer afraid of things. I no longer feel the need to wear that heavy suit of armor to protect myself.

It happened to me more than once, but after the first time, the others were not as hard to deal with. Why? Because I finally got it. I finally understood that these significant emotional events only happen when I am not paying attention to the signs that have come before me. In the past, I had oftentimes allowed only my ego to listen and take direction in life instead of my true self – my Source.

Significant emotional events will always be the last resort to getting your attention.

The key to getting through them is to forgive you! **FORGIVE YOURSELF!** You are a magnificent being who has done incredible things and you have done the best you could...always the best you could at any given moment. I truly believe this. So go easy on yourself. You are still loved. You're just licking your wounds right now. It takes time, but you'll heal and you'll be better for it and more open to life in the future.

And, smile! It's over. Now, in the forgiving of your own self, the depression will lift.

10. ANGER

Then, there is anger. I have often mistaken my anger for depression until I contemplated it further.

Many times when we're not happy in life, we blame ourselves and we beat ourselves up. God, we're so cruel! Why is it so easy to forgive others but we can't seem to forgive ourselves?

Depression is sometimes suppressed anger. When we're angry with someone else, we're actually angry with our selves really...not them. You see, human beings are a reflection of us...they are our mirrored-self. We are conditioned to blame everyone else, but it is actually all about us.

We have certain expectations of others in life and we also have certain expectations of ourselves; and it's all tied into the ego. We want to be the best we can be: the smartest, the thinnest, the most pleasing to look at, the most successful with the best marriage and the most beautiful and successful

children. We want to be recognized, loved and accepted, and we want life to go according to our plan and no one else's. We want it to be on our terms – or at least our egos do.

We always want to know where we are going and we want to be in complete control each and every day of our lives. We have a plan, a roadmap that we have created in our minds, and when suddenly we find ourselves faced with a change in direction on that map, we become agitated and have a difficult time dealing with it...some have more difficulty than others, and of course this is all tied into the ego. We think we know exactly what we want when maybe it's not about what we want, but it's about what's best for us – what's best for our higher good.

Maybe we need to live in this situation “for now,” with no action required yet. Maybe we need to go through this “uncomfortability” in our relationship or marriage “right now,” and no action is required, except to support our partner.

Maybe we're meant to cancel the plans we had for this dreamy vacation that we've been working toward, planned for so carefully, and waited for forever...and instead, stay put and work and sleep and stay put and work and sleep....how long...stay put and work and sleep...how depressing!

See how easy it is to fall into? You're stuffing the anger at not being able to go as planned. You're pissed! But you show up for work every day and go through the motions, holding your breath hoping that a miracle will happen and your vacation will magically appear.

But it doesn't, and you're stuck between the cogs in the wheel called life and you can't get off. So instead, you sleep more, or sit home and lick the wounds that are now etched upon your ego. I say your ego, because your SELF should be happy wherever you are if you are living in the moment, enjoying each moment that you live.

It's your ego that wants to go on that wonderful vacation. But the good news is that egos heal. The way to release your depression due to anger is to first accept it, and then practice this mantra each time you feel the anger rising up inside you:

“Everything that happens to me today is for my highest good.”

Or,

“My vacation was canceled for my higher good. I know I don’t understand at this moment, but it will become clear to me soon.”

I know mantras might seem foreign to you, but look at them as positive visualizations or verbalizations to train the mind. The mind is powerful and can make and shape you and your destiny. It defines your sanity as you move through life and ignites the ego when it wants to create havoc in your world. You MUST become friends with it in order to become happy and successful.

Have you ever heard the phrase:

“The mind is a dangerous neighborhood. Don’t go there alone. Take a friend...”

It’s true. It is intoxicating to listen to, brilliant when it speaks to you. You will believe anything it tells you. *“You need to do better...you are not good enough...she did that on purpose...you need to be afraid here.”*

Don’t buy into any of it! It’s only trying to protect you. Instead, respond to it and remind it, *“Thank you for that, but I’m doing great. Thanks, but I don’t see it that way.”*

Trust your SELF to know the truth...not your EGO. You can train it to be positive, you know.

11. EXHAUSTION

Then, there is the kind of depression that comes from exhaustion. This will drop you right smack in the center of the VOID. Ahhh...that place of feeling - no feeling, that place of peace and chaos, that place where you are uncomfortable - or are you really comfortable? No mind...don’t try and figure it out. It doesn’t really matter.

What matters is that you're exhausted and now you're depressed because of it. It could be short-term or it could be a long-term situation due to your work or travel schedule. You might have a hectic month scheduled and you are already only firing on two cylinders.

When exhaustion sets in, it's as if many aspects of you are sleeping on the job, and much of you is shut down. Therefore, when the brain sends a signal to the troops in the body that they need to perform a task (in the physical, emotional and mental bodies, because they all need to work together as a team), there is no response. The brain doesn't know what to do and short-circuits.

Then the emotions kick in and you become angry, if you have the energy...or whiney, nonsensical, paralyzed, or depressed. Then where do you end up? In your new home called the VOID.

This one is the easiest to rectify. Stop everything and get some rest! I know, sometimes it isn't that easy! You probably hold board meetings as you lie in bed at night, or solve all the problems in not only your own life, but everyone else's that you know as well! I know this one.

I come up with my best ideas when I'm in my room lying flat on my back. As a matter of fact, I keep a notebook by my bed within arms reach so I can write with my eyes closed. This practice doesn't make for the best night's sleep.

But I've learned how to manage it. It's a three-step process really. First, you must know the triggers that will shut you down or at least slow you down. Is it a massage...a trip to the beach...swimming in a pool of water...soft music with a glass of wine...the opera...a hike in the forest...climbing a mountain...or exercise?

Learn what your trigger is for YOU, and then finally make an appointment with your self to pull the trigger. And make sure to shut off your blackberry! Block the time off on your calendar and go! You have to create the space to rest and sleep is what you need to heal and rejuvenate your body.

It is amazing what one night's sleep – unbroken – will do for the mind. You will be back in the saddle and in control, able to manage all that comes

before you as you move through your day. The key is in knowing when you need to stop and take some time for yourself.

12. LONELINESS

Are you single, or in a relationship or marriage where you are feeling lonely? Do you have friends and family in your life but still feel lost and disconnected from them?

Don't think that you're the only one who feels this way because you're not. There have been hundreds of articles written on "coping with loneliness." The myth is that only single people are lonely, but this is not the case.

Everyone feels lonely at one time or another in their lives and this leads to depression. You become paralyzed, sitting inside your home, not venturing out into society except to go to work. Thank God for work! Otherwise, we would truly be disconnected.

This problem is easier than you think to solve. Two things... first, you need to connect with your Source. Whatever that might be or however you define it, you need to find it and know it intimately. Romance it. Become one with it.

For some, it is as simple as being with nature. For others, it could be surfing, gardening, cooking, meditating, praying, going to a church, synagogue or temple, or journaling your feelings each morning over coffee.

Whatever connects you to your Source quiets the mind. And in the quietness, you will find peace, love of self, and regeneration.

The SOURCE is inside you. It is whatever you believe it to be. It is a higher power that fills you up and is your compass. It sets you in the right direction and gives you strength, and all you have to do is listen to him/her. In other words - meditate.

Some religions don't believe in meditation. **I believe that prayer is when you are speaking to God and meditation is when you are listening to God.**

Now stay with me here, because I want to talk about your Source, your Higher Power and the concept of God for the moment, and how the three tie into each other.

God is a concept that some religions don't believe in, like the Buddhists. They don't believe in God as western religions and philosophies do. They instead believe in humanity. They believe that "each human being is precious and important, and that all have the potential to develop into a Buddha – a perfect being."

The perfect human being they are talking about is one who can be compared to Christ, who walked as he did – God-like. He was the perfect human being, a being who was loving, kind, compassionate, who assisted others, who was truthful and did not cheat, steal or kill other human beings. He was the perfect being - a saint, a god, a Buddha.

The Taoists don't believe in God either, but they do believe in the "Tao" or the "Way," which is a way of life – living in perfect harmony with man and nature. They believe man can reach "Immortal" status, by following the basic tenets or principles that most other religion believe.

The Muslims, like the Christians, believe that there is one God or Allah – one God only and that he is the Savior, the Almighty, the Creator, the Sovereign and the Sustainer in the whole of the universe.

On the other hand, the Hindus believe in many gods; but ultimately, they are all different aspects and ways of understanding the one God they call Brahman.

So you see, **there are many paths up the mountain, but only one mountain top.** We are all going to the same place and we are all being governed by the same laws of the universe. There is a higher power that we want to reach and merge with, no matter how you define it or label it:

God,
Allah,
Buddha,
the Immortal...

So back to the Source inside you...whether you believe in religion or not, you have to believe that there is something greater. I believe IT – the SOURCE - is inside each and every one of us and we hold the key to happiness, peace, love and success. So, connect with that place and you will be one step closer to lifting the loneliness called depression.

The second step to combating the loneliness is to go out and connect with others. Join a book club. Join a ski club. Volunteer your time to a worthy cause. Nothing takes you outside yourself and your depression faster than doing for others.

Do something where you have to interact and commune with others. Make a promise to yourself that you will have a conversation with at least one person a day, other than your co-workers. Step outside yourself and your normal life. Dive into the waters of the unknown and spice it up a little! This is the key to happiness.

Then depression will be a thing of the past.

13. YOU ARE NO LONGER NEEDED

A feeling very close to loneliness is the feeling of not being needed by anyone. I felt this when I found myself single and my son was old enough to take care of himself. What was my purpose, I wondered? I didn't recognize this as being the issue at first. I thought I was simply depressed with no reason. I was perfectly happy and on top of my game at work, but once I stepped outside the office, my spirit sank.

Then it dawned on. I was needed at work because of all that I did and all that I was responsible for. I was a manager with a staff who needed my guidance. The company needed me to achieve goals that had been set; and peers needed me to help them become successful. I was needed to make decisions all day long.

Once I left the office, I was alone in my car and alone in my life. I could go anywhere I wanted to and could do anything I dreamed of doing; but instead, I mistook my freedom for not mattering to anyone.

A friend pointed this out to me and once I recognized it, I was able to change it. I gave myself permission to really feel it before I was ready to release it, but I put a timeframe on it. I allowed myself to wallow in it for the next twenty-four hours, and then I started to get involved with others. Whether it was friends or family, I put myself out there.

If you feel as if you are no longer needed by anyone, volunteer your services somewhere. There is nothing more rewarding to the human spirit than doing for others. It will take your mind off yourself and before you know it, you will be on top of the water of life, riding the wave again.

If you feel you no longer have a purpose, then find your passion. What did you love to do in your other lifetime before you had children and a spouse? And if you can't remember, then what excites you now? The world is your canvas, and on it you can create anything.

Find a group to connect with. Write, draw, paint, sculpt...travel. Enjoy yourself. Take command of your own ship and before you know it you will be so happy living your life that you won't remember the lows you were feeling!

Remember...you are your own loving parent now, and you can give yourself permission to do anything.

14. DISAPPOINTMENT

Sometimes in life...no...oftentimes in life, we find ourselves disappointed. Why? Because we have set high expectations for ourselves and how we think things should be. And when they don't turn out the way we thought they should, we end up disappointed. This often leads to the lows we call depression.

The cause of disappointment is expectation. So stop having them! Just know whatever the outcome is in every situation, is the way it is supposed to be. It is all perfect. I know this is hard because you know you should have gotten that promotion, or he/she was "the one" - the relationship that was supposed to live on "happily ever after." You know this was the right house

and it was supposed to be yours. You love him/her, so you are disappointed that he/she does not choose to see you anymore.

All is perfect. Life is unfolding exactly as it should – remember...for your highest good. Maybe there's a different path in the job, a different promotion coming soon. Maybe you need a little more experience.

Maybe there's a better house or a better relationship coming. Maybe this relationship only chipped the tip of the iceberg in your learning about YOU and how you relate to yourself and others. After all, each relationship is to teach us about ourselves and about what we want.

It's about the journey and not the destination, so enjoy each moment.

Your Source or your Higher Self could have a different roadmap than the one you visualize inside your head. You don't know everything, you know. Your Higher Self or Source might, but your mind and your ego don't.

So don't have such high expectations in life and you won't be disappointed. And when you are, go back to the mantra, *“I know I don't understand the purpose of this outcome right now, but it will be revealed to me soon. It's for my higher good and serves a higher purpose.”*

15. DIFFICULT RELATIONSHIPS

Not all relationships and marriages are perfect. When you fell in love and committed yourself to your one and only until death do you part, you thought you would remain the same two people and live happily ever after in a fairytale like setting...like a picture book. But sometimes, it goes awry.

We all change. And sometimes the one you fell in love with is not the same person you are now married to. It happens all the time; and sometimes, marriage doesn't work because of it.

It's normal for human beings to change and grow. Everyone grows at their own rate, some more quickly than others. Change isn't easy for everyone especially if your mate or partner has gone off and gotten into something you don't agree with or accept. A change in religious belief, a change in

lifestyle, a change in how you think you should raise your children, even a mid-life crisis could come along and change everything.

People change every day and sometimes, relationships survive it – sometimes they don't. Sometimes, people get angry all of a sudden – out of nowhere and they are no longer happy. They might feel pent up in the marriage or relationship and need to break out into freedom, for they feel as if they will suffocate if they don't have the space they need. Of course I am speaking from my own experiences.

I always say, “You are your childhood.” If you have unresolved issues swimming around inside your conscious or unconscious mind, those issues will surface at some point in your adult life and in your relationship. It doesn't make you a bad person, just a person who needs to deal with the stuff that has come up. We all have stuff, and this happened in both my marriages and changed them forever. Divorce was inevitable.

It would have taken a superhuman god-like being to hold onto me as I dealt with my childhood traumas. I had to be free of my attachment to any other adult human being, or suffocate and die. I felt like a bird in a cage, captured and tortured. And the reality was neither was I being held in captivity or being tortured. But my mind was that of the little blonde-haired, blue-eyes, angelic, innocent four-year old when the traumas took place.

Just a side note...Our minds are so incredibly brilliant that if you have suffered severe trauma, the mind will block it out sometimes for years, even decades...until you are strong enough and/or ready to deal with it. Then it will slip into your consciousness very slowly. At least that is how mine arrived at my doorstep in the middle of my marriage.

My relationships, my marriages...all at some point, suddenly represented “the bad place” to me. I had to get out. I was confused, angry, scared, traumatized. I couldn't deal with the littlest issues. I had to heal myself and become the adult my unconscious mind had pretended I was when I fell in love and married. Sometimes, you have to go it alone, and sometimes it's okay to do just that.

Give yourself permission...

Just remember that if you are the spouse or the partner and your other half has changed suddenly, it is not you. It is not you. It is them. I speak from experience.

It is they who need to go through whatever it is they are facing; and no matter how much you love them, they ultimately have to do it alone to become whole. You are not the reason. They are. Love them and let them go. Support them the best you know how. Maybe, your relationship will survive. Maybe it will change form and become something other than it is. Whatever happens, be open – and pray.

Get support and take care of yourself during these confusing times, because you will never understand what they are going through completely. You will ask them and they will try to explain, but I know from experience. They cannot fully explain what they are going through, because sometimes they don't even know themselves – until they finally reach the end of the healing, the end of the journey when it is revealed to them in all of its glory and its wisdom.

16. CAREGIVERS

Unexpected things happen in life such as a severe illness – physical, mental or emotional. There are so many things that could happen, but I am going to mention only a few.

You could be caring for a husband or wife who has a severe physical, mental or emotional disorder, condition or illness. He or she could have had a stroke, a weakened heart, are wheelchair bound, suffering with Alzheimer's, or are incapacitated or disabled, and need round-the-clock care. Or, he/she could be struggling with bi-polar disorder / manic-depression, alcoholism or drug abuse. Each one of these conditions is completely different, but they all have the same impact on you as their care-giver.

You try and stay strong, for you are the one holding the family together, making sure they are taken care of and their needs are being met, and then taking care of all the needs of your children if you have any. You have to have super-human strength, both physically and emotionally.

Whichever situation it is, it affects you in the same manner. You need to find a way to take care of yourself. When it first happens, seeing your loved one in this condition takes its toll on you like a shot in the heart. “This isn’t how it was supposed to be,” you cry...if you allow yourself to.

Now you’re trying to pick up the pieces by supporting everyone emotionally and then taking care of all their physical needs. You’re probably still working, taking care of the household chores, the yard work, and the school work... You are cooking...cleaning...I know...you are tired just reading this.

And who supports you as you support everyone else? Who is your cheerleader? Probably no one and that’s why you are depressed. With these types of illnesses and conditions, you could live inside this depression for years.

You have to take care of yourself. You have to connect with people. Confide in a friend. Join a support group. Like I said before, there is healing in sharing your story. Talk with someone who understands.

Steal time for yourself. Disappear for a few hours and sit in a movie or sit at the ocean. Go somewhere that soothes you. Maybe it’s just a matter of sitting in a café not speaking with anyone but reading a book, sipping a cup of coffee and being quiet without interruption. Maybe it’s taking you away from it all for just a bit.

Find out what makes you feel loved and supported and gives you strength. Is it your faith or friends? Is it quiet time or time in a support group? Whatever it is, find it, for you can’t live forever as a care-giver unless you too are being supported or filled up. Look at Mother Teresa – she gave, gave, gave, because she was filled up by God - her love and her faith were so deep and so steadfast.

Let’s talk about alcoholism and drug abuse. These are unfortunate, but you cannot be the caretaker or the enabler forever. At some point, if your spouse or partner does not want to get help, or does, but continually slides backwards, then you have to let them go. And if you have children, then the situation is much more difficult. This is a tough decision to make and one that takes time.

After you have made the decision, it could be reversed once or twice, depending on their success with getting help and staying clean. But at some point, if they continue to spiral down, you have to let them go. This is never easy because it will throw you into the lows of decision-making, separation and loss, and loneliness. But it will pass in time – as long as you are connected, you have support, and you know your own self.

17. FINANCIAL STRAIN

Does it ever end? No, because it is Life. And some people seem to get hit all at once. If you are suffering financially and can't seem to make ends meet, it will take its toll on you. When you do not have your finances under control, it's like a subtle toothache that never goes completely away. It grinds on you as you sleep and even slips into your dreams. You find yourself waking up in the middle of the night gasping for air. It never stops...always nipping at your heels.

It is relentless and it keeps chipping away at you until you get it. It's one of those signs along the road of life. Pay attention to it. What is it trying to tell you? Do you need to change the way you are managing your money? Are you spending too much or is it just too difficult to live the lifestyle you are living right now?

Maybe it's trying to show you an opportunity or asking you to start putting Plan B into effect. Maybe you need to go back to school or move into a less expensive place for the time being. Obviously, you need to take drastic measures because money is not going to fall from the sky.

You have to face your creditors and not take it personally. So you tripped. Pick yourself up, dust yourself off and try again. But be honest with everyone. Ask for a payment plan. Negotiate down the interest on your credit cards...and then cut them up! You can live without them!

You will be surprised to know that once you face your debt head-on, and put a plan into action, you will start sleeping better. And remember one thing – **Your debt is not a measure of your self-worth**. You are worth so much more, so don't be confused by this.

18. FEAR

After putting this book down for quite some time to work on another project, I realized I was not finished. I had forgotten about fear. Some of us live in fear all the time and find it difficult to make decisions because of it. It grabs hold of us and won't let go, causing us to become anxious, sleepless, and depressed.

Where does it come from...childhood...not feeling good enough to succeed? I don't know. I am not a psychologist. All I know is that I have felt fear – fear of failure. I have been afraid to make decisions in case I make the wrong ones which could lead me to failure. Or I could make the wrong decision and be disappointed. Then I'd really feel stupid.

So instead, I did not make any decisions for a very long time. I sat in my misery and became depressed. You see, a few years ago, I wanted to move to the island of Capri but didn't see how I could do it. I had a life here, my job and my son.

But I wanted it more than anything and knew if I didn't get there, I might not be able to function in my life. I was already deeply depressed. I would wake up, drag myself out of bed, go to work, come home, sit and stare into space, then go to bed again. And I wept all the time in between. I was miserable.

But to make that kind of decision was scary. I had my son to consider even though he was a young adult. I was still his mother. I had my job of six years, my safety net. I had a place that overlooked the Pacific and I came home to sunsets every night, the moon and the stars, and the sound of crashing waves. People told me I was crazy, that I had a perfect life.

But I had to go. And as long as I stayed in the fear and did not make a decision, I was depressed. It took me eight months to make it and when I did, the depression lifted off me as if it was melting snow.

How did I get through the fear in order to do it? I met it at its front door, grabbed it by its shoulders and confronted it. “What is the worse that can

happen to me?" I asked. And it came to me. I would truly be crazy, just like my friends said. I would have to come back and face them and they would finally find me out as the failure and as the madwoman I was. I would be coming home to nothing...my house would be gone, the security of my job, my life here.

I sat with it for two days, talking with it, crying with it, reasoning with it. Then I went into the "what ifs" if I failed. Okay, so I come back and start my life over. I saw what that would look like...where I would live...starting my career over...I felt all the fear and the anxiety of it.

Then I changed the tape in my head, the one that said that I was afraid of being a failure. I changed it to, *"I am going to follow my dreams. This is something I have to do. I could be gone a month, six months or a year. I don't know. All I know is this is my dream and I will be better for following my heart."*

And I became euphoric at that point. I was no longer afraid to fail, afraid to make the decision. I was no longer disappointed in myself. I actually felt elated that I had finally made a decision to change my life. I had something to look forward to.

And I didn't fail. I lived there for almost six months, happily...no...ecstatically. And I came back to my friends and family who supported me and loved me and were happy to see me again.

If you truly want to step outside of your fears and drop them like discarded clothing, then confront them. Ask. *"What is the worst that could happen?"* Then sit with the answers for awhile. Next, change the tapes inside your head. You can do anything...once you give yourself permission.

19. NOT LIVING THE LIFE OF YOUR DREAMS

At some point during the writing of this book, I found myself once again, deep within the bowels of depression. This time, it hit me hard. Why?

I wanted to go back to Capri for some respite, for a holiday. I wanted to go back to the island that wrapped me up in its arms so tenderly and to the

people that called me family. My home...Capri...I have dreamt of returning there once again...

After two years, it was time. I had been over-worked and hyper-focused on my projects, both in my career and my book world. I had been sleeping far too little, not exercising enough, and having no fun. On top of this, I had recently suffered from heartache caused by a recent breakup.

As I said before, I am an intelligent woman, so why had I found myself back in this place again keeping company with depression?

Because it is the cycle of life... Sometimes, you have to work hard for a bit...especially if you have a goal you want to accomplish. Mine was my work and a new book. Did I enjoy it? Yes! (That's a resounding yes, by the way). But it had left me exhausted, numb and depressed.

I should have recognized the signs earlier, but I didn't. I was too busy! Do I forgive myself? Yes, because I am my own loving parent and my biggest fan. I believe in me and I know I am doing the best I can. I also know that sometimes, you have to work hard in your life for spans of time - especially if you have a dream. You just have to make sure you nurture and care for your mind, body, and spirit along the way, sort of like being your own caregiver.

And I understand that many of us don't even know what our dreams are. And many of us will never know unless we have contrast in our lives. Contrast, as I call it, is painful. It shows us what we don't want in our lives.

My most recent experience with contrast was moving inland to be closer to my company since I spend so much time there. I thought I could do it and I loved it for months. But now, contrast has shown me that I am a water person. I have to live on the edge of the sea. I'm like a fish that dries out if I stay out of the water too long. It's the moist air and the smell that I need. So I am that much closer to knowing how I want to live my life – the life of my dreams.

So contrast is a good thing once we get through it. It will help us realize our dreams so we can live them. Then we can stop living our lives by rote, waking up each morning, doing what we need to do, going home, going to bed and waking up again.

It's easy to get caught up in the cycle. That's why we have movies and music in my opinion. These things nudge us, tickle us, pinch us, and prod us into feeling so we can ask ourselves, "*What is it that I really want in my life? What are my passions?*"

If you really want to know what it means to live the life of your dreams and you have the courage, then ask the universe. Pray for some insight. And you will be given the answers either directly or through contrast. Sometimes, you have to weed through what you don't want before you know what you do want!

And sometimes, it's simply a matter of timing. Maybe your Source or your Higher Self wants you to wait just a bit until both you and the universe are ready. Maybe there are just a few loose ends to be tied up before you arrive.

II) - BALANCE IN THE HUMAN BODY

1. HEALTH

If our bodies don't feel good, our minds and our emotions are affected. Our entire physicality is affected by what we ingest through our mouths, our lungs, our mental bodies (our minds) and our emotional bodies. The proof lies in how well we look and feel. Our skin changes color and texture, our eyes become dull and cloudy, our weight or puffiness shows it, and our muscular bodies show it. But most importantly, how does it affect the internal workings of our bodies?

If you look at Chinese medicine and the belief in the five elements (wood, earth, fire, metal, water), each element represents a major organ: wood-liver, fire-heart, earth-spleen, metal-lungs, and water-kidneys.

The five element theory helps interpret the relationship between the physiology and pathology of the human body and the natural environment. Simply put, are all organs working together in harmony and are they working optimally? If one is sluggish or diseased, then the other organs feel the stress of trying to pick up the load. It's like the weakest link theory. If one team member falls down, then the others will have difficulty succeeding.

There are so many things that could affect the flow of perfect health and our mental and emotional stability as it relates to depression, but I am only going to talk about the things that have affected me in my own life, for I cannot address the things I have no experience with. In the next pages, we'll talk about the affects that emotions, medication, food, and sudden illness have on our bodies and their link to depression.

2. EMOTIONS

Emotions affect the physical body in a huge way. For example, when we are anxious or stressed, the adrenal glands produce a hormone called cortisol

known as the “fight or flight hormone.” It slows the body down in order to conserve energy in preparation to fight off whatever might come next. Although it gives us the extra focus, strength and energy we need in times of stress or crisis, at the same time, in high levels it causes accelerated muscle tissue break-down, fatigue, weight-gain, obesity, high blood pressure, and depression. It also ages the body.

Oftentimes, in the past in my own work environment, I have operated in this mode every day for years – which led to my own illness, an autoimmune disorder.

When stressed, the release of stomach acids slows down digestion, and the colon is stimulated causing diarrhea. Your immune system tries to quickly deal with the threats of stress, but when it is a chronic state, it becomes suppressed making you susceptible to disease and infection. It also increases your risk of autoimmune disorders (when your own immune system attacks your body’s healthy cells). And if you already have an autoimmune disorder, stress can trigger flare-ups.

During stress when the production of cortisol is activated, the nervous system is affected by the changing or slowing of the brain cells, hence affecting memory. This contributes to the feelings of anxiety and depression - sometimes even severe depression, and sometimes in extreme cases, even personality or behavioral disorders.

Cortisol affects your cardiovascular system by raising your heart rate and blood pressure which are risk factors for stroke or heart disease. And if you have any type of illness, or condition, it triggers attacks. Examples are flare-ups with autoimmune disorders, acne, eczema, hives, and asthma. So you see, even if you think you are not emotionally affected by stress, you are, and the proof is in your body and how it is responding.

The same goes for surrounding yourself with people who are negative. This also stresses our system, even when we think we can handle it. And you already know what the remedy is to this: remove yourself from the situation and continually practice the cleansing exercise.

Living day-in and day-out in a stressful or negative environment affects our mental and emotional states and then our physical body soon follows. If the

job is continually stressful every day, and you cannot get a handle on it, then you need to make a life change.

Let me note here that you can change the stress in your life by changing your mindset. Let me repeat this again, not only for you to hear, but for me as well. You can change the stress in your life by changing your mindset.

When I look back to those times in my life when there was stress all around me, but it was not having an effect or impact on my physical body, the reason was that I had balance in my life. I had a small child (children melt your stress away when you see their faces once you walk through the door at night).

Other times that I was unaffected, I was either happy in my home life, in love, or I was writing or following my dreams. I had hope, dreams, or something else to look forward to. I was on top of the world and knew I could accomplish anything.

If your life is in upheaval or chaos or you have some pretty intense things going on that you are trying to resolve in addition to the stress, it will be much more difficult to change your mindset because you will not feel strong enough to do this. You are probably also exhausted because chaos and stress leads to anxiety and anxiety leads to sleeplessness.

Do the best that you can to tackle one thing at a time. And get some help if you need to. You do not have to handle everything alone so ask for help.

Work on each issue one by one. Or prioritize which ones will have the most impact on your health and well-being. And in the meantime, exercise out the stress, pray and or meditate, and find a way to release the energy. Take control now while you can – while it hasn't gotten so out of hand that your immune system has weakened or shut down.

If is a relationship that has you stressed out, you will eventually need to make some decisions for your own sanity and health. Therapy is a good start, a wonderful way to learn to communicate or assist you in communicating with your loved one or your children if you cannot speak up on your own. Remember, you are your own voice – your own loving parent. No one will do it for you, but you.

Besides making the decision to either change the situation or leave it, you need to move the body and exercise, even if you only have time to walk for short periods during the day. Try a “walking meeting” if you are in an office environment. Always have your sneakers or walking shoes at your desk so you have no excuses. The work will be there when you return and you will be more productive since you will be moving the stress and stuck energies out, and also pumping blood more effectively.

3. MEDICATIONS

Sometimes, medication is very necessary in healing the body. Although I tend to see my naturopath and my ayurvedic doctors first, I believe that medical doctors are quite necessary in life. I think of healthy eating, living greens, juicing, enzymes, exercise, herbs, essential oils, body movement such as Tai Chi and Yoga and naturopaths and nutritionists as preventative medicine.

The medical community of doctors, physician’s assistants, surgeons and nurses are very necessary in the fight to cure disease that has already manifested in physical form in the body. I also believe it is possible to use both modalities simultaneously, and then back off on medication when you have built your body up enough by improving your diet, exercising and detoxification.

“The Greatest Healer you will ever know is the one inside your own Self.” This was told to me by Dr. Stephen Bizal, my personal holistic wellness doctor and friend who worked with me throughout my illness, and who guided me through my own healing.

I know this statement to be true because I am a living, breathing example of it. I healed myself. I was on an intense drug called Mestinone for my condition OMG or ocular myasthenia gravis. It is an autoimmune disorder I manifested in my body through poor eating habits including excessive sugar, lack of exercise, and a continued state of stress, and a general long-term build up of toxins in the body. The disease was debilitating but the medicine also had its own side effects. I was on high doses of this medication plus breakthrough tablets each time I had a severe attack.

It took me eighteen months to completely change my life and my diet, to remove all stress, detoxify, and eventually heal my body. Only then was I able to start reducing my medication very, very slowly. I am happy to say I have no symptoms and no disease now and I honor my body and care for it as if it were a temple. To be able to heal itself of this disease was a miracle. And I do believe in miracles.

My point is, sometimes, medication is necessary. Just know that it will oftentimes interrupt the body's rhythm and balance. All medication, as everything else you ingest, has to be processed through the liver, taxing it. And in the understanding of Chinese medicine and the five elements, all the other organs of the body are being taxed as well, leading to an imbalance and a fight to stay afloat and functional.

I was extremely depressed during the twelve months it took the medical community to diagnose my illness, and an additional twelve months as I took the medication and healed my body. The only advice I can offer is what worked for me.

Forgive yourself and love yourself.

Because in having the disease, on some level, whether it is conscious or unconscious – you may feel you deserve it as some type of punishment. Just a thought – try it on for size. It fit me. Remember...you are worth loving...you are your own loving parent.

I believe that if disease manifests in the body, there is a reason. Sometimes we don't know the reason. Maybe it will be revealed to us through our higher power – maybe not. Why not eliminate the possibility that we feel like we should be punished for something we perceive we did wrong?

Back to healing the body...

Start the road back to optimal health by doing the research. Eat organically whenever you can. Think and live green foods. Find a gentle detoxification program. Exercise, exercise, exercise...even if you can't walk...you can do something small and that small things will lead to bigger things, even if it takes months.

I had trouble walking and could not exercise, but I found something that looked like a miniature scooter on QVC that I could stand on and move my legs up and down. It was slow...only five minutes per day in the beginning. Then over six months, I was able to do fifteen minutes.

In parallel, go for therapy, turn inward, connect with your divine source, pray...do whatever it takes to heal your emotional and mental bodies so your physical body will follow. If you are not healthy mentally and emotionally, then you will not heal your disease.

The word disease means *dis-ease*. There is disharmony somewhere in your being (mind-body-spirit), and usually it is unconscious. We are usually not aware until either someone else points it out to us or we go looking for it. Remember...you can heal anything and **I am your biggest cheerleader.**

4. FOODS

I want to talk about foods for a moment. We have been fed the idea that all foods we buy in the supermarket are good for us and won't harm us. This is not always the case or the whole truth.

We have been led to believe that if we eat foods that are prepackaged which contain preservatives, chemicals and additives, our bodies will not get diseased. We live in a world where our food and water is what it is. It feeds the masses. We have to eat and drink to survive, and organic greens and vegetables are not always available to us.

So how do we survive and thrive with our food sources being what they are? First, eat in moderation. I used to have a tendency to find a food or a meal and eat it daily, never realizing that it could have an adverse affect on my health. For instance, with my illness, if I ate TV dinners, I would have flare-ups of muscle weakness, joint swelling and aching, tingling of my extremities, jumpy legs and loss of feeling.

My belief is that it was the preservatives in these types of prepackaged frozen meals ready-to-eat. Once I stopped eating them, my symptoms would disappear within 24-hours. Can I eat a TV dinner now? Yes. Do I still have

symptoms when I eat one? No. Do I start experiencing these symptoms if I eat one each day for three days? Yes.

Moderation...

Will it hurt you to have one can of soda pop once in awhile, even though it is filled with chemicals? No. If you drank a six-pack every few days, would it be healthy? No. The same goes for beef, chicken and pork. We all know that animals reared for slaughter (for our food) are shot with hormones and antibiotics. This in turn makes its way into the processed and packaged meats we buy and eat. Could there be affects over long periods of time? Yes, most likely. Does this mean we have to stop eating meat? No, not if we don't want to.

We can start by eating less meat and instead eat fish. Or we can make smarter choices such as organic meats. Every little bit helps and your body will thank you by staying young and healthy.

Remember, nothing in excess. Be smart. If it comes in a box or a package, you can bet there are lots of chemicals and preservatives inside. For some, you won't feel anything. But for others like me who have suffered with a disease, you will feel its affects and know when you need to rethink your choices.

I make sure I eat organic greens, vegetables and fruits whenever I can. I eat beef once or twice a month, but always organic. I eat chicken occasionally, but try not to eat too much pork as it tends to knock the pH balance off in my body more quickly and I feel as if I have acid running through my bones and tissue.

I take an organic green powder daily and wheatgrass twice a week and drink lots of water. I even drink bottled water that is infused with minerals or oxygen whenever I can. We usually remember vitamins but forget about minerals and other nutrients that come from living greens. I don't take vitamins because I don't believe I need them since I am getting so much through my organic foods. But my way is my own and maybe not yours. You will have to decide for yourself by listening to your body, and by doing the research.

5. SUDDEN ILLNESS

Remember the philosophy of Chinese medicine discussed earlier and how your physical body is a beautiful machine when all the organs work in harmony with one another?

If you have been stricken by a sudden illness, depression oftentimes sets in. A cancer patient once said to me, *“If you don’t have your physical health, you don’t have anything.”* We’ve all heard this before. This is also true when you don’t have balance between the mental, physical and emotional bodies. Cancer is jolting, even life-changing. Not to diminish this disease, but in fact any illness at all - even a common cold or flu can cause an imbalance in your body, mind, and spirit.

Even before I was diagnosed with OMG, the fact that I was failing physically, having trouble walking, and could no longer ski or hike in the wilderness, catapulted me into depression. I was extremely depressed, so much so that my friends were alarmed. I was afraid for myself, because I had never sunk that deeply into depression before.

It was a very frightening time. I battled with the decision of whether to take antidepressants – or not. But each time I came close, I opted not to and instead tried alternatives. They would work for awhile and I would have a reprieve. Then it would come back again. I was constantly up and down emotionally.

Finally, it came to me that I needed to pinpoint how and when my disease had started, and why I had manifested it in my body. I had to dig deep and it was emotionally painful, but I did the work and got my answers. My self-loathing and guilt went back to my early childhood when I was four years old. I had not forgiven myself on all levels for my sexually abuse, even though I professed that I had on a conscious level.

So I had more work to do. Once I started, I was on the road to healing my depression. It sounds easy, but it was not. But I made it through by the grace of God and all the assistance I had from loved ones both here and on

the other side. I'm not one of those humans who think they can do it all alone. I know I can't, so I continually ask for help and receive it.

During this time, I also researched how to live with OMG and how to heal it. The medical community said it was something that I could not heal and that I would have to live with for the rest of my life. Dr. Bizal was the only one besides me who believed I could heal it; and with his guidance and support, I was able to do just that. I had this blind faith that I could do it and it happened.

I researched the right foods to eat for perfect health and well-being and learned how to cleanse my body of all the waste that was now living in my cells, my tissue and my organs. There are so many things that accumulate over the years: metals like aluminum and mercury, drug residue, stuck emotions...yes, even emotions sit in the body in our bones, muscles and tissue. As a matter of fact, toxic emotions are sometimes far worse than other things we have ingested, if we do not move them out but instead let them linger inside us and become trapped.

The anger toward my self was so deep that it created this illness that left me with little strength to move my legs to walk or hold a hair dryer or brush without dropping it. This negative energy had become stuck, catapulting me into weakness and further depression until I spiraled down so deeply that it took a tremendous amount of effort to repair the damage it had done.

But I kept eating green, living foods and continued to detox. There are plenty of easy ways to do this so that you can still function and work while you go through the process. You can do your research on-line; and at the back of this book, I have listed websites I used.

I moved my body slowly at first only because I could barely move...exercise is key to not only detoxing, but also in moving the depression, grief, sadness and anger out. I also prayed to those unseen beings that I could feel around me, always there supporting me. I cursed them, too...but they loved me still without judgment, for they knew I judged myself far worse than they ever would and they loved me far more than I loved myself at the time.

All these things helped me find my balance, my health and well-being, and my center so that the heavy umbrella of depression finally lifted.

So if you are depressed because you are ill, now you know why...and now you know what to do. Your healing is just around the corner.

6. DEIBILITATING ILLNESS

If you have a debilitating illness, disease, or condition, regardless of whether it is physical, mental, or emotional, please understand that it is not your fault. Go easy on yourself. It is not your fault. And if your husband or partner is your caregiver, please do not blame yourself.

Of course you are depressed. Your life has changed forever. And now you are feeling responsible for the happiness of your loved one who you may feel is stuck with you and your illness. STOP!

You are doing the best you can with the cards you have been dealt. You have to know that your husband, wife or loved ones love you, just as they loved you before your illness, condition, or disease. When they look into your eyes, or look at you, they only see love.

Don't forget this fact. Caring for you is a selfless act of kindness, and for many of us, this is the greatest gift in the world. I liken it to giving someone a really big gift that they can't afford for themselves. The giver's heart opens up as he gives it and the receiver's heart opens up as he accepts it, awestruck that someone could love him so much. The giver is lost in the passion of giving to someone he loves deeply and the receiver feels so loved.

But some days are harder than others for your caregivers, unless they take care of themselves and take a break long enough to nurture their own selves on a regular basis. If they do, they will be genuinely happy and filled with love as they care for you. The only thing they need from you is understanding when they need a little time to take care of themselves.

I truly believe that those who need care-givers...such as you...are actually earth angels who have come here to open up the hearts of their loved ones and to forever change their lives. In doing so, you are teaching them about selfless love and compassion and their lives will be, if they are not already, so much richer for having loved you as they do.

7. IMBALANCES IN THE BODY

This is a great place to stop and talk about hormonal and chemical imbalance and how they affect your emotional and mental bodies and can cause depression.

Our environment, stress, diet, exercise (or lack there of), illness, and a whole host of other conditions can exacerbate the symptoms of depression. The key to changing all of this is to get to know your body.

8. HORMONE IMBALANCES

Andrew Herzog, chief of neuro-endocrinology at Harvard, believes that “the reproductive hormones powerfully modulate mood and anxiety.” His extensive research shows that **estrogen** increases the action of an “excitatory” neurotransmitter called glutamate, which is so powerful it can damage cells if not properly balanced.

Glutamate’s partner is **GABA**, an “inhibitory” neurotransmitter, and its activity is increased by progesterone. Estrogen acts like an antidepressant and progesterone acts like Valium or Xanax.

But too much estrogen can cause anxiety (just like antidepressants do in bipolar disorder). And on the other end, too much progesterone can leave a woman sedated with low energy. There is a complex balance between these hormones and it changes daily, no...make that hourly.

After reviewing research by Deborah Sichel, M.D. and Jeanne Watson Driscoll, M.S., R.N., I began to understand that a woman’s moods can be altered by hormonal imbalances during her menstrual cycle, during pregnancy and childbirth, postpartum and during menopause. I read an alarming statistic: that women have a 50% rate of depression after childbirth.

Traumas, a stressful lifestyle, our diets and medications also affect the hormonal balance in our bodies, so we are forever changing and always walking a tight rope, it seems.

We women are familiar with how we feel when our hormones are out of whack. We are roller-coasters in the emotional body of life. We have more ups and downs than an amusement park! And each time we move from one height to the other, our emotional body screams out.

How do we deal with it? Innately, most of us know to express our emotions – and sometimes it's neither pretty nor feminine. But if we didn't we would suppress them (our emotions) and become depressed.

So first of all, start expressing how you feel. If you are angry, find a way to release it. Exercise or martial arts are two excellent ways to release, and releasing is mandatory. Try not to blow up buildings or slice and dice other human beings with your anger! Look for a healthy alternative to screaming, yelling and beating your fists on the first person you see.

Secondly and most importantly, seek out someone who can help you. The body is complicated and trying to find the right balance for you is a challenge because it is a constantly moving target. Stay with it, though. Trust your own intuition and assessment of your body and your doctor. Ask questions. Ask lots of questions and keep asking. Do some research yourself. There is so much out there.

An alternative option to seeing a medical doctor is a naturopath, depending on the severity of your depression. If you are not seeing results with one, then see both simultaneously while working to balance your body as you are on medication. At some point, you will balance out and might possibly be able to move to a more natural method.

9. MISDIAGNOSES

My point in this whole section is to bring to light the fact that we could be misdiagnosed as being bi-polar / manic depressive, having a thyroid imbalance, or some other new illness that has just been identified - when in fact, it could be a hormonal imbalance.

When we are put on the wrong medication, this can exacerbate the symptoms making us feel far worse than we originally felt. And most times, it is not the fault of the doctor, because the body is a complicated organistic, living machine and no two are alike. Each human being has a separate set of blueprints, issues, rules, complications, exceptions, etc. There are no two bodies exactly alike; each one is built differently. And that is why they call it “practicing medicine.”

10. THYROID IMBALANCE

I have no personal experience with thyroid imbalances, but have been tested for this when I have suffered from depression. When doing research on hormone imbalances, I came across information and research by Mary Holmes, NP and Marcelle Pick, OB/GYN NP. They found that far more women than men are likely to experience thyroid problems. They state in their research, that over 20% of menopausal women in the US are diagnosed with thyroid dysfunction and many millions more suffer from the same symptoms but are left undiagnosed.

Hypothyroidism is a condition in which the body lacks sufficient thyroid hormone to run its metabolism, leaving the body fatigued, weak, irritable, and depressed...and these are only a few of the symptoms. Oftentimes, thyroid disorders are diagnosed as the actual cause for depression, when in fact there are so many other things to consider. Again – **medicine is a practice...**

Holmes and Pick believe that other conditions in the body can often cause or contribute to hypothyroidism, so you have to look at the body as an interconnected system rather than looking at the thyroid alone. Adrenal stress can impair thyroid function because it causes overproduction of cortisol, (remember the stress hormone) which blocks efficient conversion and use of the thyroid hormone.

Holmes and Pick also state that insulin resistance has many of the same symptoms as hypothyroidism and may also play a role in thyroid disorder. Then there is the delicate balance of the hormones (estrogen vs.

progesterone) to consider and hormonal imbalance acts as a trigger for thyroid problems.

Thyroid disorders can mimic mental illness and mental illness can affect the thyroid. Drugs that are used to treat mental illness can also affect the thyroid. Lithium which is used to stabilize moods in manic depressives can cause hypothyroidism, and hypothyroidism can cause depression, which is what the original treatment was intended to relieve.

It is so complicated that you would be wise to do some research in order to ask your doctor questions before agreeing to take medication. Learn to understand and know your body. How does it feel to eat this or drink that? How does it feel when you don't exercise? When are you stressed? When are you exhausted? **Know your body and do some research.**

And again - ask questions. Don't be afraid to question your doctor. They like to be challenged and they like it when their patients ask intelligent questions. I have asked so much that they finally talk to me as if I am on their level. In this way, I understand what has led them to the conclusion they have reached because they share their research, testing, and analysis with me, their patient.

FINDING BALANCE

There are many different modalities of healing to choose from. I personally see an ayurvedic doctor, and the herbs I take in an infusion tea help regulate my body. I see a naturopath and when needed, I take cutting edge phytonutrient power-house formulations that build and heal my body on a cellular level.

For the men out there, I can only speak from a woman's perspective, but it only makes logical sense that you too could suffer from hormonal imbalances at certain times throughout your life. After all, you are also prone to imbalances in brain chemistry. I would imagine that the above suggestions for women would also work for you, because ayurvedic herbs help balance hormones, body and brain chemistry and all the organs in the body, leading to optimal health.

11. CHEMICAL IMBALANCE

Back to imbalances... We have talked about hormonal imbalances. Now, let's talk about chemical imbalances. I believe that hormones, illness, medication, and a whole host of other things create chemical imbalances in the body.

In my first trimester when I was pregnant with my son, I went through a major emotional upheaval. All my childhood fears, guilt, distress and self-loathing came to the surface and I had to deal with the insanity inside my head. I was jealous, thinking my husband was having an affair, I was fearful that my girlfriends really didn't like me, and I suddenly lacked self-confidence at work and assumed I was doing a terrible job and on the verge of getting fired. I had gone insane.

Nothing had changed. I was the same person I was weeks before and was handling every situation the same as before. The only thing that had changed was my body chemistry due to the pregnancy.

But at that time, I was afraid to be "found out." So I didn't share my dilemma with anyone, not even my husband. I suffered in silence. It was one of the hardest times in my life because I was afraid that my life would unravel any second. Finally, after two long months, it subsided. Poor me back then. I didn't know then that I was supposed to be my own loving parent.

Woman's bodies change when they are pregnant. And they also change after the birth of their children which is the cause of post-partum depression. I cannot speak to this because I have no experience with it.

During these imbalances, there is a reduced level of neurotransmitters such as serotonin, dopamine, norepinephrine, acetylcholine and GABA. We are thrown into a stress mode because of all of this and suddenly our bodies become deficient in essentials such as vitamin C, B, potassium, magnesium and zinc, and certain amino acids, while our cortisol (stress hormone) levels and a toxic neurochemical called homocysteine increase. Who wouldn't feel crazy with your body seemingly fighting you every step of the way?

So how do you heal it? First of all, accept it without judgment. Then stop the negative thoughts, because it is also believed that our own thoughts and actions will worsen the situation.

Then seek out help, either a naturopath or a medical doctor. Talk to your doctor about natural alternatives if possible. I know sometimes, the imbalance is so extreme that you need something stronger to balance your chemistry. But sometimes, something as simple as St John's Wort, SAM-e, or 5-HTP will work.

If you think you can deal with it on your own, then you might try Valerian Root, Kava Kava, Passion Flower or Ashwagandha. They may possibly relieve anxiety, reduce stress and relax the nervous system. I have used SAM-e, St John's Wort, Kava and Ashwagandha in the past with some success. But please speak with someone who has experience with herbal remedies before using any of them, because there are certain foods, caffeine or alcohol that you cannot ingest while taking them.

12. BIPOLAR DISORDER / MANIC DEPRESSION

I have known a few people who have suffered from and have been diagnosed with bi-polar disorder / manic depression; but I have no personal experience with this illness. Therefore, I cannot write about it from my own perspective.

However, it is such an important topic and cause of depression that I cannot omit it from this guidebook with good conscience. I also do not recommend you go this alone if you think you have some of these symptoms. As I said before, I believe in the ability of medical doctors and this is one area where I personally believe you need professional assistance and support.

I have researched bipolar disorder / manic depression, and read about the symptoms and treatments; so to the best of my ability, I will pass on the information I have found.

Bipolar disorder is the medical name for manic depression. It is a mood disorder that affects approximately 1% of the population in the US. I did not

find statistics on other countries in the world, but I did find out that it affects men and women equally.

The textbook definition of Bi-Polar Disorder is “one or more manic or hypomanic episodes, accompanied by one or more major depressive episodes.” These episodes typically happen in cycles. These episodes are called mood swings, and they alternate between periods of depression and mania.

I will list some of the symptoms of both depression and mania, but these are just a few. If you feel these describe your behavior, then please do some research and seek help, as I am no authority and am only trying to assist you in identifying and knowing your own behavior.

Symptoms of depression are: feelings of hopelessness, feeling sad, ashamed, anxious, lack of interest in pleasurable activities, loss of feeling for loved ones, feelings of worthlessness, loss of interest in work, thoughts of delusion, and loss of energy or fatigue.

Symptoms of mania are: heightened self-esteem, increased creativity and work ability, an elevated and expansive mood, decreased need for sleep, feeling high, elated, euphoric, being more talkative than usual, and an increase in goal-directed activities. These are not all the symptoms; there are others that I will not go into.

All these feelings are part of life. But the key here is whether you are fluctuating quickly between depression and mania, then repeating the cycle.

Two thousand years ago in ancient Greece and Italy, patients who were diagnosed with bipolar disorder, were prescribed rest and long baths. As a matter of fact, patients were often sent to spas which were found to be rich in Lithium salts. Today, sometimes lithium is used for the treatment.

One thing that caught my attention was that the treatment for this disorder depended upon the symptoms, the duration of the illness, possible causes and previous response to treatments. The treatments could include ECT (electroconvulsive therapy), psychotherapy and/or medication.

The medication could consist of one of the following: Lithium, Tranquilizers, or Anti-depressants. **If you have to go on medication, then**

do it without judgment. Give yourself your life back. But be aware that you need to work closely with your doctor, and you need to get to know your body and its rhythms. The body has to sustain a fine balance and medication will throw it off. It could also need to be adjusted on a regular basis.

I read with interest, the opinions of Ghaemi SN, Hsu DJ, Soldani F and Goodwin FK from their research program on Bipolar Disorder at Cambridge Hospital, and Harvard Medical School. The reason this article stopped me in my tracks was because I knew someone who was treated with antidepressants for his bipolar disorder and his symptoms grew worse instead of better.

Ghaemi, Hsu, Soldani and Goodwin believe that a cautious approach needs to be taken when treating a patient with antidepressants because they can be less effective than other medications. They argue that this treatment should be used only in severe cases and not routinely used in mild to moderate cases, that there could be long term worsening of the illness with the use of this drug. They believe that antidepressants should be discontinued after recovery of the depressive episode, and maintained only in those patients who repeatedly relapse after antidepressant discontinuation.

I found an excellent book titled, "Surviving Manic Depression: A Manual on Bipolar Disorder for Patients, Families, and Providers," by E. Fuller Torrey and Michael B. Knable. The book is simple to read without being overwhelming. It offers information on symptoms, various medications and their side effects, and how to control those side effects. It also has an extensive appendix listing books, websites, and other resources on bipolar disorder.

Researchers have not identified the cause for this disorder, but some believe that biological factors play a major role and that this illness tends to concentrate in families. Currently, they are looking for genetic markers to prove this to be true.

First, let me say that many people with this illness can lead productive and fulfilling lives. You can find happiness with proper care and support, so there is hope. And again, this is a condition that you should not try to analyze or treat on your own. See someone with experience that can help you.

Remember...you are not damaged or broken because of this. I think of our human bodies as a complicated jet engine, wrapped in a living organism with an intelligent computer brain running the whole works. To throw in more complication, there is a delicate web, an electrical network that runs through the entire system that could short circuit in any given moment.

Everything has to be running perfectly at all times. If there is one tiny problem, then all other systems are thrown off. Troubleshooting is not easy since no two systems are alike and there is no guidebook. Everything you eat and drink affects your system, and frankly some are more resilient than others.

Remember, you are a spirit trying to live in a human body. For some of us, it is more work than others. Who knows why? Maybe some day it will be revealed to us. In the meantime, forgive yourself. “You are a divine act of God here and now in every cell of your being...”

13. HEREDITY

This is a good place to talk about depression if you have been told it is hereditary and that you will have to live with it the same as your parent or ancestor. Yes, it is a physical condition so I have placed it in the Balance in the Human Body section of this book. But I firmly believe that you can heal anything with the mind.

There are some physical conditions that are passed on from one generation to the next, and I do know that when your body is out of balance (with a physical illness or condition), along with it, depression will arrive at your doorstep. I met a woman recently who told me the reason she was depressed was because it was hereditary.

It was not a genetic physical condition that she had inherited, but manic depression which both her mother and aunt had suffered from. She had given up and accepted that her life would be the same as her ancestors before her. She was now on antidepressants and had been for the past five years, her husband and family caring for her. Her mood swings were not balancing out so she was constantly in crisis.

She had given up and had accepted her life as it now was, based on something she had been told. Now, she was living as a victim suffering from an illness that she had just accepted and that she thought she would die with.

I still believe we can heal anything – even a life sentence that has been passed down from one generation to the next. It's like breaking down paradigms, shifting to a new consciousness, going beyond, jumping off that cliff into freedom. It is a mindset and your mind can create your reality. You can change anything if you truly want to.

Sometimes, I still wonder if I should have been diagnosed with “manic depression” years ago. But the fact is, I'm glad I never was, because I probably would have latched on to that label and walked around telling everyone I was destined to a life as a victim, for that was my M.O. back then, before I realized I was in control of healing my own self.

Am I still manic? Hell YES...when I go into my head and beat myself up. I have moments...no sometimes hours where I will pace and talk to myself and feel I am at the lowest point of my life. I call this the “pity pot.” And then I snap to and realize I can change my mindset.

Sometimes, it takes a walk on the beach, diving into either the pool or the ocean, a conversation with a good, supportive friend who knows me like a book or a beautiful glass of wine that smells like perfume. I have learned triggers that change my mindset, and catapult me into being able to talk my own self down off the high-wire of mania so that now the highs and lows are closer together.

Like this woman, I once assumed I was doomed and there was no hope, no one that could help me, and no way I could or would rid myself of this condition. But I did it. I broke the pattern and in doing so, I healed the generations before me and the one my son would now lead. How? By showing my friends and family that it is okay to feel too much...that it's all part of life and that I am not crazy...just feeling passionately.

Emotions are meant to be expressed through the emotional body and not through the mental one.

That's where the confusion and the insanity set in. The mind is a powerful weapon if it is aimed straight at you and not being used correctly. It should come with instructions!

Being raised in the same family might cause a propensity toward depression like you parents or siblings, but you can change the course in your current and future life. We have the power to heal anything and it starts with our own minds. We, of course have to heal the physical and emotional bodies while we are healing our minds, but we CAN do it.

ALTERNATIVES OR ANTIDEPRESSANTS

ALTERNATIVES

It was so wonderful to write a book such as this because everything I have ever experienced in my entire life (on depression) came tumbling back into the forefront of my mind, ready to answer the questions I was now asking myself. Everyone who has ever said anything profound to me came to mind as well. More signs along the roadmap to my life...

One Christmas day a decade ago, I was traveling and on a flight to Denver. A seventy year-old man sitting beside me was in poor health and had been on dialysis for quite some time. We pondered the meaning of life together, which was brought on by my question to him of what had kept him going through these last few years.

He was so wise. He said. *“In order to be happy in life, we must have something to live for, something to hope for, and something to love.”* And he said he had all three of these.

He had a passion for his work which he still tended to daily even at his age (something to live for). He believed he would live to see his grandchildren grow – he loved them so (hope). And he loved his wife. He talked about what an incredible woman she was and how he adored her, and she him (love). He had a smile that you knew was always there because the lines in his face told you so.

Each time I go to the void, I think about him and then contemplate my own life. **In order to be happy, we need to have a purpose, we need to have hope, and we need to know love.**

I have come to realize that many times when I have been depressed, it is because I have allowed my self to become seduced by my own mind. God it is brilliant! A good friend of mine a few weeks ago said, “Don’t be seduced

by the mind. **Minds don't feel. They think.**" You need to feel your life.
Not think about it!

For centuries, man has been on a quest - in search of how to quiet the mind and harness its energy. Many have written about it, but what it comes down to is that the key to quieting the mind is different for every single human being. What quiets your mind is not the same as mine. For some, it is sitting in meditation; for others, it is gardening or connecting with nature. The key is to do whatever it takes to connect you to your Source. This will quiet your mind.

I want to talk about the power of physical exercise for a moment. It is like a magical drug. It not only heals the body, but it also helps to harness the energy of the mind because you cannot think that deeply when you are focused on your own physical activity. It takes more energy to focus than it usually does when you are idle. Therefore, you cannot think but must put your thoughts aside until you have the time. And when you are being physical, this is when the magic happens...

When you are exercising the body, you release the pressure that is being created by your mind and its thoughts. Body Feels. Mind Thinks. There is great wisdom in the physical human experience, for it is all about feeling the sensations of life.

Think about what it is like when you make love...when you are in the throws of rapture...when you orgasm. Your hearts and souls writhe in ecstasy and you skid across the surface of your existence...no thoughts of where it is taking you...you are only along for this glorious ride. The mind has stopped. Nothing matters or exists at this moment in time. It is as if you have found the secrets to the universe and the cure for the human condition called suffering.

Can you imagine what shape the world would be in if everyone across the planet felt this feeling of souls dancing in ecstasy communing with God at the same moment in time?

Allowance, Acceptance and Peace ...would be all there was in the world...

Then I am reminded of the state of the world... **Maybe the depression I am feeling is the dire madness of the world** as it grows and evolves with

all it is going through at this point in its (our) evolution...we are all connected. It's just a breath away...the insanity...the depression.

The sanity I find myself searching for is the relief from my own mind cogitating on all of this.

How can we truly feel passion and think about living the life of our dreams when our mental minds look at the big picture and go, "Holy Shit!" It's not easy being a human when all of this is happening around you and you have no control over everyone else.

So give up the control of trying to fix everything and make it perfect. **Let it be.** Of course, help where you can. But help with no expectations because if you have them, you will be disappointed. **Accept** the world as it, and **allow** everyone else to play out their own dramas in their own lives. The most important job you have is to hold on to your own sanity and to find happiness inside your own self.

Remember: **It is your choice. You have the power.** Depression is something we create for ourselves...whether it is through the physical body or through the mind.

ANTIDEPRESSANTS

Sometimes when your world has been shattered, it is difficult to recover. Sometimes, even after the support of friends or family, or turning to your faith, or trying to care for yourself, or connecting with your Source and following some of the other suggestions we have talked about, you still cannot seem to pull yourself up out of the lows.

If you feel yourself on the edge and can't seem to get on top of it, then the last resort is antidepressants. And know that if you have to take them, you can always work with your doctor to reduce your dose and eventually get off of them as you work through things.

But **do not beat yourself up or judge yourself for your decision.** It is what it is and it may be necessary. Go easy on yourself. You have not failed. You have done the best you can, and it is all good.

Give yourself a timeframe to be on them, something you can live with. Give yourself a month or two or three, and see how you do by really looking inside yourself for the answers, and by using this guidebook to trigger the questions you will ask yourself.

Give yourself permission to stay in the void for a bit and not judge your self. Just remember to love your self and nurture your self during these times.

Eat chocolate, hug a puppy, hold a baby, smell a flower, take your shoes off and walk in the dirt in the forest, stand in the rain, swim naked and feel the cool waters tickle your body...and in taking these small steps, you will once again reignite your passions for life.

Take it slow. Don't think too much...just feel.

Eat clean and green and exercise. Take care of your body. Make life your meditation in all that you do. Allow yourself to be who you are – even when you don't know who you are in these moments. Just BE YOU and ACCEPT YOU.

Remember. **How you shift from depression is how you live with it.**

Dance on the edge of nothing with an empty mind. Buy an IPOD. It will stop the insanity and soothe the mind.

If you print this little e-book, there is a blank page at the end of it. Use this page to write down all your depressing thoughts, all your fears, all your negativity. Then close the book and walk away from it. Now you will step back into your life as a new person.

Remember, we all have the answers within; and if you think you don't, look for the signs that come before you each and every day. How could you possibly get lost if you are paying attention to them?

There...how do you feel now? Like there is HOPE, right?

So go out and take on Your Life!

LINKS AND INFORMATION

<http://www.pioneerthinking.com/main.html>

Aging

<http://www.solveyourproblem.com/anthony-robbins/get-the-edge.html>

Anthony Robbins

<http://www.anxietytreatment.com/>

Anxiety

<http://www.anjaliayurveda.com/main> Ayurvedic Naturopathic Medicine

<http://psychservices.psychiatryonline.org/cgi/content/full/53/9/1182>

Bipolar Disorder / Manic Depression

<http://www.quantumconsciousness.org/>

Brain Mind Science

<http://www.caregiver.on.ca/cgcc.html> Caregivers

<http://www.cedarfort.com/author/Michael.html>

Death, Facing It Through Laughter

http://www.healthyplace.com/Communities/Depression/treatment/alternative/food_moods.asp

Diet in Mental Health

<http://www.debtsteps.com/financial-stress.html>

Financial Stress, Help

http://www.helpguide.org/mental/grief_loss.htm

Grief, Dealing With It

<http://www.rockies.net/~spirit/grief/grief.html>

Grief and Loss Resource Center

http://www2.oprah.com/tows/pastshows/200505/tows_past_20050503.jhtml

Health

<http://www.herbdoc.com>

Herbal Products, Dr Richard Schulze

<http://www.drweil.com>

Integrative Medicine

<http://www.theseecret.tv/>

The Key

<http://www.alwaysgood.com/>

Live the Life of Your Dreams

<http://www.singlescafe.net/>

Loneliness

<http://adrr.com/living/>

Loss

<http://www.meditationhome.com>

Meditation

<http://mindbodyfocused.com/>

Mind-Body Health

<http://www.chopra.com/124103.html>

Mind-Body-Spirit

<http://www.garynull.com>

Natural Foods

<http://drbizal.com>

Personal Wellness Mastery

<http://skepdic.com/chopra.html>

Quantum Healing

<http://www.americangrassfedbeef.com/e3live-cousens.asp>

Raw Foods

<http://store.soundstrue.com/aw00539d.html>

When Things Fall Apart

http://www2.oprah.com/tows/booksseen/tows_book_20011107_dsichel.jhtml

Women's Moods

http://www.pureyoga.com/learn.php?section_id=5

Yoga and Meditation

EPILOGUE

In the autumn of 2005, I moved back to America after being in the south of Italy for half a year. I had traveled to a small island off the coast of Napoli called Capri and had fallen in love with the place. I knew I had to move there, for I had finally found my home for the first time in my life. There, I was at peace in the solitude and the stillness of the sea and in the little village of AnaCapri at the very top of this rock of an island that lay out in the middle of the Mediterranean.

Every day, I sat in the sunlight underneath the clear blue sky overlooking the aqua and turquoise waters that surrounded me. I listened to the sounds of silence for months and sat drinking tea on the terrazzo of my little villa overlooking Monte Vesuvio, the great volcano I came to have a love affair with. It was my strength and it spoke to me as I sat there gazing at it like a star-crossed lover. It had so much power that I wondered how I could harness it. It would take months of sitting in contemplation, before I would come to know how.

I sat for hours, watching the light of day as it danced across Vesuvio's face, changing it with each brilliant shade of sunlight and shadow of cloud. The colors of the sea morphed into liquid aquamarine as the sun danced across the sky. My favorite time of day was two hours before sunset – “tramonte” as the Italians call it. They all stop and “Ahhhh...” acknowledging it with their hearts. At this time of day, the sun shines diamonds on the water, millions of them as if the sun god, Apollo himself had dripped them there. I knew it was a gift to me, for I was in Paradiso with my soul wide open, worshipping everything around me.

This special time brought many gifts to me. After six weeks of living in AnaCapri, I was finally able to make peace and then make love with my bedfellow who had come all the way from American with me – my depression. I embraced it and loved it. I loved it so much that it finally released me, and thanked me for acknowledging it after such a long silent treatment where I had pushed it away as if it was a skeleton in my closet that I was ashamed of.

It helped me understand that the mind is so powerful it can form your life and your sanity – or insanity for that matter. I had always been insane until I reached the shores of Capri, I later came to realize. Sanity - or insanity was all in my mind...the same as my depression. Once I harnessed and trained the mind, then I was able to do the same with my depression. Only then was it like a wild steed that had been tamed.

Once I was able to climb onto its back, I could ride it forever, it following me eagerly, as I led the way. As long as I kept it happy, the reins were in my hands and I had the world at my feet waiting for me to gallop across it.

So I did just that. I acknowledged my pain. I acknowledged my suffering. I acknowledged my loneliness and my fears for my life. I acknowledged that I was depressed and after six weeks of holding my head in my hands as I drank my tea and stared at the Mediterraneo and Monte Vesuvio, I finally had all my answers, and I was ready to let it take me like a lover, out into my new world as I drank in every moment.

My playground was the Bay of Napoli as I sailed in my winged hydrofoil across it. My vistas were from the great volcanic cliffs that surrounded me on Capri - Ischia, Sorrento and the Amalfi Coastline. I swam at the rocky beaches where bits of polished pebbles, glass, and colored tile washed up onto shore for my gathering. There, I lay in the sun feeling its heat on my body, soothing me and bringing it to life after being ill for so long.

Let's go back to the beginning of this phase in my life that took me unwillingly into this year-long depression...

I had been diagnosed with Ocular Myasthenia Gravis (OMG) two years before, and my health was failing. Because of the weakness in my limbs and the muscles in my face, and the numbness in my hands and feet, it was a miracle that I was able to get to Capri at all...but I did. I lay awake for weeks before I started my sojourn, worrying about whether I would be able to drag my suitcase behind me or even walk through the airport. I was almost too weak to think about it, but my spirit was driving me with this unknown force.

I knew I had to go to heal not only my physical body, but also my spirit. I had become increasingly depressed over that last year due to my diminished

physicality. I had always been a high energy person and now my body could not keep up with my mind.

It was a miraculous time for me when everything in my life was laid out before me. Did I want to jump off the cliff and freefall into a new life filled with happiness and joy and perfect health?

Or did I want to stay where I was, wrapped up in the arms of a comfortable life and job?

The choice was made for me, for my soul made the decision that I could not make. All I had to do was close my eyes and breathe, and I was led so easily through the rest. My new life path was that of a rudder on a sailing vessel as it sliced through the waters of the world. It was that easy. All I had to do was say “yes” to it.

And magically, life changed into a fairytale and I was now living and writing in paradiso. Do you know that in Italy, paradiso means both heaven and paradise? And that it was...a perfect description of what I had found there. It was that glorious.

I lived consciously each and every moment – as I took each breath, as I drank my tea, as I walked to the village, a mile each way for my food and supplies...yes, I forced myself to walk each day the first month. It was almost impossible, but I had no choice. My diet was clean and consisted of organic fruits and vegetables, olive oil, very little meat, and lots of fresh fish that smelled like the sea...

I slept long hours each night in my new stress-free life and it changed not only how I felt, but also how I thought. I was now physically healed and mentally healthy. I had made peace with all of me and I was whole again. It was a surreal time where my reality was my dream and my dream had become my reality.

Then one day, I awoke; and as I removed the soft Italian linen sheets from my body, sat upright, and placed my feet on the tiled floor of my little bedroom in my villa, I spoke to myself out loud. *“I have to go now.”*

I knew I had to do it, as much as my soul did not want to. I had to return to my life in the States. But that day, I heard the sea whisper to me that I

would come back to live and die on the soil of Capri, for I was only going to America for an extended vacation...maybe five years or so.

So I left the island and rode the hydrofoil across the Bay of Napoli, not taking my eyes off the cliff-line. I wanted to remember every line, every curve, every boat in its port. I wanted to remember the smell of the Mediterraneo, like an intoxicating perfume. I closed my eyes and listened to the poetry of the language that those around me spoke, and promised myself I would be back to visit many more times before I came to finally live here forever.

My return to America was not an easy one, for I wept every day that I awoke here and dreamt every night that I was back there, walking along the cliffs of my island. It was months before I was able to buy into having to be here again, living and working. Then it was many more months before I even realized that my old lover, that bed-fellow that had kept me company for six weeks in Capri, had returned and wrapped its arms around me so tightly that I could hardly breathe.

I was deeply depressed. I tried to smile every day and be thankful for all that I had – the good life living by the ocean here while I worked at a job I loved by day, and my soul writing love letters to Monte Vesuvio by night.

But each day that I was separated from my soul mate Vesuvio, the depression grew stronger...so strong that it finally got my attention by holding me down against my bed one morning when I tried to rise up to meet my day. I was caught inside a moment when time stopped. I tried to get up, but I couldn't – didn't want to. I didn't care if I lay there forever. Nothing could arouse me. I felt numb. Thoughts swam in my head as my ego tried to get my attention. It nudged me as if it were a soldier guarding something precious, telling me to move along and not disrupt things.

I didn't care. I was even too numb to weep, to feel, to release it all. And in that moment, I fell back into deep slumber and dreamed I was standing on my terrazzo at tramonte, watching the sun fall lazily into the sea as Vesuvio looked on from a distance. I smelled the air and heard the silence. I felt the light breeze on my skin and my soul sang; and when my eyes opened, I had *Vesuvio* in my heart and Capri on my lips. It was enough to pull me from my bed and get me to move to meet my day.

I had a purpose and I knew I had to keep moving – moving toward my future – my destiny – to go back to my lover and wrap myself up in his arms so I could stay there forever. So I allowed myself to grieve...but only for a short time.

Then I promised myself I would move my body with exercise, I'd eat healthy, I'd love and nurture myself and live my life passionately, each and every moment. I promised myself I would do the things that that I needed to do to fill me up with passion. I surrounded myself with friends and family who I loved and who loved me, and I sang every moment that I could.

And each and every day, I make a conscious effort and a promise to myself, to live the life I love - the kind of life I had in Capri.

My wish for you is to please, please take care of yourself, get to know yourself, love yourself and give yourself everything that makes you happy, because my deepest desire and hope for you is that you find your own Capri.

Cleaning Out the Closets of the Mind

Note: Please write down all your stresses, fears, and negativities that you will release as soon as you close this book. Remember...No judgment.



THE END