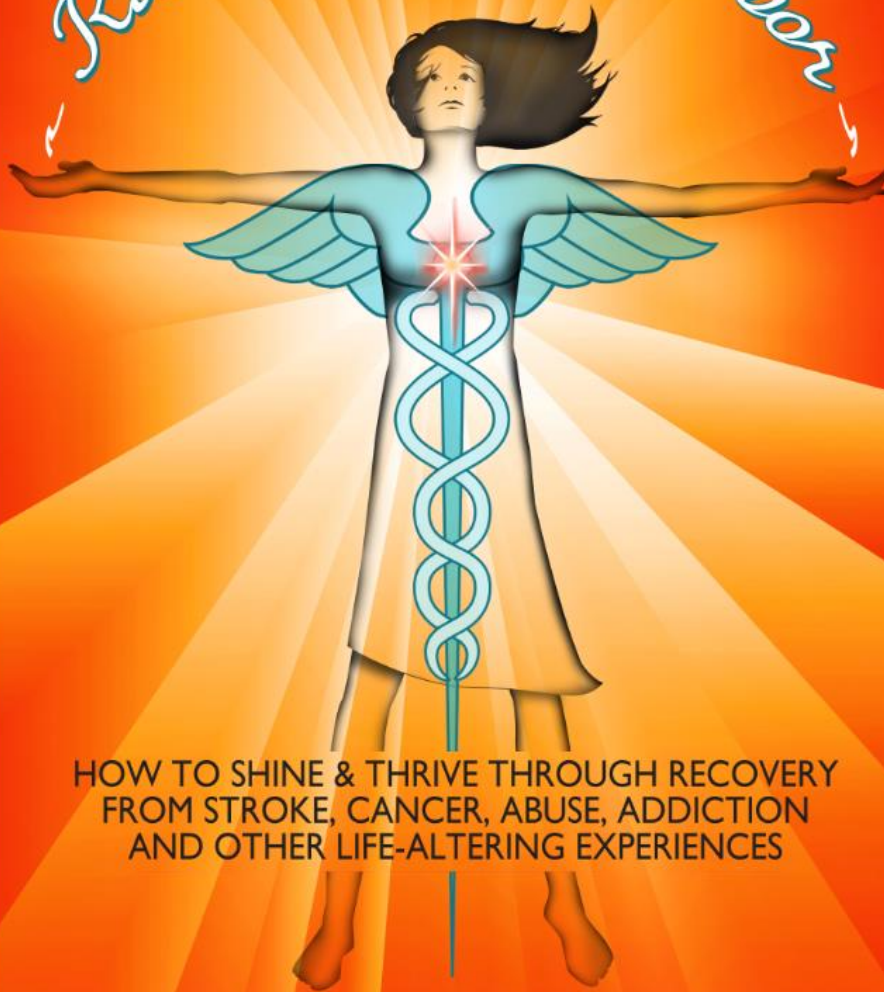


ERICA TUCCI

Radiant Survivor



HOW TO SHINE & THRIVE THROUGH RECOVERY
FROM STROKE, CANCER, ABUSE, ADDICTION
AND OTHER LIFE-ALTERING EXPERIENCES

The Total Transformation of Self

Excerpts: Introduction and Chapter 1

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Table of Contents (of complete book)

Introduction
My Story
Never Give Up
You Knew Your Trauma before You Were Born
Limiting Beliefs
Gratitude and Attitude
What's Your Support Structure?
Surrendering and Letting Go
Believing in Yourself
In the Moment
What's Important in Life?
Recovery Is a Process
What If I Don't Fully Recover?
You Can Survive and Thrive
Shaping the Future
Miracles Do Happen
From a Caretaker's Point of View
Lessons Learned and Pearls of Wisdom
Coming Full Circle
Radiant Survivor (the poem)

Introduction

Have you ever faced a life situation that completely changed your life, one that may have brought you to the brink of death, be it physical or emotional death, only to transform you from the person you were to a person with a whole new set of beliefs, values and truths? Mine happened June 10, 2011 at 6:30 am.

But before I tell you my story, I want to tell you why I'm so glad you've chosen to read my book. As you might have already gathered from the title, it's a book of transformation... moving from the old to the new. I hope you see it as a resource for your own healing as well as a vehicle through which you can help others, if you choose to do so.

At the time I was writing this introduction, I was 85% recovered from my trauma, after months and months of rehab, exercise, massage, Reiki, yoga and any other modalities I could use to bring my body back to normal. As much as I have done, it seems that I will be actually better than before. I am on the road to full recovery and I hope that before I finish writing this book, I will have completed my metamorphosis into the person I am meant to be instead of the person I was, not only physically, but most importantly emotionally and spiritually. I will have healed, at least from the life circumstance that was brought into the light during this odyssey. Our healing never stops, not as long as we live in our physical bodies. What I desire now is to use my healing experience and share it with others, in hopes that my transformation into the person I will be will help others who are facing similar life-changing experiences see their circumstances not as a curse but as a blessing. Life challenges are truly gifts from the soul, offering so many opportunities to grow as we learn the lessons we are being taught and gain the wisdom from these lessons. And because there so many different types of trauma we can face in this world, my story being only one, I have also included others' stories of their tragedies and victories – breast cancer, loss of a loved one, emotional and sexual abuse, addiction, depression leading to feelings of suicide and others, as well as caregivers' stories, as they are also affected in many ways... very compelling and powerful indeed!

Please note that each chapter is written with different emotions and perspectives underlying each. As I went through the different phases of my recovery, the theme of each chapter was what I needed to work on at the moment of writing it, and was reflected in my story as well as in the diverse stories used to elucidate the various themes. They all had a unique effect on me: some are heavy with story, some are more weighted with pearls of wisdom and others have a balance between both.

Beyond my story, the subsequent chapters of this book explore the various perspectives of recovery from life-altering experiences, addressing such subjects as:

- Believing in yourself and never giving up
- Understanding the limiting beliefs that hold you back from being all that you can be
- Being grateful and having the right attitude
- Knowing that your experience is part of your sacred contract with the Divine
- Surrendering and letting go
- Establishing your support system
- Seeing recovery as a process
- Wondering what to do if you don't recover fully
- Finding out what is really important in life
- The caregiver's perspective

And more!

This book is both spiritual and practical, as we are spiritual beings living in physical bodies so we must live life from the soul but also through a certain amount of logical reasoning. I will tell you that there may be parts that challenge your beliefs as they may discuss topics that you do not believe in or that you've never thought about. All I ask you is that you open your mind to all possibilities, as it is in this "knowing" that new and wonderful opportunities in life can flourish and bring you to a greater level of awareness of life itself.

I do hope that what you read in the pages of this book is most useful to you in living through any difficult life circumstances. I've tried to be as witty as possible, sprinkling the stories and discussions with bits of humor. I've also included exercises at the end of each chapter to reflect on your situation and to help you ensure that everything possible is being done for your healing. Life is not meant to be hard. It's meant to be full of joy and peace, even in the roughest of times. "You can use a challenge to awaken you, or you can allow it to pull you into even darker sleep." (*Power of Now* by Eckhart Tolle, p. 74) I truly believe that our attitudes either awaken us to all possibilities in life or they can plunge us into a dark abyss. Where would you rather be?

My Story

That very memorable, momentous morning, I woke up as always at 5:00 to meditate, do my morning exercises, shower and eat breakfast before getting ready for work. As I stepped out into my living room from my bedroom with my purse flung over my shoulder and car keys in my hand, ready to head out the door, something strange happened. I collapsed onto the floor. No warning, no signs, no symptoms, just a simple belly flop onto the carpeted floor. Figure that one out! I sure couldn't! And no matter how hard I tried to get up, my body just wasn't cooperating. It seemed like my body was no longer whole, like a part was missing.

I don't know how long I struggled to get up with the operable part of my body before giving up and turning over on my back, but when I did, I realized that something was terribly wrong. I just lay there for a moment, contemplating the situation. I was completely coherent, my mind filled with mixed thoughts of wonder and disbelief. What had just happened? Why was I laying in the middle of my living room floor and not able to get up? What did I do?

My 19-year old son (at the time) was in his bedroom just 10 feet away, but I couldn't yell. My vocal cords seemed somewhat frozen. When I fell, my purse had fallen with me – lucky for me. With my hand that was still working, I took my phone out of my purse and dialed my mom's number. Three rings and...

"Hello," sounded at the other end.

"Mumm." It took every bit of effort to get that one word out.

"Erica...is that you?" Mom asked, recognizing the phone number on her cell phone. "What's wrong?" I could sense panic in her voice.

"I dun no wat's 'appenin'." I could barely talk; my mouth felt numb, my words slurring.

"My God, where's Brett?" Mom's fret intensified over the phone.

"Call 'im. He's in 'is room."

Usually my son wouldn't keep his phone on while he slept, and he usually slept until noon (since it was summer and he was out of school). But as fate would have it, he had his phone on this morning. I heard his phone ring and within minutes, he came running out of his room.

"Mom, what happened?" my son, with his eyes as big as saucers, questioned as he called 911.

"Please send an ambulance!" he blurted into the phone. "I think my mom has had a stroke!"

It was kind of a blur from then until the ambulance arrived, only minutes later. I was actually surprised at how fast they came, but I soon found out why. If a stroke victim is administered a tPA (tissue plasminogen activator) within 4.5 hours of having a stroke, the effects of the stroke can be minimized substantially. In my case, I had an ischemic stroke (caused by a blood clot) that affected my basal ganglia, which controls voluntary motor control, and cognitive and emotional functions. Since I arrived at the hospital in time, they were able to administer the tPA, thus reducing the consequences of my condition. Of course, there was also the risk of me dying from the medication and I had to sign a release before they would administer it. I was willing to take the risk and signed. Lucky for me, I didn't die!

Regarding the effects of the stroke, I still had my wits about me although I did tend to forget things (of course, I was forgetful even before my illness!), and I was pretty emotional (but again, I've always been very emotional and I am of menopausal age, so who knows if the stroke exacerbated my emotions). Mom and I laughed at my behavior after the stroke because anything could trigger tears, although it was usually very short-lived... only seconds before I bounced back. What was most affected were my motor skills. I became a hemiplegic (where one side of the body is paralyzed). My right side was completely paralyzed. In the hospital, I couldn't even lift a finger.

Well, while I was trekking to the hospital in the ambulance, Mom was "flying" in her car as fast she as could, as if she was on a broomstick, running stop signs she didn't even see, with her focus on getting to the hospital as soon as possible. I guess the cops were on vacation at the time or maybe Spirit cloaked Mom's car in an invisible wrap so they couldn't see her. She got to my apartment where Brett was waiting for her and the two of them raced to the hospital.

After going to the emergency room, then to the ICU where they ran what seemed like hundreds of tests, I finally landed in my own hospital room with numerous wires running from me to all the machines they had me hooked up to. I looked like the Bride of Frankenstein. And this is where the fun began, beginning with the most fundamental question...

Why Did It Happen?

I was seemingly in great condition. I was slender; I worked out at least three times a week; I had none of the risk factors such as high blood pressure or high cholesterol. There weren't any hereditary heart conditions in my family. So why did I have a stroke? Yes, I was working 80+ hours a week since I was a corporate manager at a Fortune 500 company and also trying to build a healing arts business on the side, as well as writing and publishing two books. My foray into massage, Reiki, life coaching and writing was my true passion and one day, I hoped to do only that, leaving my life as a corporate cog behind me in the dust. Yes, I was stressed out

working so many hours, but I loved what I was doing and couldn't attribute my stress as being the culprit. There had to be something more to it.

During the course of my recovery, little by little, the vision of the truth behind my "dis-ease" became clear. It was as much a spiritual journey as it was a physical journey. The mantra I lived by was "I am on a magic carpet ride with Spirit at the helm." I knew there would be speed bumps but I never knew how big they could be.

First things first...while in the ICU, one of the tests they ran on me was a trans-esophageal echocardiogram (TEE) to assess the health of my heart. Lo and behold, what they found was that I had a PFO (patent foramen ovale), which in simple terms means I had a hole in my heart. Did you know that 25% of humans have a hole in their heart into their adult lives? We are all born with one, but it's supposed to close soon after birth. There are no symptoms, and the condition is not usually treated unless there are other heart problems, or a person has a stroke caused by a blood clot (www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmedhealth/pmh0002102/). Isn't that great? Someone has to wait until they have a life-threatening condition before they find out what caused it, something that could've been prevented by a simple test...well I wouldn't say "simple". A trans-esophageal echocardiogram (TEE) is by no means simple. A probe with a transducer is inserted down the esophagus, sending out ultrasonic sound waves that are sent to a computer to interpret the echoes into an image of the heart walls and valves (www.stanfordhospital.org/healthlib/greystone/heartcenter/heartprocedures/transesophageal-echocardiogram.html/).

Now we knew physically why I had a stroke. The hole in my heart allowed a blood clot to pass through it and settle in my brain. But the doctors were still somewhat baffled because when they checked my body for blood clots, particularly my legs, they couldn't find any other ones. Apparently, older people with PFOs (Geez, I'm not that old!) often develop blood clots in their leg veins. The only one was the one that reached my brain through the hole in my heart, where it wreaked havoc on my body. I guess it only takes one!

But the bewilderment surrounding my stroke led me to seek more profound answers as to "why" this happened to me. I'm not talking about the "why me" of someone feeling like a victim of the circumstance. I'm talking about the bigger "why" that is the underlying truth behind it. And in my quest for the Truth, I went on the most reflective spiritual journey I'd ever been on. Since I can remember, I have always been very introspective: meditating regularly; going on meditation retreats; reading every spiritually-oriented books that resonated with me, gleaning everything I could from them; doing different forms of therapy, including energy work and past-life regression, all helping me to approach what I consider my Truth.

The Truth – My Truth

I was reading Dr. Brian Weiss' most recent book *Miracles Happen, The Transformational Healing Power of Past-Life Therapies* and it reminded me of my own past-life regression sessions that would reveal the most amazing information about my stroke. Brian Weiss is a pioneer of past-life regression. He is a very successful psychiatrist, a graduate of Columbia University and Yale Medical School and was Chairman Emeritus of Psychiatry at the Mount Sinai Medical Center in Miami Florida. He was very skeptical of non-scientific fields such as reincarnation until his encounter with one of his patients, Catherine, who he regressed under hypnosis to events in her childhood that were causing the anxieties she was fraught with. But when she went under, she instead took Dr. Weiss back to past lives in which she recalled memories with such vivid detail that Dr. Weiss was able to confirm some of their validity through research. She even revealed truths of Dr. Weiss that she couldn't have known without being a conduit for information from highly evolved "spirit" entities that revealed many secrets of life and death. Her past-life memories and channeled messages from the spiritual realm healed her of her anxieties within a matter of months. With these insights, Dr. Weiss' skepticism began to erode and his first book *Many Lives, Many Masters* was published in 1998, discussing his account with Catherine. He has since focused his work on past-life regression because of the tremendous healing power that it has had on his patients, and he has regressed thousands since that first surprising encounter.

My first session actually occurred in 2009, two years before I had the debilitating episode that left my right side paralyzed. The regression took me back to 1897 in Charleston, a port in South Carolina. Before the regression, I had heard of Charleston and knew it was somewhere in the Carolinas, but I didn't know which Carolina, nor did I know it was a port.

As the regression therapist guided me back in time, she asked me "Do you know what year it is?"

"Yes," I responded as I relaxed into a beta state, the state where our ego is set aside to allow for the flow of subconscious thoughts and images. I was lying very comfortably on her couch in her living room (she split her schedule between clients at the center where she worked part-time and clients at home). "It's 1897."

"And where are you?" she continued querying.

"It looks like a port. In the Carolinas. Charleston, maybe?"

"And what are you doing?"

This is where my story took on a life of its own, revealing the past traumas that would affect me in my current life. For those of you who are skeptical about past life regression, bear with me as I tell the story. You may find it fascinating. Plus, remember that Dr. Weiss was also a skeptic until his encounter with Catherine's story, which was far more surreal than mine.

It seems that, as the therapist guided me through my life, I started out as a 12-year old young girl whose parents had died leaving her to fend for herself. She worked at a saloon cleaning tables and sometimes serving drinks to the customers. There was a young boy around the same age, who would walk by the saloon regularly and peek in, but never enter. I knew intuitively as the observer that the youngsters had eyes for one another but they never talked because the young boy was from a higher class than the girl and apparently his parents wouldn't let him have anything to do with her. As the therapist brought me further in my life, the next scene was at a theatre where the girl, now in her 20s, was a well-known showgirl. A well-to-do gentleman dressed in a tailored suit and spats donning his shoes, and an equally well-dressed woman on his left arm entered as she was performing. As I watched the scene unfold, I saw the most unusual image. As the girl danced, her eyes fell upon the well-clad couple that were there watching. At that moment, I saw a huge gaping hole where her heart was, as if her heart had been cut out, symbolically speaking. You see, the gentleman who had come in to see her perform with his lady friend was the same young boy from her past, the one she had kept in her heart since the first time she saw him pass by the saloon where she used to work. Needless to say, she was heartbroken, thus the "symbolic image" of the hole in her heart. The hole in her heart...hmmm, doesn't that sound familiar? How do I reconcile these incidents... one in a past life and the one in my current life? It wasn't until I had my stroke that I made the association between the two and decided to delve deeper into the past life's meaning as it related to my stroke. Maybe I would have an epiphany, some nugget of wisdom that would help me find the truth behind my stroke...the cosmic truth, as we already knew the physical truth. I had a real physical hole in my heart, but what other tidbits could I glean from that past life that would give some indication as to the karmic reason for me having a stroke. Life is based on karma. What happens in our past will most certainly affect our present life.

What Was My Karma?

In early 2012, I went to another regression therapist. My first therapist, I had learned, had fallen ill and was no longer working. I found another therapist who had actually trained with Brian Weiss, which excited me to no end. (I, too, as of July 2013 have been trained by Dr. Weiss so that I may be able to help others use their past lives to heal their present lives.) I wanted to return to the same past life to go further into my life to see if anything else revealed itself that would help me understand my current life predicament. First, let me backtrack just a bit. In that first regression, the therapist tried to carry me into the later years of my life, past that night at

the theatre. But it was as if there was a block in my inner vision that would let me go no further than that “heart-wrenching” scene. What I saw in my mind’s eye was a painter’s canvas with the left side from the upper left corner to the right lower corner painted with the image of that event, particularly the hole in the heart. The right side, the remainder of the canvas, was completely devoid of any visual expression of anything. It was as if Spirit, the higher powers that be, refused to let me see how the rest of the life of the girl played out. Why was I not being allowed to see the remainder of her life? I didn’t find out until the next regression in 2012, when the therapist took me back to the same past life, per my request.

As I lay on the therapist’s massage table in her office, covered by a blanket to keep me from getting chilled and thus disrupting the session, she first began by getting me to relax into the beta state. Once I was there, indicated by my fluttering eyes, she began the process of bringing me back to 1897 in Charleston so I could re-experience the life that had affected me so traumatically 114 years later. Going back to that momentous night of my performance, I wasn’t prepared for what was to come! As the therapist asked me to move forward in my life after my performance, I found myself in my backstage room undressing. I could feel a coldness in myself, a lack of emotion, as I pulled a gun from my purse. It went off and I collapsed on the floor. I had shot myself in the heart. I had been so overwrought seeing the man that captured my heart as a young girl with another woman that I didn’t want to go on living. Too much loss in my life... first both my parents, then the man who made my heart sing.

There’s another significant part to the story that bears much notice. First, I must reveal another facet of my current life that ties in with this past life. In 2007, I met a man from Belgium through work. We fell madly in love but there were some serious obstacles that prevented any permanence in the relationship: 5,000 miles between us and the fact that he was married with three children. We spent five glorious days together when he came to visit me, and afterward we communicated on the phone for many months. My intuition told me that I had been with him before in another life as our connection was so strong. He confirmed that, when he said, “It feels so natural to be together. Maybe you are right about us being together before.”

However, communication slowly dwindled and finally came to a halt when we realized that nothing could come of the relationship considering the circumstances. It was a sad time in my life when I saw that my “soul mate” had left my life. What was really uncanny was that I had started writing a novel in 1998 (a love story) that was about the female protagonist’s encounter with a man that perfectly described the Belgian man. I had put the novel away after writing the synopsis and three chapters, but picked it up again after our “chance” meeting in 2007, nine years later. I had even given the chapters to my Belgian lover for him to read, and he identified perfectly with the male protagonist. He even called me by the female protagonist’s name. Had I manifested my dream of the man in 1998 into a real person in 2007? I realized the

synchronicity of the situation and decided to complete the novel in 2010. It's called *Anything is Possible* and is available for purchase.

To come full circle with the story of my stroke, the Belgian man was indeed a reincarnation of the gentleman in my past life. We HAD been together before. What did it all mean? In my past life, I had ended my life because of lost love. In my current life, I almost died from a condition that was a reflection of that profoundly emotional time. Maybe I am being given another chance in this lifetime to reconcile the circumstances.

As if this whole discussion about past-life experiences and how it affected my present life so profoundly wasn't enough, there's more to my revelation of Truth as it related to my stroke. I wrote an article that I sent to my sacred feminine community as well as posted on my blog, entitled "Man Fears Woman – Yin Versus Yang," that puts a compelling twist on my story. I have included the article below.

"As I recover from my stroke, I have been pondering about "why did this happen?" Today's message is an expression of the answer to my question, not from the victim's perspective of "why me?" but from a karmic viewpoint.

As you know, there are two polarities of self and in the universe – Yin, the feminine principle, and Yang, the masculine principle. The feminine aspect is the feeling, creative part of the self; the masculine deals with thought, the mind and acts of doing. Both polarities are manifested in humans at the physical level, but equally important, at the level of consciousness. Ultimately we want to be in balance using both aspects.

Whereas we as humans are a microcosm, the world is a macrocosm with the same structure. Looking at the structure of the universe in terms of feminine and masculine aspects, the universe has the feminine at its center, the heart, using her intuitive feeling function to determine what must be created for the greatest good of all life. The feminine then engages the masculine energy to determine what actions need to take place to manifest this creation into being, thus, the Yin and Yang working in harmony. Unfortunately, our world has been completely out of balance for centuries, with the feminine aspect being denied and suppressed by the masculine principle.

The male polarity has feared the feminine nature, with its unlimited creative power, judging it to be frightening, unsafe and unsure, because the Yin nature is associated with the unconscious, where all the mysteries of life spring forth. Manifesting things only through these fears, man desperately tries to deny, hide and control the feminine, in himself and in the world, so as not to unleash her unbounded power. The extreme physical manifestation of this need to control the feminine is the requirement of women

to cover their entire bodies. On a global level, our world is on the brink of destruction due to all the male-driven economic corruption and warfare.

The only solution to our predicament is to have the feminine lead us back to balance on both a microcosmic and macrocosmic level, with Mother Earth, the Divine feminine archetype, leading the way. We as women can do our parts by placing the value on our feminine aspect that it deserves. This in turn will emanate outward into the world and help to re-align the universe so that it is operating from its basic core – using its feminine nature to “feel” what needs to be created, then enlisting the masculine principle to “manifest” its creation.

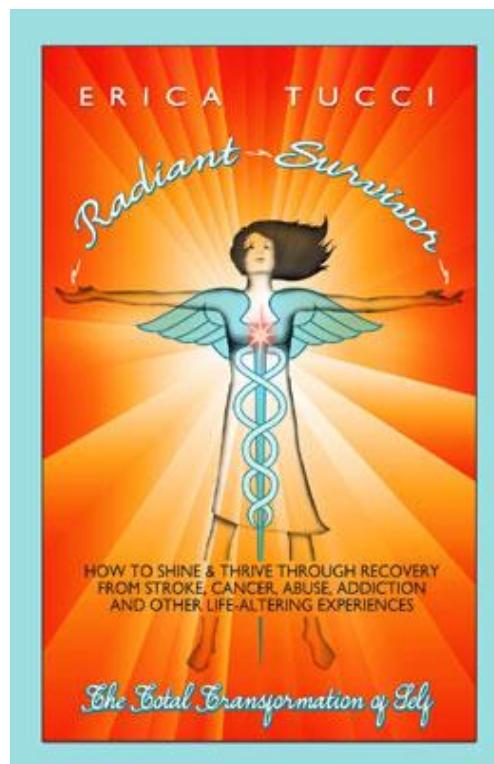
As for how this relates to my stroke, my masculine side (my right side) was completely paralyzed. Although we’re talking about the physical body, psychologically speaking, I have always operated more out of my masculine side, being very controlling and aggressive, while suppressing much of my femininity (represented by the left side). The masculine had to be stopped if I ever wanted to achieve balance within. Thus my stroke...the universe’s way of helping me find this equilibrium between the masculine and feminine principles. I don’t wish such trauma on anyone else seeking the same. This was my karma and although I thought I had been working on balance for the past several years, I was still operating primarily from my masculine side, as what I was doing was more of an exercise of the mind (using control and force to make things happen), not of the heart (using intuition and feelings to guide my actions). As I recover, the process has moved from my head to my heart, where I am learning how to “let go” and go with the flow of life, knowing that I can’t control everything that happens to me, and instead of being “action-oriented” most of the time, I am now just “being” with myself to allow my creativity to flow.

I must place more value on my feminine side so that I have an inner stasis, a stability due to the harmony between the Yin and Yang within. As that occurs, my physical healing takes place as my feminine side takes over and helps to bring my masculine side back to life. You’ve heard the saying “Behind every good man, there’s a good woman” and vice versa? Isn’t that just another way of saying that Yin and Yang are balanced?”

So what is my Truth as it relates to my stroke?” How does it all tie together: my past life experience and how it affected my current life, and the relationship between the masculine and feminine principles of our souls? And how will it help you in your own journey through your trauma? Let me boil it down to a few simple, easy-to-understand phrases...

Love and relationships are, in my mind, the basis of life; they go hand-in-hand. At the center are self-love and the inner relationship you have with yourself. If these two phenomena are strong,

if you have found that balance within, you are living your life from your true essence, your authentic self. The stroke brought me home to my core essence. It made me realize that my life circumstance was not who I am; it was not my life but it helped me find that inner balance that made me whole. "Life is our deepest inner being [*not our outer presence*]. It is already whole, complete, perfect." (*Power of Now* by Eckhart Tolle, p. 86) It showed me when you are whole within yourself, you are filled with pure love and your outer relationships and circumstances are more meaningful because they become a reflection of your soul as it radiates that love. "...Only love is real... Love never ends; it never stops. Its energy is absolute, eternal... Love transcends everything else." (*Miracles Happen* by Dr. Brian Weiss, pp. 250, 251) Love knows no bounds. It knows no obstacles. It just is. And that's MY TRUTH!



I hope you enjoyed this taster of *Radiant Survivor*.

Our crowd funder will run from April 15th – June 14th, 2013.

Our Amazon book launch is scheduled for Tuesday November 19th, just before Thanksgiving Day.

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