

Laurna's Story

My Healings from Chronic Fatigue Syndrome

by A. Laurna Tallman

Introduction

The following account is skeletal and is limited to my personal experience. My own illness was the least disabling among our family members struck with Chronic Fatigue Syndrome. I have not attempted here to recount the spiritual nature of my journey or account for the obstacles that made my route to healing so long and painful. Neither have I thanked the many friends without whose support I could not have continued the journey nor have I touched on the major work of my husband and myself towards the healing of our family.

My academic training was in English and the social sciences, with postgraduate work in English. I had a short career in semi-professional and professional theatre (production and design), worked broadly in educational publishing, and then specialized in developing reading programs for the elementary grades. I spent several years as an administrator in educational research. After my marriage I developed curriculum materials for special programs in the Arkansas Ozarks and in Kentucky. My husband and I are freelance editors of university text books and live in rural Ontario.

The Illness

In the spring of 1988 I caught a virus that was being identified as 'Asian flu'. Until that time, in my adult life, it was very unusual for me to feel so ill that I would remain in bed, even for a day. For three weeks, I suffered such extreme vertigo, among other symptoms, that I remained in bed, and sometimes needed assistance navigating the stairs on the way to the bathroom.

I did not recover. I continued to feel as though I still had the flu, weary from the time I got up in the morning, with aching joints and muscles, sometimes with and sometimes without the debilitating vertigo. I continued to struggle to maintain my self-employment as a college text editor, care for my family, look after our rural property, but with sharply reduced abilities. Frequently I drew on all the discipline of my academic training to force my concentration. Some days I felt so mentally foggy that I had to stop working. Eventually I found myself turning down or avoiding new assignments. Our planned expansion of our business and my artistic projects (I was teaching wheel-thrown pottery in my own studio) had to be abandoned. All of my involvement in the children's schools and in the community had to be dropped, except for minimal involvement in church. I strained muscles in mild physical exercise, such as tossing a Frisbee, causing permanent damage. Several times during the winters I fell on ice as though I had lost some of my ability to keep my balance. I developed some problems with short-term memory. Formerly the sort of person who thrived on challenges, stressful situations began to take a physical toll. I consulted doctors, who told me some forms of flu were hard to recover from, even after three or four years. One doctor thought I might have lupus. I resigned myself to my condition.

I was out of the country for a year in 1993–4 and when I returned, changed family physicians. The new doctor had experience with Chronic Fatigue Syndrome and did extensive testing to eliminate other illnesses, including lupus; after a few weeks he diagnosed my Chronic Fatigue Syndrome. The Checklist of Dr. Jay Goldstein of California, who was doing pioneer work with this disabling condition, helped my

understanding of how the disease affects individuals differently as well as similarly. The condition was first called ‘fibromyalgia’ in Britain; the terms are used interchangeably by many physicians. CFS is also called myalgic encephalitis (ME) and such unhelpful terms as ‘the yuppie flu’. During the next few years I researched my condition and experimented with a number of recommended therapies to little avail.

Healing

The effort to understand and remediate one of my son’s learning problems led me to The Listening Centre. When Paul was interviewing me and my sixteen-year-old son for the first time (February 1997), he mentioned that a listening program also would help with my Chronic Fatigue Syndrome. I assumed that Paul, like most people I met, did not really understand the disability that I was living with and that I had thoroughly researched—although his story of the limp monks had caught my attention in *When Listening Comes Alive*.

With no expectations whatsoever, I undertook a listening program and found it pleasant, especially the Gregorian chant, and odd—a curiosity. During the listening I rested or read much of what was at that time available in the Listening Centre’s shelf of fascinating books on music, sound, kinetic-music therapies, and learning environments. At first I did not notice anything in particular. Then one day, very suddenly, I felt as though someone had thrown a switch somewhere in my head. My former sense of normal energy returned instantly. I was amazed, delighted, and puzzled. It was difficult for me to relate what had happened to me to those French monks Dr. Tomatis had analyzed and Paul had described. Nor did I know if it would last, or to what degree my array of CFS symptoms would be altered.

Simultaneously my son was undergoing what seemed to me no less than a miracle. He had lost all of the symptoms of dyslexic syndrome that had been displayed in him in one form or another from birth. I was so preoccupied with the changes in him that I paid relatively little attention to what was taking place in me. However, there were clear signs that I had all of my former energy and mental acuity back again. My sensory awareness was heightened. I was waking rested from sound sleep. My urge to create art returned. A few days later, the sister of the friend with whom we were staying in Toronto, whose family was non-English-speaking, was haemorrhaging seriously. I took charge of the situation, insisted against her family’s fatalistic despair that she be taken to the hospital, stepped into the role of mediator between the family and the medical staff, and then became the strong advocate for immediate treatment. I believe my renewed ability to act with energy and confidence saved the woman’s life. Furthermore, although I had been up most of the night under stress, I slept briefly and put in another full day. I knew something very significant had happened to me through The Listening Centre’s listening program.

In the weeks and months that followed my energy remained high, my immune system regained normal function, and my mental processes remained clear. Although an extremely stressful situation had developed within the family I was functioning at much the level of energy I had enjoyed before CFS had felled me eight years before. I probably did not gain full restoration of my muscles and related physique as I was post-menopausal and aging. I returned to editing, enjoying the challenges of college texts in logic, environmental issues, international economics, and so on without mental fatigue, fogginess, confusion, or memory problems, and with much of my former assertiveness.

Twice in later years I experienced viral illnesses that again damaged my inner ear. The vertigo and other symptoms of Chronic Fatigue Syndrome returned. The first time after a few weeks, quite fortuitously, sound energy from my sudden laughter (a TV ad struck me as funny) again, instantly restored the function of my inner ear and completely restored my health. The second period of illness occurred about

four years ago (2001) and for a number of reasons, including my care of my mother-in-law in Florida who suffered from Alzheimer's disease, I postponed action. I had reached a level of fatigue where getting up in the morning took effort and the pain in my feet and ankles was such that I was worried about falling on the stairs. Dizziness and vertigo of various levels of intensity were very frequent. I had to pace myself carefully to keep on working at editing and basic household activities. When I turned to care-giving I had to give up editing. My weight gain, which had been steady at two pounds per year with CFS, and that had abated with my first healing, now increased to ten pounds per year.

Three months ago I returned to The Listening Centre and using the LiFT undertook a listening program. The results were immediate. My energy level, measured in terms of my daily activity, doubled. A walk up the hill behind our house that had left me panting in June was now effortless. I felt as though a cloud had lifted from my mind, in terms of alertness. My short-term memory improved. My sensory awareness became much sharper, which I noticed particularly in terms of pain and discomfort where formerly there was no or little sensation. This allowed me to treat such things as muscles that had developed permanent spasms. My feet stopped hurting. I regained a more normal immune response, throwing off colds with normal upper respiratory symptoms instead of the deadening fatigue and joint pain of Chronic Fatigue Syndrome. This meant I could go into public places without always catching some virus or other. I regained the ability to shiver, to laugh, to cry—all signs of neurological health that had been diminished or lacking. My thumb and index fingernails are returning to normal shape (arched rather than flattened) and my fingerprints are returning—one of the odd symptoms of CFS is that the finger tips become significantly reduced in the characteristic ridges and valleys that form the fingerprint. I stopped taking a supplement to ensure sound sleep (something I had attempted on other occasions without success) and found this time that I no longer needed it; the hormone had been important to me, too, for joint pain, and I no longer needed it for that reason, either. My hunger level dropped, the weight gain has stopped, and even been reversed a little.

A month following my listening program I had become stronger, healthier, happier, more confident, more assertive, calmer in general but also capable of sudden and intense emotion (which I found a little uncomfortable to readjust to). I felt less pain from arthritis, without losing the improved sensory function for the sense of touch and kinesthetic awareness. My balance and posture improved. I started singing again, a long-time joy that had drifted away during the years of illness.

Two months later I continued well. In mid-December, when I realized a week had gone by without singing and humming, I also noticed that I was feeling more fatigue. I did some sporadic singing and humming, which seemed to put me back on track. For example, that week I drove to Toronto and back, both on Wednesday and again on Friday, filling the city hours with renewals of friendships, more driving, etc. and I felt none the worse for the long days, intense encounters, and 3-hour stints of navigating Highway 401 in heavy traffic. Prior to my Listening Training program that level of activity and neurological stress would have been impossible—one such day would have forced me down to a lower level of activity for several days and I would have succumbed to some virus or other, which would have added further days of pain and exhaustion. My immune response is much stronger. I am not falling prey to other person's colds and sniffles. Emotional encounters (for example, with my recently bereaved Aunt, with a friend returned from Europe after four years) do not leave me simply exhausted as formerly, but rather with normal feelings of compassion, satisfaction, contentment, joy.

When in January I noticed I was singing less, I began the The Listening Centre's Earobics Series and learned that my own version of humming needed instruction! I found the posture, breathing, and

humming exercises were improving my posture, my energy level, my emotional resiliency. While I had Chronic Fatigue Syndrome I felt more tired when I got up in the morning than I do now at the end of a much fuller day.

I am deeply grateful to Paul, Morana, Edna, and all The Listening Centre staff—and to the late Dr. Alfred Tomatis for his research into the connection between the health of the inner ear and the health of the rest of the body and for the discovery that sound stimulation can effect healing.

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