

# CHAPTER SEVEN

## ***Gratitude – A Reason to Live Better, Longer and Stronger***

Compassion is the realization that your actions have implications for the well being of others. With this understanding, a decision can be made to choose that which will benefit those in need. In the Buddhist tradition, this is called the Bodhisattva Vow. You take it for the sake of all sentient beings (those who have not found their way to happiness or liberation) and choose to return to the land of struggle and toil for the sake of helping others, even though you could live forever in paradise. This is a very significant realization and state-ment for one to make. Return to the real world and work harder... it sustains a life compassionate with actions for others because you can and see the dilemma. What is the value of paradise if there are still others suffering? Merely, the illusion of paradise.

It would be a few more years before I took my personal vows. The Universe was already asking me the question loud and clear... "Kid, what are you going to do with your life?" Wouldn't you feel just a little guilty about the fact you are indulging in only self-serving actions? The work police could come around the corner at any moment! I thought about my situation. I started working at about 12 years of age, finished med school at 28, and six years later I was still working seven days a week when cancer came to teach me a lesson. After a couple more years of work, I abandoned "work" as I knew it to essentially go on a quest! I find what I am looking for and yikes, I then have to construct the perfect life, or deconstruct my values and world view. Poor me? In reality, it was not that difficult, but more like putting a foot into a warm bath that was just right. Nelson felt good and the body just followed along. Reconnecting to "things" was a little odd. Having an entire apartment to ourselves for the first time in two years was a conscious decision that made us appreciate just how little we needed materially to make life work. Now our needs were "stark" in comparison to the house on the hill in Del Mar.

### ***Re-Invent a New Life***

I had a feeling that what I had to do could only be done once. It had to be done with reverence. The new lifestyle in Nelson needed a strong base. Balance was necessary to ensure that my fragile body would last the entire six months; the imaginary amount of time it would take to die if all things went wrong and the cancer came back. I felt that it could work out and made a list of the perfect lifestyle:

- Join a gym, something we had never done before.
- Continue in the internal arts of meditation. This aspect of life was taking on new depths as the internal alchemies were experienced from the inside out.
- Ponder about passion. What was passion, anyway? I felt that it was pivotal to longevity as an emotion and had many positive side effects. I had once had passion for architecture - could I actually experience passion again?
- A reading list, long and interesting.
- Cooking needed to be explored in our new kitchen and a garden planted.

And so life became the gym on a daily basis, excellent food, books and a time to nest. Life was good in Nelson. M and I were getting stronger, both mentally and physically. We started some design classes at the local Polytechnic and settled in. The renaissance had begun in full. Though we were not in the league of the peanut farmer from Georgia (Jimmy Carter, President, humanitarian, farmer, nuclear physicist), we felt proud of our new life. There was a satisfaction from establishing a new lifestyle on our own without the help or vision of those who had done it before. Actually, we did not know anyone that had accomplished our goals. There were no mentors and in fact, another decade would pass before I understood the significance of having mentors.

One unexpected spin-off of our interaction in the Nelson area was that we were meeting people while doing activities. This social interaction was different. No longer was I called "Dr. Stark." Now the interaction was simple – how good was your project in design? How much could you bench press? How much are you laughing on a daily basis? It was honestly the first time I felt accepted for who I was as a person, not who I was trained to be as a professional.

Lifestyle. The word itself denotes some panache, a little art-like flair, which adds fun to "life." We understood, as doctors and now people, that we are living gratefully in the world, that it took balance, planning and oddly, spontaneity to keep the animal alive. This mental construct was the basis for exploring joy and happiness over the next five years in Nelson. This was a clue to what healthy people do, and the idea, though fleeting at first, stayed with me.

Mike was a second-degree black belt in the Okinawan style of Bushin Ryu Karate. (He is now a 7th dan). He was a couple of years younger and about the same size physically. He worked as a personal trainer at the local gym we belonged to and taught his own karate classes in a church hall four times per week. Mike suggested I come to a few karate classes to see if I might like them. It was not long before I had the full kit, white belt and all. With aerobics classes, weight lifting and yoga, the Karate made for a full physical schedule as the renaissance marched on. With the change in my physical program, I passed another milestone.

It had been a little more than two years since I stopped Chemotherapy. The massive implosion of tumors in my lung cavities had left scar tissue, which caused a deep aching pain that migrated to my ribs at different points. This was disconcerting as it always felt like the cancer was returning. I felt it wasn't, but how could I be sure? I had a fool for a patient before, and that was me.

My theory was that the scar tissue would be stretched during the course of normal activity. When it broke, inflammation would be part of the repair process and I would have the sensation of the aching pain from the swelling. There was a gnawing doubt about this; but after about six weeks in the gym I had notched up the bench press and loaded the thoracic cavity in a way that had not been done since my college days. The pain was gone! Real strength was returning for the first time in a decade and life was interesting. Retirement was fantastic.

### ***The Monks Had It Right***

It was about this time I really began to get my head into Taoist philosophy. The longevity aspects of the formal training of monks made perfect sense. In the last millennia the training had been refined to a high degree with every question about the human body's needs and how to care for it answered, a pragmatic detachment to life or death was the bottom line against which all was

measured. It set up the view of the world for the master. It gave me a foothold, as I did not have a living mentor or map showing me how to proceed.

The goal was to live another six months. A loose system of exercise, diet and study had begun in earnest and I now had friends with historical accounts of monastic life. Yet the Chinese paradox was that I could not cling to the outcome. I had to let go and live each day; each moment needed clarity, conviction and passion.

My first understanding of Chinese Medicine was in medical school almost 14 years earlier. Now the dissection of the rich world of ancient China gave color and meaning to the formulae I had used in the treatment of my patients. It was essential to know the acupuncture meridian system to practise meditation, martial arts and how to eat correctly. Everything has a purpose, life is never a system of compartments; life is whole and connected. What one did in the kitchen allowed martial arts abilities to be purely expressed, which then allowed full mental faculty for the meditation practice.

Classical Chinese education would require other involvements if one were to be an "Immortal". Music, poetry, calligraphy, martial arts of many styles and even the bedroom arts were all considered areas necessary to master. My retirement did not have enough hours in the day. It was humbling to realise how much I did not know and how much existed at such a detailed and exacting level. The lesson was to learn and master all, and then find it wasn't necessary in the first place. The process takes about 100 years according to the Taoists.

Nelson provided a stable environment for in-depth study, punctuated with travel to Australia. We would test our theories about how the world worked with travel and observation in distant lands. We had already made the decision not to live in Australia. Learning about the land and indigenous people took over three years of part time travel. We would spend three to five months each year traveling and camping in the Outback; learning about plants, animals and the ancient ways of the aboriginal people.

### **Gain More Wisdom from Those Who Came Before You**

The oldest known tribe on the planet is the indigenous people of Australia. While some controversy exists over the exact time frame, it is probably close to 40,000 years that the Aborigines have existed in uninterrupted society. Think about that compared to the Anglo European or American Indian. It is literally 10 times the history of any other people on the planet. Despite this feat, they are some of the worst treated and almost eradicated species on Earth.

To us, it was as if Australia was a large loaf of bread and we could tear off small bits and feed ourselves for a very long time. The loaf never seemed to end and it tasted good.

Again, with a theme of mortality, I looked at this society with perplexed admiration. How did they do it? What philosophy allowed them to span a legacy for so many thousands of years in harmony with the environment? This was a riddle worth looking into. It appeared that the disease culture of the pure native did not exist. Everything was in perfect harmony in the Aboriginal world. The harsh environment was a candy store of richness and history if you knew how to use it. How did they do it?

## ***Diet Could Be Key***

Referring back to my farming experience, I examined the varied diet of the Aboriginal. Some estimates counted over 300 types of food in their diet. The sad thing is that when you confine these people to a Westernized diet, they cannot thrive any longer. In fact, their ability to metabolize carbohydrates is very limited and alcohol, the super sugar in my estimation, is poison to their systems.

## ***Political Struggles Always Play a Role***

Huge social and political problems face Australia. Yet, aside from all the strife and hardship endured since the arrival of the "white fella", their true spirit still shines through.

The separation of the world into compartments is a mental construct of the Cartesian system of logic. It was never considered an option to ancient Aborigines. In fact, the cosmos and planet were connected without question. Everything in the world had spiritual significance at the deepest level and this was held in memory to be celebrated with song at any instance. This was a completely different society. Isolated from the rest of the world, the Aborigines developed in isolation over the course of 40,000 years. The average person in ancient Australia lived and died in a tribe that had a migratory existence.

This held great interest for me as I too had been migrating all over the planet. What could these mysterious people teach me about living longer and better? It had worked perfectly until the Europeans arrived. The consequent conflict is one of the worst examples of social and human injustice the human race has ever created. I suggest that it is 200 years of genocide, coarse and underpinned by the British colonists. Not being British or a bigot, I was able to witness the beauty and plight of these Aboriginal peoples.

After three and a half years of study, I came to the conclusion that this unique and isolated tribe of almost a million people in 1788 was and is one of the most advanced species on the planet. As a people, they have developed right brain dominance, rich with special verbal, musical and visual capacity. Their story is more advanced than any other race of people I have ever encountered. We, as a counter-point race, cannot even communicate with the Aboriginal well enough to be able to measure their intelligence. Yet, as little as 50 years ago scientists and society have judged them as a subspecies.

This ignorance and arrogance continues in Australia today. The country is rife with indigenous turmoil and many unanswered questions about how to create a lasting Aboriginal lifestyle in a modern world. The struggle is, in fact, similar to the problem we all face today. Our planet is going to cull the weak ones and the shocking news is that eight out of ten are the weak ones! Do we want to pay this price with our children's blood? I think not when we look at it this way. However, the Australian Aboriginal is truly a mirror of our planetary problems, only on a smaller scale.

## ***The Message is the Same Regardless of the Culture***

Diversity of diet, spiritual harmony and unending awareness were the same messages I learned in Chinese Medicine and here they were again in this indigenous tribe. I was beginning to see a pattern. Perhaps, I could live another full six months? My spirit was soaring with the newly appreciated knowledge and I layered it atop investigations into pre-Buddhist Vedic history. This was completing the loop of understanding in Chinese Medicine and Taoist philosophy. Ayurveda as a system of healthcare is the oldest written form of Medicine on the planet. It is over 5000 years old and is responsible for the development of Chinese Medicine.

Ayurveda came from the three-element system or Tri-Dosha of fire, water and air. Taking these three elements, the Chinese system added two others – wood and metal. All systems of health use the elements of fire, water and air to summarize in relatable terms, the living and functional world around them. As I continued to study physiology, biochemistry and nutrition, it struck me how the philosophical systems of the ancient ones could actually be used in modern science without too much conflict. In fact, parallels had already been published between ancient Vedic teachings about the cosmos and current theory at the University of California Berkeley. This was quantum physics and the work of Fritjof Capra, Ph.D. that were included in his book, *The Tao of Physics*.

I was developing a holistic view of the universe and a way that I could actually continue to live in it. The ancient sciences were as

valid as quantum physics in my fight to stay on the planet. The internal dialog of just how to do life with certainty every day, was in fact, just that; a dialog, which aided the observation of daily events and served as a guide to navigation through the massive amounts of information I was trying to process.

In one sense, I was like Homer's Ulysses, looking for my beloved homeland. Held somewhere between my head and my heart, a peace must be found in this lifetime. The circle of life had become full and complete and as the years of self-imposed study drifted in Nelson, I was roused with an uneasy feeling that a bigger picture existed. There had to be a unifying theory, one that put to rest any question of doubt. This theory must include science and heartfelt faith of a righteous path that was superior to what was previously available. Was I asking too much? I did not feel I was. In fact, I felt the answers were very close and that the "dust of illusion was waiting to be removed from my eyes."

I went looking for the Holy Grail, both inwardly and outwardly and this is disruptive to any relationship. I was swimming towards an unknown distant shore, knowing it was a desperate life-challenging event. Doing this left no security for M. I quickly learned that I could not return to the raft, I had pursued a path of following truth and had allowed the universe to lead me. I had to remain open and vigilant to my quest. It was a life lived consciously, healthfully and with purpose!

The inner quest had ramifications on my relationship, ones I never saw coming. M had been there with me and for me during medical school, after graduating, in practice, through my cancer, and during my retirement. But it was my restlessness and internally focused struggle that ended my relationship with M in 1995. We had been in each other's company every day for 18 years. The raft of attachment was breaking up in the sea of life and this was disconcerting and painful but all the study about the Tao was helping me cope.

As one pushes the mental and emotional boundaries of daily existence you must be willing to accept change at all levels. M and I were inseparable, however, over the next five years that relationship would have to be sacrificed for the sake of further personal development.

Whatever it took, life had to be lived and sometimes the mental constraints of relationships get in the way. Rinpoche reflected once on this; he thought that those who entered relationships were "very brave", as he could not have the courage to take responsibility for another in that way... "Very difficult," he would say. Being independent in thought and not relying on another was a hurdle that had to be jumped if full realization was to be achieved.

Right or wrong at the time, ending the relationship seemed to be a positive move for both of us. Gratefully, we are still friends and confidants on our journeys. We both have new partners and we occasionally visit each other's home with support and reverence for our history shared. She leads a gentle life in the U.S. and Australia, floating between the two. Life is perfect if you let it be.

## ***A Higher Purpose and Vow Always Should Be Considered Important***

Does one always know there is a higher purpose to their life? I think so. The feelings of insignificance of one's life can vanish, seeing the complete trust placed in a parent by a baby's gaze. The connection is that simple. Trust, love and commitment are the invisible adhesives, holding life together so it can be stitched into solid fabric. This fabric gives shape and texture to a life, short or long; it's your life and you have to wear your fabric every day. What I had just been given? Wow! I was still alive and had learned so little about so much. How could I ever hope to find the unifying theory of life? Khensur Thabkhey Rinpoche, a Tibetan Lama mentioned previously, was 800 years old when I first met him. This man had chosen over and over, for the last eight centuries to be reincarnated to the same purpose – to teach with compassion, His Holiness, the Dalai Lama. Rinpoche was from a long line of Lamas dedicated to being personal tutors to the Dalai Lama; each time he was reincarnated to his path. It's not just H.H. that comes back each lifetime to teach; there is a whole support team. In the later years of his physical existence, he was sent to New Zealand to expound the Dharma to those who would listen. This was not the first Lama I had met - but he was the Lama for me. He and I had an understanding early in our meeting. I had work to do and what he held in his head was integral to my work. I took my vows with him and never looked back; I knew it was the right path.

The Bodhisattva Vow expounds that one must do all that is necessary to achieve a life with high merit and mastery. Respectful and dutiful to all the common responsibilities, one is asked to reach for enlightenment in this life and then when one is able to leap into unending bliss, come back and join the masses until all reach the same equanimitable space. This was what I was meant to do and I sensed it. My pain and brush with death had been a preparation for a knowledge that could reduce or eliminate the pain in others. When practised, this unifying code of conduct would allow those who wanted liberation to achieve it, but I was not Buddha! What was I going to teach?

Khensur Thabkhey Rinpoche had a method and as I absorbed all that my turtle egg thick skull could, the genius of this man burst forth from my heart. My lesson had been easy for the Lama to see, once examined from an untached and enlightened point of view. Overcome all adversity, go to school, become a doctor, overcome terminal cancer, educate yourself to a higher level and spend your life teaching the methods of health, discovered and refined over a lifetime.

Rinpoche pointed out how "STARK" the message was! He thought it was hilarious, too. That was it! It was the birth of STARK HEALTH as a concept of simplicity and clarity.

Dharma is so simple. I was even given the name of my method with my birth; but there was still much work ahead. To write the unifying code of the universe in just a few pages was easy, Einstein had done it! What I needed was another language if anyone else was expected to read it. I left New Zealand and returned to the U.S. to allow passion and vision to unite. What actually happened was a lot different than I expected but exactly you would expect according to Rinpoche. It would take another 10 years to bring the concept to fullness.

## ***Why Not Help Others with What I Knew?***

I had an idea. I could write my newly formed idea and distribute it via this newly developing technology called the internet. It was 1997 and I was living on an "island" outside Nelson at the end of a very long farm road. I went online! Progress was very slow, but bit-by-bit, I began to compile the information for the website – whatever that was. At around 1100 pages on the computer, it was time to take a breather. Mom's health was failing so I decided to skip the New Zealand winter and go to the United States.

### ***Riding the Air Waves Was Similar to Riding the Waves in Life***

During 1996, I had discovered a new sport, one that filled me with passion and adventure. It was paragliding! As described by another flier from Scotland, "You take a bag of laundry, walk to the top of a perfectly good hill, inflate it and jump off into thin air." Paragliding was the three dimensional surfing I had been looking for. Concerned about the amount of time it was taking out of my life, Rinpoche encouraged me to investigate "passion" and saw it as a good thing.

The previous winter I had been to Europe and had competed in a dozen or so international competitions. Paragliding is similar to yacht racing. Landmarks are used as buoys, with the fastest one around the course winning. The courses vary from 20 to 60 miles depending on the weather and are designed to drop about 90 percent of the field along the way to the goal. Walking with a 20-

kilogram pack on your back, hitchhiking through the countryside, just adds to the mystique of this sport.

I packed the paraglider and headed for California. My mission, secondary to my mother's health, was to represent New Zealand in an international competition in Aspen. Little did I know how it was soon to change my life.

The problem with Aspen is that those who are rich consume unending amounts of resources. I could not believe that a campground with a shower in it could not be found in a 50-mile radius when there were so many mansions on the hillside! After a cold night sleeping in my car in the canyon at a place aptly named "Difficult," (to an enlightened one, this should have been a clue!) I went to town the next morning for a cup of hot coffee. Sunny and warm, I sat and just soaked up the mountain air. The next thing I knew, a very attractive lady, with an equally handsome Boxer dog, asked if they could join my table. "No worries, Mate," I said. The future Mrs. Stark sat down and a conversation began.

## ***An Achievement Worth a Pat on the Back***

I managed to finish amongst the top dozen U.S. pilots at the competition and stayed in Aspen for the season, smitten with my new friend. As I was going back to New Zealand in the southern Spring, I made plans to leave. Sharon and I were getting serious; it seemed like we were a great match. She was a medical doctor with a specialty in radiology; I was a Chiropractor with an interest in all things including high-level training in radiology, so I could at least understand her language. She was outgoing, athletic and had a lifestyle of her own making.

By fate or destiny, I'm not sure which, I asked her to marry me prior to boarding the plane for my return to New Zealand. I was to return within a month, with glider and possessions in hand, momentarily turning my back on New Zealand.

If one has to live in the United States, Aspen is about as good as it gets. A town of about 5000, it boasts Gucci, Lauren, Prada and Fendi outlets just to make a statement to the world. This combined with the beautiful mountains and cooler summers make it a haven, sought after by the rich and often not so famous. With my work from the last eight to 10 years on hold, I amused myself, how enamored I was with it all. As the winter set in, I realized I was about to learn to ski for the first time. How much fun could one have! Developing the website to which Rinpoche had given me the name, "StarkHealth," was a project worth the work. Also, slipping on the boots, walking to the Gondola every day and soaking in the steam room in the afternoon at "The Aspen Club" has to be as good as it gets in the USA. I skied over 100 days that winter, adding another sport to my belt. Was I losing my way, my spiritual path in the land of the rich and famous? New Zealand called. By the following year, Sharon and I were on our way back to Christchurch. How my life and focus had changed in this time! We lived in the city and began our new life - but it didn't work. By the following year we had moved back to Aspen, restless with both the changing world and ourselves. The Universe would have lessons to teach me whether I was interested or not. Letting go is something not all people can do. You have to negotiate your boundaries when you come at one with your own death, not everyone can do that and as the relationship with Sharon went on, it became clear over the years that defining my own boundaries would be a lesson learned.

## ***The Invisible Magnetism in Life***

Magnetism is one of the first experiments I recall from school Science projects. Iron filings are placed on a piece of paper and a magnet is pulled underneath the paper to move the iron filings "invisibly." With this simple experiment, one can see that which is unforeseeable; the effect of magnetism. Aspen was similar. While we had ideological problems with it, we were pulled back. It was just like a magnet.

In the Summer of 1999, we attended a weeklong medical conference in Snowmass, Colorado on Wilderness Medicine. At the seminar was Dr. Ron Rothenburg, M.D. who talked about Anti-Aging Medicine. He claimed that the hormonal system was the master link to the aging process and everything else depended on it, including pathology.

I paid attention; this was the first time I had ever heard a Medical Doctor make sense about the topic of health, prevention and a rationale for reversing physical decline.

Sharon was off to California and immediately signed up with Rothenburg as a patient. I observed the process and was intrigued by the tenets but not the practice. While I could see the science behind the decline of hormones and how they opened the door for accelerated aging processes, I disagreed with the idea; prescription hormones were a quick fix to put life in order. Anti-Aging Medicine tenets state that the hormone level of a healthy, active 25 to 35-year-old is what exceptionally fit and healthy people have, regardless of age. If we mimic these levels in a 50, 60 or 70-year-old with prescription medications, they should feel like their younger counterpart. And they did.

I decided to study the topic more in depth and attended my first Anti-Aging Medicine Conference in Chicago. I could feel the energy in that room of 5000 doctors. For the first time, interventional medicine could actually work preventively. As a Chiropractor, I had always embraced the ideal of preventative care. Patients would come monthly for "tune-ups" to stimulate their nervous system via manipulation and thus modulate their organ and muscular system to function better - before illness occurred. For close to 100 years, this has been the Chiropractic way. Now the very same people who called us quacks discovered it was true all along. Prevention rocks!

I realized that the rest of the world was slowly waking up to my new field of endeavor. The hormone theory of aging had merit and the effects of lifestyle on health were actually greater than any drug in the majority of cases. In fact, Allen Mintz, M.D.; the founder of Cenegenics, a very successful Age Management Clinic in Las Vegas, reported "Over 90 percent of patients could achieve optimal hormone levels with just the judicious use of lifestyle." This confirmed everything I had learned from the Vedic, Chinese, Chiropractic and Medical fields; but how could I put it in a capsule and sell it to the world? I mean, it involved sweat and effort, two additives people don't like!

Over the next few years I would move back to New Zealand three more times. Moving can be a distinct stressor in life. Because I had done it so many times in my life, I had learned to detach from the stress of moving and uprooting one's life. However, I believe it was more difficult for Sharon to move and the stresses caught up with her. It was an intense moment in my life, as the emotional liability of my relationship and its effects on my health were seen for the first time. I had let myself slide physically for the first time since my recovery from Chemo. It was not Sharon's fault; it was my lesson if I chose to learn it. I vowed to regain my strength, composition and focus. I had learned to set boundaries of what was and was not in my personal environment and relationships. A painful, poignant lesson learned and we began the "divorce process" in 2006.

## ***Couldn't Resist the Urge to Help Others Heal***

Anti-Aging Medicine appeared to be such a major part of the puzzle of human health. I dreamed about the potential of this new body of knowledge to help patients. It wasn't long before I was convinced that Anti-Aging Medicine worked. I began seeing patients in my clinic in Christchurch in 2007. By 2008, I had a personal assistant and actual objective proof that my patient population was

doing as well or better than those on hormone replacement therapy. I had arrived and the information was slotting into place at a very fast pace. A rationale now existed for a natural, non-pharmaceutical Anti-Aging practice and lifestyle, which could be objectively proven.

My patients had proven to me as I had proved to myself, that the body could function better with less risk, and possibly longer. It was a guarantee for quality of life for anyone who was willing to follow the program. While I practised what I preached to my patients, the two and a half days of patient contact time was becoming an increasingly busy schedule. I needed to perfect a method of education for my patients as well as a method of teaching other doctors the high standards required to do this work. Again, the Universe supplied the answer in the form of a charismatic Australian teacher named Matt Church, a self-made guru of the media arts, writer, speaker, mentor, coach and the like. I quickly learned better methods of communication and embraced many of his ideas as superior methods of facilitation for patients and doctors. I was back in the fast lane this time but it had taken 20 additional years of training to realize just how precious the mission was. As Matt would tell me, "Patterson, you have to accept that you are the Guru of Anti-Aging Medicine, and teach with passion and conviction."

## ***Reflections on the Journey***

The journey from sitting on my sofa, crying softly to myself with the acceptance of my death just 20 years prior, to having in my hands today, the most advanced system of personal mental and physical health is astounding. I remain humbled by the blessing and opportunity at hand. I am humbled by the fact that people I do not know will read these words and take meaning from them, and then return to their families to take actions that will improve the quality of their daily life. I am humbled by the fact this information and these simple actions compound, like interest, and it's daily interest! Any banker will agree that's the best kind. In addition to the physical blessings, I have to acknowledge that as a man and individual in a modern time, I have not been an easy person to live with or be around. We all must take responsibility for our own actions and what we will allow to happen in our interpersonal relationships. For many years I was unclear of what role I wanted to play or was expected to play in the game of life with my partner. Now, when the pain of divorce made me get clear about what were the most important things to have, an incredible thing happened – an angel appeared!

In one way I defined my perfect partner via the positive and negative experiences I had in the past and what I "thought" I would want going forward. Who showed up was an amazing person, one who had also been on her personal development path for the last 20 years. She had done the work and understood what I had discovered about personal growth – it's never really done. The joy of being where you are, the joy of being with whom you're with, at the time you are there, has defined a peacefulness and intensity to "now" that was unknown to me previously. Gayel in every way has allowed this process of passion in life to continue with physical and spiritual support. The days that are numbered and yet to be counted are insignificant, as all are a gift.

With gratitude, I awaken each day with two questions on my mind. 1) Am I breathing? If I am, then it's a great day and 2) How are you, Patterson, going to give something back to this planet today? With self-love and gratitude, I can do anything! The passion of answering the question makes me hop out of bed and get started!

Well, everything is connected to everything. I need to have a strong body, nourished by the best food available and lastly I need a dash of passion about my goals this day. Planning for success, I know when to work out, what to eat and when to take private time. With what some would consider exceptionally low goals for the day, I now have a platform for success.

## ***Decisions to Live Affect More Than Just Ourselves***

In medical school, one of the first courses we take is Gross Anatomy. We identify the landmarks on the surface that orient us to the structures that are below. We go deeper into the subject and take a course in Surgical Anatomy, not missing a stitch of tissue along the way. I remember my examination one day with a pin in the abdomen of the cadaver and the question: From the surface to the deepest structure, name each layer of tissue.

This is similar to what happens in life. As you look at the world you live in and make decisions for yourself and your loved ones, you affect them and yourself both on the surface and to the deepest parts of their being. All this happens with simple decisions on how to live each day.

I remember the feeling of being overwhelmed when I started med school. You, dear reader, may overwhelm with health issues that arise in your life. However, once you learn to manipulate your environment to your advantage, this sense will disappear. You need to know two things. Firstly, what is the Gross Anatomy of the situation – where all this started and all the death traps and disease risks you are taking with your life? And secondly, what is the Surgical Anatomy of the situation – how do you live with gratitude, humility and a sense of purpose? I call this amazing process "STARK HEALTH," the direct uncluttered view of the structure and function of health. With these tools, you can protect that which is so very precious....life. It is