

WomanMade News, Spring, 2004

Purpose

by Margaret Dubay Mikus

Let me tell you a story, One that tells you as much about me as anything.

For most of my life I thought I was not a creative person. Science was the path that seemed open to me, and in 1982 I earned a Ph.D. in microbiology from the University of Chicago. My work was in molecular genetics (gene cloning) and I was good at it. But I did not fit. Something was missing. My life was off balance.

In graduate school, I had the first attacks of what was later diagnosed as multiple sclerosis. MS is caused by the immune system attacking the insulation surrounding nerve cells. The damage can be healed, but over time scarring can occur, leaving permanent damage. Symptoms come and go depending on what nerves are affected, including numbness, weakness, tingling, muscle spasms, fatigue, problems with sleep, balance, and vision. For me, as the disease progressed, it mostly affected my left side, which is controlled by the right hemisphere of the brain, the center of creativity. In some ways, it was as if I was cut off from my creative self. With intensive work and professional help, I healed from MS in 1995. Yes, I know that's not usually thought to be possible, but if you don't worry about that, then doors can open.

The following summer, I began writing a poetic journal that bubbled up from me as if flowing from some deep creative well. I was astonished and amazed when these poems seemed to touch others deeply. I resumed photography, which I had been unable to do when I had MS. And I continued working on my singing with a superb voice teacher. That "recovery of voice" fed my writing. All in the context of taking care of a house, husband, and two children.

A year later, I was diagnosed with breast cancer (two unrelated tumors, one in each breast). I was devastated, but gathered my resources and expanded my healing process. I chose to combine conventional medicine (surgery, chemotherapy, and radiation) with my own personal mix of unconventional therapies. Reconnection with my spiritual side, writing, music, and photography were essential to my healing from cancer—and transformed my life. I used some of these poems and photos when I designed my *Life Support Cards*™ and in my book, *As Easy as Breathing: Reclaiming Power for Healing and Transformation—Poems, Letters, and Inner Listening*. And I created my workshop series, *Expanding Our Possibilities of Full Blooming*™. With my poems as the core, I used energy balancing, flow writing, music, and visualization to help access creative potential.

One of the poems from *As Easy as Breathing* is called "A Messenger." To set the stage: Exhausted after surgery and chemotherapy, I was badly burned from weeks of radiation treatments and trying to decide whether to stop. How could I make a balanced decision when I was so off balance? I talked, I wrote, I read, I thought, and I listened. I cried out to the Universe for help. And I paid attention. Here was an immediate response:

A Messenger

A man came to my house today
to fix a sump pump
and replace the battery

He was heavy-set, wearing
smoke-filled work clothes
spoke kindly and worked well.

He talked of a sister who had died
of breast cancer and of her last year.
"Sometimes the cure is worse than the disease."

How clearly
I can occasionally
see;

so fearful of death
I start to believe in
limited view and limited options,

and lose hope
and lose heart.
I deserve better.

Margaret Dubay Mikus
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Sometimes the most ordinary people can help us, if we are paying attention. His comment, "Sometimes the cure is worse than the disease," unintentionally supported my decision to stop radiation. Three years later I mentioned the poem to him and gave him a copy, since he seemed open to it. (Something I did often.) Recently, when he came again to replace the sump pump battery, I mentioned that "A Messenger"

was in my book. This is what he told me: Three years ago, when he read the poem I gave him, he saw himself differently and was inspired to stop smoking! He was a heavy smoker and has not had a cigarette in two and a half years.

So this is what I want to say to you: Doing art from that deep honest place, in whatever form, can be healing, inspiring, and moving for you and for others in ways you do not control or even intend. I suspect there are many like me who grew up cut off from creative expression. As my story shows, that rift can be mended with awesome results. Hang in there!