

CHRONIC FATIGUE  
My Special Bridge  
by Judith Morton Fraser

The summer of 1986, with so many things in my life going right, fate played a cruel joke, and turned everything upside down.

I had been counseling physically and emotionally abused children; setting up educational material for therapists on the devastation of child sexual abuse; assisting the American Cancer Society in their outreach program; working with adults who were experiencing anxiety disorders and preparing to take the exam for my state license as a Marriage, Family, Child, Therapist.

I was a hard working, happy, forty-eight year old woman. Our children were getting ready to leave the nest. My husband and I both had more time for each other, as well as to follow special interests.

I loved the excitement of learning new things, as well as reaching out into the community to be of service. I had a thirsty mind and a willing heart.

Then something happened. I started to get tired. Very tired. At first I thought it was a bug of some kind that would go away. As weeks went by, my muscles began to ache and I could hardly walk. The memory I had always taken for granted was getting dim. Sometimes, it was a struggle to remember what I was doing, or had to do next.

I began skipping lunch so I could take a nap. After work, I hurried home, so I could take another nap. "A really bad flu," I said to my worried family. My self diagnosis led me to take extra vitamin c, garlic, and echinacea, as well as my usually dose of vitamins. I also added fresh, home-made vegetable juice to my daily routine. A concoction that had always worked before.

After several months of resting as much as I could, and trying home remedies, instead of getting better, I was getting worse.

Finally, I dragged myself to the doctor, thinking he could prescribe something that would make this "bug" go away.

"You have a bad case of Mononucleosis, and worse than that, you test positive for Chronic Fatigue Syndrome," the doctor said, after the blood tests came back. "There isn't anything I can do that will make it better. Just rest. The Mono will go away in a few months, but Chronic Fatigue can take five years to get out of your system, and in some cases, it keeps reoccurring for a lifetime."

"Five years," I cried. "I can't be this tired and achy for five years. There's too much to do. People depend on me."

I guess I thought my desire to continue the life I'd been living could change the diagnosis. It didn't. The Mono went away in a few months. The Chronic Fatigue didn't. It was just as the doctor had said.

No matter how much I tried to push to regain my old lifestyle, I always ended up exhausted. At the end of the first year, I could barely climb twenty stairs. I'd given up my daily walks in the hills near our home. I'd quit my work at the counseling centers. I'd stopped going out with friends, except on rare occasions.

When my husband got a temporary job in Germany and wanted the rest of us to go with him, I had to stay home. They offered to get me a wheelchair and push me around. I knew that even a chair on wheels wouldn't give me the strength I needed to travel.

It took all that I had to just carry on with the basic necessities. Sometimes, my head and muscles hurt so much that I thought I was going to die—and sometimes, I hoped that I would.

At the end of the second year, I was very depressed. Nothing I could figure out seemed to work. The fatigue just kept ebbing and flowing according to its own agenda, not mine. I was frustrated, angry and embarrassed. How did I get into this terrible position? What had I done to deserve this dilemma?

One day, I laid in bed crying and feeling very sorry for myself. Tears streamed down my face and into my ears. I wanted my old life back. I missed the vibrant, fast-moving, quick thinking, independent woman, mother and wife, that I had been. My whole body sobbed with the pain of my lost self.

*"Be with the feelings deep inside you, as if they were friends, not enemies."*

When I had spent all of the tears, and didn't have an ounce of energy left to do anything but lie there, something happened. I heard someone speak to me.

"Slow down ... just slow down," someone said in a deep calm voice. I opened my eyes and looked around. No one was there. It was confusing. Weird. I knew I heard a male voice, but I wasn't sure where it was coming from. I was used to hearing my own inner dialogue. I knew how to reason with unreasonable thoughts. This was different. These weren't thoughts, they were actual spoken words.

Maybe I was becoming paranoid on top of everything else. Maybe I was really losing my mind. Maybe this was a psychedelic experience, something others described in books about altered experiences through LSD. However, I'd never taken LSD. Maybe I was talking to my father. He'd been dead a long time, but some people describe "talking to those who've passed on." It didn't sound like my father. It didn't sound like anyone I'd ever met. Maybe it was an angel. My guardian angel.

As I lay there, trying to make sense of it all, the voice spoke again.

"Slow down," the voice said again, more emphatically.

Jarred into responding, I blurted out, "I have slowed down. I'm at a standstill already."

If anyone would have walked into my room at that time, they probably would have locked me up. I was lying perfectly still, talking out loud, to something that was talking back to me. Something invisible.

"Are you going to let me help you or just keep doing this alone," the voice said firmly.

Goose-bumps sprang up all over my body. It was not only talking to me, it seemed to KNOW me—intimately. It was as if it had been following me around.

I had been doing this alone. I'd tried to slow down in ways that I thought my body wanted. I didn't know any other way to go about trying to get rid of my illness.

Shaken into subservience I finally answered, "OK, I'm willing."

What else did I have to do? I'd tried everything I knew. I was afraid if I didn't listen to what the voice wanted to tell me, I'd fall flat on my face again. I wanted to try something new. I just didn't know how to do what the voice was asking.

"What should I do?" I asked, waiting suspensively, unsure of what I was waiting for.

"Just relax. Focus on sensations. What are you feeling?" the voice said gently.

I took a deep breath in and followed the way it made my body feel as it moved in through my nose, down my throat and into my diaphragm.

"Be with the feelings deep inside you, as if they were friends, not enemies."

Instead of pushing away from my fatigue, I began to increase my awareness of it. It felt like a grey cloud, hanging in space. It was scary but I stayed with it. As I focused on the cloud and the feelings that came up, I was taken on a journey. A journey unlike anything I'd ever experienced before. I drifted into another dimension.

All of my energy became intensely focused inside of me, not in my thoughts, but inside the sensations of my body. I floated in and out of colors, shapes, and forms. Then, even though my parents had been dead for many years, I sensed them with me. Their love was overpowering. It felt like a bright light touching and warming every molecule within me.

I began to re-experience a myriad of joyful past experiences. Time meant nothing in this other dimension. I was six years old, then twenty six; three, then thirty. Wonderful, delightful moments played like a movie in my mind. Instead of just watching—I was reliving it.

When I opened my eyes, I felt a surge of energy shoot through me, an electrical charge that made my whole body vibrate. It was wonderful! It was like someone had given me a magic pill. My depression had given way to hope. It was hard to believe that listening to my body could give me such an incredible gift.

Each time I went back inside to listen, more and more love and joy poured through me. It helped me to slow down in ways I never thought possible.

I became keenly aware of my misuse of the very thing that my illness had robbed me of . . . Energy. If a thought came up that was none of my business, or I had no control over, I learned to let it go. "A waste of energy," would echo in my mind. I also, learned to stop volunteering to do things for others that they could easily do for themselves. The less I used energy in ways that were unnecessary, the more time I had to enjoy the wonders of life: the softness of the ferns growing in my garden, the sounds of the hummingbird drinking from my orange flowers, the blush of pink dancing across my white roses, the

smells of winter after our last storm, the music of the coyote singing through the air on garbage night, and the sounds of silence.

My life has definitely been turned upside down. Listening to my body is now something I do on a constant basis. It aids me in my writing, acting, and counseling as well as the myriad of other things I do.

Tension, fatigue, fear, illness, or just a tightening in the stomach, are signals of some kind. When I take time to acknowledge, rather than push away, from these signals, I receive information that is personal and unique.

What was once a devastating experience has become the catalyst for a new, exciting connection. One that I will never turn away from again. It is the nectar that feeds my soul. My special bridge to an Infinite Wisdom that I call, The Great Spirit, God.