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FOREWORD

THE POWER OF WORDS

Words can change your brain, and the right words spoken in the right way can generate mutual rapport with others. The right words can enable cooperation, while the wrong words can generate conflict in less than a second. And if you continue to communicate with negativity, even for a few minutes, you may actually damage your brain. That's what our latest neuroscientific research has found.

Words generate thoughts, and thoughts change the way you perceive the world. Positive thoughts generate feelings of peacefulness and serenity, whereas negative thoughts generate anxiety, fear and doubt. Recent studies have even shown that gazing at a list of positive words makes you feel better but a list of negative words makes you feel worse. Thus if you want to achieve any degree of success in the world – be it in business or in love – you have to choose the right words that will inspire your brain to take positive actions in the world.

But here's the problem: most of our thoughts – and the words that comprise them – are unconscious, and thus we're rarely aware of how the negative ones are interfering with our ability to achieve our goals. If we want to improve our lives and the world in which we live, we must learn to listen to the inner stories, which are constantly spinning in our minds and transform the negativity into life-affirming words.

Andrea calls this the 'incessant internal dialogue', and research shows that this inner speech begins in the first two years of life. By the age of ten it becomes unconscious, but the inner noise continues to shape nearly everything we say and feel and do.

If we don't like the stories we hear, all we have to do is rewrite our inner script, bringing in words of optimism. We can choose words that empower us to take action, we can choose arbitrarily to suppress words that undermine our confidence, and if we keep a list of our positive words and gratitude, our self-esteem and satisfaction with life will soar.

Changing our inner speech

Internal dialogues are constantly racing through our mind at spectacular speeds, and this causes us

to talk faster when conversing with others. But if we deliberately slow down our speech, we not only increase the listener's comprehension, we also lower physical tension and stress in both the listener and ourselves. As we relax into our positive words and dialogue, we also interrupt the mechanisms that cause misunderstandings and conflict.

When you speak *very* slowly, and *very* briefly, you'll begin to hear your own inner speech telling you what you should and should not do. Sometimes it sounds like a nasty parent, and sometimes it just sounds crazy, but that's the nature of everyday consciousness, and it keeps you so caught up inside yourself that it becomes virtually impossible to connect with what anyone else is saying.

By slowing down your inner and outer speech, you can begin to choose your words more wisely. Each one will take on more power, compassion, and meaning, and the process will begin to stimulate inspirational thoughts in the listener's brain. In fact, the other person's brain will begin to mirror what you're feeling. It's a process we call 'neural resonance' and it's the most effective way to build mutual understanding and trust. You can even use silence to increase the power of your words, and thus inspire others to become more conscious.

The power of silence

Andrea's story will inspire you, but the inspiration comes from your imagination, not from the actual words in this book. Words are just words, symbols that are unique to every person on this planet. Take, for example, the word 'love'. We all know what it means, and yet if you ask someone to define it, everyone comes up with something different. I'll give you a personal example. I really *love* chocolate. I love deep conversations, I love science, and I really love my family. But each of these 'loves' is fundamentally different. That difference is reflected in the tone of the voice, and in the memories that hold on to those images and feelings of love.

In fact, words are the least important part of the communication process. Andrea and her husband Seth captured this astonishing fact in a film, which runs for less than 90 seconds. It is the foundation on which this book is based, and it's one of the most moving videos I've ever seen. It's so powerful that I now use it in every class I teach. If you haven't seen this film, called *The Power of Words*, go to YouTube right now using this link: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hzgzim5m7oU>

I've watched it over and over, and each time it brings tears to my eyes. It will touch the same emotional chords in you, bringing up sadness and joy, and if I were to scan

your brain while watching it, it would stimulate some of the most important neural circuits involved with social awareness and compassion.

How is that possible? How can a few words, ‘spoken’ in silence, move your heart, your brain, and your soul? The answer to that question will be found in the pages of this book, but you’ll have to surrender yourself to the hidden images that are evoked in your own imagination.

In the book Andrea shares her journey, where she finds herself nearly penniless, struggling to survive. But she is not filled with worry, fear, or doubt. Instead, she holds onto a sacred inner dream, a dream filled with hope and vibrant faith. Her story and her words will change your brain and change your life. And you can do the same. You can embrace your own story and your own words and live them from your heart. When you do so, you’ll bring more joy and peace into the world as together we travel down this marvellous path of life.

Thank you, Andrea, for changing my world with your words!

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Build Trust, Resolve Conflicts, and Increase Intimacy*

INTRODUCTION

INNER CONVERSATIONS

‘The world we see that seems so insane is the result of a belief system that is not working. To perceive the world differently, we must be willing to change our belief system, let the past slip away, expand our sense of now, and dissolve the fear in our minds.’

William James

I always chuckle to myself at airports, waiting to board a flight.

‘Do you have any baggage to check in please?’

Oh yes, plenty.

‘And did you pack your baggage yourself?’

Well, other people sometimes gave me stuff to carry around for them but it was me who decided what would stay.

‘Could anyone have tampered with your baggage?’

I'd like to see them try!

I happily wave off my case, feeling free and adventurous for a few hours. But when I land in another country, I discover it has followed me, faithful and familiar. Half of me is relieved, while the other half knows the bondage of recognition and regrets what its retrieval from the circular trundle means. But I pick it up because it's mine.

And so it is with personal baggage. It might be uncomfortable to lug around with us but we wouldn't know who we were without it. Yet let's face it, half the time we don't even know what we've packed!

I believe that when troubles show up in our lives it's a call to action: an opportunity to go within to the 'heart of the matter' and listen to our inner wisdom. Perhaps a chance to open up that baggage, take a good look and clear out anything that no longer serves a positive purpose in our lives. The tools we need are the perceptions we hold, the thoughts we think and the words we use.

The origins of beliefs

Psychologists tell us that most of our beliefs are formed between the ages of three and 12. This is when our view of the world and how it works becomes deeply embedded in our brains. It is also the time when we are most receptive and least discerning, and so it's hoped that the adults we depend on during that phase have our best interests at heart. Even in 'stable' family environments where our parents are doing their level best, an adult might still be carrying around inherited negative belief systems, which they've never thought to question or maybe aren't even aware of. It's easy to see how patterns get repeated – our teachers can't teach us what they haven't yet learned themselves.

We are constantly telling ourselves internal stories. In his *Magical Mind, Magical Body* series Deepak Chopra

provides us with a startling fact: we have up to 50,000 thoughts every day and 98 per cent of those thoughts are the same as yesterday. So if we're walking around with a collection of beliefs, which were mostly formed from others' experiences and passed onto us as children, then repeating those thoughts pretty much verbatim each day, is it any wonder that our lives keep showing up how we expect them to? And when change does come along we generally tend to try and wrestle it to the floor.

But what are we afraid of? Nothing genuinely stays the same. Realistically each of our thoughts and every one of our cells has the potential for change every second of every day. Let's take our perception of our bodies, for example. Our physical bodies are a collection of all our ideas about them. If we change our words, we can change our world. This means that if we change our inner stories and ideas about ourselves, we can also change our bodies.

When we feel low or unwell, someone might ask us 'What's the matter?'

We speak of 'mind over matter' when we want to overcome a physical barrier or condition. Matter is defined as the stuff that things are made of and it consists of chemical substances. Quantum physics and neuroscience will tell you that matter is influenced by

energy, and that energy can be thought patterns and emotions, as well as physical energy. Therefore if the quality of our thoughts and emotions can influence our physical body, if we are consciously directing and shaping those thoughts, it follows that we can consciously create the stuff around and inside us.

Listen to your body

Imbalances manifest on several different levels before they become physical, which is why energy rebalancing techniques such as Reiki and faith healing can work. Physical matter is the densest of our energy fields and it can take a lot of effort to remove something from this level if we haven't cleared the emotional and spiritual disequilibrium too. If we don't get to the root cause of a medical/physical problem by reaching the 'heart of the matter', we are only treating the symptoms, so the dis-ease is likely to manifest again, as I know from experience.

To truly get underneath a symptom, to get at the root, we need to consider every factor that might be contributing to the problem, as holistic practitioners understand. Gardeners also have an innate understanding of this. If your rose has black spot, it's no good just treating it with pesticides. It's also important to consider

whether the plant is comfortable in its environment: does it have adequate nutrients, enough light, space and water? Is it infested with parasites? Is it happy where it is? I believe plants, trees and animals have a consciousness of their own. If they develop a problem, it will manifest physically to get attention. Just like our bodies.

It's my experience that our bodies are constantly sending us feedback. Often our lives are too crowded to listen to the quiet voice within, the one that tells us if we're off-balance. We live 'filled-full' kinds of lives in this twenty-first century Western world, but true 'fulfilment' can evade us. If we keep refusing to listen to minor symptoms, our bodies' dis-eases will become increasingly amplified in their seriousness until we *do* pay attention. We are all blessed with inner wisdom. It just takes the willingness to ask, listen, and sometimes wait for the answer.

We generally spend far more time worrying about what we put into our mouths, than we do about the words that come out of them. Of course, the food we eat, water we drink, social conditions, cellular inheritance and environment all have their part to play in our circumstances, but it's my firm conviction that we can more positively influence our quality of life when we consciously engage with our thoughts, feelings, beliefs and the expression of our truths.

Current scientific thought, pioneered by inspirational beings like Dr Candace Pert and Dr David Hamilton tells us that the body and mind are so intrinsically linked that science doesn't even bother to separate the two words anymore. So the 'bodymind' is the part of us that processes our thoughts and turns them into reality.

But where does that leave spirituality, inspiration, those enlightening experiences where we know beyond doubt who we are and why we're here? I would go one step further and encourage you to remember that we are three-part, or mindbodyspirit beings, and that we need to be resolving dis-ease on all these levels simultaneously. By dis-ease I'm not just referring to physical ailments. 'Ease' is our natural spiritual state, as anyone who has ever transcended their mortal form will know. It's difficult being attached to a body! They age, they leak, they need regular maintenance and many of us have additional physical challenges to work with in this lifetime.

It's no good just treating the physical form, although that might bring some temporary symptomatic relief. It's pointless just working with the mind, though many of us believe that this is the 'control centre' of the body because it's easy to get stuck there. And we can't expect to live a purely spiritual existence without nourishing the body and mind as well.

Creative intuition

For us to be truly well we need to feel whole. Only when the three aspects of us – mind, body and spirit – are in harmony do we experience that sense of ‘rightness’ that signifies we are ‘on track’, in concert with the universe.

More and more people are waking up to the fact that we are being limited to a miniscule percentage of our true potential. Not by governments or companies, terrorists or environmental threats. Not by our parents, our partners, our children, our religions or our jobs. Not even by our state of health. But by ourselves, by our inner conversations – those insidious internal saboteurs that make us question our own innate wisdom.

We’re all familiar with that knowledgeable internal voice that nudges us to take an umbrella even though the sky is a cloudless blue, the surety we sometimes experience when we know who’s calling before we pick up the phone, the ‘gut’ feeling that precedes decisions. It’s the same inner guidance system, which keeps our hearts beating, regulates breathing, grows a baby and charts menstrual cycles with the moon.

We can also tap into our intuition to heal our bodies, come up with creative solutions to problems and infuse our lives with a sense of joy and purpose. It just takes

a willingness to tune into this inner intelligence and the commitment to follow its guidance. Pretty soon we realize that we're creating our own map in life.

I once had a dream in which I was travelling on a fast-moving train. A small man came up to me and said, conspiratorially 'Want me to show you how to drive this thing?'

Well I was curious so I followed him through the carriage to a control panel, which I'd never noticed before. He showed me a computer screen with what looked like a floating glass ball in a dome alongside it.

I watched him hover his hand above the dome then pull back and slowly move his hand toward the ball again. As he did so a map appeared on the screen and zoomed in until I could see the track ahead and the trees whizzing by. Smiling, he invited me to try. I wanted to know why I would bother to drive the train, as someone else was obviously doing a good enough job. We were moving, the track was underneath us and I expected to arrive at my destination on time.

'Because it's your train,' he explained with some patience. 'You can get it to take you wherever you want.'

‘Oh! But what about the tracks?’ I asked.

‘You lay the tracks as you go!’ he laughed.

I awoke from that dream and then slipped straight into another with a similar theme. This time I was on an ocean liner, hanging up washing in the engine room. A cleaning lady came to me and handed me a key from the pocket of her apron.

‘What’s this?’ I asked.

‘That’s the key to your ship.’

I was starting to catch on. ‘Are you going to show me the controls?’

‘Oh there aren’t any controls as such, just this thing here.’ And she used the key to open a cupboard housing what looked like a porthole.

‘A window?’

‘More of a GPS. You just look through here, decide where you want to go and your ship will take you there. She listens to your thoughts’, she said smiling.

Now if that wasn't my inner wisdom sending me a clear message about tuning in and following my intuition, I don't know what is! Life is full of so many miracles and if we can only learn to trust ourselves and craft our stories with care, we'll be taken to magical places we only half dare to believe exist.

The process of life

This book will help you explore your inner terrain and take charge of the incessant internal dialogue that seems to scroll like ticker tape in your mind. If you take the time to engage with the processes sprinkled throughout the book, and commit to working on the words you use and the beliefs you hold, your actions will take care of themselves and your world will start to miraculously shape itself around your highest thoughts.

The result will be a deeper sense of peace and an unfolding feeling of awe at being a part of the process of life. As soon as you take responsibility for the role you are playing in your own mini-drama or full-length feature film, your health is bound to improve. When you start to turn old ideas on their heads and develop a new belief system that fully supports you, you may notice that the state of your bank account is dependent on how you're feeling about money and the degree of prosperity

you feel you deserve – not the other way round. And when the words you speak have been considered and bathed in love before they're allowed to leave your lips (or fingertips), imagine how your relationships will improve.

So much of what we've learned has been passed on to us via words and stories, which hinge on others' beliefs, and many of us have never thought to question whether those ways of thinking still serve or limit us as full-grown adults. Occasionally we'll clear out our wardrobes, cull our emails and generally set our houses in order but how often do we give our beliefs a good airing?

This book takes a look at how we can use words to help or hinder, to expand or restrict our experience here on Earth.

As you move through some of the exercises, sometimes you may find yourself at the edge of your comfort zone. You might suddenly become distracted, very sleepy, upset or annoyed; start yawning a lot or develop an irritation within your body. That's a good sign. Please don't walk away at this point, as usually it's a signal that you're getting close to something that may have been causing you trouble in the past, perhaps without you even having been aware of it. Remember

that no person, thought or situation has any power over you unless you decide that it has. Just remain as present as you can, breathe and commit to taking one step at a time. Just one step, that's all that's required. You'll know when you're ready to take the next one.

Above all, working on yourself and becoming conscious of the effect you are having on the world can be a fun process, a journey of discovery and wonder! Self-improvement can easily turn into addictive navel-gazing and become 'heavy' if we dwell too much on our emotional baggage. The aim is to intervene in our negative thought processes and *change* our way of communicating with ourselves and the world, not become bogged down in why we think or speak the way we do. Change your words to change your world. And remember to ask yourself at intervals: 'Will my words *improve* the silence?'

1

OUR STORY

‘The biggest adventure you can take is
to live the life of your dreams.’

Oprah Winfrey

It was September 2002 and sunshine played through the trees at the back of the house. I pulled on my rucksack, opened the door and drank deeply in the vanilla-scented morning, taking in the hint of a nutty earth smell, a gentle reminder that the seasons were starting to turn.

Something felt different today. The leaves were etched against an impossibly blue sky, which somehow seemed closer. Everything had a message for me – I could feel my veins thrumming to an ancient beat – but much as I strained to hear, the only sound for miles was birdsong.

A curious squirrel stopped halfway along the five-bar gate into the garden and fixed me with an unflinching stare. ‘Well, what’re you waiting for?’ he seemed to say before scurrying off.

I sighed and pushed through the tall grass into the woods beyond. As I got closer to the dry-stone wall bordering the back fields and bent down to scoop up some dry twigs, it occurred to me that Seth – my new boyfriend (and friend for the past 20 years) – was missing out. OK, we might be destitute and soon-to-be-homeless, but surely this beautiful morning was worth noticing?

I looked back at the low white Ayrshire cottage with its fading hanging baskets, and felt a warm swell of

appreciation for everyone inside it: Seth, curled up in bed; his two beautiful daughters who stayed with us every weekend; his quiet sister Becky and her young son Josh. All of us squashed up into a single room so that we could make a hasty retreat from the creditors encircling us if necessary.

We had all once believed in our dream, swept along by a tide of enthusiasm. Some stalwart friends and colleagues still do, and we'll always be grateful to them. Two years previously I had moved to Scotland from England, totally burned out yet determined to follow my heart. Seth and I had moved in together and started a multimedia business with the shared ideal of making a difference in the world. Just at the time when Scotland had been labelled the 'sick man of Europe' we'd created some interactive software for kids, educating them in a fun way about nutrition and exercise, which was quickly adopted by Glasgow City Council and a handful of local celebrities.

Thinking our future was secure, we'd naively calculated a return of investment within two years, and borrowed to the hilt. It was to be another four years before the project was finally rolled out as part of the National Curriculum, by which time we'd lost our home, our energy, our solvency and most of our pride. But that's another story.

Standing in the hush of the woods that late September morning, arms and rucksack full of firewood, knowing it was time to move on, but not knowing where or how, I'd never felt so alive.

We'd been staying in the cottage for two months. Most days were the same. Get up, cold shower, a layering of whatever clothes you could find, a hasty mug of tea and piece of toast before it was time to face the creditor of the day. Seth would valiantly travel to Glasgow in the grim hope that a cheque or some good news would arrive (they never did) and that the bills wouldn't (they always did) while I would head to the woods to gather firewood for the open fire, the main source of heating in the cottage.

But this morning everything had changed. The night before, Becky had gently asked us to leave. The strain of living in a cramped house with two frantic adults and three lively kids was starting to show. This news had been too much for Seth who'd retreated to bed, determined to stay there for as long as possible. I'd left him under the covers that morning while I headed out, blithely convinced that something positive would come out of all this.

Tree of knowledge

A few weeks earlier when I'd been gathering firewood in the same spot, I had been drawn to a mammoth tree that seemed to explode out of the ground. She was a giant beech, dwarfing every tree for miles, shrouded in green mystery, and we've since renamed her 'Mama Beech'.

Having led the no-nonsense life of a senior executive in the newspaper industry and been the head of my own company up to this point, talking to trees had never really been part of my routine. So I'd put it down to sheer exhaustion when she started to speak inside my head!

'Sit down here, take a piece of paper, apply for your ideal life... and make sure you get it.' Her words, not mine. Stunned, and secretly feeling that I'd sunk to a new low, I had pulled a notebook from my pocket, sat down with my back against her trunk and started to write. 'Present tense,' she'd nudged.

About an hour later I'd filled several pages with stuff I hadn't even known I'd wanted. A large house that my friends and family could call home, set in a natural environment, surrounded by trees and fields. A healing room and somewhere I could write. I wanted a career that would combine the two (healing and writing), working

from home and bringing in enough to live on. To have a dog... and marriage to Seth. Wow! What a fantasy!

So here I was, weeks later, standing in front of the same tree. 'Huh' I thought. 'So much for all that.' But as I turned to leave, I felt the word 'trust' directed at my back.

I dumped the wood at the front door, tapped on the bedroom window and called out that I was going for a walk. Silence. The car was still in the driveway.

Becky's old gatehouse cottage was rented from the laird of a rundown estate. Once known as 'the challenge', it's built on the crossing of two ley lines, one of which runs through the ruins of Scotland's first Masonic lodge. The build-up of energy within the house is so powerful that you regularly have to knock a tapstone to release it, so it's a legendary healing and transformative place. It stands at the entrance to a square mile of indigenous and imported trees, undulating fields and a chuckling river that meanders through the grounds. The crowning glory of the estate is a mansion house, built around a twelfth-century keep, all of which had fallen into disrepair.

I chose the path toward the mansion house and was so absorbed in my thoughts that I didn't even hear the car pull up beside me. Peering out from the open

window was Lina, the laird's wife. They'd assumed their inheritance a few months earlier and were about to renovate the house. Lina and I had shared stories over a few glasses of wine, and were just starting what would become a valued friendship.

'Hello darling! You look like you could do with a chat and a coffee! Jump in!' she trilled. We headed past the cracked, moss-covered tennis courts to her newly converted carriage house. Over a frothy coffee by the Aga in her big warm kitchen, Lina heard me out. I hadn't intended to be quite so thorough, but an hour had passed, the coffee was cold and I was still rattling on.

She looked at me thoughtfully, head to one side. 'Hmm. I've got some errands to run. Why don't you come with me? We'll talk as we go.' Her tone brooked no argument so I followed her out the door to the car. We pulled up outside the main house and she produced a huge bunch of keys. For the next half an hour I trailed her up four flights of stairs to the top of the house, through every room and back down to the bottom, talking all the way. We got to the kitchen before I drew breath. 'So... how would you like to live here darling?' she smiled.

'Here?' I repeated, uncomprehending.

'Yes here. In the East Wing?'

It was only then that I noticed the place was empty; I'd been so wrapped up in my story! I felt like someone had shaken fairy dust all over me and I didn't want the spell to break.

'I'd love to, but we could never afford it.'

'Look. I know the dreams you carry in your heart and I believe they'll happen. You've written them down haven't you? Why don't you go back to Seth, decide what you could afford and we'll put it to the Trust?'

I shivered. Trust ... there was that word again! I could hardly contain myself and after nearly knocking her over with my kiss, I thanked her and ran out the door, not stopping till I reached Becky's cottage.

Seth was still huddled under the covers and must've woken with a real shock when a blonde blur of breathless incoherence landed on him. When he'd extracted the story from the tumble of words that fell out of me, a slow smile spread across his face and we started to work out what we could afford.

But even with every penny we had left and the meagre income we were pulling in from scraps of work we'd managed to salvage, it was nowhere close to what we thought the Trust would accept.

The only solution was to call a mutual friend who was looking for a place to live. 'Pamela? What are you doing for lunch? Today. I only need 15 minutes! I promise you, you won't regret it!'

New beginnings

Pamela came out to see the house that evening, we pooled our resources, came up with a proposal and put it to the Trust that same week. Then, true to all manifestation techniques, we let go of the dream, as we were due to spend a week together in Germany working for Salem International, a children's charity that would become very important to us.

We asked everyone we knew to pray for us, or at least imagine us living there, which is really the same thing. One of our friends in Germany gave us hope, saying 'It's done. I can already see you living in the house.'

When we came home, a thick envelope was waiting for us – a six-month lease! I think we cried. We all moved in together the following week, November 2002 and, despite the fact that we only expected to be there for six months, we decided to unpack. Just as well really – we ended up living there for the next nine years.

The East Wing was a sprawling delight of idiosyncrasies. Added by the de Blair family in the 1700s, it was originally the nursery wing, and a joyful childlike energy still permeated some of the rooms. Because it had been a family home for the past 20 years, some of the larger pieces of furniture had just been left behind, probably because they were far too heavy to lift. One of my favourites was a huge oak chest with an ornate Harry Potter style key and the date 1795 among the intricate carvings that covered it.

As you entered the house by the heavy front door you were faced with a church pew, or settle as it's called in Scotland. There were coat pegs and shoe racks for about 20 pairs of shoes; perfect for all the friends we wanted to look after. The 70ft wood-panelled hallway peeked into the original stone-built keep, looking into a world gone by.

An antiquated industrial boiler tried its level best to heat the house in winter for the first few years of our tenancy, a pointless exercise considering the sash windows were single-glazed and leaked air like punctured lungs. The living room carpet was threadbare, the huge kitchen housed a lethal dumb waiter, which arced blue light if you so much as looked at it, the water ran alternately brown and orange, we were often without electricity and a working phone, plus we had

a ghost cat, a leaky roof and a resident family of very cheeky mice.

We loved it.

We soon learned the true value of thick woollen sweaters, candles and hot water bottles. We knew the location of every charity shop and auction room within a five-mile radius, and how to make hearty soup from just about anything we could find. The mice had a lucky escape on more than one occasion! As they lived in the larder, which had a vent and a north-facing wall, I'm surprised they didn't freeze to death.

As you mounted the stairs to the first floor, two very stern-looking portraits of Colonel Blair and his wife, who lived in 'the Wing' during the early 1900s, critically appraised you. We never had the heart to take the pictures down, and fancifully imagined that the Colonel's eyes softened over the years, as he came to recognize the love and respect we held for his house. Either that or the glass needed dusting!

The double-aspect living room at the heart of the house overlooked the sweeping red gravel driveway and a clutch of 200-year-old towering redwoods. We spent many a cozy evening huddled around the open fire, playing cards, drinking wine and singing along to

Seth's guitar. For the first few years we couldn't afford a TV in that room, so homegrown entertainment became a necessity. A 4ft-square thick pine coffee table, the only piece of furniture Seth and I owned when we moved in, took pride of place in the centre of the room, surrounded by three deep comfy sofas, which crept closer to the fire as the nights drew in.

One of the 'understandings' of the estate was that we could help ourselves to any fallen wood, so we always had a full log basket. We learned to set 'single match' fires from the very best – Betty, the estate's 85-year-old housekeeper, whose secret recipe included corks and candle stubs.

Across the hall was the study, stuffed with book-laden shelves, computers and a tangle of cables, and graced with a small chandelier. Since we all intended to work from home when we moved in and there weren't enough desks, I commandeered a full-length mahogany claw-foot dining table and covered it with green baize. Here I would sit, tapping away at my computer, surrounded by inspirational photos and affirmations, dramatically lit by an Anglepoise lamp. Friends used to joke that I could run the world from my huge desk, and I came home one day to find an enormous laminated map of the world covering the wall behind it. All I needed to complete the picture was a fluffy white cat and a leather chair!

Next door was the first of four bedrooms, a peaceful pale yellow room with a mahogany fireplace and writing bureau, overlooking the river. At the back of the house on the first floor there was a bathroom and a tiny pantry kitchen, complete with original Butler sink.

Pamela soon got used to her enormous en-suite bedroom, which, with its two large wardrobes, kingsize bed, fireplace and chest of drawers, was bigger than entire flats she'd been viewing. Seth and I settled into one of the top floor attic rooms with a sloping ceiling, which I loved because it overlooked the outdoor pool and gardens, and the kids shared its twin facing the river and tree-lined bank.

But the room that really took your breath away was the Cecily Blair room on the second floor. Crowned by a magnificent carved four-poster bed, elegant chaise longue and intricately crafted fireplace, this was the epitome of bridal suites. When the main house was renovated this room was reclaimed as the master bedroom, but for two blissful years we could gaze on it and pretend it was ours. I would often envisage celebrating my first book signing with a Champagne reception there.

An ideal life

In those early days, even though we had absolutely no money and very few prospects, we felt like millionaires. Whatever we needed seemed to manifest itself almost instantly. Washing machines, sofas, fridges, TVs, computers, even cars would turn up. If something went wrong, there was always someone around to help fix it. Everyone was willing to share. And if we were feeling low, all we had to do was walk outside and look around. In return we fed anyone who came through the door, listened to their troubles, gave healing treatments and helped where we could.

It was important to me that we lived according to the vision I'd had under Mama Beech. The house seemed to come alive when people visited and the East Wing was rapidly becoming a place where people felt they could relax and be restored. My mantra has always been 'you are safe and you are loved', a phrase I try to build into all my Reiki treatments. In time, the very walls seemed to emanate this message. When people came to stay, they didn't want to leave in a hurry. It had become a healing centre by word of mouth alone.

I firmly believe that thoughts and feelings create your reality. I also believe that if you write down your dreams or out-picture them, it brings you one step closer

to achieving them. The very act of believing something long enough to write it down if you're a wordy person, or create a storyboard if you're more visual, or even record your own voice telling a story in the present tense if that inspires you, seems to shift the energy toward creation.

Then we have to let our vision go, which is often thought of as the hardest part. The mistake we tend to make is taking it all too seriously. I like to treat this part as a game, pretending I've entered a universal competition, which I can't possibly lose. Whatever comes back will be OK. After all, I also believe that we are always in the right place at the right time, with the people and circumstances necessary for our growth. We just need to learn to trust the process. Even if this is not true, *what if you believed it was?* Your life would definitely change for the better.

So one year later, we were settled in Blair, with no idea of how we were going to earn enough money to pay the rent and feed ourselves. We looked out on paradise each day but were bankrupt. It had taken all our inner resources to get through the past year, with the disappointments of business to contend with and, to be honest, we needed time to regroup and re-energize.

While Seth valiantly went off to work each day to keep the software project alive, Pamela and I would shut

ourselves away in the study, wearing fingerless gloves and big jumpers and tap away at our keyboards. A dear friend Kenny sold his flat and moved in to help with the finances, and keep us entertained with his pithy Scottish humour.

We'd decided to take in any work that came our way. By day we got stuck into audio-typing, funding proposals, magazine articles, even organizing business lunches. By night we would don our black and white uniforms and head next door to the mansion house where we would greet and serve the well-heeled guests who were starting to stay at Blair.

Isn't it strange how we bring into being what we have inside us? Although I had been a high-flying executive managing teams of people who were older and more experienced than me, the perception I was carrying around that our business had 'failed' was colouring my judgment. I had become self-critical, convinced I would never be able to cope with work that demanded any more of me than washing dishes. Even though the house we lived in was living proof that affirmations and positive thinking worked, if I look back to the thoughts I was carrying around in my head at that time, I'm surprised by their negativity.

Where attention goes, energy flows

Thoughts such as *'There's never enough money', 'I'll never get a good job', 'Nobody's interested in what I have to say/write about', 'This good fortune won't last'*, and other variations on the theme of *'I'm not good enough'*, stopped me from attracting meaningful, well-paid work for a long time. But one daily practice I did maintain was saying 'thank you'. Every time I walked outside and breathed the fresh clean air, or leaned against an ancient tree, I said thank you. And really, that's all a prayer or affirmation is. It's acknowledging that something in your experience is good and that you're grateful for it. It's true; where attention goes, energy flows.

One thing that truly warmed my heart was seeing the pleasure that others derived from the house and its surroundings. Friends would come for the weekend and not want to leave. In fact some of them never left! No matter how stressed they were when they arrived, they would always go away with a new perspective, a sense of being restored.

We were living simply, growing organic vegetables, cooking up big soups, stews and 'heaters', as they're known in Scotland: gathering firewood and making our own entertainment. We recycled and composted as much as we could, shared what we had and laughed a

lot. If we could help anyone out we did, and we stopped being afraid of receiving aid in return – a hard lesson for any independent person to learn.

We owned nothing – even the car was repossessed eventually – but still felt rich beyond measure. I remember sitting with Seth on the riverbank one glorious summer's day (yes, we do get them in Scotland) and asking where he would live if he won the lottery. As we gazed at the back of the house, the answer was obvious. We were already living the life of our dreams. OK so we didn't own it, but really that just meant we didn't have the cost and responsibility of maintaining it. The only regret we had was that by not having any extra money, we were unable to help others as much as we wanted.

We had no idea what the future held: that within ten years our collective dreaming would help us serve the world in ways we hadn't imagined. That we would be able to set up our own branch of an international charity alongside some of our closest friends and help spread a message of peace and hope from our little corner of this beautiful planet. With the benefit of hindsight, all I can say is 'your words and visions are creative. Be careful what you wish for ...'

2

HEALTH

‘A healthy outside starts from
the inside.’

Robert Urich

One of my strongest beliefs is that what you give out comes back to you multiplied. This is just as true of thoughts and feelings as of actions. While I was bombarding the universe with thoughts of ‘I am not good enough,’ ‘I don’t deserve it,’ ‘There’s never enough,’ and so on, that is what was coming right back at me.

This universal intelligence, of which we are all a part, is so faithful it reflects back exactly what you tell it. If you say ‘I want’ it will respond ‘so you do.’ And there you are, stuck in a state of wanting. If, however, you affirm that you already have whatever it is you think you need, the chances are you’ll either be prompted to recognize that you really do already have it (usually by being stretched in some way) or you will attract it to you.

The trick is to appreciate whatever it is you already ‘have’, be it harmonious relationships (even if it’s only with your dog at this stage), sound health, financial abundance, a great job, etc.

While I was affirming for the ideal house back in September 2002, I was also blessing all the houses I’d lived in before, as well as feeling grateful for the opportunity we’d been given to stay with Becky for longer than expected. It’s the feeling that’s important, and gratitude seems to be the universe’s most fertile soil.

If you take the time to really examine whatever it is you have in your life, you'll probably realize that on some level you expect to have it. If it's something that's been with you for a while, it's usually because you're comfortable with it, or it's helping you understand something.

For example, for years I had struggled with various health problems. As a 'driven' executive, I suffered from irritable bowel syndrome and, eventually, complete exhaustion, or burnout. When I first moved to my new life in Scotland, all these symptoms miraculously disappeared and I felt healthier than I had for years. My life was working on all levels.

After our business crashed, my self-esteem plummeted, my relationship with myself and others suffered and, of course, I created a series of 'joyless' conditions in my body. First it was *Candida albicans*, a yeast overgrowth, which makes many women's lives miserable. Then it was a thyroid imbalance, which changed the texture of my skin, made my hair fall out, increased my weight, drained all my energy and stopped me thinking clearly. I was convinced there was something seriously wrong because it changed so many systems I had previously taken for granted within my body.

After that I grew a uterine fibroid so large that people thought I was pregnant and started offering me seats

on trains! An ultrasound scan showed the tumour was the equivalent of an 18-week foetus. I was very self-conscious of my protruding belly and, what was worse, the incredibly heavy periods accompanying the fibroid made me severely anaemic, which in turn increased the bleeding. At the lowest point of this condition my doctor cautioned me not to climb stairs or do any housework because I was running an acute risk of a heart attack. I was 35 years old.

In all these cases, it was only when I took the trouble to really go within and get to the root of the problem, the 'heart of the matter' that my body would heal. Dr Deepak Chopra coined the wonderful phrase 'every cell in your body is eavesdropping on your internal conversation'. Although diet and lifestyle changes certainly help, I am convinced that clearing and releasing thought patterns and emotions, which no longer serve us, is an intrinsic part of the process if we are to heal on all three levels.

The body is a living pharmacy

Whatever your body creates, it can heal. It is my belief that spirit holds the original blueprint of perfect health for each of our bodies. Dr Candace Pert's groundbreaking studies of neuropeptides and her research into opiate receptors reveal that there is a corresponding receptor

for every drug known to man on the surface of each cell. So we can generate feel-good chemicals and, if we know how to tap into this healing storehouse, we can heal without the drugs. It's just a question of knowing how ...

Plant medicine, thankfully, is coming back into our culture. There are herbs for every condition and the knowledge of how to use them was passed down from woman to woman through generations until recently. Where pharmaceutical drugs are designed to scientifically emulate the physical properties of plants and can be very effective if used carefully, the holistic, energetic quality of the whole plant is lost, creating inconvenient and sometimes dangerous side effects.

I am not unrealistic. I believe that most healing practices have their advantages. If someone broke their leg I wouldn't hang about giving them Reiki, I'd get them to the local hospital as soon as I could. (Though it might be a good idea to travel with them and give them Reiki on the way to keep them calm.) Herbs, diet, relaxation techniques, exercise, surgery and even drugs can all be effective in treating health disorders.

But the key factor for me, which is so often overlooked, is going within to receive the message. Louise Hay spent many years compiling her 'little blue book', a catalogue of symptoms and the probable emotional contributing

factors underlying them. When she condensed them down, she found that most imbalances in the body could be attributed to just three primary emotions – guilt, anger and fear. I have found this to be true in the majority of cases when treating patients in my healing practice too.

If anger is held onto and stored in the body it will eventually ‘erupt’ as a burning or itching feeling – the medical term is usually a condition ending in ‘-itis’. Boils, cysts, rashes and fevers are all symptoms of anger and it can show up emotionally as impatience, irritation, frustration, resentment, bitterness, jealousy or criticism. Fear often manifests as tension, anxiety, worry, doubt or feelings of unworthiness. Guilt and resentment literally ‘eat away’ at your body if they become habitual, and can manifest as cancer. Women, and mothers in particular, are experts at carrying around suitcases of self-blame and guilt, often unconsciously.

It’s time to let go of all blame and guilt.

Inner healing

Healing is all about creating the conditions necessary for the body to heal itself. Our inner wisdom will do the rest. High temperatures are the body’s way of purifying itself.

Vomiting and diarrhoea are the same. Pain is usually a symptom of guilt and where the pain occurs can tell us a great deal about the source of the problem. For example, headaches are about our egos punishing us. Pain in the neck can be issues with flexibility, discomfort in the stomach difficulty 'processing' new ideas, and lower back pain is usually about feeling unsupported or having money or relationship worries.

I once walked to work behind a rather large lady with very swollen ankles and wrists, who was having some difficulty walking. Having just returned from a week's training in Louise Hay's philosophy, I was curious as to why the lady should be storing so much fluid. Then I noticed she was wearing a conference badge stating 'Complaints Management Committee'. Louise's little blue book suggests that 'holding onto criticism' causes swelling. No wonder the lady was so uncomfortable! I was very tempted to stop her in the street and advise her to 'get pissed off' and let all the complaints leave her body, but was deterred by the fact that she might think I was crazy.

Listen to your body

The heart has long been touted as being the barometer of our emotions. We talk about our hearts being full,

broken, open, closed, heavy, light and so on. We even refer to a heart 'attack', suggesting it has turned on us. In truth, it's more likely to have given up trying to pump life energy around our bodies after we have squeezed all the joy out of our lives.

All these symptoms are trying to get our attention, telling us to slow down, change our pace, go inside and reflect. Yet we think we're superhuman. Rather than stop or give into our bodies' demands, we pop a pill, rev up on caffeine and carry on with even more determination.

In the macho culture that has become the working norm in Europe and America, we work longer and longer hours, hoping for more recognition, satisfaction, reward and productivity. Childbearing age is increasing in the developed world as more and more women put off raising a family in favour of pursuing their careers. The family unit is stretched to breaking point as men and women spend more time working so they can pay for more consumer goods, and teachers are dissolving under the pressure of having to be substitute parents, psychologists, counsellors and, more often than not, policemen.

Resting is seen as weak in our culture as we strive to stuff more and more into the same number of hours we've always had. But I've got news – days aren't getting

any longer! The more pressure we put on ourselves, particularly if we're feeling trapped in any way or are out of alignment with our deeper values and purpose, the more likely it is that our health will suffer.

We can't ignore our state of health for too long. When we do crash, it's likely to be spectacular, as that's the only way our bodies can get our attention. Illness has become a socially acceptable way of saying 'no' without causing offence. Many of us lack assertiveness to such an extent that we hide behind our ailments. How often have you pulled a 'sickie' at work or got yourself out of doing something because you didn't feel well?

A lot of the illnesses we think of as physical are often actually an emotional or even spiritual malaise. Our society is geared towards external realities and therefore external solutions, so it's only natural for us to want to be 'fixed' by someone or something outside of ourselves. We'll visit a doctor, research alternative therapies on the internet, read a book written by an expert. But no one can really interpret another's disease. Healing is a personal journey and meaning can take time to unfold. Ultimately we all face death, and it will be the spirit that decides at which points we heal or self-destruct, but we do have a lot of innate power which can determine the quality of our lives while we're here.

UK amateur athlete Jane Tomlinson was diagnosed with incurable metastatic breast cancer in 2000, and told she had just six months to live. Despite this bleak prognosis, she dedicated the rest of her life to raising money for charity and over the next seven years successfully completed the London Marathon, the Great North Run and the Ironman UK Triathlon, as well as cycling 4,200 miles across the US on a nine-week fundraiser. In that time she raised over £1,500,000 for charity and inspired millions of people along the way. Although she died of her disease in 2007, no one could claim her story to be one of failure. Motivated by a desire to leave her beloved family with some fantastic memories, Jane outlived her prognosis and left behind an inspirational legacy. We can all make a unique difference.

The power to harm or heal

A word about the medical profession: I fully support doctors, nurses, surgeons and other health professionals and know that the vast majority have been drawn to their profession by a desire to help, to heal. However, what frustrates me is the absolute mantle of authority we have placed on them. In Western society, medics have overtaken even priests in our esteem! If a doctor prescribes a drug and we believe it will heal us, the

likelihood is it will. The same can be said of a placebo, a sugar-coated pill with no active ingredients, revealing that it is our beliefs that hold the potency.

Medical professionals have a duty of care. We used to speak of a doctor's 'bedside manner' and the modern Hippocratic oath states:

'... I will remember that there is art to medicine as well as science, and that warmth, sympathy, and understanding may outweigh the surgeon's knife or the chemist's drug.'

A study by the University of York featured in *The Lancet* in 2001 showed that enhancing patient expectations through positive information about the treatment of the illness while providing support or reassurance significantly influenced health outcomes. Conversely, if our physician tells us we have terminal cancer and only have two months to live, a lot of us will give up. Talk about giving away our power!

Jane is a registered nurse and health visitor. Having longed for a child of her own, she was delighted when her daughter Maria was born, but joy turned to heartbreak when Maria was diagnosed with cancer aged 11 months. Having also trained as a clinical hypnotherapist, Jane was acutely aware of the effect words have on the

unconscious mind, and was determined to protect her daughter from any negativity surrounding her condition. She opted for a conventional course of treatment including chemotherapy, but insisted that every health professional and adult that came into contact with her daughter would only talk about the cancer and her prognosis in positive terms, even while Maria was under anaesthetic.

Jane also wove hypnosis techniques into Maria's bedtime stories, and taught her empowering self-hypnosis techniques for pain relief and visualization. Fifteen years later, Maria is still in remission.

While Jane was training to be a hypnotherapist, another remarkable thing occurred. A previous car accident had left her right arm incapacitated, to the extent that she had no sensation from midway up her arm to the tips of her fingers. She was always burning herself in the kitchen. At the time, her doctor had categorically told her that her arm would not recover as the nerves and tissues were too damaged to repair themselves. However, during her hypnotherapy training, one of the exercises involved inducing trance and numbing her left arm using the power of suggestion. At the end of the exercise, Jane's tutor asked the group to use the phrase 'I now remove all previous hypnotic suggestions from your arm.' As luck would have it, the

partner she was working with mistakenly removed all hypnotic suggestions from *both* arms. Immediately Jane started to feel a tingling in her right arm and burst into tears of joy. Miraculously, over the course of the next few weeks she regained full sensation in her 'irreparable' arm!

Jane's story is a powerful reminder of how much store we put in doctors' words and the effect they have on our unconscious minds when we are at our most receptive and vulnerable. Our life can literally hang in the balance depending on our response to their prognosis. In this litigious age it does make you wonder how many health professionals are so fearful of being sued that they give the worst-case scenario to protect themselves.

Re-balancing

Around the time I developed *Candida albicans* I was feeling really low. There was a huge lack of trust in my relationship with Seth and others, some of it justified, some of it my perception. Losing a business, particularly one you've run with your partner, is bound to bring up issues of blame, feelings of failure and a decline in confidence.

Dietary changes certainly helped. I switched to a virtually sugar-free diet full of raw foods and garlic. It

was January so luckily there weren't many parties in the diary! I invested in the highest quality organic multi-vitamin within my budget and took daily probiotics. I drank only water and herbal tea and made sure I walked everywhere and went to bed early. After a month of this I lost a stone in weight ... and most of my friends!

I was utterly miserable, a real grump. When you deprive your body of sugar and caffeine, at first your serotonin levels drop. This is the real detox stage when your body chucks out all the old junk. Usually your skin suffers, you feel lethargic and if you've been taking caffeine on a daily basis you can experience horrible headaches. It's important to support your liver and colon at this stage, as they will be responsible for eliminating most of the toxins and need to be in the best of health. I would recommend a one-off colon, liver and kidney cleanse to kick-start the whole process. If colonics aren't your thing, raw fruit and vegetable juices can be just as effective.

Thankfully the detox 'hangover' doesn't last long. By the end of the month everything was starting to improve and my symptoms had reduced. After three months even carrots tasted like nectar and I was bursting with health and energy. And because my system was so much more robust and vital, it was possible to gradually introduce

more foods back into my diet with no adverse side effects.

Although this was a powerful re-balancing of my physical body, I was also aware that remaining symptom-free would take more than just a nutritional overhaul. There was some serious emotional and mental house cleaning to be done. It was spring, a very symbolic time for clearing out the old and making room for the new so I set aside an hour a day to get in touch with my inner self.

Each evening, around the time the 'old' me would have been enjoying a glass of wine, I would take myself off to the bedroom, plump up the cushions on the bed and settle in for a meditation. Oh wow. The first sessions were like eavesdropping on a bitchy conversation. I couldn't believe how negative my self-talk had become! *'He never supports me, it's always down to me to make things right, this house is too big to keep clean, nobody cares ...'* and other such selfish drivel. I made a conscious decision to stop my negative thinking ... and then promptly forgot to do it!

Months later when I was diagnosed with an underactive thyroid and a uterine fibroid the size of a melon, the doctors I saw wanted to a) put me on thyroid drugs for the rest of my life, b) induce the menopause to shrink the fibroid or c) perform a hysterectomy. When

I told them I intended to heal my condition without recourse to any of those measures, they looked at me with a mixture of scorn and pity.

Again dietary changes helped, supplemented by some potent herbs, exercise and massage techniques. I also stopped drinking water from plastic bottles after uncovering some worrying research about xenoestrogens. But all along my inner wisdom was telling me the two were connected with frustrated creativity and emotions that I'd stuffed down inside myself for years.

As a Reiki practitioner I was aware that the second and fifth chakras were connected and imbalances in either could affect the other. The throat chakra is about self-expression and the sacral chakra about creativity. At the time both these conditions manifested, I was working in a 9 to 5 job in a multinational organization, which left me with little room for personal creativity and individuality. I was also carrying around a truckload of resentment. On a fundamental level, I knew that this sense of not being in alignment, together with my poor self-talk was adversely affecting my health.

Time to change

Here's a startling fact: fibroid tumours affect 30 per cent of women, many of whom are unaware they even

have them. They are almost always benign, sometimes symptom-free and can lay undetected for years. They are also currently responsible for a third of all hysterectomies. A hysterectomy is a major operation with a considerable recovery time and a surgical complication rate of between 40 and 50 per cent. Many surgeons opt to remove the uterus and frequently the ovaries in preference to a myomectomy (surgical removal of the fibroid alone). This is despite the emerging research, which suggests that removal of the uterus, and ovaries might be detrimental to women's long-term health and can accelerate the aging process.

When you're faced with a monthly episode of feeling as though you're bleeding to death and are unable to walk for one day in every 28, it's actually a tempting prospect to let someone just 'whip it all out' and have done with it. Unless your condition is life threatening, however, and especially if you still want to have children, I would urge you to explore the other choices even if you do finally decide that major surgery is the best option for you.

Fibroids strike at the heart of a woman's femininity, her creative centre. As women we have a tendency to take a hurt from a person or a situation and nurse it until it takes up too much space in our wombs and lives.

Think of a pearl – it started out as a piece of grit that just got polished until it became precious! Same thing with slights and insults, but the difference is we nurture them until *we* become precious! I can't deny that I had become a walking example of this theory. If you re-read the thought processes I was carrying around then, you'll see the evidence was right there!

Dr Christiane Northrup, author of *Women's Bodies, Women's Wisdom* discusses fibroids in the light of unbirthed creativity. She talks about unfulfilling jobs and relationships, and issues around reproduction and motherhood. Louise Hay refers to fibroids as 'nursing a hurt from a partner' and speaks of heavy bleeding as being 'joy running out of the body'. Fibroids are extremely common in the Afro-Caribbean community where they are often labelled the 'he-done-me-wrong' syndrome.

Feeling overwhelmed or under pressure to 'fix' everything is a classic bond amongst fibroid sufferers and it's easy to see why such a fast-paced environment could be building more problems for future multi-tasking generations.

Some women with fibroids have internal conflicts about their sexuality, which they may have never explored and I know of others who have terminated a

pregnancy without resolving the accompanying guilt. Many feel resentful that they have given up their own dreams for somebody else's and not been appreciated for it. Whatever the issue, it is usually connected with the expression of a woman's creativity.

The emotional 'profile' of someone with fibroids is likely to be an independent but sensitive woman, someone who is used to being self-reliant. There is a tendency to need to make things happen, to be 'ballsy' and 'gutsy' and some of the other qualities traditionally attributed to a man. When I was diagnosed with my fibroid, a friend who knows and loves me joked 'I wondered how long it would take you to try and make a baby on your own!' Hmm. Truth hurts.

Women's creativity is fundamentally different from a man's. Not to put too fine a point on it, when a man sows a creative seed it is very much in the moment whereas a woman's ideas and problem-solving abilities benefit from gestation. Of course we are all part feminine, part masculine but too often I have tried to succeed in a man's world by emulating men's behaviour. With the wisdom of hindsight it's clear to me how much more advantageous it would have been to have used my ovarian power and spent a bit more time creating a labour of love instead of constantly moving onto the next thing.

The thyroid, a butterfly-shaped gland at the base of the throat, is your body's regulator. It controls metabolism through the secretion of thyroid hormones and can be underactive (hypothyroidism) or overactive (hyperthyroidism). Not much is known for certain about what causes disturbances in the thyroid gland – autoimmune conditions, hereditary predisposition and dietary deficiency can all contribute.

In metaphysical terms, any imbalance around the throat area is concerned with self-expression, and thyroid problems, according to Louise Hay and others, symbolize feeling creatively stifled.

Orthodox medicine does recognize that imbalance in this gland can cause havoc with internal homeostatic systems, and accepts that prolonged stress can be a major factor.

Cortisol is a stress hormone, manufactured in the adrenal glands in response to stressors, which increases the efficiency of thyroid hormone. A physiologic amount – not too high and not too low – of cortisol is required for normal thyroid function. Too much of the stress hormone will create a condition of thyroid resistance whereby thyroid hormone levels remain normal but tissues fail to respond as effectively to the thyroid signal as they should. Perhaps more worryingly

this resistance also applies to all other hormones, e.g. insulin, progesterone, oestrogens, testosterone and even cortisol itself.

When stress hits the adrenal glands, if they are fatigued from long-term abuse (classic burn-out), they can be unable to produce enough cortisol. Alternatively, chronic stress elevates cortisol levels to such an extent that you start getting resistance from hormone receptors throughout your body. In either case thyroid hormones become inefficient and thyroid activity is thrown off-balance.

Cortisol naturally fluctuates throughout the day, being lowest at 2 a.m. when the body is regenerating and highest in the morning when you need to get out of bed. Melatonin is the body's regenerator and works hard in the early hours to repair tissues and cells. If cortisol levels remain unnaturally high due to stress, melatonin production will be inhibited and not enough growth hormone or thyroid-stimulating hormone will be produced.

It goes without saying therefore that decreasing stress and following a 'sensible' lifestyle with enough regular sleep is vital to general, and especially hormonal, health.

Healing my condition certainly took patience and

understanding. By finally going within and truly listening to my body's messages I was able to take corrective action on the physical, mental/emotional and spiritual levels. My body healed from the thyroid imbalance over the course of a year, without recourse to any of the drugs or treatments proposed to me by my doctors. The fibroid took a lot longer and I eventually resorted to minor surgery in the form of uterine artery embolization to improve my quality of life while I worked on addressing the underlying emotional causes. Even though the operation was 100 per cent successful, it took a further two years for the fibroid to dissolve, much to the astonishment of my surgeon – even he urged me to 'let go of whatever you're hanging onto!' Once again it was only after I'd got to the heart of the matter and forgiven myself for an earlier termination that I was able to finally heal on all levels.

The human body is a far more sophisticated healing mechanism than we give it credit for. Every second, of every day, we are creating a new body. With every breath, we take in many billions of atoms, which will eventually make up our cells and tissues. As we exhale, we exchange atoms with everyone else, a neat little reminder that we truly are all one!

You create a new stomach lining every five days, a whole new skin every month, a liver every six weeks

and a skeleton every three months. Within just one year, you will have replaced 98 per cent of all the atoms in your body!

So who says we can't reinvent ourselves? It's my experience that we can if we are willing to look within rather than outside ourselves for answers and change the way we talk to and about ourselves. The following chapters show you how ...