

Bringing Heaven to Earth
A Journey Into Grace & Gratitude

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Preface

Life is about learning, and good teachers teach their students to be lifelong learners. Although this goal relates to academic learning, a pursuit of knowledge continuing over the span of one's lifetime, it is also applicable to an even greater purpose: the kind of learning that contributes to our own spiritual awakening.

My life has certainly been about learning. When I was young, I was taught about academic learning and I excelled at it. By age thirty, however, I began to realize that the major focus of my learning had been "outside" of me, and I was in desperate need of inner wisdom. I had been through my share of crises in thirty years, having lived with a severe physical disability from an undiagnosed case of polio.

One Friday evening, as I was leaving the emergency room with a food obstruction still lodged in my throat, threatening my airway and my breathing, I finally knew I had to start taking charge and working with life—and my body— from the inside out. This was to be my final nightmare of dealing with my body medically from an outside point of view, through well-meaning physicians who "looked, but could not see." What I did not know was that this traumatic experience would be a turning point in my ability to elicit health and happiness in my life, despite progressive physical weakening. If my disability had been the catalyst for learning spiritual truth in this lifetime, this experience was the extra fuel needed to wait no longer to awaken. There would be no time to waste if I were to avoid further suffering with what appeared to be no solutions in sight.

There is something about serious health issues that commands our attention in a new way and has the potential to awaken us to something greater than ourselves for healing. After this and many similar experiences, I felt an urgent need to learn about energy and the metaphysical world so that I could deal with my physical challenges without such nightmarish results. The medical experiences in the first half of my life were fragmented and often painfully disastrous. However, they had set the stage for a major learning curve on my part – to blend the physical world with the metaphysical world.

My physical disability has definitely awakened me. It has taught me how to direct my strong will in a healthier way through intuition and guidance, to question my limits and what I believe to be reality, to see the interconnectedness of all, and how the effects of my thoughts create my world every day. I have often told people, “Thank God I got that optimistic gene from my mother!” It has been one of the many gifts from the Divine that has been tested often in this lifetime. It has propelled me to look for good, even when there seemed to be none in sight. It is still training me to see with a spiritual sight that opens possibilities that were never present with physical sight alone. And with that has come a deep sense of joy and peace, and a calmness about life that becomes more solid each day even during the most difficult situations. My awareness of Divine Grace and the ability to access it has been sharpened, and my gratitude, grown immense.

In this book, I share my life story with you since it is through our individual experiences of life that we learn. The tone of my writing reflects the progression and depth of my inner development over time. In my earlier years, I was outwardly observational and matter of fact, so my descriptions of life at that time are from a more mental, superficial perspective. As my inner quest progressed, so did the depth of my spirit and I found I could write about life from a more emotional and spiritual perspective.

I have experienced great suffering and tremendous Grace. Although you may be drawn to the painful parts of my experience as you read, I caution you against staying overly focused upon them, or attempting to find logic in them. Just as I discovered for myself, some answers will never be found with the mind. My most painful experiences often seemed to release unwanted, heavy energy and *turn me in another direction*. It is the Good that is most life-giving, and that is what deserves our greatest attention.

I refer to the healing energy of the Infinite, Source, God, or the Divine as a greater power for Good, or Grace, that exists in the universe. For me it has been a higher, immensely wise level of energy. It has had a profoundly positive effect and impact on my entire life, especially in the area of my greatest need – dealing with all aspects of living daily with a severe, progressive physical disability. We all emanate from this spark of the Divine regardless of religious preference, and we are, by virtue of this origin, already connected to It. The purposeful intention to expand into It and bring It forth consistently through our will into the physical plane is what brings peace to the body, mind, and to the world.

The final chapter of my book contains some of the main concepts that have been key in developing my ability to consciously bring forth and exist upon this higher, healing energy. You will see throughout my book that Grace sometimes appeared through my purposeful intention to find It, that sometimes the old beliefs and ways of living had to collapse before something better could be created, and that many times Grace just appeared to gently move me along, often unnoticed at the time but profoundly effective. I have seen for myself and through myself that Divine Grace is present everywhere and in every situation, but it is our job to call it forward to bring Light out of darkness. I hope this book inspires you to discover Divine Grace in your own life and the ability to consciously choose to bring its goodness to you.

Living with a physical disability has deepened my awareness of and interaction with the Divine for creating all aspects of my life. This has been the perfect situation to stimulate a mental quest for understanding the positive, expansive nature of life and has helped me repeatedly find solutions and relief when there seemed to be none in sight. Esoteric contemplation of the metaphysical and physical worlds without action would have been intellectually stimulating but not life-altering. True learning, true knowing, has come from repeated, direct application in real-life situations where my will to persist rather than succumb to fear has been invaluable.

Chapter 10

Breathe in Life

My resolve became stronger and stronger with each success, and the universe powerfully rushed in to meet my expectations.

By the age of thirty, I had been living independently for two years and working excessively for six. My mind loved it, but my body did not. I noticed I had lost strength a bit more rapidly throughout my body than I had in childhood, including more weakness in breathing at night and general swallowing. However, it was subtle, like sand slowly draining from an hourglass. I held a diffuse set of beliefs surrounding my disability that losing strength, struggling more, and a decreasing quality of life were inevitable and unchangeable. Therefore, I reaffirmed somewhere along the line— even more adamantly— that if I could not stop the weakening, I would take charge and use to its maximum every ounce of strength that I did have before it, too, disappeared. There was so much I wanted to do and no time or strength to waste.

I was thirty years old and had never had a clear medical diagnosis, just the descriptive labels from Stanford when I was four. So I decided to have a neurological exam to confirm that these difficulties, especially those relating to my weakening throat area, were indeed related to my disability and not to something else. The exam was uncomfortable to say the least as high levels of electric current were run through my different muscle sets to look at their responsiveness, but I finally received a clear diagnosis.

“You have had polio,” the neurologist said, “no doubt about it.” He was surprised that something so obvious had been missed. I was

actually relieved to finally have a definitive diagnosis after thirty years of being an enigma to the medical field. I had not gone to the neurologist looking for a solution that would rid me of my disability. I was looking for a reason for all the physical issues, something that tied them together and made some sense. I had been concerned that my swallowing weaknesses could have been due to something unrelated to the original illness, like a tumor. I now had a diagnosis, a label I could wrap my painful experiences around. It not only validated how serious the initial illness had been, but also validated for me that the multiple, related difficulties I had accumulated over the years were significant and not just in my head.

I felt “satisfied” with the results, though they did not explain my steady, lifetime weakening. A pearl of medical wisdom regarding long-term loss would emerge intuitively years later. For now, just the confirmation that I was dealing with polio and the experience of being “seen” medically was progress.

I had been told once by someone with post-polio that my muscle strength was like burning a candle, so I should not force my movements or the “flame” would burn faster and run out sooner. It was meant as a kind warning to consider moderation, but that did not suit my personality. My philosophy was not to hold back, and I was okay with burning the candle quickly if it meant I was free to do what I wanted.

Though I was not outwardly prone to anger, I will now say that this stance on life was at least partially fueled by hidden resentment regarding the medical atrocities I had experienced that had not only been painful but had made daily movement so much more effortful. This emotion fired me up to move through life, luckily, rather than spiraling me down. It served its purpose for many years to get me mechanically through quite a few tough situations, but eventually I had to learn to use it with more wisdom and in moderation, in order to bring peace to my mind and body.

This aspect of how I approached life was not very Grace-filled, but thank goodness it did not spill out to darken my interactions with others in an angry way. The kindness that was so easy for me to give to others was hardest to give to myself.

Years later I would uncover a similar belief that had gone unrecognized all of my life but that had underscored all of my decision-making regarding how I treated my body. Fueled by an unconscious, gnawing fear of suffering, I believed I had to push my muscles at all times, not allowing them to relax for fear they would not pick up again. In my mind, strength meant quality of life, and quality meant an independent lifestyle similar to my able-bodied peers despite my disability. I focused on keeping a maximum output by “keeping the bar raised” in pushing what I could do even as my body balked. Since I’d had a pattern of growing weaker physically, I also believed that eventually when I could not force my body any longer, I’d somehow be done with the ability to help others, which had felt good, and be left to deal exclusively with the worse aspects of my body. I’m not even sure what “done” meant, but it felt very dark. I had an unquestionable fear that long-term physical suffering would be unavoidable once I was “done” and before I could die. How ironic that when I finally did have to stop forcing my body because I was so overwhelmingly depleted at forty-five years old, a gateway miraculously opened to shift me more rapidly toward the Divine rather than spiraling me downward into a suffering, hellish state. What had been held so firmly in fear was ultimately met and released by a tidal wave of Grace.

And so I often drove my body relentlessly, a slave driver of sorts, not believing or recognizing any wisdom in the messages it gave through its health or lack of it. The weaker it got, the harder I pushed. I argued with it constantly, until I could argue no more, and only then would I finally make a change and do things differently in order to back off from some of the emotional and physical strain. I now feel that this belief—that I had to push myself to the point of exhaustion in order to survive—had been built over many lifetimes,

based on the depth of its hold and its subtle yet wide-spread influence on my thinking. It sounds, I'm sure, unbelievable that I would actually think this way, but it was deeply ingrained and unquestionably real to me. I thought this approach to my life was an unavoidable fact because of my disability. I believed I had no choice but force if I wanted to live well and avoid physical suffering for as long as possible, though in reality it was the very thing that caused emotional and physical suffering. Looking back, it is amazing what my body was able to do, and how forgiving it was in picking up after health issues, trying to right itself towards better health whenever I gave it a chance. It held far more wisdom than I knew.

Not until many years later, after a profoundly frightening experience, did a new set of thoughts surface that shed light on the old – allowing the belief in resisting my body and therefore, my life – to be quietly released and eventually replaced with a more gentle belief seated in the infinite wisdom of knowing and experiencing the unlimited possibilities of the universe.

It is Friday evening and I am leaving the emergency room, having been seriously misdiagnosed once again. The kernel of corn, lodged in my throat for almost a week, hovers dangerously near my windpipe. I am told by a physician that my case is not an emergency, that my airway is not currently occluded. My pleas are not heard. "Come back Monday if it's still a problem," he mutters as he walks coldly out of the room. The nurse tries to reason with him on my behalf, but to no avail. There is no logic to this scene, only the recurring theme of not being "seen" correctly. My body is panicked for its survival. I feel scared, angry, isolated, and a deep sadness engulfs me. Exhausted with seemingly no option again, I suddenly have a quiet, unwavering thought as I cross the parking lot to my van. "You cannot address your body from the outside. You must do life from the inside out." Its message resonates with clarity and truth. I begin to relax. I am given hope again.

In an instant I was transformed by this powerful, dynamic thought with which I felt profoundly aligned. It came out of the blue,

obviously not of my own thinking. This was another pivotal point, more significant than all the others before it, to turn my attention inward. I am tempted to say that this was the answer I'd been praying for, but that would be only partially true. It was the answer, but its wisdom was so far beyond the scope of my limited thinking that I did not have the thought to pray for it, nor did I understand how profound it was at the time. It did provide me another concrete example, however, that we are carried by Grace. I was not alone in dealing with my body, for the Heavens were completely attuned to the details of my plight and already had the best solution. My job, I would be taught over and over again, was to remember to ask for and listen to Divine Insight first and foremost, and thus my thoughts could be infused with Wisdom. Then, and only then, could I begin to move in a direction and truly trust that the rest would unfold to my greatest good.

Two days after leaving the emergency room, the dreaded kernel of corn finally passed without incident. As I was rolled on my side to get dressed that morning, I happened to roll a bit father than usual and felt the obstruction move a bit. I immediately told my aide, and her knowledge as an occupational therapist came to the rescue. She gave me some ice to chew and swallow while still in that position. Its coldness helped my weak swallowing muscles contract to move the food gently through, and my throat was finally clear for the first time in seven days. It left rather humbly; its purpose had been served. The message had been received loud and clear. No longer did it need to stay as the signpost to direct my focus inward for healing.

This was not the first time I'd had a serious issue with food and choking. About six years earlier, a piece of lettuce closed off my airway completely. Luckily, my brother and mother had been home. By lifting me out of my chair and onto my side, the lettuce fell partially aside so air could pass for temporary relief. However, true to my theme, I was not correctly "seen" in the emergency room when I arrived by ambulance even with all the conscious directing and focusing I could metaphysically muster for a calm outcome. I was sent away from the hospital with the obstruction still present.

Feeling the lettuce flipping on and off my windpipe, I knew I could not go home or I would die. So my parents and my aunt (Aunt Jo, once again) drove me to the county hospital where a young intern agreed that something was wrong. After more than an hour of working down my throat, he finally pulled out the quarter-sized piece of lettuce. His creativity in working down my throat and his phenomenal persistence solved the problem without the further dangers of surgery. My calm outcome had finally come.

From that point on, however, I continued to have trouble with food sticking in the same part of my throat for several days at a time. I reasoned that if I chewed carefully, its size would not be life threatening when it stuck and this gave me some semblance of relief emotionally. Though I did not want to feel fear about choking, it always loomed in the background of my mind as a potential danger.

I will say that dealing with medical nightmares like these taught me over the years how to become calmly powerful in moments of crisis by being intensely present. There is such a natural force for Good that comes through us and others when we become present, and once it is experienced, there is no mistaking its Truth. I had repeated practice with medical crises to immediately let go of all thought except for those aligned with what I wanted, and to hold steadfast to those thoughts moment by moment until a more peaceful result arrived. Eventually I learned to expand this skill deeper within me, to hold open a pathway with thought energy that allows this sacred healing energy of Grace to come forth for miraculous results. The more I could become present and hold this pathway open from my heart without having to control all the details out of fear, the more relaxed I became and the greater the result. I was learning to use my will for, I believe, its true purpose: to hold my thoughts on a positive outcome despite what I saw with my physical eyes or what I feared from past experience instead of using my will to direct and control every detail. My medical experiences would become too serious to control it all; I needed to let go into something bigger. I was learning how to surrender, to literally get myself out of the way so that a greater,

wiser force for good could lead. And with each experience over the next two decades, I became more comfortable in trusting Its lead.

I knew I did not want to live anymore with a fear of choking to death, so the week after the hospital incident, I decided to get counseling to help deal with the fear. Counseling seemed to align itself with the insight I had received regarding addressing life from the inside out. I was not one to just jump into looking at emotion, but any resistance was countered by the need to lessen my fear of choking. A friend of mine had been sharing her experiences with me about a therapist she'd been seeing by the name of Mary who, I thought, had an intriguing way of looking at life. What caught my attention was the concept that health issues were not random, but reflected unconscious emotional issues that needed to be addressed for a body to move towards health. What a concept! I knew for a fact there was a mind-body connection in directing my body, but it never occurred to me that my body was actually trying to *say* something. This idea is more widely accepted now, but at the time, it was revolutionary. It was just what I needed. It would be out of searching for solutions to the darkness of multiple, serious health issues over the next twenty years that old patterns of thought were broken and my greatest spiritual growth obtained.

Mary soon became my therapist, too. She coincidentally had been a nurse before becoming a therapist, the perfect blend of experience for me. I worked with her over the next two years, learning to become aware of life and its messages through my body's health. Mary was the first professional to offer me real assistance in beginning to deal effectively with my body in an entirely new way. Although our sessions were not dominated by all things metaphysical, I was drawn to anything she mentioned related to energy, thought, the body, and healing.

Mary began by introducing me to some basic metaphysical principles regarding emotional thought and its effect on the body. I'd had plenty of experience using positive thought to maximize my body's

functioning, but I had never touched upon facing negative thought. I was an expert, actually, at diligently avoiding negative thought because I was well aware of how detrimental it was to my muscle movement. However, avoiding it, I'd discover, did not mean it was absent or that it was not affecting my body. Within the first few sessions, Mary posed a question relating to my choking problems that stirred my thinking. "You can cut off a leg and live, you can cut off an arm and live, but you cannot cut off your throat and live. What is your need to cut off your airway? What are the thoughts behind it that your body is reflecting?" Not knowing the answer to her question, she recommended I do some journal writing to gain insight into what choking symbolically meant to me. She probably had no idea how essential this question was, but it was incredibly on target in leading me to pinpoint the problem that quickly resulted in better swallowing.

Journal writing for guidance proved extremely effective for me. By the next session, I had my answer. As I wrote it became clear that choking symbolized flashes of death. Steady weakening had felt, I realized, like a slow, physical death with a body that I believed would continue to go awry. Although I was a positive person and wanted to make the best of it, I thought I had no option but to do "misery" as it came and be strong. And as a result, part of me wanted life to go quickly in order to avoid sustained suffering, though another part of me knew I was not one to give up easily. The result was a conflict of thoughts that was erupting through my throat. I had to look honestly at my beliefs if I wanted a chance to lessen future suffering. I did not know they were simply beliefs that had permeated all of my perceptions; I assumed they were just facts of life. Always quietly undefined but significantly present, these thoughts had been supported by my repeated experiences of finding nothing here on this earth to help – not physically, anyway.

Once these beliefs were brought more directly to my attention, I knew that they existed as thoughts and that thoughts could be changed to create something better. It was a call to consciously wake

up and develop my thought energy to a higher level, or frequency, to support a very damaged body. I had no clue that this was actually a spiritual call, to fine tune through physical experience my awareness of and gratitude toward, Grace. It was calling me, to move toward and exist upon the higher, more pure realms that provide gentleness to a body, wisdom, true peace, and joy in all aspects of life. It was a serious call, a guide for soul development, while in this physical form.

With these realizations, I could now question, “Suffering and death. Is that what I want? Is there another option?” The opposite of death was life, so I made up my mind to take charge of opening my airway from the inside out by affirming a new direction, “Breathe in Life.” I now had a new approach. Instead of trying to clear my throat physically, I’d pause as soon as I felt food stick, take a gentle breath to relax, and tell my body calmly but firmly to breathe in Life. Simultaneously, I’d visualize the inside of my throat lined with a slick, smooth surface and the food slipping down properly. No more struggles, no more using a physical response to correct a physical problem. I employed instead an energetic response directed through thought to correct the physical problem, and the results were nothing short of miraculous. Within a month, I noticed that obstructions passed more quickly and soon they were occurring less often. After six months, food lodging in my throat became a rarity. Now my careful chewing and swallowing were effective, and if something small did stick, I had an effective way to help it along.

This was the first time that I’d been so successful in improving a physical condition with my body that, by standard medical thinking, could not be done. In fact, my swallowing could only get worse when viewed from a purely physical perspective. I’d received a medical evaluation before beginning my work with Mary. Two swallowing evaluations and video X-ray footage had shown documented, concrete evidence that I should not have been swallowing food well at all. I had little if any muscle contraction for swallowing, and “pocketing” on the right side of my throat from lack of muscle tone where the

food had been lodging. The recommendation was to grind all solid food. That, however, was not something I was ready to consider.

Regaining my ability to swallow more safely through a meta-physical approach was an empowering breath of fresh air, literally. If I'd had any doubt about a direct correlation between my thoughts, emotions, and my body's response, they were whisked away by such rapid, miraculous results. The seriousness of the problem kept me highly motivated to insist upon nothing less than clear, safe swallowing and breathing. Life, or death, no wavering. My resolve became stronger and stronger with each success, and the universe powerfully rushed in to meet my expectations. I had found a gateway to direct and support my energetic field, a field inextricably influenced by my thoughts and emotions, the field upon which my physical form rests. I knew it worked because I'd experienced the change myself. And with anything rooted in the Divine, the presence is so solid that there is no question of its reality. It is only doubt itself that pulls us away from our access to the Divine.

This completely changed my perspective on dealing with my body. Previously when I'd have trouble physically, I'd think, "Oh, not that, too!" as if it were unrelated to whatever was going on, or had gone on, in my life. The awareness that it was *telling* me about life, a help rather than a hindrance, was brilliant! I did not know that this was to be the catalyst for deepening my spiritual knowledge. I just wanted relief from fear and pain. And just because my body was "talking" did not automatically make me want to hear what it had to say! On the contrary, I was good at arguing with my body, and continued to be until just a few years ago when I had no strength left with which to argue. Over the years the serious need to find solutions related to my disability, when there seemed to be none in sight, has pulled me gently up a divine energetic spectrum that I have learned to call forth and exist upon for support despite outward, superficial appearances. I have found that sometimes wisdom presents itself but we have to grow in order to fully receive its benefits.

My swallowing muscles had not significantly improved, but my *functioning* had mysteriously improved and that's all that mattered. I did not need to question its reality through logical thinking. I was experiencing the results. Since then I do not put such limits on functioning or outcomes based on what I see. What I think sometimes is real based on physical perception isn't always what it seems. There is so much more that can happen, thank God!

I now had an insatiable drive to read anything I could get my hands on relating to energy, health, and soul development. Bookstores had begun carrying small sections of books on these topics that have since grown by leaps and bounds. I had never had an interest in reading before (I preferred "doing" over sitting still and reading), but all of a sudden I was so thirsty for knowledge that I was like a sponge. There was an excitement about learning, a deep desire that I'd never felt before. My soul was probably dancing! I had finally been turned in the right direction. I read books by Louise Hay, Thomas Moore, Marianne Williamson, James Redfield, Eva Pierrokos, Gary Zukav, Barbara Brennan, Shakti Gawain, and Doreen Virtue to name a few. I also read, *A Course in Miracles*, which profoundly shifted my thinking and brought me a solid sense of peace about life.

I began seeing common threads of information in my reading that rang true about my body based on past experiences. Everything I read about perceiving life's events in a deeper way for improving health and for getting needs met made so much sense to me. My medical experiences were interwoven signposts for my soul development towards higher truth, not just fragmented disasters with no hope for change. I remember thinking how much formal education I'd had in thirty years, but how little I knew about the essence of life. I needed to go beyond a physical, concrete level of looking at life to a metaphysical, abstract level for my soul to soar and to flourish despite all my body's difficulties.

I was fascinated by the idea that events and our reactions to them actually pointed toward subconscious thought patterns

dominating our inner world and manifesting in our outer world. I was desperately in need of some inner wisdom to handle my body's health and day-to-day functioning, to gain an understanding of my body at a deeper level that could give life instead of drain it. I'd eventually come to realize that my disability had been the perfect instrument for learning, even though at the time, I still had no trust in doctors or my body.

I started questioning physical cause/ physical effect, and began looking at my body through an energetic cause/physical effect paradigm. Barbara Brennan's books, *Hands of Light* and *Light Emerging*, accelerated my knowledge in this area. No other reading had tied together the divine energetic interrelationship among the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual bodies for me as completely as hers. It resonated through my entire being as essential knowledge for healing at all levels.

I wanted to maximize whatever physical strength I had so I could work and drive as long as possible, and metaphysics definitely seemed like a promising avenue. I used its principles to drive my body towards what I wanted, not what I didn't want, with a long-term goal of squeezing out every ounce of function from my body before it stopped moving completely.

Now there was another belief to question, the belief that I had to gather and use up all of my strength while it was around because there wasn't enough for my lifetime. I saw myself as responsible for accessing this divine energy for good, like a commodity, to use as best I could. I still felt too separate from It, but supported in many ways by It. I believed I had to work hard to capture pieces of Grace that came from someplace far away. That was my level of knowledge at the time, which was more than I'd ever known before but small in comparison to where I am now. I had not yet learned to relax and ask for Divine help that brings with it an even greater amount of blessings. Years later I would move closer to that level of understanding

and finally *feel* the Divine love and wisdom that this energy carries, bringing steadfast peace and joy. But for now, I plodded along trying to educate myself on the essence that carries life.