

THE

THYROID CURE

The Functional Mind-Body Approach to Reversing Your
Autoimmune Condition and Reclaiming Your Health!



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Prologue

“Love is what we were born with. Fear is what we learned here.”

– MARIANNE WILLIAMSON

If you opened this book, chances are that you or someone you love has been diagnosed with an autoimmune thyroid condition and are not getting satisfactory answers from conventional medicine. I understand your pain and confusion because I’ve been there myself.

As you read my story you may feel overwhelmed by the information and what I went through to get better. I want to ease your mind and let you know that your path will be much easier. I have done the research and spent the time creating a program that essentially streamlines the road to recovery. I have done the work so that you don’t have to. I share my journey so that you can get a picture of how I arrived at my conclusions and to illustrate that I know how challenging it is to be an autoimmune sufferer.

In March of 2004, just a few weeks after my 36th birthday, I was diagnosed with Hashimoto’s thyroiditis. I didn’t know it at the time, but I also had positive autoantibodies indicating early signs of lupus. I was 35 pounds overweight despite rigorous daily cardio workouts, hot yoga and a strict 1500-calorie-per-day organic, vegetarian diet. My face looked like someone had blown it up with a bicycle pump, and I had an unsightly freckle mustache due to a condition called melasma. It wasn’t pretty. Other symptoms included chronic sinusitis; foggy thinking; mood swings; carbohydrate and alcohol cravings; relentless hay fever all year long; skin rashes all over my body and on the palms of my hands and feet; swollen, aching joints and insomnia. I was living in Santa Cruz and buckling under the pressure of running my own marketing firm and enduring an unhappy, codependent marriage.

The diagnosis was quite accidental. At the time, my husband had been having strange gastrointestinal (GI) symptoms that left our small beach town doctors stumped. I had been poring over alternative healing books for years, partly out of curiosity and partly to find an answer to my own chronic symptoms. I had just read a book by a well-known alternative physician in the Bay Area. I was convinced that this doctor would be able to figure out what was happening with my husband’s digestive system.

I barely even thought of making an appointment for myself. After years of ignoring my own needs and intuition and putting others first, I was so stuck in a victim/martyr role that I all but ignored my own symptoms—even though they were more severe than my husband’s. I was used to putting the needs of others before my own and then silently (and sometimes, not so silently) resenting them. Like many people with chronic illness, I frequently neglected my body’s many cries for help. I had yet to learn the art of self-

love, and was not prepared to take full responsibility for my physical or emotional health.

So, instead of addressing what was happening in my body, I convinced my husband to see an integrative medical doctor, who I'll call Dr. Wake Up, about his GI symptoms. We made an appointment and drove north.

As we sat in Dr. Wake Up's office discussing my husband's travels around Southeast Asia, he turned to me and said,

"How are you feeling?"

Surprised that the focus was now on me, I blurted out, "Lousy, but my doctor thinks I'm just depressed."

"What do YOU think is wrong?" he asked in a genuinely inquisitive tone.

I was taken back by the question—I couldn't believe he was asking me for my opinion. I said, "I think I have a chronic Candida infection and it's ruining my health, but all the doctors I've seen say that's impossible."

"Okay, let's run some tests for that and check your thyroid, too."

I felt a combination of surprise and relief, because this doctor was actually listening to me. I had been to so many doctors over the years, both alternative and conventional, who completely ignored my intuition about my own health. I felt hopeful, but I didn't have any expectations. My attitude toward my health tended to be defeatist and self-pitying: Woe is me—nobody will ever figure out what's wrong with me!

A few weeks later, on the day of my diagnosis, I sat in my doctor's private office waiting for the results of the blood work I had taken. As he looked over my labs, he raised one eyebrow and said,

"Well, it looks like you do have a Candida infection—and you have Hashimoto's thyroiditis, which is a form of autoimmune disease. Unfortunately, there is no cure for Hashimoto's, and your thyroid gland will eventually be destroyed by your immune system. The only treatment we can offer you is thyroid replacement hormones, which you will have to take indefinitely."

I was shocked, and almost too stunned to speak (which takes a lot for me).

"Indefinitely? You mean for the rest of my life?"

"Exactly."

"Will I feel better?"

"Maybe," he replied in a vague, noncommittal tone. Then he asked me a question that surprised me into another moment or two of speechlessness: "How do you think you got this disease?"

"What? Why is he asking me?" I thought, "Isn't it the doctor's job to figure out where diseases come from?"

"I don't know, I mean... How am I supposed to answer that?"

"I think you have a pretty good idea. Why don't you go home and think about it? For now, we'll start you on a low dose of Synthroid and see how you do."

I felt stunned and devastated as I walked out of the doctor's office and got in my car. After years of feeling sick, tired and fat, I finally find out what's wrong with me, there is no cure, and my doctor is insinuating that it's my fault!

On the drive back to Santa Cruz, I went through a range of emotions from sadness to feeling like a victim to rage. How could this doctor just throw a diagnosis at me and send me home with a prescription that might not even make me feel better? An incurable disease for the rest of my life? How could this be happening to me? What did I do to deserve this? I felt helpless and victimized. I felt like running from everything—my life, my job, my husband, and this illness. "How is this my life?" I thought. It's not fair!

What I wouldn't find out until years later was that at the same time, the doctor had run a test that would have revealed a lot about my condition and possible future outcomes, but he never mentioned it to me. The test is called an antinuclear antibodies test (ANA), which documented the presence of antibodies to my own tissues. Positive ANA's are found in many people with chronic inflammation and can indicate a more serious stage of autoimmunity. I know now that my results, along with my symptoms, indicated the beginning of a condition called lupus.

Lupus, like Hashimoto's, is an autoimmune condition but can be life threatening. It can cause inflammation in the joints, the skin, the kidneys, the blood cells, brain, heart and lungs. Lupus is difficult to diagnose until it's full-blown and causing serious symptoms. In fact, many people can suffer with strange symptoms for years before they get a definitive diagnosis.

There are a few reasons why Dr. Wake Up may not have mentioned it. Since many people with Hashimoto's also have positive ANA's and my symptoms weren't putting me in the hospital, he may have decided to "wait and watch" and see if I got worse. He may have been worried that the suggestion of a diagnosis as serious as lupus would throw me into an unnecessary tailspin that would take me down the allopathic road to an even worse condition. He may have intuited that his question, "How do you think you got this?" would stick in my mind.

In the weeks and months that followed, I was physically miserable and emotionally drained. As a practice management and marketing consultant to doctors, I had access to some of the best medical and alternative care in the country. Desperate, I went from specialist to specialist hoping that someone would be able to "cure" me. While I received differing opinions on how to manage the symptoms of my condition, there were two things everyone agreed on:

1. No one knows what causes autoimmune thyroid disease.
2. There is no cure.

I became depressed. I felt sorry for myself. I felt betrayed by my own body. I lost faith in my doctors and the medical system. I even lost faith in God.

I had always assumed that doctors were the experts, the authorities, and only foolish people tried to evade their advice. At least this is what I believed, until I received a diagnosis of a "deadly" and "incurable" disease. But once I got this incurable diagnosis, a rebellious part of me asked, "Who says this is incurable? What do they mean when they say, 'We don't understand the mechanism of this illness?'" and, most significantly, "If they can't answer these questions, why should I put my health in their hands?"

When I wasn't caught in self-pity or feelings of angry rebellion against medical authority, the surprising question the doctor asked me, "How do you think you got this?" kept popping into my mind.

Deep down, I was unhappy in my work and my marriage. I worked long hours and drank too much coffee and wine. I was chronically depressed and unsatisfied and had lost much of my enthusiasm for life. I did sometimes worry that the stress of it all was making me sick, but I was too scared to rock the boat. After all, my life at the time was a huge improvement over my childhood—at least that's what I kept telling myself. But I couldn't stop the doctor's question from coming up and pestering me for an answer.

One day, I decided to take a three-day weekend alone. I drove south to the little beach town of Cambria and rented a small hotel room. My intention was to stay there and write in my journal until I found the answer to why I was sick. I decided to retrace my whole life—every physical symptom I could ever remember, everything that happened to me that could possibly be the cause. I found myself filling page after page. I was writing so fast that my fingers began to hurt. What I found was that there were possible causes from the earliest age.

The details are not important for this book, but in short, I was the survivor of repeated emotional, physical and sexual abuse throughout my early years. This journaling exercise allowed me to see how those traumas, and my story about them, had influenced literally every area of my life...including my health.

At the end of the three-day weekend, I had filled up an entire journal with things that could be related to my illness. Since all the books I had read said that stress was a major factor in illness, every trauma I had ever experienced was relevant. On the evening of the third day, I looked at myself in the bathroom mirror and asked the doctor's question one more time:

"How do you think you got this?"

I heard a small, quiet voice in my head supply the answer in just three words:

My whole life.

The implication of the answer left me trembling. If I were to heal, I would have to change my life on every level.

Lessons from the Sandbox

If my whole life was the cause, I knew a pill would not be the solution. I decided to see a psychotherapist I'll call the Sandbox Lady. The Sandbox Lady was an overly empathetic, thin, mousy woman with glasses, who had an approach I found frustrating and disappointing. At the start of every session, she would ask me to review, in infinite, graphic detail, another part of my childhood abuse. When I explained to her that I had spent several years in therapy in my twenties dealing with the past, she said that it was clear that I had not processed everything and needed to do more work. Before I even opened my mouth, she would pass me a box of tissues as if encouraging me to cry. As I recounted the episodes, I felt more angry than tearful. But the Sandbox Lady, who had explained at our first meeting that she had been abused too, was always ready to do my crying for me. As soon as I started sharing an episode, and sometimes continuing throughout the entire appointment, her eyes would well up with tears. I began to feel that I was paying her for the chance to be the host of a pity party that was being thrown for her benefit, not mine. My stories seemed to be the background music for her own memories and self-pity. She never offered a word of advice, interpretation or comment of any sort. The only definite thing I got from her was a prescription for Valium.

Right next to the couch I sat on during our sessions was a sandbox with little figurines. In the midst of one session, I broke off her questioning and asked,

"Do you think maybe we could work with the sandbox today?"

She gave me an astonished look, as if I were a first-year nursing student who had just asked if I could give brain surgery a try.

"Oh my goodness!" she replied in an incredulous tone. "You're not even close to being ready for the sandbox!" I found her answer so absurd that I couldn't help but laugh out loud.

"Well, how long do you think it'll take before I am ready?"

"Oh my, I have no idea. Processing these sorts of memories takes a very long time, and the sandbox is an advanced therapy."

I instantly envisioned a decade of weekly pity parties with tissues and Valium in place of tea and crumpets. I didn't have a decade to spend before graduating to the sandbox—and so I decided to stop working with her.

I did, however, learn a very valuable lesson from the Sandbox Lady that has great relevance for everyone reading this book.

What You Need to Know:

You have the right and the duty to evaluate the quality of care you are getting from a therapist or health care professional of any kind. If you don't feel you are being helped, find someone else!

The realization of this principle, invaluable as it is, wasn't all I had gotten from the Sandbox Lady. The sessions I spent with her resulted in my getting fed up with my "story" and the dramas of the past. She also caused me to become permanently exasperated with self-pity. My days of tearfully gazing into the rearview mirror were over. To heal myself, I had to look at where my life was now and then take actions to keep moving forward.

A Very Deep Adjustment

One day, during the time I was still working with the Sandbox Lady, I was feeling really lousy and at the end of my rope emotionally. A large part of this was the downward spiral of my marriage. I called my mother and said, "I just don't know if I can take this—I can't stay in this marriage anymore!" My mother was silent for a moment, and then, as if looking into a crystal ball, she said in a somber tone,

"If you choose to stay in this marriage, it will make you sick, tired and old."

My mother knew firsthand how an unevenly yoked marriage can drain both partners, so I knew she was talking about herself. I also knew she was looking into my future. The clarity in her voice sent chills down my spine, because I knew she was right.

Then one morning, about a week or so after my final session with the Sandbox Lady, I woke up feeling foggy and exhausted. I staggered to the bathroom and found that my mother's words were running through my head: "Sick, tired and old. Sick, tired and old." I looked in the mirror—and I really looked sick, tired and old. I felt desperate. It was a real "dark night of the soul." I went back into my bedroom and I curled up in a ball on the floor and totally broke down. I found myself praying for the first time in years. I REALLY prayed. "I give up!" I cried. "I'm so tired of fighting. I can't live like this anymore. I can't do this alone. I need help. God, I really need your help! I don't know how to do this alone. Please help me!"

And sure enough, it happened. Later that day, while I was working with my chiropractor, I experienced nothing short of a miracle.

I had been seeing a network chiropractor, Dr. Ian Chambers, and the work that I had been doing with him was pretty profound. It involved somatic integration exercises where you breathe into different parts of your body. This work helped me get in touch with my physical body. I hadn't realized it before, but my consciousness had been floating around and above me instead of being grounded inside my body, which is very common for someone who has been sexually abused. I wasn't in my body, so it was very easy when I was in pain to push myself through the day because I was so divorced from what was happening physically. From the neck up, I was "in," but from the neck down, I wasn't.

What was so remarkable about the work I was doing with Dr. Chambers is that it allowed me to drop into my body. What I noticed right away, within the first month, was that I was more aware of physical sensations and of how my emotional state was affecting my physiology. I could feel things in my stomach that I hadn't felt before. I was making a crucial connection between my emotional state and my physical state. It was rewarding, but at the same time it was a bit scary.

I remember that on that morning, right after I prayed, work seemed to go painfully slow. I felt heavy, and it took an effort of supreme will just to make a few phone calls and do paperwork. It felt like I was

frozen in time, like a fly caught in amber or an unlucky space explorer stuck in some sort of time warp. Psychiatrist Carl Jung once described this state as one where, “The life giving rhythm of the aeons becomes the dread ticking of the clock.” It felt like the only thing I had to look forward to was the hour-long chiropractor appointment I had scheduled at the end of the workday.

Dr. Chambers seemed to take in my exhausted and dispirited condition with a single glance and asked me to come into the treatment room. I lay down on the table and we began the somatic breathing exercise. I’m not sure how long I was doing it, but suddenly there was this incredible release. It felt like heavy iron plates that had been constricting my chest all my life were falling off. The feeling is almost impossible to convey in words, because it has so many layers or dimensions that all unfolded at once. It felt like space opening up and sunlight breaking through heavy cloud cover. All the colors in the room became so vivid, and I felt a deep love for everything, for every part of my life, even the worst parts, and there was this sense of a deep and everlasting meaningfulness to everything—even to the little things. In my ecstasy, I wept.

As I left the appointment, I was struck with this incredible sensation that I was connected to everything and everyone. I didn’t feel alone anymore. I felt a depth of love that I had never experienced before. I wanted to bring the love I felt back to my husband. I wanted to heal our broken relationship. But the feeling had humbled me, too. I knew that despite the great love I felt, we couldn’t do it alone. We needed help, a counselor who had great skill in putting broken marriages back together.

My prayers had been answered with a spiritual epiphany that day. One of the benefits, right off the bat, was a sense of empowerment. I felt more empowered than I had ever felt, and it was coming from a very grounded place. I was finally in my body. I’m here, I thought. I’m experiencing this experience of life right now.

What You Need to Know:

Be ready to accept help from unexpected people and in unexpected ways during your healing journey. Healing is a process that is often driven by intuition and serendipity, as well as by reason, analysis, research and treatment protocols.

What Can Be Healed, and What Must Pass Away

At the end of this life-changing session, I asked Dr. Chambers if there was anyone he could recommend to counsel my husband and me. He went to the front desk of his reception room and came back with two business cards.

“There are these two wonderful life coach women, Grace Caitlin and Diana Chapman, who work together. We’ve worked with them in our marriage, and both my wife and I highly recommend them.”

It took me a week’s worth of convincing and cajoling to get my husband to agree to a session. I told him that I thought we really needed the help, but he was very opposed to any kind of counseling. He didn’t like the idea of opening up to strangers.

He said, “I don’t trust these people. What are they going to do, and how are they going to help us? I don’t buy it. Besides, you’re the crazy one. You’re the one who needs counseling.” I had to practically beg him to agree to a one-hour session.

The session occurred in the home of one of these two vibrant women. They were into acting things out...playful stuff. They wanted us to move around with our bodies. My husband and I were both kind of taken aback by that. At that time of my life, for me to be able to dramatize things through spontaneous movement required medication, or some strong drinks at the very least. I just couldn’t feel that uninhibited,

cold sober on a Tuesday afternoon. They drew an imaginary triangle on the floor of their living room and then put big yellow flash cards at the three corners of the triangle labeled, “Victim,” “Villain,” and “Hero.” We were asked to stand on a particular point and play out each of these roles as we did in our marriage. Needless to say, this didn’t work for my husband. He acted like he had been taken captive by a particularly embarrassing Nickelodeon reality show.

At first, it felt like the exercise was a spectacular failure, but in the midst of it—as I stood on the Victim card and my husband reluctantly slouched on the Hero card—I could suddenly see how we both danced between all three archetypal roles in our marriage. We were stuck in a codependent triangle of shaming, blaming and rescuing one another. Somehow, the exercise had captured the essence, not only of our marriage, but also of all of my relationships!

After a short while, my husband was over it, so we left. Later that night, curious about his feelings, I started to ask, “So what did you think of...” but he cut me off.

“That was the most ridiculous thing I have ever seen in my life. Those people are crazy. They’re kooks, and I have no intention of ever going back to see them again, or anyone like them.”

“Okay, we don’t have to ever go back to those women, but are you willing to meet me half way and work on this relationship?”

“No. I’m tired. I don’t want to work on a relationship. A relationship shouldn’t be this hard.”

That was exactly what I didn’t want, but needed, to hear. My husband couldn’t have stated his position more clearly. He was not interested in meeting me halfway or doing the work it was going to take to repair our relationship. We had a lot of struggles—financial, emotional and sexual—but I never gave up hoping and trying until that night. The exercise and my husband’s own words were like a high-contrast X-ray of our marriage. There was no mistaking the fracture. It was like another incurable diagnosis, but this was not one I could find my way around. I know now that neither one of us was ready to commit. But at the time, I felt abandoned, devastated and scared. I didn’t know what I was going to do. My career was devoid of meaning and fulfillment. I was already battling an incurable medical diagnosis, and now I had to face the grim reality that my marriage was terminal. The only thing I knew for sure was that everything would have to change, but I didn’t even know where to begin.

What You Need to Know:

Healing is impossible without willing, committed participants. What doesn’t want to be healed has to be allowed to pass away.

Taking Control—From Catastrophe to Conviction

Nine months after my diagnosis, I knew that my life would require massive changes, and that half measures would not suffice. So I did what any smart woman does. I got a divorce, I quit my business and I moved a block away from my mother to a cute little beach cottage in Oxnard, California. I took a look at my life and realized that almost nothing was working the way I needed it to—so I changed everything at once.

It might sound like I’m saying I threw in the towel, but the feeling was different. It was a feeling of surrender. I thought, *I don’t know what I’m doing, but whatever I have been doing isn’t working, so I’m going to try something else.*

Even though I was alone, and my career and my husband were gone, there was a sense of new

possibilities in the air. I began to dream again and felt enthusiastic about my future. They say there are no do-overs in life, but this felt pretty close.

I'm not in any way suggesting that individuals who are diagnosed with a chronic illness quit their jobs or divorce their spouses. Every healing journey is different. For some people, a beloved spouse or enjoyable job may be a key source of support or a major catalyst of change for the better. But for me, I felt like I had no choice, because the life I had created was a lie.



I was living alone by the beach and feeling happier due to the new possibilities in my life, but I still couldn't lose a pound, despite taking two thyroid medications (Synthroid and Cytomel), running for 45 minutes on the beach every morning and eating less than 1,500 vegetarian calories a day. I still had terrible night sweats, rashes and crying spells, my eyebrows were half gone, and I could have woven a rug with all the hair that was falling out of my head. I was starting to feel like independence was somewhere on the horizon, but feeling truly at peace with my body and beautiful in my own skin was still a long way off.

After a few months off I decided to work on an Internet start-up company with my brother, and went back into the "comfortable," stressed-out mode I was used to. The new project had me sleeping an average of six or seven hours a night, waking up, commuting an hour each way to the office, drinking a lot of caffeine, and then coming home and drinking 2-3 glasses of wine to fall asleep. I see now that I was addicted to adrenal hormones and found it impossible to rest and stay still.

Then my mother suggested I see an OB/GYN who was learning about something called functional medicine. My mother had read a book called *The Schwartzbein Principle* by Dr. Diana Schwartzbein, an endocrinologist from Santa Barbara, who had cured her own chronic fatigue. This particular OB/GYN (who I'll call Dr. Edgy) had gone through Dr. Schwartzbein's training, so I made an appointment with her.

I showed Dr. Edgy all my labs and presented her with the diagnosis of Candidiasis and Hashimoto's. I explained that I had tried different combinations of thyroid medication but none had made a real impact. I still had the weight gain and the night sweats and all my other symptoms. I also told her that I was recently divorced and that although it was a good thing, I was still very emotional.

After reviewing my lab work Dr. Edgy said, "You need to be taking at least 3000 mg a day of omega-3s, some DHEA and we need to get you on a compounded T3/T4 thyroid medication."

Like Dr. Wake Up, she had all my labs, but never said anything about the positive ANA results.

Then she said, "I want to get you on a medication for depression." All the hairs on the back of my neck went up. Literally. I didn't want to do that. She explained that she felt that I had a condition called polycystic ovarian syndrome (PCOS) and that an antidepressant was in order. My response was, "I'm not crazy—I'm going through major life changes! And besides, what does depression medication do for cystic ovaries?"

My comment deeply offended her. "I'm on an antidepressant," she snapped, "and they're NOT just for crazy people!" Then she angrily explained that PCOS often causes depression, and that the medication would help. When I asked if it would help the cystic ovaries, she looked at me like I was nuts and said, "No!"

Dr. Edgy wrote me a prescription for the compounded T3/T4. This new thyroid replacement regimen was a game changer! I went from 160 lbs. to 148 lbs. within 6 weeks. Almost overnight, I experienced a

huge improvement in all my symptoms. I was still overweight, but this was the first time the scale had budged in years. I should note that I made no changes to my diet whatsoever and we never discussed food sensitivities, gut health or detoxification. I now know that my gut and liver were a mess and wasn't converting T4 to T3 properly.

Dr. Edgy's description of the antidepressant she wanted to prescribe, Cymbalta, scared me. "We have to do some liver tests on you before you can take this because it's very hard on the liver," she told me. Given that I was a heavy wine drinker at the time, I put two and two together and realized that a drug that stressed the liver probably wouldn't be the best choice for me. I also had a hunch that my liver wasn't doing such a great job anyway, and wondered if it was contributing to my symptoms. I also knew that I wasn't ready to stop drinking wine and coffee. I figured that with the stress I was under, having just gone through a divorce, moving, and changing my career, there was no way I could deal with cutting out alcohol and caffeine. So, after researching the side effects of the drug, I decided not to fill the prescription.

When I started feeling better due to the T3/T4 hormone combination, I decided to research the work of Dr. Diane Schwartzbein, so I read her first book. I was beginning to connect the dots about the physical reasons I had developed my condition! I had suffered from chronic stress since I was a baby, and continued a pattern of stress into adulthood. Because I was on a low-calorie, low-protein, low fat, vegetarian diet that included a lot of wine, I had developed a condition called insulin sensitivity, and I had burned-out adrenal glands. The result was a damaged metabolism and an autoimmune condition.

I tried to follow Dr. Schwartzbein's recommendations for my condition, but her nutrition program made me gain ten pounds in two weeks and my symptoms got worse. She explained in her book that some people would gain weight and feel worse before they felt better. The weight gain freaked me out completely, and I felt like I was heading in the wrong direction. I know now that I had a very damaged metabolism, because I definitely felt worse. I didn't do the functional testing for GI inflammation she recommended because I wasn't sure I really needed it—after all, it was not covered by my health insurance, it was expensive and, at that time, considered controversial. I know now that I would have benefited tremendously from that testing and it would have saved me a lot of time and money down the road.

I went off Dr. Schwartzbein's program and back on my very low-calorie (starvation) vegetarian diet and lost the ten pounds. I was able to maintain a moderate level of health on the new T3/T4 thyroid combination. I still had all of my symptoms, although they were not as severe, and I was still 18 pounds overweight, but I figured that it was as good as it was going to get.

After a year of living by the beach, I decided to start dating. Almost immediately, I met a wonderful man named Andrew. After a few months of dating, I moved in with him. Not long after that, he proposed. We decided to move to Taos, New Mexico, and get married.

The decision to get married prompted me to try harder to lose the 18 pounds I was carrying around, so I tried a diet called The Fat Flush Plan by Ann Louise Gittleman. Ann Louise's program is an elimination diet where you remove all grains including corn, legumes, dairy and toxic substances like caffeine, alcohol and over-the-counter drugs for two weeks and then add foods back, one at a time. She emphasizes the importance of eating tons of non-starchy vegetables, a few low-glycemic fruits such as berries, and small amounts of organic lean-animal proteins and omega-3 enriched eggs. The program is designed to improve liver and kidney function, as well as find out what foods are contributing to unwanted symptoms.

Up to this time, I had been a strict vegetarian for over fifteen years and 60 percent of my calories came from whole grains and legumes, 30 percent from vegetables and fruits and 10 percent from fats. The idea of adding animal protein scared me to death! I loved animals and considered the act of eating

them immoral, but her rationale made sense so I did Phase One. I lost 9 pounds in two weeks, putting me at the lowest weight I had been in years. I was thrilled! What was weird was that my debilitating hay fever symptoms improved, and my rashes were clearing up as well.

I walked down the aisle at 139 pounds (I'm 5'7") and felt pretty good! After the wedding I did not add foods back one at a time like she recommends. I added them back all at once—and gained all the weight back, plus 2 pounds more, in just four days of my normal, organic, vegetarian grain/legume-based diet! My allergies and rashes came back with a vengeance, and I felt lousy. At this point I was starting to connect the dots between my symptoms, my weight and the types of the foods I was eating versus the quantity or calories in/calories out.

I continued to go on and off Phase One of Ann Louise's program every time I wanted to lose some weight. I sometimes wondered if I was just the kind of person that should stay off grains, corn, legumes and dairy for life, but that seemed unreasonable and unfair. I found myself feeling very angry and frustrated that I couldn't just "eat like everyone else."



Living in Taos was a dream come true. When I was 13 years old, I had read about Georgia O'Keefe and the wide-open spaces of the Land of Enchantment. I had come to visit Taos on many occasions throughout my twenties, and had always dreamed it would someday be my home. Here, at the base of the Sangre de Cristo (blood of Christ) mountains, Taos welcomed me home to heal.

Andrew and I purchased an old adobe home and spent nine months restoring it. I had the job of being the designer on the project, a position I enthusiastically embraced. This was the creative outlet that was so desperately missing in my life. I still didn't feel perfect physically, but I was too excited about life to pay that much attention to my symptoms.

In December of 2007, Andrew and I were vacationing in Mexico, where we decided to sail a catamaran in the Tamarindo Bay. Andrew is an excellent sailor and it was a thrilling experience as we followed a whale and her pup for hours.

Later that evening, I developed painful, fluid filled blisters on every part of my body that was exposed to the sun. The resort docs had never seen anything like it. I tried oral and topical antihistamines with no relief. After four days, the rash was still there, I was extremely fatigued and my joints were beginning to ache. I was getting worried that there was something really wrong with me.

I should point out that my entire diet in Mexico consisted of corn and wheat tortillas, beans and tons of foods made with vegetables from the nightshade family, such as tomatoes, potatoes and peppers.

A week later, when I arrived back in the States, the rash was still there. I went to a dermatologist I'll call Dr. Cavalier, who took one look at me and said, "Well, you probably have lupus." He didn't have lab work to make that diagnosis, so I felt his statement was totally unwarranted. Ironically, the positive ANA results indicating lupus from 2004 already existed, but I had yet to have anyone interpret them for me. So I felt this doctor was making a cavalier assumption about my health, and I was angry!

"Is that your actual answer? There is no way I have lupus! But if I were a different kind of person, I might go home and actually get sick just from your diagnosis alone. You shouldn't tell people things like that, it's irresponsible!" (I have a tendency to be a bit fiery at times.)

He just smirked and said, "Well, your symptoms don't warrant serious medication, so we'll just wait and see what happens. Go home and wait until your symptoms get worse."

Go home and wait for my symptoms to get worse? Really?

He gave me a prescription for a heavy-duty steroid cream, and I went back to Taos. We had just finished the remodel of our adobe home and started the process of moving in. At least I had that to look forward to.

Tending to the Mind, Body and Spirit

I wasn't sure what I was going to do in Taos and had been seriously considering a career in real estate. I went through the real estate licensing program and was offered a job by a broker. I was heading towards another unfulfilling career and I knew it. A couple of weeks before I was supposed to start, I had nothing short of a nervous breakdown. In one weekend, I pretty much lost it and fell apart. I told my husband, "There is no way I can do this—no way! My heart is just not in it. I can't enter into another career that doesn't fulfill me: it will kill me!"

My husband said, "Why would you ever consider doing something that you don't want to do? You should do exactly what you want to do and nothing else."

Who does exactly what they want to do? I had never heard of a concept like that—especially related to career. I had always thought that work was work; that's why they called it work!

Andrew's remark was a major turning point in my recovery. Up to that point, I had spent most of my life accepting the unacceptable and, in essence, Andrew had said, "Why would you accept what doesn't make you happy?" The realization that I had the power to opt for something different had never occurred to me.

Dr. Cavalier's flippant diagnosis of lupus had left me pretty distraught. Years ago, my aunt had died of lupus. I was sick and tired of feeling like crap, and I was angry that this was happening to me. My intuition told me that there was more to the story. I would not accept the fate of an incurable and deadly diagnosis. I told myself that if even one person had challenged the diagnosis and cured herself, I had hope. A healthy rebellion awakened in me. I was not going to be another statistic! I could not imagine sitting around and waiting to get worse and I refused to accept the diagnosis as my fate. If the doctors didn't know how to cure this, I would figure it out on my own. I was going to have to take charge! I wondered if I could find a way to make it my full-time job to get to the root of what was causing my condition.

Thanks to Andrew, I was able to make my study of autoimmune disease a full-time job. Instead of staying in the victim/martyr role, I leaned on him, and for the first time in my life, I felt that someone was really on my side. I am forever grateful for him and he continues to be one of my biggest supporters.

Over the course of about a year, I spent ten hours a day researching everything I could on autoimmune disease, from medical journals and textbooks to stories of people who had healed their illness. Finally, I came across the work of Dr. David Brownstein. His book, *Overcoming Thyroid Disorders*, made sense, and for the first time ever, I had a hope of actually reversing my condition. All the other books that I had read at the time talked about all of the different therapies and things you could do to "live well" with autoimmune disease. There was no mention of it being curable. In fact, everyone was saying the same thing: "It's incurable." It was really quite depressing to hear, over and over again, "You'll never be able to heal this completely, so the best you can do is live with it." Dr. Brownstein was actually saying, "No, of course you can reverse this absolutely!"

I need to point out how important it was to my healing that a doctor was saying that autoimmune disease could be reversed. It gave me hope, and for the first time in a long time, I was genuinely enthusiastic about healing my body. I believed that I could heal, and that belief system was critical to the process.

In his book, Dr. Brownstein makes the connection between chronic infections, heavy metal toxicity, environmental toxins, adrenal fatigue, other hormonal imbalances, gluten allergies and sensitivities, and nutritional deficiencies. These were concepts that I had come across in Dr. Schwartzbein's and Ann Louise Gittleman's books, but now I was convinced that my overall "body burden" was high and that I would need to detoxify.

I had been working with an excellent medical doctor in California I'll call Dr. Open-Minded, who was familiar with Dr. Brownstein's work and was very open to the suggestion, too, that I could reverse my condition, which gave me even more hope!

I said to Dr. Open-Minded, "Look, I have a feeling that the root cause of my autoimmune disease has been chronic emotional stress, which has caused poor coping mechanisms, adrenal fatigue, a systemic Candida infection, mercury toxicity and a leaky gut. I also think I might be sensitive to gluten." To which he said, "Sure, why not?" I told him that I thought I could completely reverse my disease. He said he didn't see any reason why I shouldn't give it a shot.

Having read almost every book on managing autoimmune disease, including Donna Gate's book, *The Body Ecology Diet*, I was starting to connect the dots between a leaky gut, toxicity, infections and autoimmunity. I wasn't sure how to do it all, because there wasn't a clear road map for success. Nobody had written a book explaining exactly how to cure an autoimmune condition. So I was kind of mixing and matching different protocols and supplements. Essentially, I had become an experimental scientist with my own body.

In March of 2008, I started taking a super nutrient complex and felt better immediately. The supplement combination had all of the important B vitamins that I was deficient in due to chronic stress and a leaky gut, as well as selenium and N-acetyl-l-cysteine, which helped my liver detoxify and boost my body's own glutathione levels. It also had lots of antioxidants and immune system modulators like CoQ10, Alpha lipoic acid, resveratrol, grape seed extract and green tea extract. In addition to this complex, I started taking 3000 mg of an omega-3 complex, an additional 200 mcg of selenium, conjugated linoleic acid and whey protein powder, which included all the amino acids (especially glycine) I was most certainly deficient in.

I started getting to bed by 10:30 p.m. and replaced my high-energy cardio workouts with Pilates, weight training and long walks in nature.

Over the course of a few months, I also had gradually upped the dose of the T4/T3 thyroid hormone until my THS was below .05, which, as I will explain later, was a key factor in reducing inflammation at the site of my thyroid gland.

The change in my energy levels was profound. My skin was clearing up and my allergies were better.

Finally, convinced that rest and healthy nutrition were the answers to healing chronic illness, I wanted to learn more, so I enrolled in a holistic nutrition program at Clayton College of Natural Health. I chose this school because this was where Ann Louise Gittleman (one of my heroes) had received her Ph.D.

My independent research in medical journals led me to the connection between gluten sensitivity, gluten allergy, leaky gut and autoimmune thyroid disease, so I did a food allergy test and several food sensitivity tests. Even though I was not clinically allergic to the protein in gluten, I was sensitive to it, as well as many other things like bell peppers, chilies, corn, beans and dairy products. Funny that my diet had consisted primarily of all the foods I was sensitive to!

I decided to cut out grains and nightshades for good, and in 30 days I lost "the last ten pounds" and all my symptoms disappeared completely. My puffy eyes were gone, and I looked and felt amazing!

A New Calling

Soon after, other women started to notice the difference in me and I began to receive requests to help them with their chronic symptoms. So, in September of 2008, I opened a holistic nutrition center in Taos, New Mexico. Based on what I had learned with my own body, I created a program called The Women's Empowerment Program, which is a 12-week nutrition program that helps women discover exactly what foods and substances are contributing to their unwanted symptoms. The program was very successful. In fact, every single one of the women who followed it 100 percent learned what foods they were reacting to, and all were able to lose weight and eliminate their chronic symptoms.

The remarkable success I witnessed with my clients inspired me to found Vibrant Way Inc., a women's nutrition company. In my research of nutritional supplements I had the opportunity to delve deeply into the supplement manufacturing industry and what I found was that a lot of the products on the market were junk at worst and at best had suboptimal levels of nutrients from sources that could not be identified. Some were even made in China! I rarely saw a product that had on the label "manufactured in a GMP, NSF facility." These are designations that guarantee the manufacturer is in compliance with Good Manufacturing Practices and maintain strict manufacturing guidelines set by NSF/ANSI Standard 173, which is the only accredited national standard in the dietary supplement industry. The manufacturers who comply with these standards have their products routinely tested to verify the identity and quality of the active ingredients on the label and ensure the supplements are free of contaminants such as bacteria, molds and heavy metals. I was shocked to learn that not all supplement manufacturers abide by these standards.

I wanted a top-quality super nutrient formula with ingredients sourced from only the U.S., Canada and Europe. I wanted one I could trust for the health of my family, friends and myself. This led me to partner with one of the largest, most well respected supplement manufacturers to create my own custom super nutrient formula called the Women's Empowerment Formula. I modeled my formula after the supplement that I took while I was healing and I added some other important nutrients that had worked for my clients and myself. Since that time, hundreds of women (including my mother, and my 103-year-old-grandmother) take my supplement every month.

Turning the Corner

In February of 2009, I had my thyroid antibodies tested—and they had gone from 237 to 37! This was a significant drop in antibody levels, just from lowering my TSH, changing my nutrition and taking the nutrients I was deficient in.

Dr. Open-Minded was impressed.

"That's amazing," he said. "Look at what you've been able to do with lifestyle changes alone."

"Yeah, I think I have made a connection between mercury toxicity and Candida and I think I can completely eradicate this autoimmune process by completely clearing the Candida and doing a heavy metal detox."

Dr. Open-Minded agreed and told me about a patient of his who had done a heavy metal cleanse and completely reversed her Hashimoto's. This was only one case, but it gave me a lot of encouragement.

In March of 2009, I made an appointment with an integrative doctor in Santa Fe who specializes in detoxification. We talked about the connection between Candida, mold and mercury, and I asked for a heavy metal challenge test. The results indicated that my mercury levels were very high.

This was not a very surprising result in my case, because I had worked clinically in dentistry for years. Back in 1989, we would use old machines called amalgamators, where we added mercury to a metal amalgam powder and then turned a switch on to start the spin cycle, which released who knows how much mercury vapor into the room around it. We inhaled all that mercury and then handled the filling material with our hands!

I researched different ways of clearing Candida and mercury. I had read that you can mobilize mercury with different types of heavy metal chelating agents, but if the liver is sluggish and the gut barrier is compromised by a condition called leaky gut, you can potentially pass this mercury on to other organs, like the brain, where it can do even more damage. Needless to say, I wasn't very excited about the concept of moving mercury to my brain. At this point, I was living on a healing diet, and I had already done a lot to heal my gut by removing aggravating foods, but I knew I had to do more for my liver and gut to completely heal. Keep in mind that I was doing this on my own, so I didn't really know which products were going to work. I had read about glutamine, probiotics, and digestive enzymes, and there were so many products on the market, and so much information to navigate! I ended up trying just about every Candida cleanse and gut healing protocol I could get my hands on.

I started taking grapefruit seed extract (GSE) drops every day, as well as probiotics in the form of acidophilus and bifidus. I took berberine, black walnut and olive leaf supplements. I also started taking a medical food supplement powder called, "Sustain," that is designed to heal the gut. I found this product to work so well that I now include it in my Thyroid Emergency Repair Kit for my clients. Within three months of this protocol, I saw noticeable improvements in my digestion.

I had my silver amalgam fillings removed and replaced with composites by a dentist who specializes in biocompatible dentistry.

I also purchased a far-infrared sauna for my clinic, because there was a lot of research suggesting that these saunas can safely mobilize and excrete heavy metals through the process of sweating. The doctor in Santa Fe had recommended that I use a product called "Beyond Clean," which is an Ethylenediaminetetraacetic acid (EDTA) powder that you add to bath water. I used the sauna and Beyond Clean daily.

I began researching functional medicine testing and started working with functional laboratories like Metametrix and Genova because I wanted to try everything on myself before recommending it to a client. Through functional testing on myself I found that I had an H. pylori infection, as well as a parasitic infection. The good news was that both the Candida and the mercury were gone, so I was on the right track! I used an herbal formula for the H. pylori and I did a parasite cleanse to clear up the infection.

I did a few liver cleanses that included fresh live juices and homemade herbal teas. (I give more details about these treatments in Chapter 17: Restore Your Liver.) I revamped my personal care products and removed anything with parabens or other toxic chemicals. I stopped using toothpaste with sodium lauryl sulfate and fluoride. I stopped using harsh cleaning chemicals such as bleach, disinfectants, and anything I could smell in my home. I started using only organic garden supplies and got rid of all pesticides, including the ones I used on my dog. I got rid of all plastic food storage containers and stopped buying prepared foods and water packaged in plastic.

During my healing process, I tried many things to manage my stress and cultivate enthusiasm. For instance, I cut out ALL NEWS and media consumption and even set my browser to my company's Web site instead of Google News. It has remained that way ever since. I was never a TV person, and I never watched horror movies—even before I got sick—but I wanted to cut out everything that wasn't uplifting,

so I turned off my cable TV. I stopped listening to music that triggered sad memories or reminded me of my sad past. I chose only uplifting, healing music that got me in touch with happy and joyful feelings.

I listened to inspirational CDs from teachers like Eckhart Tolle, Carolyn Myss, Louise Hay and Gay Hendricks. I went to healing workshops and attended lectures by inspiring teachers like Katie Hendricks and Marianne Williamson. I participated in many healing circles with teachers, healers and Native American elders and shaman.

I read books by leading scientists, researchers and doctors such as Bruce Lipton, M.D., Lynn McTaggart and Candace Pert, who write about the new sciences of psychoneuroimmunology and new edge biology, which scientifically prove the “empowering truth that our perceptions and responses to life dynamically shape our biology and behavior.”² I began to see that I had the ability to consciously respond to the situations in my life, rather than living in a default state of reaction.

I continued to work with a Conscious Loving coach who helped me take 100 percent responsibility for the roles I play in relationships. Looking back on this period of my life, I can now see more clearly that there were some people in my life who felt uncomfortable around me as I started getting healthy. Some would try and sabotage my success, and like “crabs in a bucket,” they would try to drag me back down, but I was able to lovingly withdraw my energy, and consequently some of my dysfunctional relationships fell away.

Attitude took on a new importance for me. I stopped complaining, and I stopped listening to the complaints of others. I wanted to surround myself with people who supported my new life and my new thought process, and so I found new friends.

I practiced forgiveness for others, and for myself. I repeated affirmations over and over, such as, “I approve of myself” and “I love myself,” until they replaced the negative tape loops in my head. I worked with EFT and Quantum Healing Techniques, as well as flower essences. I developed a daily spiritual practice and a connection to the Divine that continues to fill my heart with joy and inspiration!

By July of 2010, I was clinically free of Hashimoto’s and autoantibodies. At long last I was cured! I’ve been able to maintain a level of health that looks and feels amazing. I have tons of energy, my hair is thick and full, and I no longer have rashes, allergies, night sweats or GI symptoms. My weight stays consistently between 130 and 134 pounds on my 5’7” frame. My skin is clear, and I look much younger than I did six years ago. I never feel hungry or deprived. My periods are regular and I never experience PMS symptoms. My moods are stable and I feel happy most of the time. I don’t need an arsenal of supplements or treatments to feel good. I take a good multivitamin, digestive enzymes and probiotics, and I’m on a third of the dose of thyroid medication that I started with.

In 2010, I enrolled in a two-year course at the Academy of Functional Medicine & Genomics, where I gained in-depth knowledge of how to apply functional medical testing and integrative supportive therapies into my nutrition coaching practice. Now, aside from running Vibrant Way, I have a fulfilling vocation as writer, speaker and patient advocate.

So I’m walking into the sunset happily ever after, right? Well, almost.

Even though I’m free of the symptoms that plagued me for years, I have to work to maintain this level of health. I must take care of myself. I can’t afford to allow toxins back into my life in any form.

But toxins aren’t always physical. Negative thinking is a toxin. Negative emotions are what Alejandro Junger, M.D., calls “quantum toxins.” It’s easy to identify junk foods because they have the ingredients listed on the label. But junk thoughts and toxic people are sometimes another story. Emotional toxins are not labeled, and they come in the form of any—and I mean ANY—chronic negative thoughts you allow

to run through your mind.

In the last two years, I've allowed emotional toxins to affect me. Even though I don't pay attention to the news, I've been affected by the financial crisis. I've also found myself on more than one occasion struggling with relationship issues. I've had times when I've dropped into an unconscious state and allowed what Eckhart Tolle calls my "pain body" to take over. I call it my "unhappy habit," and although it's much easier to catch now, it's been a challenging one to break.

I'm only human after all...

What You Need to Know:

No one has the right to tell you that you can't heal your life—because you can!

While each of us is unique, I have found that people with autoimmune disorders have certain stressors in common such as chronic negative thoughts, poor coping mechanisms, poor dietary choices, food sensitivities, compromised livers, leaky gut, inflammation, low-grade infections or viruses, and chemical or heavy metal toxicity.

In order to reverse your condition, you have to determine if you have any of these stressors and then work to heal them.

There is one thing I know for sure: no matter how sick you are or how bad your life situation may seem, things can get better. Every day presents you with the amazing response-ability to make new choices. I'm not suggesting that making life changes is easy, because I know it's not. What I am saying is that you don't have to accept the prognosis of an incurable disease.

You Can Have Vibrant Health!

What came between my before-and-after pictures was years of research and thousands of dollars spent on experimenting with treatments, medicines, supplements and healing modalities. The good news is you don't have to spend years and a fortune to get well, as I did! What you have that I didn't is this book! This book is the distillation of everything I've learned about how to cure (and yes, I mean cure, not symptomatically treat) autoimmune thyroid disorders. If you want to permanently reverse an autoimmune disorder, I am on your side and encourage you to read on.