

**MY STORY**  
**HOW MY ANGER AT CHRONIC FATIGUE**  
**LED ME TO HEAR MY INNER WISDOM**

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*"We don't receive wisdom; we must discover it for ourselves  
after a journey that no one can take for us or spare us." - Marcel Proust*

The summer of 1986, with so many things in my life going right, fate played a cruel joke. I had been counseling physically and emotionally abused children, setting up educational material for therapists on the devastation of child sexual abuse, counseling cancer patients and their families for the American Cancer Society, working with adults who were experiencing anxiety disorders, and preparing to take the exam for my state license as a Marriage, Family Therapist.

I was a hard working, happily married, 48-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 time to follow our own 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 it 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.

After work, I hurried home so I could take a nap. "A really bad flu," I said to my worried family. My self diagnosis led me to take extra vitamin C, garlic and echinacea along with my regular vitamins. I visualized healing light around my body every chance I could get. I pushed myself to exercise as much as I could. I prayed hard. But every time I moved forward two inches, I fell backward six.

After several months of trying home remedies I dragged myself to the doctor. I thought maybe he could prescribe something that would make this "bug" go away.

"You have a bad case of Mononucleosis, and you test positive for the Epstein Barr Virus that seems to be a part of Chronic Fatigue Syndrome," the doctor said after the blood tests came back. "Mononucleosis is contagious so you must have come in contact with someone with that disease. Chronic Fatigue can develop from a nutritional deficiency, which I don't think you have, or be incurred through a toxic environment. Often a multiplicity of factors are involved. Certainly stress of any kind lowers the immune system as does the overuse of antibiotics. There isn't anything I can do that will make it better. Just eat well, take good care of yourself and 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.

The overwhelming tiredness and loss of muscle strength reminded me of a childhood disease. I had Rheumatic Fever when I was nine years old. One of the ways to heal Rheumatic Fever was to have Penicillin shots, antibiotics. As a child, I had a shot every four hours for nine months. Now, the doctor had said the overuse of antibiotics could weaken the immune system. What healed me in the past hurt me years later.

A woman who worked in the library at Children's Institute just before me had left her job due to illness that she attributed to the pesticide the facility used weekly to keep bugs out of the old books. It didn't seem like a threat when I started working there a year earlier, but now with Chronic Fatigue, it felt like another contributor to my illness. The doctor also mentioned stress, but I didn't know what that was. I always prided myself in being able to smooth out problems.

The Mono went away in a few months. The Chronic Fatigue stayed. No matter how much I tried to push to regain my old lifestyle, I always ended up exhausted. It was just as the doctor had said.

When my husband got a temporary job in Germany and wanted the family to go with him, I had to stay home. They offered to get me a wheelchair and push me around but, I knew that even a chair on wheels wouldn't give me the strength I needed to travel. It took all the energy I had to just carry on with the basic necessities of life. 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 first year, I could barely climb twenty stairs. I'd given up my daily walks in the hills near our home. And, of course I'd quit work at the counseling centers. I rarely went out with friends. Every time I pushed myself to resume my old lifestyle I ended up feeling exhausted.

At the end of the second year I was frustrated, angry, embarrassed and depressed. The fatigue just kept ebbing and flowing according to its own agenda, not mine. *How did I get into this terrible position? What had I done to deserve this dilemma?* It seemed that God was punishing me and I didn't know why.

One day, I laid in bed crying and feeling 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.

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. It wasn't the same kind of voice that I hear when I'm talking to myself or remembering what one of my girlfriends has said. In fact, it wasn't a female voice at all. It was a male voice. The tones were deep and resonant.

"Slow down. Just slow down," the voice said. I opened my eyes and looked around. No one was there. It was confusing. Weird. I knew I heard a male voice, but wasn't sure where it was coming from. I was used to hearing my own inner dialogue--reasoning with unreasonable thoughts and following through on positive 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. But, I'd never taken LSD. Maybe I was

talking to my Father. He'd been dead a long time, but 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."

Jarred into responding, I blurted out, "I have slowed down." But, I still wondered where this voice was coming from.

"Are you going to let me help you, or just keep doing this alone?"

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'd tried to slow down in ways that I thought my body wanted but it didn't help. I had been doing this alone.

Shaken into subservience, I finally answered, "O.K., I'm willing. What should I do?"

"Listen to your body. Be with the feelings deep inside you as if they're friends, not enemies."

Make friends with the feelings that come from pain? I was raised to "turn the other cheek." I thought that meant to cut off, deny, or ignore what didn't feel good. The voice was telling me to notice the feelings coming from my pain so that I could learn from them. Even thinking about "them" as being able to speak to me seemed crazy. It didn't make any sense. I really didn't want to be compassionate with something that was hurting me, but it was undeniably compelling.

I sat upright in bed, leaned my head against the wall, closed my eyes and began to breathe slowly. I'd taken yoga and gone to meditation classes before so I knew how to focus on the breath process. I imagined my breath going in behind my nose, mouth and throat, down my lungs, through my diaphragm, into my stomach and then back up the opposite direction. I did this over and over.

Once I felt relaxed I set out to do what I'd never done before, to make friends with my Chronic Fatigue. Just thinking about my illness made me feel depressed. As I took time to breathe into the depression a picture of a gray cloud hanging in space drifted into my mind's eye. I swallowed hard and said "Hi depression, I know you're there."

The depression didn't say anything back but I persisted on my own as if I was talking to a shy child who needed reassurance that I was a safe person to be with. "I'm sorry you hurt," I mumbled. "You've been carrying all that pain around for a long time."

The depression still didn't say anything, but I felt my body relax and let go of tension I wasn't even aware was there. My breath deepened and new energy seemed to flow into my body. It felt good.

The next day when I took time to make friends with my depression, a memory emerged. At age nine, when I had Rheumatic Fever, I was imprisoned in bed and cut off from the outside world. "Contagious: Do Not Enter," was posted to the front door of our house and my bedroom door by the health department. I was given penicillin shots and kept in bed for nine months. My family didn't discuss feelings, my brothers and I were expected to overcome difficulties by pushing through them. Illness was treated as something bad.

I stopped talking to the depression that came from the Chronic Fatigue and started to be compassionate for losses I must have felt when I was nine. Losses I was never encouraged to express. "I'm sorry you had to stay in bed and not play with your friends for such a long time. That was hard." As soon as I spoke the words a river of tears

started to flow down my cheeks. The pain I'd felt at being isolated when I had Rheumatic Fever pushed against my chest and erupted like a volcano. It had finally found an opening for expression. An opening that had been closed for thirty seven years. My body shook with deep sobs of recognition for the unconscious pain that was now breaking free. "Sorry," I said over and over. "I'm so sorry."

When the tears finally stopped, I felt a deep sense of compassion for the nine year old child I had been who was locked away in a room all by herself. I felt compassion for anyone who had ever experienced a similar banishment. My heart went out to all children everywhere who weren't encouraged to talk about their feelings. In addition, I felt the fear my parents must have gone through in wondering if I would ever recover from that terrible illness. Fear, they didn't have the words to express.

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. My depression had given way to hope.

I was beginning to understand what the doctor meant by stress being a factor in illness. The depression I felt with Chronic Fatigue was very similar to the depression I felt as a child with Rheumatic Fever. With both, I'd struggled to get through the pain, but never allowed myself to be compassionate for my losses. I didn't know past painful issues were such a large part of my present illness.

Learning from my feelings became a daily ritual. When I took time to listen to the pain and the emotions that flowed from them more and more energy poured into my body. I became keenly aware of my misuse of the very thing of which my illness had robbed me . . . energy. When a thought came up that was none of my business or over which I had no control, I let it go. "A waste of energy," echoed in my mind. I learned to stop volunteering to do things for others that they could easily do for themselves. Again, the words "a waste of energy," would echo in my mind.

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 hummingbirds' wings as they drink from my orange flowers; the blush of pink dancing across my white roses; the smells of winter after our last storm; and the sounds of silence.

Now, I call that voice I hear my Inner Wisdom. It is a quieter voice than I experienced when I was ill, but it is still very present in my daily life. As I let go of what I already know and move into the awareness that comes from listening within, a shift occurs. This shift leads me to a peaceful place inside that feeds my soul. It is a place of serenity. A place that is always just a thought away.

The answer to stress doesn't lie outside of the pain, or in ways you've dealt with the pain in the past. It lies in the way you can be present in the present to your feelings. Each inner journey in my book will show you how to redirect the energy of your "bad" feelings so you can use it to uncover the hidden beliefs that stand in the way of you moving forward in your life, living in peace, and creating your dreams.

When my pain became so overwhelming that it destroyed the quality of my life, I discovered a simple truth. Pain is not necessarily bad. It is the body calling out for

attention. There is a wisdom in the body that wants us to discover how to take care of ourselves in a positive way.

Some people describe this discovery as: a personal connection to God, a healing presence, uncovering wisdom within. This connection leads to a “shift” in consciousness or an unquestionable moment of truth and a physical release of stress.

One client explained her experience as turning lead into gold. Her description inspired me to name the positive way to deal with "bad" feelings within the process of WHAT'S SO “GOOD” ABOUT "BAD" FEELINGS? as “The Goldmine Cycle”, and the discoveries at the end of each Inner Journey “treasures”.

Anyone can learn to tap into this powerful intelligence on their own. All that is needed is a little preparation: a quiet place, a notebook, and a pen; the ability to relax by focusing on your breath; a problem to work through and the awareness of the strongest “bad” feeling you experience that comes from your problem. These are the external and internal tools that set up the four steps that make up the process of WHAT'S SO “GOOD” ABOUT "BAD" FEELINGS?.