

Leigh's Story (continued from [http:// www.consciouslyhealingcancer.com/about.html](http://www.consciouslyhealingcancer.com/about.html))

As I lay my head down on his desk unable to believe what I was hearing, he gently broke the news.

“This means surgery. We’re going to have to remove your anus, your rectum and parts of your sigmoid colon. You’ll be obligated to a colostomy bag for the rest of your life. After that, you’ll be able to live a normal life. You should be back on your bike within a month.”

The emotional roller coaster that followed was intense. I could no longer avoid that cancer targeted me. I could no longer hide the fear that I might die. I was terrified at losing a body part and living out the rest of my life as a freak with a colostomy bag. My two young children had already been through enough, and I was flattened with guilt that they should have to sustain more blows.

Only the enduring love of my husband and the help from my friends carried me through that dark time.

The surgery went as expected, but the recovery didn’t. My skin had been so compromised by the radiation that the wound site—an empty “space” the size of a large orange—wasn’t closing up. The possibility for infection was great. I was unable to sit so I couldn’t drive which made me dependent on others. I felt powerless, stripped of my independence and identity, and unsure if I would ever find normal life again.

Loving friends and devoted family drove me to a constant line up of doctor appointments and consistently wiped away my tears. I saw a wound specialist three times a week and was visited by a home health nurse almost daily. These patient and kind people changed the dressing and assessed the progress of the wound every day. When they weren’t doing it, I was.

Six weeks passed and there was no improvement. The wound doc put me in the hospital to scrape out the dead skin within the wound, hoping that new, healthy skin would replace it. More weeks passed. The procedure didn’t work. I was given a wound vac, a device that has to be taped to the wound site with an airtight seal. Twice, I had severe allergic reactions to the tape. That option was out. Finally nearly three months after the original surgery, I underwent another operation, something called a skin flap.

They took a long muscle from my right leg and inserted it into the wound expecting that it would provide fresh blood supply.

A week after that surgery, the skin still wasn't healing. It was Thanksgiving day, 2007, and I was still in the hospital. I dropped to the depths of despair. I wept into the phone to my sister while my husband held my hand. I feared that I would never heal. Feared that fate would render me helpless and dependent on others for the rest of my life. Feared that whomever I had been before was completely gone, and I had no idea who I was.

Two days later, the wound doc assessed the surgery site as he did twice daily. Rather than hearing him snip away the dead skin and report the bad news as he had done each day since the surgery, there was silence.

“What?” I bellowed, preparing for him to relay that the surgery hadn't worked.

“It's taking. It looks good,” he said. “We're out of the woods.”

He released me from the hospital three days later. But I was by no means healed.

For three months, I tended to my wound, unable to sit. I kneeled on an oversized pillow at the dinner table. I lay on the couch when friends visited or cuddling with my kids before the TV. I spent many hours in bed, contemplating my journey. As I watched my children come and go, I felt delight in the presence of their innocence and wonder. As my husband refrained from complaining, helped with the kids' homework, worked overtime to pay the bills, insisted that I eat, and reassured me that I would someday heal, I experienced the meaning of devotion. As my mother held my hand, made small talk and looked at me so tenderly, I reveled in the unconditional support of maternal love. As my friends sat by my bedside, rubbed my feet, lovingly cooked us meals and contributed money to an alternative healing fund, I was overcome with the awe by their giving. As my faithful dog lay in the crook of my knees day and night, allowing me to cry into her soft fur or ask a litany of unanswerable questions, I was lightened by the faith in her eyes. I was awash with gratitude for it all. During these long months, I was still and quiet enough to experience the ubiquity—the absolute and undeniable healing force—of love.

Even though I couldn't sit, drive, or immerse myself in water, even though I was in constant pain, unable to work, at risk for infection and feeling vulnerable in so many

ways, I began to see my life and all of its contents, as nothing short of magnificent and being supported in the cradle of an ever-powerful, always accessible grace.

When I awakened to this omniscient energy, I resumed my spiritual practice with vigor. I read books, listened to CDs, meditated, prayed. I did a deep and thorough inventory of my internal world and discovered that I had much to release. I examined my unhealed wounds. I did forgiveness exercises. I revisited childhood traumas and learned to let go of grievances that I had carried throughout my 48 years. I had regular acupuncture with a man who could practically read my mind and who helped me quit feeling like a victim and take my power back. I had physical therapy with a woman who could sense exactly where my stiffness was rooted—not only in my physical body, but also in my emotional body. I had regular telephone sessions with a healer in a city hundreds of miles away who took me by the spiritual hand and led me to a place of acceptance and peace. I did sessions of Reiki and healing touch and chiropractic. I bought a micro current machine and used it near the wound site almost daily. I found the most wonderful, loving community of healers and health-care practitioners that could ever be found. Normal life took on a new definition.

In May of 2008, the wound site finally healed. Nine months after the original surgery.

That summer, I taught workshops on forgiveness and acceptance, surrender and gratitude. I felt anew. I was happier than I had ever been before.

Then, in the fall of 2008, after a routine CT scan, another tumor appeared. This one near the sciatic nerve in my buttocks. I had no symptoms and no pain. The news lurched me back into the grip of despair.

The doctor was grim. More radiation would kill me. Chemo wasn't appropriate. Surgery...wouldn't heal. The prospects were frightening. It had metastasized.

"It's what's to come that scares me," the kind doctor said shaking his head. He didn't need to say anything more for me to understand what he meant.

After two weeks of severe depression and annihilating conversations with my husband about who would care for our two children after I was gone, I decided to see Diana, a therapist. I couldn't bear the weight I carried and wanted help on ways to live as fully as I could for as long as I was alive.

Diana laughed out loud. “This is outrageous!” she cried. “You’re not dying! You have one tiny tumor in your butt! They have no idea what will happen to you!”

She had been reading Dr. Candace Pert’s book, *The Molecules of Emotion*, which explains the scientific evidence behind how thoughts impact cells. As she told me about it, suddenly, the air was light again. I had hope.

I left her office with a new mission: to work with the cells within my body. To train my mind so that the communication between my thoughts and my cells were positive. I would approach this new diagnosis from every angle: physically, emotionally, intellectually and spiritually.

And, I would write a book. It would be about people who were told they were going to die, but who are cancer free or thriving. It would include interviews with doctors who treat cancer with alternative methods, as well as traditional and respected oncologists who are striking out in new, less destructive directions with cancer treatment. It would also feature experts—scientists and doctors alike—who know all about how our thoughts impact our cells. And I would ask every single person I interviewed what they think about how our mind can both create and cure cancer.

My physical journey included eating raw foods and working with an alternative doctor who uses herbs and homeopathy for healing. I continued my sessions with all types of healers, and committed to a mediation practice that employed guided imagery and deep relaxation. My biggest challenge was to forge a new pathway in my brain that believed, without a doubt, that I could heal.

I also underwent a new kind of radiation—a five day protocol—that was supposed to be free of side-effects. It wasn’t, but the impact was minimal and adding allopathic treatment to my alternative and spiritual menu felt right to me.

I read everything I could about self healing. And I wrote the book.

Writing the book and digging deeply into myself required commitment and fortitude I had never known before. It also freed me up from a lifetime of thoughts and habits that obstructed my relationship with myself and the unfathomable beauty and abundance of life.

In the fall of 2009, one year after the last tumor had been detected, the tumor was completely gone. Vanished. I am cancer free.

I have come to believe that my cancer was an expression of unhealed wounds. I have always been an upbeat person with a positive outlook, but when I looked deeper into myself, I found that I had a life of harbored fears, resentments and anger—feelings that I accepted as “normal.” They’re not. That’s hard to realize in a culture that promotes and values drama, antipathy and inflammatory remarks. It’s hard to realize that love is all there is—and the most powerful source of healing—when people find false strength in blame, judgment, anger, vindictiveness and separation.

Our bodies are constantly reflecting what makes up our thoughts and feelings. There isn’t a mind/body connection. We are one organism. Once we learn to deliberately guide our thoughts and feelings to create unity within ourselves and toward others, then the channels of communication burst open. Not only between the mind and body, but also between our understanding of who we really are and the power of the universe. That’s when everything changes.

True healing occurs in the great adventure of learning who we really are.