

THE WAR OF WORDS

How Not To Fight Cancer - Insights From an 'Insider'

As I am writing this article the end of 2009 is approaching, for many, this a time for contemplation and reflection. I have a special calendar for this time a year with stories for each day and today's story was about a woman remembering how after WWII, it took her three years to build a new nativity scene. Three years to collect wooden cigar boxes from her neighbor in exchange for eggs to make the figures; three years to save the money to replace the two broken blades for the saw she borrowed; three years collecting paint tins from the painter next door for the precious drops at the bottom to color the figures. She ends her story by saying, that even now – fifty years later, she still looks forward to display this nativity scene, and to please understand that it had to have a chicken in it, because without her chickens dutifully laying the many eggs, there would have been no nativity scene.

I was moved by this story because of the patience, dedication and resourcefulness this woman showed – which in itself is amazing – and because of her ability to stay with her vision, to hold her passion, and to take the many little steps over such a long period of time to reach her goal and more importantly, because she was able to change a dire experience into something beautiful and meaningful.

The story also reminded me of those clients of mine, who have been confronted with what can be perceived as a life threatening illnesses. Never did I imagine that the time would come, when I would become a member of their club. But here I am, thirteen months after being diagnosed with breast cancer, having lived through what I would call the most intensive period of my life. Many good things happened throughout these months, many challenging moments came and went, I have changed and continue to change, not immediately and not just because of the diagnosis. More so, because of the training that I have had in the past and the support I receive as I live the process. I have gained through my own experiences and the many women, doctors and nurses that I have spoken with and even been able to help along the way, have opened in me a passion and dedication similar to the woman in the nativity story. Today I begin to share with you some of what I have learned.

Like so many others, when I first heard the diagnosis, I went into a kind of shock and then I

received my first lesson: a friend was with me and created what we as hypnotists, know as a 'pattern interrupt.' It was really only a sentence or two but it brought me back from the abyss of fear into who I am and returned me to a sense of control in the moment as I began the uncertain journey ahead.

Again, like so many others who are faced with cancer or a similar medical crisis, I consciously decided that since I had to go through this experience, I would learn as much as possible toward healing myself and as an energy worker and hypnotist, to be able to assist my clients more effectively in the future as well.

In the past I referred to cancer as an opportunity to connect more deeply with our spiritual aspect. And while this still holds true, I now know that there is so much more to it. It is my belief that we are spiritual beings in physical bodies experiencing the world with all our physical senses and beyond. Cancer, like any other life threatening illness or chronic disease, affects all aspects of our being: the emotional, mental, physical, and spiritual. As much as we think we are able and want to empathize, one cannot prepare for what happens next. Just the emotional overwhelm by itself has so many faces: there is grief over the end of our life as we know it, the stress and pressure having to make life-altering decisions with very little time and too much or too little information. There is the question of how to relate the diagnosis to our loved-ones and the worry about how they might deal with it. The anticipation of how challenging the physical implications of cancer treatments will be is just impossible to IMAGINE.

But... having been there, I more than ever believe, that there are powerful ways to assist. My firsthand experience as a patient as well as a professional allowed me to understand on a much deeper level how we can be more effective with our clients, what it takes to re-empower a person and how to bring back a sense of inner stability when the world seems to be crashing down on you.

As hypnotists, we are trained in the effective use of language, we are told to use positive phrasing. Yet the POSITIVE results of a cancer diagnosis are devastating and confusing, and gives a whole new meaning to the word 'positive'.

As I mentioned, I was very lucky; when I was told about the ‘positive’ results and my world stood still for this very long moment, I had a friend at my side, who immediately reframed the diagnosis in such a way that I never became ‘IT’. Looking back, it still amazes me, how one sentence can be so powerful. Sometimes it felt awkward to search for words that were true to my feelings, while describing the experience accurately and opening the space for the best possible outcome. Often when asked how I felt, I would say that there is plenty of room for improvement: a statement that covered it all.

It is my belief that words carry energy and therefore I never cared for the militaristic/conflict jargon used in medical treatment. We hear people talk about FIGHTING cancer, KILLING THE CELLS. Fighting feels exhausting to me, so my goal was to find words and visualizations that addressed the miscommunication among the cells while allowing for the healing to take place, instead of using images referring to war and death. So I looked for ways and words that would enhance understanding and peace on a cellular level.

Experiencing the need for and the power of, a loving care giver was unexpected and humbling. It is a great relief to have someone at your side as your guardian, your second pair of eyes and ears. It seems that as patients, we often shut down – at least that is what I did - when too much scary information is given. Knowing there is someone with you who listens or asks questions for you, holds you when you seem to fall into this bottomless pit is an amazing resource. Someone who makes you laugh even when you feel like crying, is not only so very helpful but empowering. With my clients I now extend my assistance to the care giver as well, they too can become exhausted and overwhelmed in the process and can better assist when they are familiar with even the most basic stress relief resources.

Once the diagnosis is given, it seems as if a medical machine takes over. In order to maintain a sense of power, the doctors, nurses and therapists and even the mechanical devices themselves, became my outer healing team: partners on my path to well-being. Yes, there are a few tricks to learn, in order for that team to remember you as the person you are. Once you know what to do, the rewards of every cookie, every comment you offer expressing interest in their lives becomes an asset. I was also impressed by the unspoken expectation of the medical or outer healing team that we know how to heal and how to cope with whatever they prescribe. In their own way, they have a lot of trust and faith in the healing abilities of our bodies. And I agree, I can feel nothing but gratitude toward my body and its amazing ability to recover from so many invasive treatments and still work properly.

The complement to the outer healing team is the Inner Healing Team. Finding the different members of the Inner Healing Team and learning how to relate to each member has been quite fascinating. It would go beyond the scope of this article to share the story of my Dragon Lady, but it is truly an amazing experience when we discover such strong allies within our selves. We can make it fun and easy for our clients to discover the members of their own Inner Healing Team and when they begin to communicate with their team, the moments of awe-filled insights are priceless.

Buddha says:

*The secret of health for both mind and body is
not to mourn for the past,
nor to worry about the future,
but to live the present moment wisely and earnestly.*

Whatever we do, think or feel, arises from our thoughts. When it comes to illnesses like cancer and we find our entire essence being challenged, our thoughts are influenced by our emotions. When we assist our clients in processing their emotions of grief, fear, anger, shame, or guilt and guide them into finding a new or deeper realization of who they are and always will be, their chance of living in the present moment increases immensely. Through our thoughts we can shift from survivor to thriver, from patient to actively participating client, from victim to the co-creator of our life's experience.