

Introduction Personal

Looking back, I first began thinking about this book in 1963. That was the year one of my best friends, Linda, was diagnosed with cancer. She died many months later. I was 16 years old. I think she was 17 years old by the time she died. We spent a lot of time together both through her brave fight for life and then during the time she knew she would die. I remember so much. I remember our many conversations about life and death, about her fears and her pain, about her joys and sorrows, but mostly, I remember how she came to understand love in a way that has taken me many years to learn.

I also remember how we needed help. We needed help in understanding what was happening to her and help in understanding what was happening to me. But there wasn't any. Neither of our parents knew to get psychological help for us. We didn't know of any books to read. So, we two teenagers listened to each other and did the best we could.

I listened and watched as she used the power of her mind. I was amazed at her outlook on life, awed by her determination, attitude, and strong will. At the time, I sensed that she gave herself extra time and certainly a better quality of life because of these strengths. I think that if she had access to all the cancer treatments that are available today, along with the power of her positive and wise mind, she would have survived the cancer.

She left me wondering what it was all about. What was this powerful mind/body/spirit interaction that I witnessed in her? What was that strength she was drawing from that enabled her to stay connected to me, other friends, and family, live longer, and smile up until the very end?

Not surprisingly, my experience with my dear friend was a powerful influence in my choice to study psychology. I started working with children and their families, and I quickly learned that the differences in people's lives is not always what happens to them, but how they interpret what happens to them. People who talk to themselves in positive ways feel better about their lives. People who talk to themselves in negative ways are not so happy. Over time, I noticed the interaction of mind and body. The children and families who worked at keeping a positive mental attitude seemed to get sick less, solved problems more quickly, seemed to be generally more satisfied with their lives. They felt more in control, even though the same difficulties were happening to them.

I began to wonder about meditation. In 1974, I read *How to Meditate, A Guide to Self-Discovery* by Lawrence Le Shan. My husband and I began to meditate, and discovered how calmed and in control we felt. Even when our lives were chaotic, we felt calm and centered.

In 1981, I found Norman Cousins's *Anatomy of an Illness* at the bookstore and read his story about how he used the power of his mind to overcome a serious illness. I remember my excitement about the concept of mind/body healing. Within the month, I developed a serious autoimmune problem which doctors could not diagnose. I was in terrible pain and felt like I would die. But, I didn't feel out of control. I felt blessed that I had read Norman Cousins's book, and immediately adopted his plan for keeping my mood positive as I imagined myself recovered. I recovered eventually, and I believe that the illness was less traumatic for me because I felt I had control over myself and my healing.

Other life events happened to me, my family, my friends, and my patients, that influenced me to explore the connections among mind, body, and spirit. I watched people's minds help their bodies feel better and recover from a variety of problems. I watched as people's bodies challenged their minds to learn something new and helpful. And I watched people learning about love, connecting to others, and about being the best person they could be as their spiritual selves emerged.

Along the way, I learned about using visual imagery for healing. That was another blessing. In 1992 I had pneumonia. It came on quickly and it was a deadly kind. My doctor told me that the antibiotics were not working and that I might die. Again, I felt blessed that I knew about the power of my mind. I went into a meditative state and imagined my immune system hard at work in and around my lungs, and I imagined myself well. Within 24 hours the pneumonia was in retreat, and I made a quick recovery. I believe that I was able to mobilize my immune system by using the power of my mind so that the antibiotics could start working. In my meditation, I felt I became one with the Universe and connected to peace. Using the power of my mind and spirit along with the power of modern medicine was the combination I needed to live.

I have witnessed what happened to me, happen to others. I have been privileged to witness friends and patients recover from illness by using the power of their minds to connect mind, body and spirit for healing. I have been privileged to be with people who have prolonged their lives, who have created a precious quality of life,

and who discovered that living through serious illness brings special learning, wisdom, and love.

I'm still working on what happened to Linda and me. Linda moved on in spirit and I moved on in life. Her life and death were an exquisite gift to me. She started me on a journey of connection, of finding the balance in mind, body, and spirit. She opened the door to my knowing that I can sit with other people's pain, and that I can sit with my own. She taught me that I can be with people in a positive, healing way. She taught me that I am happy when I'm learning, and happiest when I pass that learning on. I hope I can pass on to you the learning that began with my childhood friendship with Linda.