the Choice is Ours.

Rosalind Gregg.
"The Choice is Ours" is a story of struggle, and of the joy that comes from embracing life through the challenge of overcoming death. It describes my own healing process, including my thoughts, feelings, and choices after being told that I had an inoperable form of cancer. I was faced with the choice of life or death; I chose to live, and in so doing discovered what life is all about.

Professional medical guidance and treatment has an important role to play in the healing process - finding a doctor in whom you can place your trust and confidence is a necessary step toward recovery. Yet I strongly emphasize that traditional medical care does not relieve us of personal responsibility for our own state of health, and consequently for our lives.

I wish to stress that my approach toward healing is not the only way: I do not pretend that it will 'feel right 'for everyone. I offer it to you as an alternative for those asking the questions "Why me?" and "What can I do for myself?" I hope that it may provide encouragement to others who are desperately wanting more from life, yet are unaware of the choices facing them.

I WILL NEVER FORGET the feeling of waking to a new day with the thought, "I am going to die," heavily imprinted in my mind. Each word was like a poison-tipped spear, penetrating to my very core. The anxiety, the fear, the overwhelming dread was something I had never experienced before, not even in the most depressed moments of my life. Two days before I had received my diagnosis from a team of cancer specialists: I had an inoperable tumor of the spine.
I remember staring out of the window at a solid red-brick wall and feeling the tears well up in my eyes as the first impact of the diagnosis hit me. That wall was a powerful symbol, although I did not recognize it at the time. I was truly "up against the wall," threatened by a disease which was destroying my physical being, cell by cell. My illusions had been irreparably shattered—I could no longer pretend that the doctors were going to give me a pill and make me all better. Desperation clawed at me from the inside, like a caged animal. I longed to be free from this prison, yet I did not know how to recognize the door, much less grasp the key that would unlock it and release me from captivity. It was only on the surface that I appeared relatively calm and collected. There was no way that I was going to fall to pieces and expose my lack of self-control; I was too proud.

Three months earlier I had been operated on for malignant melanoma, one of the most threatening forms of cancer. It began with the removal of an innocent-looking mole on my thigh; I first had it checked because it had become itchy. On removal, the doctor had remarked that it appeared to be harmless. The tests proved otherwise. I had a large area of surrounding tissue removed, leaving me with a nine-inch scar and the hopeful assurance that no other cancerous cells had been detected, which was a very positive sign.

My conditioning over the years had left me with the belief that medical doctors were the only ones who could cure me; I assumed that they were responsible for my well-being. Besides, three years earlier my older sister had undergone two operations for malignant melanoma on her leg, without any recurrence of cancer, and so I tended to take this initial warning from my body somewhat lightly. Yet despite my confidence and implicit trust in the skills of these highly regarded specialists, it now appeared that the melanoma had metastasized within one of my vertabrae. I asked for further verification, but the doctors were reluctant to do a bone biopsy, and the tumor itself could not be removed without my whole spine collapsing. The message I received was, "There's no point; it's game over."

Treatment with chemotherapy began immediately. I detested the thought of filling my body with destructive chemicals, and endeavoured to compensate by filling my mind with positive, constructive thoughts. I decided that I still had a lot of living to do and my first task was to face the reality of my self-destruction. The book You Can Fight for Your Life, by Dr. L. LeShan,1 was a godsend; it gave me the confidence that I needed to begin searching for the answers to questions which, prior to this crisis, I had never bothered to ask. Did I have a choice between life and death, happiness and misery, freely expressing myself and trying to fulfill what I thought other people wanted me to be? Obviously some part of me knew that I did have a choice. The game was nor over; it had simply moved to another playing field, and I was holding the ball.
But how could I contact that inner knowing? And which direction was I to rake? I had no idea, but I did know that I had to make the first move. As Richard Bach states in his book *Illusions*, "A cloud does not know why it moves in such a direction and at such a speed. It feels an impulsion - this is the place to go now. But the sky knows the reasons and the patterns behind all clouds, and you will know too, when you lift yourself high enough to see beyond new horizons." Like the clouds, I was already moving in a direction, even though I had no awareness of where I was heading, or why.

I had been taking classes in Hatha Yoga and meditation for several months prior to the diagnosis. Several different approaches had been presented in the meditation class, and I had been particularly inspired by a visualization technique called the Divine Light Invocation. I moved with this inspiration and began the practice right away, repeating the affirmations as I visualized my whole body filled with Divine Light. I imagined that healing was taking place on all levels - physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual. At first it all seemed a little crazy; nothing seemed to be happening, yet I knew that I had to begin to trust.

I scheduled two twenty minute periods a day for this practice into my already tight schedule. It was not always easy to slow down and focus entirely on the Divine Light Invocation, but I was determined to heal myself, more determined that I had ever been in my entire 36 years of living.

After six weeks of intense concentration on this practice I returned to the clinic for further x-rays of my spine. They showed that healing had taken place on the front of the affected vertebra: a remission! That 'magic word' brought an overwhelming sense of relief in the form
of tears and laughter - it was working! However the joy was kept mostly to myself, as there were few people I trusted to provide me with the hope and encouragement that I so badly needed.

Past experience had told me that the word cancer is associated with death, but already I had begun to prove otherwise. I knew that I must continue to fill my body with Light, particularly my spinal column where the flow of life energy had become blocked. I added another technique to my two daily sessions with the Divine Light Invocation, one in which I directed a constant flow of healthy blood cells to the affected vertebra, visualizing a war within that bony structure. I pictured the defeated cancerous cells being carried away to be flushed out of my system, as healthy new bone growth took over.

Not only did I have to convince my body and mind that I was going to be well, I had to assure everyone with whom I came in contact too. It was not easy. The doctors were the most difficult to convince; they changed their diagnosis to Paget's disease, which is also considered incurable. However, the revised diagnosis did not change my attitude. I did not plan on living with the deformities that can develop from the malfunction of bone cell reproduction. My goal was perfect health.

I meditated and visualized my body healing itself, confident that this was a perfectly reasonable expectation: if I had allowed my body to become self-destructive, I could also reverse the process. I began to realize that I was responsible for my life. At first this was not easy for me to accept, because I had been conditioned to believe that the 'authority figures' in our society knew what was best for me. I am very grateful for the conscientious and skilled help I received from the medical profession, and strongly urge anyone with physical problems to seek guidance and treatment from a qualified physician. However the ultimate challenge, to create and maintain health on all levels, rests with the individual. Even the finest medical training and technology cannot take the place of personal responsibility.

Gradually a terrifying insight emerged: I had allowed myself to begin to die for some reason. Why? Did I not appreciate living? Was it so dark and difficult that growth was no longer a possibility? Could I no longer see ahead for a purpose to my existence? Had I reached the end of my road? Did I have so little love for myself that I considered myself worthless, unable to contribute to the world around me?

I devoured numerous books, searching for the answer in the different views presented of life and its mysteries. The more I searched the less I seemed to know, and the greater the need and excitement to learn more. After two months of questioning I had insights which allowed me to understand why I had chosen death over life. The part of me that wanted to die had become stronger than the part that wanted to go on living, and it had begun to take control.

I still was not sure where I was headed, but I was moving on regardless. There were glimpses of understanding within the doubts and fears that I constantly experienced. The part of me that valued Life was driving me on, and there was no turning back from my new course. I
endeavoured to learn all that I could of the yogic way of life from a Yoga teacher who had been a student of Swami Sivananda Radha for many years. She encouraged me to practice asanas! (yoga postures) and to keep a spiritual diary, in which I recorded my thoughts, my actions and reactions, my insights, my highs and my lows. She urged me to recall, record and analyze my dreams, and faithfully continue with the healing visualizations. She advised me to walk slowly and follow the 'stepping stones,' but my head was bursting with new ideas to be tested and explored, and I wanted to do it all at once. It was a mighty struggle to discipline my untamed mind, which was like a wild horse being broken to rein.

In the past I had rarely remembered my dreams, and certainly never taken them seriously. As I now began to open up to a new way of looking at them, I realized that my subconscious held a wealth of knowledge just waiting to be tapped. My first dream was one of attempting to waken my older sister who was dreaming, because I knew that I needed to know what her dream was telling her. I was quite desperate, and yet I was gently tapping her on the forehead - the point where the inner eye or sixth cakra is located. I was so excited by this dream that I awakened in the middle of the night to write it down. I had begun my search within!

Many revealing dreams followed: dreams of searching, of trying to find my way through heavy traffic, of hiding, of looking; dreams of cancer, of darkness, of formality. I began to understand the symbolic messages of my Higher Self: that the easy, well-defined way led to the doghouse; that there were a lot of gates to go through to reach the arena; that I was anxious to get to the stage; that there were long spiral staircases and many rooms to discover.

WHAT WAS THE PURPOSE for my being in this state, in this place, at this point in time? The horizon still seemed far away as I reviewed the patterns of my life that had brought me to this moment. I lived in middle-class suburbia, in what I considered to be a happy home - the odd disagreement, a few silent withdrawals, but rarely did tempers flare or spontaneous joy burst forth. My husband and I did our best to keep the household on an even keel. Our two daughter, however, were of different temperaments, which resulted in constant competitiveness, antagonism, and petty picking. I had prided myself on not allowing my children to encounter any hurts or pain that I could prevent, in the mistaken assumption that I was responsible for their continual happiness. So long as nobody rocked the boat too much was too honest or too open, I felt that the storms could be avoided and peace and harmony would result.

The fifteen years prior to my operation had been adventurous ones. My training as a mothercraft nurse had allowed me the freedom to travel to new places and meet a wide cross-section of people. I took only short term positions for as soon as I became comfortable, I found that I was bored silly and ready to move on to new challenges. I traveled over a good part of the
world; the excitement of new and ever-changing cultures, scenery and situations broadened my outlook on life, but did not offer any security.

I sought that security in my marriage, becoming fully occupied in husband children and home, and the contentment of playing out these different roles. It became our family pattern to move every two years; just when we felt comfortable in our new home and accepted by the neighbourhood, we planned another move. In retrospect I see that we merely continued my earlier habit of using change of location to escape boredom. I was still drifting along the surface of life, never allowing the discontent of familiarity to prod me into exploring my inner depths.

The last three years of this period had been different, beginning with some significant losses in my life. One of these was the death of my father to whom I was very close on a spiritual level; he died just three days after I had pulled up roots from my beloved homeland of Australia to return to Canada I expressed some of my grief openly, but most was kept buried deep inside My stiff upper lip attitude allowed me to settle down at last, and begin weaving myself a comfortable cocoon, where I could curl up and 'sleep' the rest of my life away. Busying myself with activities, I convinced the world around me that I was leading a fulfilling and purposeful life. I contributed to the community on local church committees, school committees and sporting associations. I took classes in conversational French, pottery, weaving and macrame. I sewed and embroidered, played squash, tennis, badminton; I skied. I tackled photography, I taught myself to play the recorder. I had everything I had ever wanted, yet nothing seemed to be 'enough' for me; surely there had to be more to the meaning of my life. Externally my days were full and relatively carefree, but inside there was an emptiness, a darkness that had long ceased to see the light of life, or the joy of living it. No wonder that I had ceased growing and begun to die.

I DECIDED TO SPEND ten days at Yasodhara Ashram in the summer following my operation, to see what more I could discover about myself. My visit there opened up a whole new world for me. The atmosphere was filled with peace and harmony, which allowed me to totally concentrate on the discovery of my whole Self. It was here that I experienced unconditional love; here that I learned of the power of chanting Mantra to still my mind; here that I experienced the undeniable proof that healing energy is available to anyone who asks, and that I learned the importance of asking; here that I became aware of my creative potential as expressed myself in writing, drawing and dance; and here that I began to feel so much more alive. It was exciting, exhilarating and challenging; it was like springtime, as I emerged from hibernation after a long, cold winter.
I discovered my uniqueness, which allowed me to observe myself from completely different vantage point. In a competitive world, I always felt that I did not run a very good race; I placed myself about 'dead last'. To appreciate that I was a special person with special qualities had been beyond my comprehension; my sense of security in life had always come from being what other people wanted me to be, or what I had understood them to want me to be. I was far from the confident, self-assured person I yearned to be.

I realized that I did not know what or where my real Self was. I began asking "Who am I?" and "What is real?" The words of wisdom from the Sanskrit writing, "Know thyself and be free," were the keys I needed to unlock the door of my cage of confinement. I began to peel back the layers, to take off the masks that I had spent a lifetime putting on, in order to discover the Self within.

I found that I was a complex individual, with many needs that had never been met because I had never let anyone, including myself, know what those needs were in a clearly defined way. I began to recognize my sensitivity and how it had kept me from demanding more for myself; my fears of rejection by others if I demanded too loudly; my apprehension in making myself visible in a world that seemed so threatening. I saw how I had retreated, in order to lose myself in the roles I had allowed society to designate to me.

I also discovered that people are all an integral part of each other. What I observed in others was a reflection of what I was in myself, and when I felt irritated or angry by another's actions, I realized that there was a sore point being touched within me: a past hurt that had never healed; a fear that had I never been dealt with; a weakness that needed to be worked with. I became very introspective, knowing that the answers had to come from within. Regardless of how much information I acquired from my teachers or from books, it was meaningless until I knew the Truth within myself.

Mantra chanting slowed my dizzy mind, and quieted the incessant chatter, so that the 'still, small voice within' could at last be heard. I gradually, very gradually, accepted and followed my inner guidance which showed me the stepping stones along the path I had chosen, and allowed me to know what was appropriate and when.

My FAMILY allowed me to 'do my thing' as I searched my soul, and for this I will be eternally grateful, in the realization that it is not easy to stand by and watch someone you love go through a sudden change. They provided me with the challenges, the stimulation, and the encouragement to heal myself on all levels, and to grow from the new roots I was putting down in life. It was in this new growth that I became aware of a developing strength in standing alongside others who care for me, rather than in the shadow of their strength.

My two girls were nine and eleven, and becoming less and less dependent upon me; my husband had always been a self-sufficient person. I could no longer depend on them to make me happy, to be my purpose in life. In the past I had not been important to myself, and therefore had never been able to believe I was important to others. I had allowed their needs to stifle my growth and suffocate my being. I began to use 'I' more often in my conversations, to I constantly remind myself that I, Rosalind Jean Gregg, am an important person who has an important part to play in the drama of life.
I began to discover the joy in the simple things in life, becoming attentive to the details of preparing a meal, driving the car, doing the dishes, listening to others intently, looking closely at the world in my back yard, touching with the intention of feeling, casting with new awareness, smelling the freshness of a new day. I wrote, I read, I analyzed, I recalled memories from the past, both painful and joyful ones. I remembered happy childhood memories of living life simply and fully. I recalled and analyzed a dream of bringing a lost child back from the cold, dark night, and that child, which is still a part of me, has given me hope and courage to this day. I constantly searched for answers in my dreams - dissecting, pondering, working both sides of my brain until I was weary. I took each day as it came, demanding more from life by living in the present moment. It was hard work. and by the end of the day I happily retreated to bed where I found such comfort in the rest, only to awaken to another round of questions.

Gradually I emerged into the Light, as a butterfly emerges from its cocoon when it knows the time has come to fly. At times I felt so full of self-confidence and hope that everything seemed 'crystal clear,' and then I would turn a corner on my path and encounter the darkness, the doubts, and the fears all over again. There were times that I hesitated, wondering if this battle would ever have an ending, and if so, which part of me would be victorious.

After ten months of searching the unexplored avenues of my mind for answers, the orthopedic surgeon who had taken over from the chemotherapist wanted to explore the diseased vertebra in my spinal column. I agreed to a bone biopsy. I was somewhat reluctant to undergo another general anaesthetic as I felt quite certain that there was nothing to be found, but I also wanted proof for the still skeptical part of me, and welcomed the opportunity to get the doctors 'off my back'.

I returned to hospital twelve months after the original operation. The surgeon inserted a probe into the first lumbar to remove a small piece of bone and found evidence of new bone formation, along with an extraordinary mass of blood vessels. The probe had disturbed this mass and caused internal bleeding; I was in the recovery room for two hours due to the difficulty in stopping the haemorrhage. I guess I had overdone the visualization! I was given a transfusion, kept overnight, and sent home with another diagnosis- suspected hemangioma (a healthy collection of blood cells), which made me very happy indeed.

My meditation teacher, who had set me on the road to recovery, came into the hospital to congratulate me. He was the only person who fully understood what had happened. He had complete faith in my ability to heal myself, as he had had the same success in overcoming leukemia a few years previous, by using a visualization technique.
THROUGHOUT THIS TWELVE MONTH period of questioning and searching, changes had been taking place on all levels. I knew that I had to take the driver's seat for my life's journey, yet there were times I felt very alone and unsure of the transformation process. Although I had not set out with the intention of changing my thinking, my feelings, or my being, somehow that all became inevitable as I transformed my physical body. I knew that I could not resist the changes without causing further war within my entire system; there was no turning back.

I had to trust, yet I was not sure in what. I believe in a Creator, and was beginning to believe in myself, knowing that I could not depend on anyone else to make the changes for me; but how could I make a meaningful connection to the Divine? The term 'energy' became a vital key in my search for understanding; somehow that seemed to be the missing link. I had often questioned the origin of energy, and in my studies I began to grasp the concept of energy as being "indestructible, transformable and within." Obviously there were unlimited possibilities for creative potential within me - but what was my energy invested in at this time, and was I satisfied that it was being used in a way that was beneficial to myself and consequently to the world around me?

I started to see a sense of how thoughts are forms of energy, and realized that if I could always think beautiful thoughts, then I would be surrounded by a more beautiful world. However I also realized that a lot of my thoughts were triggered by past experiences that were not beautiful, and these began the wheels of old tapes turning in my head. I began to see these past memories as negative forms of energy that I was hanging on to for unknown reasons.

When I began to analyze just why it was that I clung to old habits and thought patterns, I realized it was mostly out of fear. Fear of rejection fear of the unknown, fear of being taken for granted, or not being accepted as I am. In coming to recognize that I had chosen - consciously or unconsciously - to invest my energy into fear which kept me rigid, I now had another choice to make. I chose to face those fears, to test them out: were they real, or were they illusions that I could dispense with, and so transform that energy into positive thoughts which would allow me to move and grow, rather than stay frozen in my fear?

I began risking, for I knew that it was time to "take a chance on me." I expressed my feelings and needs, openly and honestly, determined to prove to everyone that I was no longer going to play the role of martyr by keeping all my frustrations, hurts, resentments, concerns and anger to myself as I had done in the past. There was already so much negativity from the past hidden away deep inside my gut area, and as I became more confident in dealing with my emotions, it emerged to be dealt with on a conscious level.

I now had the courage to face what I had become in this lifetime, and a lot of what I saw I did not like. It was frightening to be something other than what I had perceived myself to be, and to risk losing the love and acceptance of those who had been my security and my reason to live; to risk being alienated by friends because I dared to be different, dared to be more, dared to be honest, dared to expand beyond the confines of my limitations as I began to expose more of me.
THE WAYS OF NATURE taught me so much. I watched the seasons come and go, and realized how much there is to learn from the natural transitions that are constantly occurring. No matter where I was, I found symbols in nature that reflected my pattern of change. At times it seemed so simple, like a natural flow that required no effort; and this awareness awakened in me a deep feeling of strength and tranquility, knowing that change did not necessarily mean hard work. I had the choice to push through the resistance that I constantly set up for myself, or to just let go of it. Neither was easy. All change requires "patience, persistence and consistency." I did not have very much patience - I wanted a big breakthrough, I wanted to experience the fullness of life right away. Persistence I had been granted, and I was fairly consistent in my meditative practices.

Little by little I was able to let go of fears that were not allowing me to be myself, of hurts and resentments that held so much of my vital life energy. In doing so, I gained a freedom to do so much more with my life. I realized that if I was not using all that energy to hang on to unwanted 'garbage', I could begin to use it in joyful ways - to celebrate life rather than to struggle with it, and to be thankful for my new-found appreciation of it.

I began to relate to music and song in an entirely new way. It seemed that so many songs, both modern and classical, had been written for me - to encourage me to live life more fully. I danced through the house, enjoying with elation my freedom of movement. My chest was expanding to embrace life, because I had gained enough confidence to open up the heart area where I had kept myself so tightly held.

"I began to discover the joy in the simple things of life, becoming attentive..."
With this new awareness, I found a desire to learn more about the healing process. Natural healing methods such as the Divine Light Invocation allowed me to become a channel for healing energies, which are readily available to all of us if we but ask. In giving to others I received so much - it opened me up to give and receive more and more. My thinking became clearer, my understanding of life grew, and my knowledge of what was possible for me expanded beyond my wildest dreams. Places that once seemed 'out of bounds were now a challenge; ideas that once were beyond my comprehension became vehicles to create more challenges. I became ever more determined to overcome my fears, my anxieties, my doubts, so that I could totally accept the world that I live in, the world that I create around me day by day.

WHERE HAS ALL this brought me? I can tell you what my truth is for today only - for this moment only, because I am constantly taking in more of life, in the realization that we have the potential to learn from every situation that we encounter. We can take from life as much or as little as we desire, and we can give to life as much or as little as we wish to offer of ourselves. The choice is ours. I now know that the greatest gift that I can offer to others is to be happy, hopeful and loving; and in order to do this I must possess an inner peace, harmony and love for myself.

It has also brought me to realize that nothing happens by chance; every situation, every circumstance is for the learning that we have chosen to do in this lifetime. The many people who have 'given a hand' as I have struggled over rocky ground, the numerous books I have read, the various growth-oriented classes that I attended as I searched for the meaning to my existence - each is a piece of the complex pattern of the Universe. This understanding has helped me, in turn, to have a greater respect and a greater love for all mankind. My relationships, old and new, are all much richer today - more satisfying, more joyful, more honest and more loving.

Before I developed cancer I saw myself as a person of very little importance or use. In the past four years I have expanded so greatly that I can now see what a vital part I play in the world today, and how much more I have to offer in the future, as I continue to reach out to others who are searching for the Truth.

As I shed a little light on their path, they in turn will reach out to someone else; and like sparks from a great flame, the light will be passed on until the whole world is filled with the Light of love and joy. Had my life never been threatened, I would probably never have come to such understanding. It seems to me that one must die a little in order to live a lot.

Cancer, that word that once filled me with such dread, has become my friend and my teacher. When I have feelings of lethargy, when I encounter obstacles along my path which tempt me to turn back, when I feel inadequate in a situation and I want to give in to something that I know is not right for me, when I do not want to express my private thoughts and feelings to those I love and trust because I know it will be difficult and painful, it prods me on. I can now accept that when I am ready to make the transition from this world, that it may be cancer that will destroy my physical body. Until that time, I have much to learn, desires to satisfy, two children to nurture and guide, a husband to love and be loved by, a home to care for, comfort to give, knowledge to share, and a contribution to make in healing a world that suffers sorrow and pain.
From this vantage point, my path has no end.
Just as every river, every stream, finds the course of least resistance and prepares a path which allows a constant flow, so we too must find our own pathway through life. Each of us sets out in a different direction and travels at a different speed; there is no right or wrong way. Our way may be that of a quiet meadow stream, or a forceful, fast-flowing river. To know our path of least resistance, we must listen to our inner voice and trust our heart. This is the only true way. Some choose to flow until they are engulfed by the ocean; others choose to resist, and eventually lose their reason for existence. Whichever way we choose there is no judgement, for our lives are our responsibility alone. With the help of Divine Guidance we pursue the path of our choice.

I am created by Divine Light
I am sustained by Divine Light
I am protected by Divine Light
I am surrounded by Divine Light
I am ever growing into Divine Light

Footnotes: