

PART ONE

The Search for Balance

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CHAPTER 1

Balance and Imbalance

I was fortunate to be raised in Miami, Florida, in the midst of a very large park. Grassy hills behind our house cascaded down into the park grounds, where I inhaled the scent of freshly mowed grass. Our grounds were filled with enormous trees that I climbed every chance I got, including a coconut tree in our front yard, and grapefruit, key lime, and mango trees in the back. There I would sit on the tallest branches with the squirrels and birds who were squawking and fighting each other for the ripening fruit. My own private Eden.

What a place to grow up and escape from the rest of the world! There, from high above, I could almost see the distant whitecaps on the turquoise ocean waves, and I inhaled the salty, fresh air and the aroma of maturing fruit. I felt connected to the earth back then, watching things grow and ripen like I was an explorer making new discoveries every day.

I also felt calm and serene when I worked with my dad in our garden, watching plump vegetables grow from a tiny seed without any help from us besides water and love. Nature seemed to have all the answers. It had been harmonious, balanced, and filled with vitality since the beginning . . . whenever that was.

My dad, Cecil, who was raised on a farm in Georgia, taught me all about the beauty and balance of nature. Extremely poor, his family had lived off what they could grow. The soil was everything to them, and judging from how great my dad looked and how strong he turned out, it was more than enough. No killing himself lifting weights to achieve a buff look for my dad! Genetics were good to Cecil Brantley, and he was quite a physical specimen, with luminous green eyes, pitch-black wavy hair, a strong, healthy body, and a powerful chest.

My older brother, Douglas, also was in love with the earth. Although we were like night and day (he was quiet and laid-back while I never stood still), we tilled the soil together with my dad. Our vegetable garden was an example of how my dad taught us to respect nature. I'd make a little mound of earth, put in that tiny seed, and when it would sprout, I'd be amazed, making my family laugh each time I cried out, "Oh, my God, the little green thing is coming out."

Dad made sure that Douglas and I worked with him, weeding, digging, preparing the land for planting and finally watering. "This is where it all comes from, boys," he'd say as we toiled and sweated in the garden. "God has all the answers, so just keep digging."

My dad didn't entirely live an idyllic life, however. He had escaped a tough childhood by going to war. When his tour of duty was over, he returned home to become a firefighter and the owner of his own small exterminating company. Many a morning he returned from a twenty-four-hour shift smelling like a wave of ashes. When it had been a really big fire, his eyes were red and you could pick up the scent of burning hair on his head, arms, and eyelashes. If he looked visibly shaken, I knew someone had died in the fire, but he never talked about it. He just drank his sorrows away.

In complete opposition to the garden of Eden just outside our home was our kitchen pantry. It was something else altogether. At the time, none of us thought it was strange that the fresh produce from our garden, nature's undisputed miracles, were hidden beneath an overwhelming amount of packaged, dead, refined, overprocessed foods. We and almost everyone else ate the Standard American Diet, which has come to be called SAD for reasons that I would understand much later.

Television commercials and advertising campaigns influenced my parents, as they did most people in the country, creating a war zone in

our kitchen. Alongside the freshest fruit in the world, the shelves and countertops were littered with junk and processed foods, such as boxes of sugared refined cereals, white bread (lots of it), white crackers, hydrogenated oils such as vegetable shortening, pasteurized milk, and all kinds of canned goods poisoned with deadly preservatives. And then there were the desserts—white sugary pastries, glazed donuts, candy bars of all sorts, ice cream, Popsicles, and sodas galore.

The irony was that amid all the sugar, artificial sweeteners in pink and blue packaging, refined salt, additives, and food coloring that took up space in our kitchen cabinets, my mother banned packaged, powdered instant drinks that came in strange colors. “They’re not healthy for you,” said my mom, biting into a piece of white toast with margarine, powdered artificial sweetener, and jelly.

My mother, Violet, was from a poor background like my father’s. She was a product of a large family who always struggled to keep food on the table. As a result, my brother and I were expected to eat whatever our parents fed us. It was not an option to reject any kind of food; you simply ate it, and you’d better be thankful. I believed in gratitude as my parents did—I still do—but back then, processed and refined foods were the mainstay diet in most American households, and our house was no different.

I ate what I was told. Why shouldn’t I? I felt good, I had tons of energy, and I spent as much time outdoors as possible, fishing, diving, and bouncing through the ocean waves, the salt water hitting my face as I breathed in the fresh air. Nature was all around me, and I played hard, ate as much as I wanted, stayed slim, and was the picture of health—or so I thought. Even though there was always more than enough food to fill my belly, in truth I was undernourished, literally starving, and nobody knew it—until my body began to rebel.

As a kid, I rarely got sick besides the normal childhood illnesses such as measles, mumps, and chicken pox. I got over them like all the other kids did, and I almost never missed school, although I was hit with unexplained physical symptoms, such as waking up with a stuffy nose, occasional constipation, and an embarrassing skin condition that caused me great physical pain.

I was seven when I noticed white, dry scales on my feet that kept getting bigger. They cracked and bled, looking reptilian enough for me

to never take off my shoes in public. The worst part was how much they hurt. My feet were always in radical pain, and at times I could barely walk. This prompted a visit to the doctor; my parents assured me, “Don’t worry, the experts will handle this.”

Apparently his white coat made my pediatrician an expert, and I was willing to go along with him if he could help me. He declared my foot problem to be a fungus and gave me some cream to rub on it. Then I did the unthinkable.

“What caused it?” I asked, to the horror of my parents. My mother reached over and put her hand over my mouth. I hated that, but I was used to it. She did it to me whenever I asked a so-called authority the question. Why? She considered it a sin to question the experts, and every time I did so, she was devastated.

The white-coated god ignored my impertinent question, so I took the cream and left with my mother. Two weeks later, however, when the cream didn’t work and my feet got worse, it was back to another doctor, this time a big, fat man with glasses who also was wearing the white coat. He took a thorough look at my scaly feet and said, “You have a fungus.”

I’d already heard that from the last guy.

He went on, “Here’s some cream that should control it, but you’d better get used to it because you’ll probably have it for a long time.”

Then I did it. “What caused it?” I asked.

“I never thought about that,” he said, smiling.

“Why not?” I asked.

With that, my mother shot me a look and put her hand over my mouth again. The minute we left the doctor’s office that day, my mother smacked me on the head for questioning the doctor. I’d been dubbed “Why Timothy” from the moment I could talk, and even though adults generally answered, “Because I told you so,” I didn’t stop asking questions.

You can probably guess what happened next. The second medication didn’t work either. And for a ten-year-old, it was tough. My skin condition continued to get worse over the next three years. More visits to “experts” (this time they were called specialists) did nothing for me. Each “specialist” sounded like a machine that had been built and programmed in the white-coat factory. They usually ended up handing me a cream, often the same one the last doctor had prescribed, and sent me home.

When it got really bad, a doctor recommended that I sleep with plastic bags wrapped around my feet to make sure the medicine was soaking all the way in. I wondered why I should bother, since the medication clearly was not working, but I gave it my best try, all the while wondering if maybe the experts were having a bigger problem than I was. They didn't seem to know what to do for me, and they wouldn't admit it, but I knew if I voiced my doubts, my mom would kill me. Instead, I hid my feet from everyone, and eventually my parents refused to spend any more money taking me to doctors. My condition, they figured, was not life threatening and I needed to learn to live with it.

Surgery

When I was thirteen, I was still careful never to remove my shoes and socks in public. Then my headaches started. They were persistent, and I wondered if they had something to do with my dad's exterminating business. Doug and I helped him and we kidded around, accusing him of using us as cheap labor. We were around some of the most toxic chemicals known to man, such as malathion, Dursban, chlordane, and DDT before it was outlawed. These kinds of pesticides lay around our garage in unsealed barrels, and we used the stuff to spray lawns and kill fleas, roaches, and any other unfortunate bugs that happened to be living in the vicinity. I squeezed through dark crawl spaces under people's homes to kill termites, sometimes rubbing against house boards as a spiderweb full of dead bugs fell into my hair. In case the bogeyman showed up, I was ready with my spray gun to blast him full of poison!

Doug and I were often under houses for hours, digging trenches against the walls and pumping gallons of chlordane in there. When we crawled back out again, wet from the poison and sweat, our faces were swollen and our eyes were red and burning. Pumpkin Head, we'd call each other as my dad washed us off with the hose.

"It's just a little poison, boys," he said, laughing. "It isn't gonna kill you."

My headaches got worse, but my parents didn't know what else to do. Whatever happened or however we felt, we all went to church on Sunday, unless my dad was fighting a fire somewhere. I respected the fact that he and my mom spent time helping the poor and the needy through

our church, but as my mother felt the need to continuously impose her will on her family and her husband, the relationship between my parents became strained.

When my father drank, I escaped to the park outside our house, where I scurried up the tallest tree and lost myself in nature. I felt better, but nothing helped my headaches, which intensified as time passed. So did the huge scales on my feet, but my problems were soon overshadowed when my mother found a lump in her breast. For many months, the lump never changed in size. She wanted to forget about it, but her friends pressured her until she went to see an expert for a diagnosis. He took a biopsy and soon informed my mother that although the lump was small and had not grown for months, she had breast cancer. Her worst fears were realized. Her visit to a second specialist confirmed the diagnosis, and both doctors agreed that she needed to have a radical mastectomy.

“They know what to do,” my mother assured me, looking more terrified than I’d ever seen her. “Whatever the doctor says goes.”

“But why do they want to cut off your breast?” I asked, angering my mother with one more “why” question.

Her answer was predictable. “Because they’re the experts and they know what to do.”

When my mother came out of surgery after one of her large breasts had been removed, she looked deformed. Her chest was concave on one side, and she was in so much pain, they kept her drugged out of her mind. She was never the same after that. Instead of the strong, willful, energetic taskmaster, she was more like a bird with a broken wing and spirit, despite the fact that the god in the white coat soon declared her healed.

“It was a success,” the doctor told us. “We got all the cancer, and the margins are clear.”

“What does that mean?” I asked. Even in my mother’s drugged-out state, she managed to shoot me a look.

The doctor explained that they had cut out the surrounding tissue where cancer cells could be hiding. “We didn’t find any,” he said with a smile on his face.

“Doctor,” I said, “why did she get cancer to begin with?”

My mother apologized to him as he said to me, “Well, son, we don’t know why.”

“Don’t you want to know?” I said. I was already in trouble.

“I think that’s enough questions, young man,” he said with irritation in his voice.

My mom glared at me. Once again, I had committed an unpardonable sin in my family, punishable by the belt. I’d questioned authority, and it was a bad night for me when we got back home. I was soundly beaten by my dad as they continued to throw the word “remission” around. They said it meant that the cancer had stopped growing. So why didn’t they look happy? At my mom’s next appointment, remission or not, the doctor prescribed radiation treatments “to discourage the cancer from coming back.”

“But if she’s in remission,” I said, “why are you giving her radiation?”

My mother and the doctor looked like they wanted to wring my neck, but I didn’t care. This made no sense to me. I couldn’t fit the pieces of the puzzle together, they didn’t fit, and I would never stop trying.

I was told that radiation was a process by which they fried cells, the cancer cells *and* the good ones, to prevent the cancer from ever returning. Once again, I was filled with questions. If this process was safe and effective for someone who was in remission, then why didn’t they give radiation to everyone, just to make sure cancer never attacked them? Why didn’t the doctors, their wives, and their children take radiation as a preventive measure? I pictured a radiation drive-thru like a fast-food window.

They literally fried my mother’s chest with what I would later discover was an enormous amount of radiation therapy. When I saw the radiation burns on my mother’s chest, I wondered if no treatment at all would have been a better bet. I heard her crying from pain in the night, and I asked God to send it to me instead of her. When they declared her treatments over, I sighed with relief, but the damage was done. She spent the next year trying to recover, but although the pain lessened, she was devastated at how her body looked. Friends pretended everything was normal, but we all knew better. The cancer was back!

Once again, my escalating foot condition and headaches took a backseat to the fact that my mother began to undergo chemotherapy. “If you don’t do chemo,” they warned her, “the cancer will spread all over your body.”

And if you do the chemo? I wanted to ask but didn’t. I also didn’t say, “Look what these treatments are doing to her.” No one said that and no one would, except my brother and I, and no one listened to us anyway.

As my mother jumped from the frying pan of radiation into the fire of chemotherapy, she became sicker than I'd ever seen her. Her hair fell out, her arms swelled beyond recognition, and the nausea and dizziness were constant. She hardly slept, and she cried, moaned, and vomited all night long. Doug was away at university, and the bogeyman whom I previously had feared when the house was dark and quiet seemed like a good alternative to the agony I heard coming from my mother. I prayed for the dark and the quiet, even for the bogeyman to distract me, but my sleep was interrupted every night for months by the sounds of my mother's illness and treatments. How she survived the chemo, even for a little while, is still a mystery to me. Her genetics must have been such that she was able to get through the worst treatments in the world, which they all thought were keeping her alive. I wasn't so sure.

Everyone was talking about remission again, but if this was the same as the remission from the radiation, I didn't believe she was okay. At this time, a health professional whom I liked, an elderly nutritionist in his seventies named Dr. Jackson, came to the house to give my mother vitamin B₁₂ shots. She got a temporary lift from them, and I wanted to bombard him with questions. I believe he would have answered them, but I never had an opportunity to be alone with him.

While my brother and I joked about Mom's wig that reminded us of coconut hair they used on mannequins in department stores, we looked around us to find some disturbing answers. We knew a few adults who had gone through the same treatments, and they were dying. My common sense and instincts were telling me one thing, while all of their doctors were saying something else. When I realized that nature was in balance but the doctors were not, I thought about my cousin Debbie.

As a teenager, she'd gotten cancer, which inspired the doctors to put her on not one or two but five different types of chemotherapy. Her dad, my Uncle Bob, was beside himself with anger when he discovered that one of the drugs had actually caused new tumors to grow. The treatments *were* killing her, just as Doug and I had suspected. We tried to talk some sense into my dad, using Debbie as an example, but he only got more confused. He would not believe us when we told him that chemotherapy could actually cause cancer to grow.

As my cousin Debbie's health continued to decline, Uncle Bob decided to take matters into his own hands. He advised my father to take my mother off all traditional treatments, and he took his daughter to a

clinic in Mexico run by a medical doctor called Dr. Contreras. Unfortunately, the doctor told Uncle Bob that Debbie's immune system was too compromised after so much chemo to respond to alternative treatments. But Uncle Bob kept looking, even when conventional doctors declared the physicians at alternative clinics to be frauds and quacks.

When I asked him why these natural-therapy doctors were in Mexico, he explained that they had no choice. They were persecuted, prosecuted, and imprisoned in the United States for treating people with unorthodox therapies that were actually helping them. Then Uncle Bob told me about laetrile, which he believed was healing some people with cancer.

"It's derived from apricot pits," he said, "and people are getting results." He told me that it was illegal in the United States because it threatened big business.

I'd suspected as much, but when I heard the unadulterated truth from my Uncle Bob, an undeniable truth-teller, the reality was hard to swallow. Big business was making money off cancer patients, blocking all competition, and refusing to accept any therapies that did not pump up the bank accounts of the pharmaceutical industry executives.

Next, we heard about a man named Dr. Burton, an American doctor who had devised a plan to help rebuild the blood of people with cancer, and who had been shut down by the medical authorities. His work focused on replacing nutrients that were missing from an ill person's bloodstream. He had some success, but he moved to Jamaica, where he was allowed to practice. I couldn't understand why the medical establishment refused to acknowledge his work, but they wanted him gone. It was a huge red flag for me. I was swiftly learning that the medical industry, often corrupt and closedminded, was not usually interested in curing people. Rather, it seemed to me that they were interested in profiting from disease, stopping any practitioner who had a possible answer. My eyes were opening, and I hated what I was seeing.

It was too late for my cousin Debbie, since her immune system was shot to hell, but would an alternative treatment work for my mother? We found a biochemist named Dr. Carey Reams, who did pH tests (acid vs. alkaline) of a person's saliva and urine. His theory was that if a person's pH balance was kept within or brought back to an optimal range, that person would become disease-free. We tried to contact him, but to no avail. Like Dr. Burton, he was under constant scrutiny by the medical

authorities as they hassled, persecuted, and eventually prosecuted him for practicing medicine without a license. In other words, if the therapies worked, the doctor was doing something illegal, especially if he used no drugs at all, only herbs, vitamins, minerals, and dietary changes. When Dr. Reams refused to stop helping people, he was tossed in prison over and over again. What kind of power did the medical authorities have to manipulate the system like that and put in jail doctors who had a clue how to offer help and relief to sick people with no hope?!

I was stunned. This was America, supposedly the land of the free. Where was our freedom to choose treatments when we got cancer or any other disease? It was all a myth. We were not free to heal ourselves as we saw fit, or to use anything that nature had created to feel better. It seemed like we had no health care system at all. When I fully understood that our government was more interested in working with the industries to make money than it was in healing people, I succumbed to the anger, disappointment, and awareness that were flooding me. I refused to go along with it. I was heading out to sea, my course set to discover a brand-new world where things made sense and people treated each other with the profound respect that nature and each and every one of us needs and deserves.

I was surprised at my mother's devastation when the cancer came back a third time. What did she expect after exposing her insides to some of the most toxic chemicals on earth? I barely blinked when I heard them telling her she had to undergo yet another round. I was accustomed to the doctor's MO by now and I was swiftly losing faith in the system.

"But I got so sick from the last round, I got worse," my mother said.

"Well," said the doctor, "I know it seems that way, but we have to get this cancer back under control."

As if they ever had her cancer in control in the first place! My mother sat there, wide-eyed like a mouse stuck in a trap, nodding her head in agreement. I looked straight ahead. Did the doctors think we were all idiots, as mindless as sheep walking off a cliff because the leader did it? All of a sudden, "Why Timothy" reared his head as I asked, "What about trying some natural forms of treatments like herbal formulas?" My mother's gaze pierced through me.

The doctor retorted, "Don't listen to those quacks and frauds. That stuff could kill her."

It became clear to me in that moment that most doctors had lost their ability to think creatively a long time ago. They were programmed and conditioned by the pharmaceutical industry, and they resented my questions because they didn't know the answers. Uncle Bob was right. It was all about the money. They were not interested in competitive and alternative methods of healing and watching people get well because there was no financial gain involved.

When I turned my attention back to the doctor, I thought *he* was the quack, not the rest of the world, and I laughed out loud.

"Something wrong here, son?" he asked, clearly annoyed that I was amused by something in such a serious moment.

Everything was wrong, but like a respectful, well-trained son, I said, "No, sir."

"Good," he said brusquely, "that'll be all for today." He got up and walked out of the room. The odd thing was that I suddenly felt excited. If the doctors were so terrified of nondrug therapies, they must work! I left the office determined to find out everything I could about the "quacks and frauds" of the world—the real healers. But first I needed to talk some sense into my dad.

"Dad," I said, "first Mom got butchered and then she got fried and poisoned. I'm sick of the doctors' stupid words: chemotherapy, radiation, remission. None of it is working. Can't you see they're killing her faster than the cancer ever could? How stupid do they think we are?"

My dad looked like he wanted to rip my head off, and I felt the hair on the back of my head stand on end. We locked eyes for what seemed like an eternity—until his expression suddenly changed. He dropped his gaze to the ground. "They're doing the best they can," he told me in a weak voice. "It just isn't working."

I sat on the couch beside my dad. "They're not doing their best," I said. "They always claim that the health of the patient is the most important thing, right? Then why are they threatened by other treatments that might work? Look what happened to Debbie as soon as she started chemo. No one can help her now. Look at what happened since Mom got radiation and chemo. She keeps getting worse. Enough is enough!" I said.

He shook his head, got up, and walked out of the room.

. . .

The next round of chemo made my mother so sick, she threw up profusely, her throat was swollen all the time, and she moaned all night long. I thought my lack of sleep at night was causing my inability to stay awake in school, something that plagued me the most right after lunch. I still wonder why it never occurred to me that my eating habits might be causing my desire to fall asleep. Today they would probably call the problem attention deficit disorder (ADD) and prescribe a drug. Back then, I lived with it, struggling to stay awake until the sugar in my system was finally under control.

The doctors pumped my mom full of a drug mixture they called Bromptins' Mix. It was predominantly morphine and she felt so little after she took it, she would doze off and sleep. In her waking state, she fell in and out of coherence. She'd start talking about something and suddenly say, "I was hallucinating. Sorry."

Just when I thought it couldn't get worse, my dying mother had become an incoherent morphine junkie. When I heard that Dr. Jackson was coming back to give my mother a vitamin B₁₂ shot, I couldn't wait to see the look of horror on his face when he saw what the doctors had done to her. I met him outside where I could talk to him alone and prepare him for what he was about to see.

"They're killing her," I told him.

"I've seen this quite a bit," he said calmly.

"My uncle is trying to get some laetrile," I said. "Maybe we could inject her."

"It's too late," Dr. Jackson told me. "Her veins are in such bad shape from the chemo, even if you smuggled it in and we tried it, her veins are so collapsed, it would be really hard to inject it. Besides, I can't administer it because it's illegal. I'd lose my license."

I stared at him, unable to respond as my mom slowly hobbled out the front door and stood to face us. "Hi, Dr. Jackson," she said. "I'm walking. This must be my lucky day."

Dr. Jackson looked at me and said, "Keep up the good work, Timothy. You have great instincts." And he helped my mother back to bed.

Over the following weeks, I watched the life draining out of my mother as her body was being poisoned and depleted. When she tried to vomit and nothing came out, she described the feeling as having her

intestines ripped out. To me, it looked like a python was slowly tightening its grip on my mother's neck, squeezing the breath out of her.

I lost myself in glazed jelly doughnuts, chocolate milk, sodas, and pizza. I was obsessed with understanding what had caused the cancer, and I began to delve more deeply into the suggested diets from alternative therapists. They all had three things in common: naturalness, simplicity, and safety, a far cry from the toxic drugs and chemical therapies the doctors were prescribing.

At this point, the simple act of walking hurt and my headaches were becoming intolerable, and I decided to take a big step and see a doctor on my own, since all our family money was being used to keep my mother alive.

I was a teenager when I made the appointment with the doctor who had been my pediatrician since I was a kid. I hoped he could help. "It's my feet," I said. "They're worse than before, and I have some wicked headaches to go along with them." I showed him my scales.

"Wow!" he said. "No foot modeling this week. You could scare away the buzzards."

We both laughed until he said, "Let's try this other cream. It's stronger than the last one, so if your feet don't fall off, it might work."

"And if it doesn't?" I asked.

"I have a saw at home," he teased. "If all else fails, we can cut them off."

I appreciated his sense of humor, since I hadn't laughed in a long time. He was so jovial, I took a chance and said, "I've been looking into diets and nutrition lately and I wonder if it has some connection to my problem. Also, what about the pesticides? I was exposed to a lot when I was a kid. What do you think?"

I was encouraged when, unlike other doctors I'd seen, he acted unthreatened by what I was saying to him. He even seemed to be thinking about it. "Well," he said, "the pesticides may have irritated your feet somewhat back then, but not now. Why don't you try some different brands of aspirin for the headaches and see what works best?"

"I was thinking," I tried to explain, "about the kinds of foods I've been eating. Isn't it possible that my diet could be causing it? Maybe Mom's diet is bad for her, too."

“No,” he said, smiling, “I’m afraid that’s not it. Try the cream and if your feet fall off, don’t call me.”

I left the office laughing and frustrated at the same time. If the gentlest, kindest doctor of all had written me off, it was obvious they were all too programmed and conditioned. The doctor I’d just seen had been taught to prescribe drugs endorsed by the U.S. Food & Drug Administration and nothing else. When I applied the doctor’s stronger cream, it calmed some of the itching but did nothing to stop the crackling.

As my headaches intensified, so did the stress at home. My mother now required oxygen to breathe, and her lungs were filling with fluid. The sound of her lungs crackling as she tried to suck in air through the oxygen mask echoed throughout our small house. It was back and forth to the hospital as her arms and legs wasted away. To this day, I’m haunted by the image of her holding her wig in place as I carried her into the bathroom. I remember thinking how mangled and sideways our lives had become, just like her wig.

My studies about food and natural healing taught me that not only should processed foods be excluded from a sick person’s diet, but also that no human being should be eating them. Most medical doctors considered eating whole foods to be a radical approach, constantly reminding me about quacks and frauds, but this was my final shakedown. At this point I knew my mother was a lost cause, since her immune system was virtually gone, but I needed the information for myself.

I got teased to no end, both in school and at home, when I started passing on foods that contained sugar and white flour. It was never easy for me. It was tough, like a junkie trying to get off heroin. I craved sugar, and when I ate vegetables instead, my dad and my friends suggested I go outside and graze on the front lawn. Neither of my parents, even my mom in her present condition, could fathom why I was changing my diet. I told them over and over but they were too stuck in their ways to understand that I was looking for relief, plain and simple.

When I observed my friends’ and family’s reactions to my new, healthier diet, I realized how thoroughly we’d been programmed by the food industry. It made no difference to them that I was getting clearer while my mother was becoming a zombie, too incoherent from the drugs to talk to me at all. The doctors were giving her drugs to cope

with other drugs, as our medical bills escalated while my mother's health plummeted.

One evening at the hospital, she looked at me through her big brown eyes and squeezed my hand. Then she passed out. I stared at the tubes hanging from her arms covered with bruises, the oxygen mask covering her face. If this was survival, I wanted no part of it. We as a society had gone off the deep end, allowing ourselves to be controlled by an industry that didn't seem to care about how their treatments were affecting our overall health.

I left my mother in the hospital that night, with thoughts swirling through my head. The house was quiet, I fell asleep almost immediately, and I was in the midst of a profound dream when a warm wave rolled over my body. My eyelids opened slowly, as if by themselves, and I felt a deep sense of calm and serenity. I lay there quietly, watching the sun rise, waiting for the phone to ring. When it did, my dad picked it up, said a few words of thanks to someone, and walked into my room. His voice choked. He gathered himself for a second and managed to say, "Your mother just passed away."

I looked out the window at the sky. "I know," I said.

It was unbearable to look at my father's face, his pain mixed with relief that the agony was over. I felt as if a giant spear had passed through my body and left a gaping hole as I got out of bed. I staggered outside to the front lawn and lay there on my back. "Thank you, God," I said, "for taking my mother out of her pain and suffering."

I cried into the grass, grateful that her ordeal was over. She was free and so was I, to continue my quest to learn the truth about healing, a cause to which I would dedicate my life.

