

BEYOND THE PAIN

10

Steps to Living with Power & Freedom
after Separation & Divorce

Reclaim

Your Power and Create
Your Life with Purpose

as a flower blossoms from a bud
as a butterfly emerges from its cocoon
as surely as day follows night
from your darkest despair
comes your greatest bliss



Allannah Hunt

www.powerandfreedom.com

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Separation & Divorce

Allanah Hunt

**to every woman whose heart is breaking, whose dreams are
shattered, who feels lost, alone and betrayed . . .**

this is for you

The Fairy Tale

Once upon a time there was a little girl who heard the wonderful stories of Cinderella, Sleeping Beauty, Rapunzel and Snow White. She read tales of princesses who found their handsome princes and lived happily ever after in a beautiful castle where everything was perfect. She played 'dress up', borrowed her mother's cosmetics and dreamed of being a beautiful princess herself one day. She saw photos in magazines—beautiful women wearing gorgeous wedding dresses, handsome men in tuxedos by their sides. Her mother talked about her own wedding and how this little girl would grow up and find her own 'man of her dreams', get married and have children of her own.

She pored over bridal magazines and talked about the beautiful dress she would wear on her wedding day. All she needed was a man by her side—and one day she found him. The perfect guy who made her heart pound, made her laugh, who held her gently and kissed her passionately. He made her head spin, and she knew she was in love. On the day he proposed she felt she had arrived. She was a success. She dreamed of their wonderful honeymoon, planned where they would live and dreamed of the life they would have together. Her life was complete. She would live happily ever after . . .

Where did it all go wrong?
What happened to the life I planned?
Where did my handsome prince go?
How did I get here?
This is not what I signed up for!
I don't understand ...

The Reality

A dream is a wonderful thing but it is just that. A fairy tale. A fantasy created in the mind. A picture of a future we believe to be true. So true and real, that we live our lives as if it already exists. And when our life doesn't match up to the image we have created, we are disappointed, disillusioned and often very angry. We look for someone to blame for our unhappiness.

Often we are so focused on the dream we fail to see the reality that surrounds us. It is very rare indeed for there to be no warning signs prior to the breakdown in a relationship. As women, especially those with young children, our lives are so hectic that often the last thing on our minds is spending quality time without partner. And yet we wake up one day and feel cheated that we have lost that 'loving feeling' with the person we started the journey to our dream alongside. We look at our partner as an idiot, uncaring, absent or irritating, but remember when you looked at this same person through the eyes of love? Remember how wonderful they looked then? Between trying to earn the money to support the dream, juggling the children, the household, family commitments, a social life and trying to find time for yourselves as individuals, something's going to give. Each of you resent the other for what you perceive is their easier life. You feel alone and overworked and all along you fail to realise that the problem is not your life, but your expectations about it that is causing all the heartache . . . a dream that was never a reality in the first place.

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MY STORY

After two failed long term relationships, I felt lost, alone and disillusioned. I wondered what I could have achieved in my life if I had put the same amount of energy into myself as I did my relationships. Had I wasted the last twenty-five years? After all, apart from a wonderful son and daughter, what did I have?

But do you know what I found? I found me! The 'me' I never realised was missing from my life. Perhaps I would have found a different version of me if my life had gone in a different direction. But I like this version. I am proud of what I have overcome and who I am. I have made plenty of choices which, if I had my time over, I may change but I have no regrets and just maybe by sharing some of my experiences and insights, I can help you to find the best version of 'you'.

I am not perfect by any means. I am definitely a work in progress. However, I have learned to see the fantastic, unique and beautiful things which make me the woman I am. I am not defined by what I do, who my partner is, or how successful my children are. I hold true to what I know about myself, the vision I see for my life, and every day I am grateful for the possibilities that exist around me.

It certainly wasn't always this way. Born to a young mother living with a man several years older than her, my start in life was hardly the stuff of fairy tales. My sister was born two years after me and by the time she was 18 months old my parents had split and the three of us were living with my grandfather. I don't remember this time but I know that after a couple of years we moved out on our own. As a single mum in the 1960s and '70s, life was a challenge for my mother. She was only in her twenties, raising two girls on her own and doing the best she could.

Early on in my life she started going to a very conservative church. Our lives became centred around the church and the many services we attended there. To a large extent the church controlled the congregation through a code of behaviour more absorbed than overtly taught. There was an atmosphere of 'spare the rod and spoil the child'; that children needed to conform and if necessary, they needed to be broken in order to 'save their souls'.

Almost every other family in the church seemed to epitomise the 'perfect family'. Dad, Mum and the kids. They seemed such happy units. I felt we were looked down on and pitied and for some reason I can't explain, I didn't fit in with the other girls. As we grew up it seems girls left school, got a job and were married by the time they were 19 or 20. It appeared that this is what a girl should do. That getting married and having children was the 'correct' path for any good Christian girl.

I want to stress here that my sister and I have a very different perception and experience of our growing up years. I had been rebelling for many years against the strict controls my mother handed down as she tried to instil in her daughters the teachings of the church. As I refused to conform, I started to believe I wasn't good enough. I had the impression that, unless I behaved in the way she and the church expected, I was a bad person. Someone nobody could love. Needless to say, I

wanted to leave home as soon as possible and by the time I was 18 I was out in the world on my own.

Unfortunately, growing up without a father and in such a sheltered environment, I had no real idea how to behave or what the world was about; and certainly when it came to men, I had no experience whatsoever. The church segregated boys and girls from the age of eight and therefore the only contact I had with boys was at school. I was so shy and different from the other kids that I had no friends there either. It was as if I was not 'good enough' for church friends and 'too good' for school friends.

Even as I rebelled against the church ideals, I found myself married and pregnant with my son a 19 years of age. Two years later my daughter was born and I set about trying to create the perfect family I had seen around me as I was growing up. I stayed home whilst my husband worked extremely hard to provide for us. He worked full time whilst studying for six years to complete his degree and from the outside we came across as having the perfect life.

However, my reality was something very different. I still didn't feel loved or accepted. All I could see and hear were the negative things that confirmed my own beliefs about myself. I just couldn't see how much my husband cared and treasured not only me but our children; how hard he worked to provide a good life for us; how responsible a man he was. No matter what he did, it was never enough for me to truly accept I was loved and from this perception I created a nightmare for myself.

After 18 years our marriage finally ended and I looked forward to a life of my own. It was at this time I met a man who was also feeling unloved and unhappy in his marriage. Somehow we thought it would be a good idea to get together. I think it lasted about seven weeks before he returned to his family.

Suddenly, I was facing the reality of my life. I had never lived on my own before, and the adjustments I was making were overwhelming. It took me three months of panic attacks, very little sleep and buckets of tears before I decided to stand up for myself and create a life.

I found a job and filled my life up with activities to distract me from my pain. Within a month of starting work I was in a new relationship with a man who was several years younger than me and who had come out of a difficult break-up about six months before. He was sweet and vulnerable and I was flattered by his attention. Over the next eighteen months, I bought my own home, had both my children living with me and changed jobs. I was still seeing this man and despite the fact that there were problems between us, we decided to take our relationship to the next level and he moved in to my home. A year later I turned 40 and we took a trip to another part of the country to visit his family. I am not even sure how it happened now, but I decided to up and leave my life and children (young adults) to move to his hometown. I bought a property there and we moved in together with a dream of the life we would create together.

For a while we were happy – we were even engaged to be married. However, the dream became a nightmare as we made decisions which brought enormous stress

into our lives. We were pushing so hard to create the dream that we lost each other along the way.

My life crumbled around me, I lost my business, a great deal of money and my partner too. Once again I was facing a life which looked very different from the one I had imagined.

This time I was physically burned out, emotionally too and I plunged into a dark depression. I really could not see any reason to go on. However, with the support of my family and a few good friends I started to heal.

I had learned a lot about myself in the years since my marriage ended and even though this relationship had also fallen apart, I discovered I was still here. Even though it appeared on the outside that I had lost everything, I had in fact gained 'me'.

I worked very hard over the following year and discovered that a number of beliefs I had lived my life from were in fact lies. Someone else's truth that had nothing whatsoever to do with me. Things I had been taught from a small child that had coloured the way I saw the world. That established a set of expectations both unrealistic and impossible to meet. These beliefs created my experience and I realised if I wanted a different result, I had to learn to do things differently.

I grew to understand I needed to put boundaries in place to ensure the people and situations I attracted into my life were there for the right reasons; that they were adding to my life even as I added to theirs, and that I recognised the appropriate place each person should have in my life. In my need to feel loved, I had allowed people, particularly men, to get too close and I had given too much to my own detriment.

Even though all of this I never allowed anyone to take away my identity. It got a little squashed on occasion but I'm still here and I am learning each and every day that my relationship with myself is the most important one I will ever have – the only one which will last my whole life. I choose every day to be my own best friend, to surround myself with love and care, and as I do, I am able to give to others.

INTRODUCTION

The fact that you have picked up this book is a sign you want something to change. Perhaps you have experienced the breakdown of a relationship or maybe you are on the brink of leaving one. It may be many years since your split or it could be just the other day. To lose someone you love, or once loved, is one of the most painful experiences in life. Add to this the misunderstandings, sense of betrayal and often cruel words people say to each other when they split and it can be an experience almost impossible to overcome.

Romantic relationships can be wonderful – where you can feel a connection to one special person – unlike any you have with the other people in your life. In that connectedness is love, joy, peace and hope – a feeling of euphoria as you hold on to your thoughts about this wonderful person who makes you feel so good, who makes your heart skip a beat and causes you to shine more brightly. You love how you feel when you are together. The energy created between you makes the air crackle and you feel more fully alive and present than ever before. It appears you have found your perfect partner and you are so happy you could burst.

How is it then, so many relationships end in pain and disillusionment? Instead of a partner, friend and lover you find the person you are with has turned into a stranger. Someone who is a shadow of the one you loved so dearly. You feel uncertain and stressed as each of you struggle to cope with your feelings. Arguments become commonplace, and in order to escape from your own pain you either lash out at your partner or shut down emotionally, and your partner does the same. Where you once felt connected by love, you now feel far away and isolated from each other. It seems no matter what you do to try to reach out you keep ending up in the same place. Eventually one of you decides you don't want to do it anymore and the relationship falls apart.

But what happened? Did your partner change? Did you? Or is there something more going on that neither of you is aware of.

As the second of two serious relationships broke down and I found myself alone and struggling to understand, I asked myself, "What am I doing that has caused me to end up here again?"

The answer to that question is the basis of this book.

I want to show you a new perspective; to teach how to take a look at the life you currently have and create it anew; to discover the wonderful woman you are; to

reconnect not with your partner, but with yourself; to truly become alive and present in your own life.

Together we are going to take a journey through three distinct stages of discovery. At the start of each section is part of a poem I wrote before I started the book. In its entirety it shows the path you too will follow as you move from pain into Power & Freedom.

In Part One - Awareness, you will learn the skills you need to look at the life you have created thus far. In Part Two - Acceptance, you will see both the past and your current circumstances with a new clarity. And in Part Three - Celebration & Freedom, you will discover how to create a new life filled with joy.

My hope is, as you read the words on the following pages and absorb the exercises I have designed for you, that you will discover your own truth. That you will reclaim your Power and begin to live with Freedom.

PART ONE

AWARENESS

there in the road she saw
her shattered dreams where they
lay torn and broken
like victims of war
lifeless and cold
and she sobbed as she cried
to a universe that seemed
not to care that she
had toiled and tried
to no avail
she turned her face to the sky
as her tears flowed unchecked
she formed the question
she begged to know why
this pain was hers
she could not understand
how life could be so cruel
when she had given
her all to their plan
her very soul
how could it all have gone
so very far awry
as far as she could see
so terribly wrong
a nightmare lived
and as she stood she stopped
and looked back at her life
the world she had created
like a bubble popped
no trace to see
invisible this life
that she had once believed
was everything and more
she felt as if a knife
had pierced her soul

There came a time when the risk to remain tight in the bud was more painful than the risk it took to blossom. *Annis Nin*

AWARENESS

The first step in any process of change is to understand where you currently are and how you got there. You need courage and enormous bravery to take a long, hard look at yourself in the mirror and be one hundred per cent honest.

You will be asked to look at decisions you have made and learn what motivated you to make them. You may discover things about yourself you didn't know, do not like or struggle to understand.

It may be painful at times but if you work with honesty and openness, you can learn the tools that will enable you to transform your life.

Let us begin ...

Chapter One

STOP

Discontinue

In order to make a change we must first stop what we are currently doing. Imagine a train with two engines, one at either end. Now imagine both of these engines as they each try to pull the carriages in the direction each is facing. They wouldn't get very far would they? One engine's efforts would cancel out the others and they would either make no progress at all or tear the rest of the train apart. The same is true in the process of change. If we do not stop and change direction, nothing happens or we fall apart as a result of the enormous stress we put ourselves under.

Managing everyday life can be stressful so it's particularly important for your health and wellbeing, as well as for your state of mind to take the time to stop when things are changing.

Let's have a look at stress for a moment. There have been official studies done to determine the impact certain life events have on us. Developed by Thomas Holmes and Richard Rahe with the University Of Washington School Of Medicine, the stressful life events scale is also known as the Social Readjustment Rating Scale. Not only negative events cause stress but also events we would consider good. In times of stress our already busy lives can seem impossible to maintain. Even the simplest of tasks can require a huge effort.

The chart below shows various events, and beside each, a rating signifying its level of stress.

Number	Event	Value
1	Death of a Spouse	100
2	Divorce	73
3	Marital Separation	65
4	Jail Term	63
5	Death of Close Family Member	63
6	Personal Injury or Illness	53
7	Marriage	50
8	Fired at Work	47
9	Marital Reconciliation	45
10	Retirement	45
11	Change in Health of Family Member	44
12	Pregnancy	40
13	Sex Difficulties	39
14	Gain of New Family Member	39
15	Business Readjustments	39

16	Change of Financial State	38
17	Death of a Close Friend	37
18	Change to Different Line of Work	36
19	Change in Number of Arguments with Spouse	35
20	Mortgage Over £50,000	31
21	Foreclosure on Mortgage	30
22	Change of Responsibilities at Work	29
23	Son or Daughter Leaving Home	29
24	Trouble with In-Laws	29
25	Outstanding Personal Achievements	28
26	Spouse Begins or Stops Work	26
27	Begin or End School	26
28	Change in Living Conditions	25
29	Revision of Personal Habits	24
30	Trouble with Boss	23
31	Change of Work Hours or Conditions	20
32	Change in Residence	20
33	Change in School	20
34	Change in Recreation	19
35	Change in Religious Activities	19
36	Change in social Activities	19
37	Loan Less than £50,000	17
38	Change of Sleeping Habits	16
39	Change of Number of Family Get-Togethers	15
40	Change in Eating Habits	15
41	Single Person Living Alone	14
42	Vacation	13
43	Holidays	12
44	Minor Violation of Laws	11

Here's how to use the scale:

- If an event has taken place in your life in the last 12 months, copy the value showing beside the event
- If a particular event has happened more than once within the last 12 months, multiply the value by the number of occurrences.
- Add them up to obtain the final score

Everyone's ability to cope with stress and their reactions to it are different, but the following analysis is based on your likelihood to develop a stress-related illness in the near future.

- **Low** – if your score is below 149
- **Mild** – if your score is between 150 and 200
- **Moderate** – if your score is between 200 and 299
- **High** – if your score is above 300

When we look at the chart above, we can see divorce and separation are numbers two and three on the list, suggesting a high level of adjustment and effort required to regain stability. Add to this the additional changes that may occur in your financial circumstances, whether your children continue to live with you, perhaps starting a job for the first time in many years, moving home or any number of flow-on effects from your separation, and you could find yourself under an enormous amount of pressure. Oftentimes we are so busy just trying to cope with these changes that we don't take the time to be kind to ourselves.

Our Thoughts Create Our Feelings

The tumult and churning our mind creates when we are in pain causes a type of paralysis. The constant, obsessive thoughts that plague us morning, noon and night keep us stuck in a reactive state. We are constantly on edge as adrenalin floods our body – as if our very life was in danger. Our hearts beat fast, our eyes dart about and we replay our situation in detail over and over again.

No matter how many times we do this the result is still the same. In fact the more we focus on the thoughts, the bigger they get, until they consume us completely. This sets off a chain reaction in the body releasing hormones and chemicals which impact on our physical, mental and emotional health.

Our emotions are based in our thoughts. We think with our mind, and our body reacts in kind. For example, take the 'flight or fight' response which is the body's way of ensuring we are alerted to the fact that we are in danger. The danger is not 'real' when created by our thoughts alone but our body does not know this. What the mind believes, the body will respond to. In defence mode the body releases adrenalin which causes our metabolism to speed up. The flood of adrenalin is what allows a woman to lift a car off her son when he is trapped underneath. Or the man whose leg is broken after a fall but is able to walk twenty miles to get help for his dying friend. Whilst adrenalin is an asset in times of real danger, it is harmful to the body over a long period of time as it degrades our cell structure.

The rush of adrenalin through the body in times of stress is commonly called a 'panic' or 'anxiety' attack. Symptoms can include the following:

- Heart Palpitations
- Hot Flushes
- Chest Pains
- Trouble Breathing
- Hyperventilation
- Giddiness, Tingling or Numbness
- Shakiness
- Feeling Faint
- Difficulty Swallowing
- Jaw Clenching
- Nausea
- Diarrhoea
- Blurred Vision

- Disorientation
- Poor Concentration

Knowing this allows you to instantly recognise when your body is feeling under threat. You may also experience headaches, exhaustion or pain somewhere in your body.

Cortisol is another hormone released into the body when you are under stress. Some of the side effects of Cortisol can be far-reaching and long-term. These can include:

- Impaired Cognitive Performance
- Decreased Muscle Tissue
- Suppressed Thyroid Function
- Decreased Bone Density
- Increased Abdominal Fat
- Higher Blood Pressure
- Lowered Immunity
- Hypoglycaemia

Increased abdominal fat has been linked to heart attack, stroke and metabolic syndrome. Hypoglycaemia can be a precursor to diabetes, whilst decreased bone density can lead to osteoporosis later in life.

I have heard it said the inability to let go of the pain and anger of the past is one of the major causes of cancer in the body. In a world where one in three marriages break-up and where so many people are suffering from cancer, perhaps there is some truth to this. It is not my intention to scare you or to focus on the negatives, but to help you become aware of the changes in your physiology which can alert you to increased stress levels.

Learn to become aware of your body so you can recognise when you are under stress. Given the very real threat to your overall health, it is vitally important you find ways to reduce the effects of stress. And that's what this first step is all about.

Breathe

You may not be feeling stressed in this particular moment but the following exercise can help you relax in the times you may feel overwhelmed.

Close your eyes. Take a deep breath in and slowly breathe out. Keep your mind focused on your breathing until you feel calm. Continue to breathe slowly and regularly until your heart rate matches your breathing. As your thoughts come, keep focused on your breath until they float away again.

This will take practice. At first, your thoughts can overwhelm you and it may seem impossible to stay calm. This is perfectly normal. You are working to override your impulses. Aim to repeat this exercise several times a day. Try it when you are having a cup of coffee, travelling home on the bus or train, when the meal is cooking or as

you go to sleep at night. Repetition creates new habits which replace the ones that no longer serve you. Practise until you come to realise you are doing this automatically throughout your day.

If you want to take this further, look around your community and you will undoubtedly find a free course available to teach you the techniques of meditation. Practising meditation every day will allow you to quiet your mind and put some space between yourself and your emotions; to help you feel safe and secure as you move through the process of becoming aware, learning to accept and take responsibility for your own life.

Where Has Your Pain Come From?

Many people believe their pain is caused by someone else; that their pain is a direct result of another's behaviour. But no-one can have that much power in your life unless you allow them to. Therefore the question remains. Where has your pain come from?

I'm going to start by introducing you to something you may not have heard before. You can choose your emotions; choose how you wish to respond to the events which occur around you. And it's the decision you make in every instance which shapes your reality whether painful or joyful. Therefore your pain comes from your own beliefs and expectations about how your life **should** look. It's the contrast between how you imagined your life would look and your reality.

'How did I get here? This is not the path I was working so hard to follow. It's not fair!'

In your pain you look for someone to blame. The truth is no matter what has caused your pain or your particular story, the only thing you have influence over is yourself. No matter how unfair it all seems, by **choosing** to be a victim you are shutting yourself off from experiencing true freedom in your life – and it is a choice. You decide your response to the events in your life.

There is another thing worth thinking about too. When you stay in a state of pain you give your power away, and you give it to the very person you believe is responsible for the agony you are feeling. Pain is like a room with no windows, a prison cell for the soul. In a time of absolute disillusionment I once wrote; **the longer you wish for the way things were, the longer you will stay in pain.** Change happens whether we want it to or not. It is the one constant in life. Your choice is simply to decide how to respond; how you will let those changes impact on your life.

I spent years in misery and anger. I know how difficult it can be. I also know that if you want any kind of life, now or in the future, you need to let the pain go. If you refuse to, or decide you can't, you will forever be defined by this one event. You will remain frozen in time, going through the motions of a life you have no idea about – one you feel you inherited as a result of the past. I have seen so many women over the years unable to let go of their past. They live a half-life with no sense of purpose, locked in a moment when – as they see it – their world ended. Others appear to have built a new life but often they've simply replaced the old one with another than is fundamentally the same. Powerless to do anything else, they hold tight to this

copycat life, hoping against hope that this time it will be different. In many cases they will do whatever it takes to ensure they do not lose this time around, even at the expense of their own happiness and health. Is this true freedom? Is this enough for you?

Jennifer

Jennifer felt as if her life was ending. Her husband Michael had told her he was leaving, that he was in love with someone else. She couldn't believe it. She had dedicated the last sixteen years of her life to taking care of him, their home and their children.

Once upon a time, many years ago she had been a successful journalist. When they decided to have children she had given up her career to raise their family. Jennifer had supported him in every way she could in appreciation of the fact that he was providing financially for all of them. And whilst he was unaware of it, she worked hard to handle every aspect of the house and her children's lives to ensure none of the daily stresses she faced trickled over into his life.

She believed she had done everything she could to be the perfect wife and mother. What more could she have done? Why was her best not good enough? And what was she supposed to do now? How would she support herself and their three children? She had been out of the workforce for so long that now, at 43 years of age, what were her chances of getting a job that would provide for them all? How dare he do this to her. After all she had done for him!

Jennifer believed she and Michael had a deal. She would take care of their home and children, and he would provide for them all financially. She had held up her end of the bargain but from her point of view, he had reneged on his responsibilities and left her to handle everything on her own. Their life was meant to be a partnership. But somewhere along the way he decided he didn't want to do it anymore.

When had that happened? She thought they were on the same page, heading in the same direction. Suddenly everything had changed. She had lost not only her husband but her view of the future as well. Hadn't they talked about the travel they would do together when the kids were grown? About having a holiday home where they could have the family visit in the summer? What about the life they had planned? They went into this together. She wouldn't have chosen it by herself, but now as a result of Michael's decision she had no choice. Someone had to take care of the kids, earn the money to pay the bills.

In Jennifer's case she retreated from her pain behind a wall of anger. She felt as if she had given everything she could and he had taken her for granted and dumped her like some old rubbish. Righteous anger flooded her body, and she felt truly justified in her feelings of having been betrayed.

Many women feel this way after their relationship breaks down. It can seem easier to deal with than the mass of pain and fear that lives just below the surface. Anger is like a cancer, growing into a living thing. The more we focus on it, the bigger it gets until it consumes us utterly. We can become embittered, unable to move past the moment when we felt our world collapse around us. We may not be aware of it but we are stuck in that one moment of pain and rejection. Until we stop and address it we will stay there forever, believing in some way our partner is to blame for our unhappiness.

Anna

Anna had been with her partner for two years. They had talked about getting married, having a family together and she had never been happier. She felt everything in her life was finally working. She had a great job, wonderful friends and a fantastic man whom she loved with all her heart. She had started to look at bridal magazines and had a wonderful picture in her head of their life together. She couldn't wait for the rest of her life.

But suddenly, Terry had come home and told her it was over. He said he didn't love her any more. What? She had thought they were happy together. As he packed his bags and walked out the door, Anna couldn't understand what had gone wrong.

She got up each morning and went to work, put on a brave face with her friends, but she was completely numb. She knew there was a massive wave of grief just below the surface but she refused to let it overwhelm her. If she ignored it perhaps it would go away. Don't they say time heals all wounds?

For Anna, the shock of her partner's leaving was so great she couldn't begin to comprehend what it actually meant. There was a part of her mind that refused to hear the words, and even though Terry was gone she just couldn't accept it was over.

How had this happened? One minute they were talking about marriage and babies and the next he had walked out the door. What did he mean when he said he didn't love her anymore? Had any of their time together been real or had he always felt this way? In her mind, by refusing to admit things had changed, she was able to hide from her reality. She believed if she felt nothing then the pain couldn't touch her.

How many of us do this? Retreat into a world of denial. Pretend nothing has happened or that we're okay? We act brave and nonchalant on the outside, but inside our heart is broken. We refuse to address it and hope one day, with time, it will just disappear. However, the pain continues to pervade our lives until we deal with it.

And swapping one partner for another will not heal you either. It may feel great in the beginning but sooner or later issues will arise that will bring back all the old emotions. It may be you sabotage what is in fact a fantastic relationship because of old, unaddressed pain that has nothing to do with the now. Only then may you fully understand just how much power you've let the past have in your present.

Mary

Mary had left her husband a year ago after he had an affair with a colleague at work. Three months later she met a fantastic new man.

David was attentive, loving, kind and funny. She loved being with him, and the sex was fabulous. There was just one problem. He didn't seem to want to make a commitment to her. He said he never wanted to get married or live with anyone again. He wanted to maintain his independence even though he said he loved her.

Mary couldn't get her head around this. She obsessed about what he was doing when they were apart. In her mind, if he truly loved her wouldn't he want to be with her every day? Whilst Mary enjoyed their time together, she started to feel insecure about his feelings for her. She convinced herself this new man was playing around behind her back, just like her husband. As a result their relationship broke down and they stopped seeing each other. Mary later learned that David was heartbroken as he had truly loved her. He was in fact a wonderful man who had also been hurt in a previous relationship. He had decided as a result of his experience, he would never lose himself with a woman again and would maintain his independence at all costs.

For each of them, their past created their future and they lost the chance of something wonderful. What a terrible realisation to come to – to know things could have been so different if only each of them had taken the time to move beyond their fears.

Choices

Every minute of every day you are creating your reality whether you realise it or not. For every choice, active or passive, there is a consequence. What do I mean by active and passive choices?

A passive choice is one where you either don't recognise you have a choice to make or you feel you don't need to make one. Whilst you may believe you have kept the status quo by not choosing, you have actually set in motion a series of events that will have an eventual outcome.

An active choice however, is one where you take a look at your circumstances, weigh up all the options and decide on a certain course. Or it could just be you are checking in to ensure you are still headed in the direction to your goals. By being aware you are making a choice, you can more readily accept the consequences. Life still may not turn out how you hoped but at least you are participating in the process.

Therefore, you can take responsibility for your life or let yourself be tossed around by the winds of change. No matter how difficult or impossible it seems, you have the strength to heal yourself. In fact, you are the only one who *can* do it. No therapist or book in the world can help you if you do not want to let the pain go.

Even if you get motivated by this book to enact change, it cannot happen until you do something about it. Given that you are creating your life through every choice,

whether active or passive, would it not make sense to create actively? To choose your life with purpose and forethought? To be clear about your desires and the motivation behind them?

Intentions

The dictionary defines the word 'intention' as a resolve to do something. But all the intentions in the world will achieve nothing until you take action. Plenty of people have great intentions but their actions do not match them. They say one thing but either never follow through or act contrary to their words.

Let's use the example of weight loss. Many of us have struggled with our weight at some time in our lives. Perhaps you are struggling now as your unhappiness creeps from your heart and mind to your body. We look in the mirror and know we **should** do something about our weight. We just **know** our life will be better when we do. But what do we actually do about it? We try to eat more healthily, join a gym or perhaps a weight loss centre. Our actions match our thinking but unless we have a motivation that goes beyond our ability to discipline ourselves, we will give up as soon as it gets difficult or boring.

Even with mental determination to make the changes you know will transform your life, nothing happens until you take an action that proves you mean it. True motivation comes from within. It's the choice to take a chosen path no matter where it leads you, no matter how painful it might be because the alternative is more of what you currently have. You are therefore prepared to put yourself on the line come what may.

In order to truly change your life, you first need to learn what has got you to where you currently are. In order to do this, I am going to introduce you to a powerful tool that will help you to reduce stress and aid you on your journey to discovery.

Heal Me Journal

If you don't already do so, start keeping a journal. In fact, keep two. The first is a Heal Me Journal. Buy a thick lined book and cover it with plain paper.

Remember the books we had in school that we wrote on the front of? The ones on which we drew hearts and wrote the names of our current crush? Do the same with this book. Use words, images, photos, sketches, diagrams ... whatever medium is easiest for you. The cover needs to be a complete representation of where you are in your life right now. You will need to use a book rather than a pad of paper as these journals will form the basis of our journey together. In this journal you can pour out your anger, frustration, fears, concerns and loneliness. It's important to write your feelings by hand so you can view your writing style and understand the depth of your emotions, not only by the words, but by the way in which you write them. There are psychologists who believe writing with your non-dominant hand will allow you to access a side of your brain your logical mind may struggle to engage. In some cases it unlocks a part of your thinking or emotions you may have lost touch with. Switching between the two can help you get past an issue you are stuck on. Commit now to write in this journal at least once a day.

Another great way to express your anger or hurt in a more direct way, and without fear of reprisal, is to write in letter form. Head it up as you would any other letter, ie; Dear ... and write exactly what you feel. These letters should never be sent or shared with the person they are written to, but this process can be very cathartic.

Always remember these are **your** feelings and as such are only the truth to you in this current moment. A negative feeling is never a sign of the real truth even if it feels like it now. It has arisen through **your** reaction to circumstances and is therefore based in pain. The importance of getting these negative feelings out cannot be overlooked. Only by putting them 'out there' as opposed to 'in here' can you see them for what they truly are. How many times have you complained to a friend about your ex-partner or children, in a moment of annoyance or disappointment, only to feel very differently the next day? We often express our feelings only to understand once they are out there that they are not how we feel at all. I am not suggesting that how you feel right now is the same as the way you may have felt in a moment of frustration, however the analogy is useful as a way of illustrating the point.

I have found my Heal Me Journal very useful in the morning particularly after a sleepless night. In fact if you find yourself awake and your thoughts are running riot, it can be a great tool to help you get some rest. It allows you to get the thoughts from your head onto paper, and the very doing of this helps to release the tension keeping you from sleep. It's like talking with your best friend – one who doesn't judge or censor what you say – where you can be completely honest about your feelings no matter how extreme or silly they may seem. Keep this journal every day and you will be surprised as time passes how your thinking will change. It is a great way to map your progress through the various stages of facing the reality of your life.

Thank You Journal

The second is the Thank You Journal. I suggest you look for a beautifully bound book with inspirational images on the cover, or create your own. Write in your Heal Me Journal to eliminate any negative thinking before making entries in your Thank You Journal. This is the place for positive thoughts only; no complaining allowed. Before you go to sleep at night be sure to write at least one thing you are grateful for.

Writing in this journal helps you balance out any obsessive thinking by forcing you to focus on the positives in your life. Over time you will find your mind naturally shifts to a more thankful platform without having to think about it. You are working to build new behaviours to replace the old reactions. Thank You Journal writing creates a lifetime habit of recognising the fabulous things in life that surround you every day. No matter how dark your world may seem, there is always light. You just need to learn how to see it.

Commitment

Before we move on to the next step, take a moment to repeat the breathing exercise at the start of this chapter. Close your eyes. Take a deep breath in and slowly breathe out. Keep your mind focussed on your breathing until you feel calm. Continue to breathe slowly and regularly until your heart rate matches your

breathing. As thoughts come, keep focused on your breath until they float away again.

Awareness is a powerful knowledge that starts you on a path to rediscovering your power within. The tools I have outlined here are designed to help you halt the thinking that can keep you stuck in reactionary behaviour.

Before you read on to the next chapter, take yourself out to buy your journals. By taking this step, you are showing your commitment to a process that can free you from your past and start you on the road to a life of power and joy.

‘once you become aware of your thinking you are in a position of awareness’

Chapter Two

STEP BACK

Objectivity

The second step in the journey to awareness is to step back. Stepping back is the process of being able to look objectively at yourself and your situation. It involves the awareness we talked about in the last chapter.

Objectivity is the ability to look into your life and thoughts as if you were a bystander, with the same kind of balanced perspective you would use with a stranger. It is the skill to remove the feeling from the thought and look at it with a clear, unbiased mind. However, it is more than an analytical process. It is also the ability to spin your situation around and look at it from many different angles.

Imagine a Rubik's Cube for example. When you're trying to work out your next move, it's necessary to hold it in your hand and turn it to view every face before you twist, and even as you do so, you are consciously looking to see the effect your move will have on the overall position.

Similarly, we can get so caught in our own perceptions we can't see there is more going on than we first thought. As our thoughts run away unchecked, our anxiety levels can rise. Our reaction to our thoughts cause emotions which feed the thinking, and a vicious cycle is started which can very easily get out of control. Before we know it, we can become completely consumed by our feelings, without any ability to understand what it is all about.

Therefore, it is necessary to look at both the past and present in order to see a clearer view of the truth – the past as a way to ascertain where we have come from and the present to determine where we currently are.

Grief

As with any loss, a process of grief accompanies a separation. Grief is not just about sadness. We see people cry, and associate grief with tears, but it is more complicated than that. In some ways the end of a relationship is more difficult than a death. It is hard not to take it as personal rejection, as it can feel like premeditated abandonment. In many cases you still have contact with your ex-partner so the pain is revisited over and over again.

Emotions can come in any order and you may not experience all of them. If it appears the separation has come out of the blue, or you discover your partner has been dishonest with you in some way, then **shock** and **denial** are likely to be the first emotions you feel. It can take time for the mind to process the words and begin to understand what they actually mean. The information can be so far away from what you believe you know about your life that it's incomprehensible to you. Part of

the mind's defence mechanism may be to refuse to believe it; he's just having a mid-life crisis and he will come to his senses; he didn't really mean it – we've just had a fight; he'll calm down in a few days and things will get back to normal; he has too much to lose to walk away from our relationship; it was only an affair – it didn't mean anything, are some of the ways you might try to explain away this mystery that caught you off guard and shattered your dreams.

Jennifer

Jennifer was so angry she could scream. In fact she did. She took herself for a walk to the lake and screamed as loudly as she could. She ranted and raved and sobbed at the unfairness of her life. How dare he do this to her? Who does he think he is anyway?

As she calmed down a little, the thought came that his affair wouldn't last. He was just going through some sort of midlife crisis. It's not like he's that great a catch. I'm sure she will tire of him and he'll come back with his tail between his legs. He will soon realise how good he had it with me, then everything can go back to the way it was. She would be strong and wait for him to come to his senses, she decided.

Because she was upset, Jennifer couldn't think straight and rather than face the change and accept the loss of her marriage, she chose to believe her husband would come back. She was so wrapped up in her own feelings she couldn't see the truth that their relationship was over. In fact, it had been over for some time, she had just failed to recognise it.

When reality starts to seep into your consciousness, you may begin to feel **angry**, **fearful** and try to bargain with your partner. A sense of **desperation** can set in and you find yourself begging your partner to change his mind. You make promises you cannot keep, all in an attempt to avoid the reality of your situation, and as you do so, you despise yourself for who you have become. Your **anger** grows and you **blame** your partner for reducing you to behaviours you don't respect, that you vowed never to stoop to. In your anger you may tell everyone who will listen how hard done by you are. 'Look at what he has done to me'!

You may even go further and cut up his clothes, pour paint on his car or turn your children against him by telling them all about the so-called 'bad' things he has done to you. This behaviour continues to feed your anger until you lose yourself in emotions that destroy the real you. You forget how to be anyone but this embittered woman who nobody likes however sorry they feel for you.

In your anger you can't even see the person you have become. Gone is the loving mother, the loyal partner, the wonderful caring friend. In her place is a woman who is so filled with **pain** your children feel they are living with a stranger. They become quiet and withdrawn. These children, to whom you have dedicated so many years, feel they have lost not one parent, but two. You are so consumed by your own pain you can't see they are grieving too. You need each other in order to adjust to your loss, but you are so wrapped up in your feelings, they have no support.

Then you wonder what happened when your children can't wait to leave home. When they spend their time with their friends often getting into trouble, drinking, doing drugs and sleeping around in an attempt to heal their own pain, to try to find some of the love they used to get from you.

I have seen this so many times and yet we often fail to understand it is not the separation causing our children so much pain but how we choose to handle it. For children and young people, the separation of their parents is a threat to their security. In that moment everything in their life changes and given they have known nothing else, they have no frame of reference to work through their shock. It is up to us to show them how to adjust to change by our example.

I know I wish I had handled things better when my husband and I split up. I wish I had understood the tools that would allow me to act from my heart instead of from fear. Perhaps then, my teenagers would have been spared the huge emotional upheaval they went through as their father and I tried to find a way to cope with our own feelings.

Linda

Linda was a mum with two young boys when her marriage broke down. She and her husband, John, had drifted apart over the ten years they had been together and Linda had decided to call it quits. She had found herself a full-time job in a local clothing store, rented a two-bedroom flat and prepared for life as a single mother.

She had felt so confident when she started out, sure in the knowledge that being on her own would be so much easier than dealing with an unhappy relationship. However, the reality was starting to hit home. She was exhausted trying to do everything by herself.

Her two boys were angry with her for taking them away from their dad leaving her feeling guilty for hurting them. Perhaps she was just being selfish? Maybe it hadn't been all that bad? She hadn't realised just how difficult it would be on her own. Why couldn't they have made their marriage work? Life would have been so much easier raising their children together. She missed being a part of the traditional family ... she felt so alone and isolated.

Even if you, like Linda, were the instigator of the separation, when your partner leaves, or you set out on your own, the **shock** of the adjustments can be unexpected and terrifying. You may decide to return to the relationship, feeling in that moment of panic that in fact things couldn't have been so bad. Anything has to be better than the terrifying reality of being alone.

Unfortunately, **denial** does not change the truth as you soon realise. Even for those who are sure of their decision and have made the necessary preparations for a life without their partner, the reality can be very different than expected. There are so many issues to face, particularly if children are involved. You feel **fearful**, **guilty** for putting your children through pain, and **depression** and **loneliness** can set in. All the hope you had for your future seems to pale in the reality of the changes you have

to make. Suddenly you are on your own and freedom you expected to find seems to evade you.

You may be **exhausted** and off balance. You can feel your heart beating fast, you have **trouble sleeping**. You may not understand why you feel like this and fail to realise it is due to your expectations – about the story you told yourself when you decided to leave your previous life, the illusion you created for yourself in order to find the strength to leave. It is very difficult to leave our current situation with no idea of what the future holds. So we tell ourselves a story in order to feel we will be better off on our own. The reality is that this story may be no more real than the one we told ourselves when we started on the journey with our partner.

As once again we are faced with something very different from what we expected, a sense of **hopelessness** and **helplessness** can set in – and even more so if this is the second or third time you have found yourself in this situation. Your **disillusionment** knows no bounds and you can get lost in **despair**. This is a place of powerlessness but somewhere all too easy to find yourself. You become too **scared** to make a move, as in your mind you see that no matter what you do, it doesn't turn out right. So you stay stuck in a place of **uncertainty** and **anxiety** not knowing what to do next.

For others the **sadness** is all pervading and **darkness** is all around. There seems no hope and they cannot see a future. The dictionary defines grief as 'deep sadness' or 'intense sorrow', and a grievance as 'real or imaginary cause for complaint'. Isn't it interesting that from the same root word come two meanings that appear incongruent? But are they really?

In both cases, the definition focuses on the griever's emotions – the feelings that arise out of an event or perception of an event. It does not distinguish between a real or imaginary cause, as the outcome is the same in either explanation. This tells us our grief is based in our response to a situation. It doesn't matter where your pain originates, it is real for you in this moment. Just like pain in the body lets you know something is out of balance, the same is true of the mind. Your emotions emanate from your thinking. What are you thinking that is causing your pain?

Acknowledging your pain does not mean being overwhelmed by it. It refers only to the recognition. It's the awareness that allows you to step back, be objective and begin to understand the pattern of thinking that lies at the heart of your perception of your life.

Anna

Anna couldn't shake off the sense of sadness and loss that surrounded her. On the surface she appeared fine, if a little thin nowadays. Her friends accepted her word when she said she was okay. They looked closely at her to see if it was the truth but she put on a brave smile and they had no choice but to believe her.

Inside though, was a physical pain in the centre of her chest that would sometimes make her catch her breath. She couldn't muster up enthusiasm for her work. All she wanted to do was sleep. Everywhere she looked there was

darkness. She used to have a future but now she couldn't see one. When Terry left he had taken her future with him. She had no idea what to do next and she didn't really know how to care.

Anna believed so strongly in the future she had created in her mind, she wasn't ready to let it go. She couldn't see past it because to her it had been real; so real she had lived her life as if it had already been created in her physical world. Whilst the truth was, now that Terry had gone, that particular version of her future was no longer possible she had no way to accept it. In her mind she had lost everything; her past, her present and her future. She had lived so long in the belief she had created that her grasp on reality was lost in the mist of her imaginings. Now she had no idea how to face a world that was not her fantasy. The incongruence of it all left her reeling.

Goals & Dreams

Having goals and desires is important. The problem arises when you focus so fully on your goal you forget to live your life in the present; when you are so attached to your dream you fail to see the beauty that surrounds you in the now. Neither the past nor the future exists in the present and therefore the only place you have any power is now. So if you have a goal, a desire for the future, then take an action every day that will bring you closer to it. But do not be so attached to your version of the outcome that you fail to see the opportunities that exist all around you. I once read a very poignant saying: **'sometimes on the way to a dream you get lost and find a better one.'**

At one time in my own life, I was so driven to create my version of the goal I was working towards that I pushed too hard. I failed to see there were other options available to me that could have taken me in a far better direction – a direction that may have ensured I was successful. My determination to create my version of the goal led to my downfall. I certainly appeared to create the dream but before long I lost it in a changing world over which I had no control. It was this determination to create my vision at all costs that was at least in part responsible for the breakdown of a six-year relationship. We had discussed the life we wanted, however, I was so busy trying to make it happen, I lost what was most important to me and the original purpose. Suddenly I found myself alone in a world far away from the one I had planned and worked so hard for.

I have learned a lot about myself through this experience and have a much clearer idea of the life I actually want; a life of freedom. One where I create my reality as I go along. Where if I take a turning that leads me somewhere new, I stop, step back and look to see if this is actually what I want to experience. I watch very closely for actions that might lead me to the same outcome I have experienced in the past.

These are the truths I want you to grasp; **that it is the yawning chasm of space between your hopes and dreams, and your reality that causes you pain**; the complete disillusionment that your life looks nothing like you imagined leaves you fearful; and the failure of life to live up to your expectations can bring you to a place of anger and righteous indignation.

All of these truths have nothing whatsoever to do with your partner's actions. You may believe they have created the gulf between your imaginings and your current situation but no one person can be that powerful. Somewhere along the way you decided your vision of the future was real. Perhaps it appeared to be on the outside however, if you had taken the time to look closely, you would have seen there were cracks in your vision, or that it was one-sided; a vision created in your mind which perhaps you thought your partner shared. Perhaps they had a vision which was similar, but I can guarantee your individual visions were not the same, no matter what words were said that lead you to that conclusion.

Relationships are entered into with two sets of hopes based entirely upon the individual beliefs. They are almost never discussed, and as each of you is different, you are in the dark about what your partner truly believes. One day, they act like a stranger and you have no idea what it's all about. You may find yourself accused of being unfair, unloving, inattentive, selfish, and all manner of other traits you believe have nothing to do with you. And in many instances you are correct in that assumption. Often when your partner accuses you of letting them down in some way, it's about their expectations or beliefs, and nothing to do with you at all; and the same is true in reverse. We are very quick to blame our partner when we feel neglected, abandoned, ignored or otherwise unfairly treated. But if you take time to actually step back and assess what you are thinking, you may be surprised to discover that perhaps it's you who is being unreasonable. It may be your own expectations or insecurities speaking.

Have you ever said something to a partner in the heat of the moment and then instantly regretted it? Even as you are saying the words you know it's not the truth. You wish you could take it back as you see the look on their face. But it's as if another person was speaking, one over whom you have no control. You can only apologise for the hurt you have caused and say you didn't mean it, but words spoken with emotion have a huge impact on the person to whom they are directed. As the words and the body language seem to match, it feels like the truth to your partner, and that's all they can go on. Out of your own fear you have spoken from a part of you that needs to hurt in order to relieve some of your own pain.

I'm not saying there isn't real pain associated with the loss of a loved one, however – and this might challenge everything you believe about grief and loss – it is possible to accept a loss and move forward free from pain. It takes a certain perspective to achieve this, but if we remember **'the longer we wish for the way things were, the longer we stay in pain'**, perhaps we could explore how to achieve true acceptance more effectively in our own lives. It is important also to recognise that we can find it difficult to separate in our minds the grief associated with the loss of our partner and the pain caused by the massive adjustments we need to make in order to create a life that doesn't include them. It can all get so mixed up we have trouble identifying how we truly feel.

Relaxing Technique

This is really why the second step is so important. Once we stop, we need to step back from our pain in order to see clearly. Let's go through our breathing exercise again and take things a little further this time.

Find somewhere comfortable to lie down for a moment. I like the floor as it keeps me grounded. With your eyes closed, take a deep breath in and gently let it out, feeling your body relax as you do so. Concentrate on your breathing until your heart rate slows to match. Let your mind drift for a moment.

Okay, now you're feeling calmer, focus your mind on your body. Starting at your toes, concentrate on feeling them relax. Work your way up your feet to your ankles, calves, knees and up towards your hips. Your legs should be feeling heavy now.

Keep your focus on your breathing and as you release the air from your lungs let your abdomen deflate and relax. Concentrate on breathing only from your diaphragm, which is the little air bag central to the base of your ribs. This should be the only part of your torso which moves as you breathe. Let your chest and shoulders relax into the floor, letting your head tilt back naturally. Feel any tension in your head disappear as your thoughts float away on each breath you release. Stay here until you feel completely relaxed both in body and mind. Doing this cleansing exercise, will prepare your mind for the clarity you need to take the next step.

Do this as often as you feel you need to. Add it to your nightly ritual and you will find you sleep more easily. By relaxing the body and quieting the mind you allow your natural bodily rhythm to take over. This will not only improve your sleep patterns but will aid with digestion as well.

We live in a society which views the illness of the mind and the sickness of the body as two separate issues. But our brain is attached to our body. We know our brain controls our every bodily function as well as our thoughts. So how can an illness in the mind not affect the rest of the body and vice versa? If your mind is under stress, your body will be also. If your body is exhausted and burnt out, this will affect your thinking and mind processing. And if your spirit is broken due to the loss of a loved one or a dream, then surely this will affect the mind and the body? We are a three-part being; mind body and spirit; each separate but connected one to the other. Whatever affects one part affects the other two as well. Letting go of the pain of the past is one of the fastest ways to full health.

So what does it really mean to step back? It means to quiet the mind and step away from the emotions that consume you. Only by doing this can you begin to understand what has got you to this place in your life.

Analysis Exercise

Head up a fresh page in your Heal Me Journal as shown below or use your workbook to complete this exercise.

Emotion	Thought

I'm going to go into more depth in Part Two of this book but for now let's do a quick exercise together.

Find an entry in your journal that is full of emotion. Where you have written exactly how you feel, not only with the words but in the way you've phrased them. Read it with fresh eyes and work to identify the strongest emotion you see in the chosen passage. Write the emotion or emotions in the left-hand column of your chart.

Next have a look at the circumstances or event you have written about. Perhaps a particular behaviour or set of behaviours has evoked your emotional response.

Now is your chance to step back. Behind the actual events and the emotions you feel is an expectation that has not been met. Somewhere along the line you had an understanding of how things would be and when your reality didn't match, your response was the emotion you have identified. So what were you thinking? What was it you expected? Write the thoughts you have discovered in column two.

This is a simple but effective example of the process of 'stepping back'. It is the space you create between you and your emotions which allows you to use the logical, thinking part of your mind. Here you can begin to understand the thinking behind the reactions which have created your life till now.

Use this tool to examine other passages in your Heal Me Journal as this is your chance to read what you have previously written without your emotions getting in the way. What do you see in the words and tone of the entry? Does this sound like you? I have found that often as I read back my journal entries, they are no longer quite the truth. I accept they were the truth I felt at the time I wrote them, but they are not a truth I recognise once my mind becomes clear. This is a great way to become aware of how your thoughts and emotions keep you in the grip of a cycle that continues until you break it. As with any new skill, it will take practice. Before long though, you will begin to look at both your entries and the emotions you feel in a new light.

No matter what your current circumstances, there is a way to move beyond your past to a brighter life ahead. Because we have learned that a thought creates a feeling, working backwards will get us to the beginning. Once we stop and step back, we can look at our emotions and figure out what we are thinking. Only by acknowledging the thought pattern and finding out the truth can we move beyond the pain or place of 'stuckness'.

It's time to get real.

'every day you are creating your reality whether you realise it or not'

Chapter Three

LOOK

Analyse

With a clear mind you can now begin to look at your own personal experience and the emotions that have kept you in a place of pain or stuck in the past.

Your Perception Creates Your Reality

Your perception creates your reality and experience. We have all seen or heard about instances when two people witness the same event but their impressions and memories about it are completely incongruent. Sometimes their stories are so far apart, they could have seen two different happenings. It's the unique view of the world we have built up over many years which creates these differences in perception. We hold tight to our beliefs as if they are the absolute truth. But there are many shades between black and white, and even these two colours are made up of every other colour in the spectrum.

Belief Systems

What are belief systems? They are the fundamental understandings or conditionings that form the basis of our lives. There are certain core beliefs, or ways of being which are stored in our genetic code and passed down from generation to generation. Others we learn via messages from our parents, teachers, peers, employers, the media and the unspoken 'societal norms' we absorb as we go through our lives. All of these 'messages' form a part of our conditioning and this conditioning forms our belief system. It's from here we see the world and our place in it.

A lot of what we learn is appropriate, keeps us safe and allows for some sort of order in our world, however, there are other messages we hear which form beliefs that are not healthy for us, that keep us from true Power and Freedom in our lives. We will examine these beliefs; the beliefs or conditionings that keep you stuck in 'automated behaviours'; stuck in a merry-go-round of the repeated patterns that have formed your life story.

What Are Automated Behaviours?

Automated behaviours are actions or reactions without conscious choice – the times you discover you have driven yourself home from work with no memory of the journey. Or when you react in anger to a small incident that has no importance and you don't understand why. It is the times you find yourself apologising for – when you feel bewildered by your actions and tell yourself you are not going to do this again.

In many cases you will not even be aware you are repeating these patterns of behaviour which are creating your reality each day as so much of your life is on 'autopilot', going through the routines of each day in the busyness your life has become. Certainly our ability to do certain tasks by habit is essential otherwise we might not do them at all.

However, if we live our lives without awareness, automatically and reactively, we may one day discover that we have arrived somewhere we don't recognise. Somewhere we never planned for. Somewhere that bears no resemblance whatsoever to the life we dreamed.

The definition of insanity is to **'keep doing the same thing and expect a different result'**. Therefore in order to change our experience we need to learn to change our behaviour. But in order to change the behaviour, we need to look at the beliefs that cause it.

Challenging Perceptions

If we use the example of the fairy tale at the start of this book, and we assume that for many this has created a belief about relationships, then the expectation which results is that marriage should be 'happy ever after'. You fall in love, raise children and live together forever. Part of you understands it's not quite this simple, and you will have difficult times, but love conquers all, doesn't it? Other people have problems but you love each other too much to ever fall apart.

So you buy into the story you have told yourself, and to begin with everything is great. But one day you find you are living with someone who comes home tired after work and sits in front of the television all night. You have bills to pay and argue over money. The fantastic news that you are having a baby blurs into oblivion as you discover the hard work involved in raising a child. You are so busy just trying to get on with the job of living that you barely see each other anymore. You feel worn out and think your partner should help out more. Your partner sees the woman he fell in love with turn into his mother. You remember how much you loved each other, the fabulous sex you used to have, the nights out, the fun and you each resent the other for the fact that your dream life is in tatters. You miss each other dreadfully but neither of you knows how to reach the other.

Slowly but surely, life turns into a daily grind of boring routines. You each fulfil your role in running the household, but there is no intimacy, no joy in each other anymore and along this path you lose each other. You forget what you came together for. You each blame the other for your unhappiness and say to yourself, 'if only they would do this or that, things would be better'. You are so busy focusing on the other that you fail to look at yourself.

What is the real problem here? Is it your partner who is at fault, or is it your beliefs and perceptions which are causing your pain? Perhaps if your perceptions were to shift, life might look very different.

Jennifer

Jennifer would be strong and wait for Michael to come to his senses, she decided. Everything was perfect before he left, wasn't it? But if it was so perfect, why wasn't he still with her? Perhaps things weren't as great as she thought they were. Surely if Michael had been happy he would not have fallen for someone else? Perhaps in pursuit of balancing her life she had missed the whole point. Had she been so busy trying to be the perfect mother that there was no room in her life for him? As she asked herself these questions, Jennifer realised maybe Michael had been in pain too. Perhaps it was out of his sense of isolation and loss that he had turned to someone else.

By putting herself in her husband's shoes for a few minutes, Jennifer had created a small shift in perception. As if the door to her pain had opened just a fraction and perhaps she could let a little bit go.

Anna

Anna couldn't feel anything but pain. Her chest continued to hurt and she sometimes couldn't breathe for the agony of it. She just couldn't get past the rejection she felt when Terry left her. What had she done wrong? Why did he stop loving her? Had he ever loved her or was it all a lie?

One day she asked herself this question: 'What if it isn't about me?' Perhaps it was just a choice Terry made for himself. Maybe they just wanted different things no matter what he said when they were together. That would mean she couldn't have stopped it happening no matter what she did. Here she was, feeling abandoned and certain she could have done something differently. Who did she think she was? Did she really believe she was so wonderful that Terry would have stayed with her even if it wasn't what he wanted?

As Anna opened her mind to the possibility that she was not to blame for the break-up, she understood that for Terry it must have been incredibly difficult. They had planned so much together, and he was a good person. It would not have been easy for him to end their relationship knowing she would be so hurt.

Challenging Perceptions Exercise

Using your Heal Me Journal, head up a fresh page with the following or use your workbook to complete the following exercise.

My Reality	Their Possible Reality

With your eyes closed and focussing on your breathing, try to capture your overwhelming feeling when you think about your ex-partner. Conjure up his image into your mind and pay attention to the emotions that accompany it. Do not focus on what comes, just recognise it. Allow the feeling to wash over you and then float away again.

Describe a specific disagreement or event from the relationship with your ex in 'My Reality' column as if you are a stranger viewing from a neutral point of view. Write down your memory of the facts – not all the emotions that go with it but just the facts as you see them.

Now comes the challenging part. Move on to the 'Their Possible Reality' column and step back to imagine how your ex may have viewed this same situation. You will of course be relying on your memory but try to remember their words or reactions and work to see what the thoughts behind the emotions could perhaps have been. What might their truth be? Using the objectivity we talked about in the last chapter, take a big step back and look at what you have written. Have you been telling yourself the truth?

The powerful exercise is not designed to negate your experience but perhaps as an opportunity for you to truly step back from your emotions and engage the logical part of your brain. When emotions flow freely and strongly, it's difficult to think at all clearly. We become so wrapped up in our feelings we cannot see anything else.

If you have written in your Heal Me Journal about some times you have been angry or resentful about your ex-partner's behaviour or actions, this is a useful exercise to help you see things differently and balance your perceptions.

You are not doing this task to help anyone but you – to take another step forward in your life by letting go of the past. It is your choice whether or not you follow the exercises in this book. I do know however, that if you do, you will never again see your life in the same way. Your perceptions will have changed and once they do, there is not going back to the old way.

Belief Formation

Let's have a look at a different life experience and the beliefs that may have been formed as a result. Maybe you grew up in a household which was violent. Did your father come home drunk from the pub and abuse your mother? Did he abuse you?

You may have seen your mother accept the abuse, continuing to love your father, no matter what. This could have taught you that taking abuse is part of loving someone. Or perhaps you vowed never to allow someone to treat you in the same way and have become wary of all men.

Unfortunately, women who have been exposed to violence and abuse as children often go on to pick partners who degrade and abuse them as adults. No matter how determined they are their life will be different; something in them attracts an abusive partner.

Tricia

Tricia had been married to Nick for five years. When they met, Nick was kind, attentive, sweet and generous. Tricia believed that after a difficult childhood with an alcoholic abusive father, she had found someone wonderful. She had been so excited to leave her parents' home and start a life of her own she failed to notice the subtle warning signs.

Used to outward physical abuse, she did not notice the possessive streak which made her feel special, was actually a little extreme. Neither did she see that she hardly spent any time with her friends anymore. She told herself Nick needed her. She felt happy and fulfilled in her role as Nick's wife. He didn't even want her to work. It was his job to take care of them, he said. Tricia couldn't believe how lucky she was.

Slowly, after the first year however, things began to change. Nick would yell at her if his dinner wasn't ready when he got home. He complained when he learned she had spent time at her mother's home during the day. It was her full-time job to take care of the house and ensure things were the way he liked them when he arrived home. He vetted her wardrobe, criticised her hairdo, told her she was fat even though she was smaller than when they were married.

Over time he eroded her confidence, isolated her from the people she loved and let her know she was incredibly lucky to have such a wonderful husband when she was so stupid. And she believed him.

Then one day, everything in her world came crashing down. In the heat of the moment, Nick lashed out and hit her. Suddenly in that moment she recognised the truth – she was married to a man just like her father. He may not have been an alcoholic, but Nick treated her in the same way her father had treated her mother. It was only because he was so much more careful and subtle she had not seen what was happening. The man she loved was systematically destroying her, the man she believed loved her in return.

For Tricia the truth was that in some part of her she recognised Nick's controlling behaviour as love. Based on her childhood, and with no other model to observe, her beliefs had been formed from her dysfunctional environment. Even though Tricia was determined never to end up like her mother, in the deepest level of her mind patterns of behaviour had been formed of which she was totally unaware. It took a physical blow to wake her up and realise she had married a man just like her father.

Once she understood the truth, she left the relationship. Nick did not make it easy for her, and she spent some time in a woman's shelter, but little by little she became aware of the fundamental beliefs which had formed her experience. She took responsibility for her life and as she did so, everything changed.

Tricia has since trained as a social worker. She puts her own experiences to use in helping young women from abusive homes to recognise their own core beliefs before they too find themselves trapped in an abusive relationship.

Perhaps you were taught that in order to be successful and accepted in life you needed to fall in love, get married, have children and live happily ever after – as in the fairy story at the beginning of this book. It could be that your mother or grandmother lived this life and because of their generational conditioning, they

believed it was the right thing for you too. Maybe because of the social understanding of the time they were more able to accept this as the norm. Perhaps as a result, these were the only expectations they had of life and they were therefore more realistic about them than we tend to be today. Or maybe the truth is, they too struggled with unmet expectations but due to societal pressures they persevered in unfulfilling and unhappy relationships.

Certainly some people seem to live their whole lives together and still walk down the street holding hands in their later years. What do we really know about these people? Did they learn early on to respect each other as individuals and not to place expectations on each other? Or due to the time in which they grew up, were the expectations so clear there was never any conflict about what their relationship roles would be?

Life is very different today and with the fast-paced lifestyle we lead and materialistic society we live in, the pressure on relationships is greater than ever. Young people go into relationships wanting what their parents had. Certainly it appears a couple of decades ago it was easier to buy a house than it is today.

However, perhaps this is partly because our expectations of a desired lifestyle have changed as well. We want all the latest gadgets to put in our houses. We want the social life we have become accustomed to, two cars per household is now the norm, and whilst in the past one income was enough to meet the basic needs of a family, it seems impossible for most families today.

Children seem to be the centre of their parents' lives with the result that in many cases adults have no life of their own. Their so-called leisure time is taken up with family outings, running the kids here and there, keeping them entertained and buying all the latest computer games, toys and gizmos television advertising tells them they must own to be 'cool'.

Life seems to be a competition. Who has the biggest house? The most expensive car; the best career. What does it really mean to us as individuals though? The question has to be asked ... by what measure do you define yourself? Is it the car you drive, the clothes you wear, where you live, what you do for a living? Are these things really a reflection of who you are? What would happen if you lost them? Who would you be then ...?

How do you define yourself?

We live in a world filled with expectations about how things should be, and these days the expectations on women are overwhelming. The roles we are expected to fulfil are impossible, and when we fail, as we ultimately will, we feel we are somehow less than who we should be; that we have let ourselves down; that there is something wrong with us because we couldn't live up to the expectations we adopted as our own.

Take a minute here and look at these words: 'that we adopted as our own'. Are they really choices you would have made for yourself if you could have had any life you wanted? We are bombarded constantly with images of the perfect wife, the perfect

mother, the perfect career woman, the perfect lover, daughter, friend ... every image shows an immaculately groomed, slim, vibrant and satisfied woman. I'm sure if we had to be only one of these things we would manage it magnificently. But to be all of them? I don't know about you but I would need at least three of me to be able to live up to that image!

Yet for many of us our sense of self-worth is defined by the roles we play; the roles society seems to lay out so clearly. 'I am a wife, a mother, a career woman, a lover, a daughter, a friend'. When your life suddenly changes dramatically, you can lose your identity. You are still the same person you have always been, but ask yourself, 'Who am I without my partner?' You were a unit, a part of something bigger than yourself. Invitations dry up as many of your social peers are a twosome. Friends often don't know what to say and not wanting to take sides they just drift away from your life. Going out with other couples is awkward and reminds you of what you have lost so you choose to stay home and let's not even get started on family occasions. The ritual of Christmas and other holidays you have been included in for years disappears in a puff of smoke as you lose half your family.

These secondary losses are sometimes more difficult to bear than the separation itself. Suddenly everything you have built over many years comes crashing down around your ears and you no longer know where you fit. The very foundation on which your life is built seems to crumble leaving your self-esteem in tatters.

Isn't it interesting that whenever you meet someone new they ask you what you do? What they are really asking is 'What is your job?' Or 'How do you earn your money?' The truth is that who you are has nothing to do with what you do or who your partner is, but society seems to need to make a judgement about you, to put you in a box and treat you accordingly. But does this let people know who you are? Of course not. But in their minds they know everything they want to know and that's enough for them. What about you though? **Is your identity so wrapped up in what you do that you don't know who you are?** Is that okay with you? Have you ever stopped long enough to ask yourself?

Roles I Play Exercise

Take a fresh page in your Heal Me Journal and head it up as illustrated below or use your workbook to complete this exercise.

Roles I play:

Past Roles	Current Roles	Future Roles

Write as many of the roles you play in your life as you can think of or choose some from the list below.

- Wife
- Partner
- Mother
- Daughter
- Granddaughter
- Niece
- Aunt
- Sister
- Employee
- Employer
- Friend
- Grandmother
- Caregiver
- Homemaker
- Colleague

Repeat this for all three columns. As you grow through different stages in your life your roles will change and it can be tough keeping up with them all. When you were younger, your role as a daughter was no doubt very different than it is now. If you are a grandmother then your role as a mother has changed dramatically. As you go through life you will collect differing roles like awards or medals, and the requirements and expectations others place on you or you place on yourself, may at times seem overwhelming. It is all the more important therefore for you to discover and maintain your own identity. If you define yourself by the roles you play in life then you are at the mercy of other people’s choices or circumstances over which you have no power.

If you feel you have somehow lost yourself in a life that seems to sweep you along on a wave of doing, this next exercise will help.

In the task above we focused on the roles you play, that is, the things you do. Now we are going to look at who you are. I know for some of you this part will be really difficult as you realise just how long it’s been since you thought about this. For some it may be a completely new question you have never once considered.

Who Am I Exercise

Take another fresh page in your Heal Me Journal and rule up the page as below or use your workbook to complete this exercise.

Aim to list a minimum of 10 strengths.

Strengths	

Here are some suggestions of the types of strengths that form part of this exercise. You will see that they are not bases on physical appearance but on your character – the traits that make you, **you** if you like.

- Kind
- Intelligent
- Empathetic
- Loving
- Attentive
- Funny
- Caring
- Bright
- Ambitious

If you are having trouble with this, try to think of who you are to the various people in your life. Have a look at the last task and the roles you play. What makes you successful in these roles? What are some of the qualities about yourself you are proud of? You can even ask some of the people who care about you. You might be surprised by the response.

I was taught as a child to be modest; and I know this is true for many other women too; never to praise or talk about my abilities and talents to others as this was seen as bragging. Unfortunately, all this does is reinforce the negatives we see in ourselves, and that we believe other people see as well. We spend endless energy worrying about how people will perceive us, and yet the truth is they are so wrapped up in their own lives they don't notice us at all. Often even those closest to us don't really know who we are. How important then that *you* have a clear knowledge of yourself.

Take all the time you need to work on this task as it is fundamental to your progress. Determining how you view yourself is part of the road to full awareness. Only by acknowledging your true thoughts about yourself can you change them. Your own view of yourself will create the reality around you; how others treat you, how you treat yourself and who and what you attract in to your life.

So how do you define yourself?

Who are you without the roles you play?

There are two words of extreme power you can use every day to transform your life. They are '**I am**'. Every time you say 'I am' the words which follow become a truth in the here and now. Not 'sometime maybe I will be', but 'I am'.

Write your strengths in a sentence starting with 'I am'. For example, 'I am a loyal, kind and considerate woman who is funny, smart, passionate, strong and capable'. Can you see how powerful this simple sentence is? It may feel like a lie when you first write it but this could be your defining moment – a way to rediscover the wonderful woman you are. Repeat your statement several times a day as you go about the busyness of the roles you play. Look yourself in the eye in the mirror and

say it to yourself as if you are a stranger, as if it was someone other than you speaking.

What Are You Projecting?

The beliefs you hold about life and the way you see yourself create a projection that sits like a cloak around you. It is this that tells people how to treat you.

Penny

Penny grew up in an affluent environment with all the privileges this brings but she fell apart when her parents' marriage started to break down when she was fifteen. She spent very little time at home choosing instead to sleep rough on the sofa of whoever would take her in. She turned to drink, drugs and sex in an attempt to find security and to numb the pain she was feeling. She picked a certain type of guy, one who would knock her around and generally treat her with contempt.

Now several years later she has met a guy who treats her well. He pays her compliments, buys her little gifts and seems to adore the ground she walks on. And do you know how she feels? She feels uncomfortable. She isn't sure how she feels about him and keeps him at a safe distance emotionally. Why? Because this guy is behaving in a way that is different from all the other men she has been with. She is used to being treated badly, and in some sad way, she questions this new guy's motives. She tells him to 'shut up' when he tells her she is beautiful. She is embarrassed when he pays her a compliment.

Penny doesn't like herself. She feels ugly and worthless and it's exactly this she projects to the world. No wonder the men she has been with don't treat her with respect. She has none for herself. If she does not learn to give herself the respect she deserves she will lose this wonderful man and continue to choose guys who show her the lack of respect she has for herself.

There is a direct correlation between the view you have of yourself and the way people treat you. You attract to yourself people who mirror, with their behaviour, the image you have of yourself. How people treat you will be a reflection of how you treat yourself. What we put out in life is exactly what we get back.

I have heard some say, the people in their life are not really their friends, that they are surrounded by people who have their own agenda and use them for their ends. What are they putting out to attract this type of person? Do they need to be liked? Need to be needed to feel worthwhile or important? Is it a way for them to say 'I exist'? If other people need them, maybe they aren't invisible?

Have a look at your life. How do people treat you? Are you living the life you feel you deserve? If not, then what is the belief that has created this reality you are living? And where have your beliefs come from?

Greta

Greta was a woman who due to a difficult childhood had never felt loved. She searched everywhere for the love she knew must be out there somewhere. She had grown up without a father and had always craved the love of a man. The minute a guy paid her any attention, she latched on to him and played up to it. In her mind, maybe this was love?

She craved attention in any form and even if it was negative, it was better than being ignored. She met a good man who loved her; they married and had a couple of kids. The problem was she still didn't feel loved. He told her every day how much he loved her and that everything he did was for her, and even though her head told her he must care, in her heart she couldn't believe it. It wasn't until her marriage was over that she finally came to understand the belief that had caused her pain for so many years.

Somewhere deep within her mind she had formed an assumption that 'if my mother who should love me more than anyone, ever, can't love me ... I must be unlovable'. Greta's mother did love her but due to her own childhood and personal circumstances she wanted a certain path for her daughter. When Greta refused to conform, her mother tried to enforce her will, and as a result Greta never felt she was good enough, that she would only be acceptable if she was someone else or at least behaved in the way her mother expected. She looked at her image in the mirror and didn't understand how the young girl looking back at her could be so unloved.

This experience coloured the way she viewed herself for many years. Only once she acknowledged the belief she had created, was she able to replace it with a new truth – that in fact she was lovable and many of the people around her did love her. She had just failed to see it.

Using Greta's story as an example is a good way to illustrate how a deep-seated belief, of which you have no knowledge, can colour your whole life. How it can create the outcome of your relationships with your friends and family – and definitely your most intimate relationship with your partner.

Photo Exercise

Ask a friend to take a photo of you, or go to an instant photo booth and have one taken there. Be as natural as possible. I have found that photos are a very good way to see ourselves as others do. Whilst they are not always flattering and often catch you mid expression, to some degree they do tell the truth – at least the truth of that moment.

Most of us make snap judgements every day about the people we see and meet. We decide who they are by the clothes they wear, the colour of their hair, the way they apply their cosmetics – or the lack of them – and the size they are. I abhor our judgemental society and the boxes we therefore put people into, but unfortunately it's part of our sometimes shallow world. In this instance you can use it to look at yourself from an outsider's perspective.

Use your Heal Me Journal and head it up as shown below or use your workbook to complete this exercise.

Name	Date
Post photo here	Your impressions
Your feelings	

Stepping back from the fact that this is you in the photo, what is your first impression? Look at the usual things that would stand out to you when you meet someone. Cast your eye over the superficial things – hair, make-up, size and clothing. What do you see? Is this who you see in the mirror each day?

Now look more closely at the image of you. What is the feeling behind the photo? What does your posture tell you about yourself? If you are smiling, does it reach your eyes? What do your eyes say about you? Do you see someone confident and radiant or someone who looks somewhat defeated by life? Can you see the pain behind the mask you wear? Is everything you feel written clearly on your face?

Jot down all your impressions on the page. You may not like the image that looks back at you, and this could therefore be painful however, without honesty you cannot learn the truth which has led you to this point. Be brave enough to start the process of standing up for yourself today.

Next, write down the feelings you experience as you view both the photos and the impressions you have about it. This is where we really get real. How do you truly feel about yourself? What image do you project to the people around you? This is not an excuse to focus on the negatives but an opportunity to see what you are projecting to the world. Objectivity is the key to this task. You need to be able to step back from your emotions to benefit from this exercise. Take a minute to breathe, to quiet your mind and spirit when you have finished.

Looking at your own life is not easy. This is part of why your Heal Me Journal is such a perfect tool. As you pour your thoughts and feelings onto its pages, you will start to get a clearer picture of what is going on in your mind. By taking each entry as a moment in time, you can look back with the clarity of hindsight and see the truth. Over time, as you journey with me to places unknown and, as a result, your perceptions start to change, you will begin to see the unmet expectations behind the words and as you dig deeper, the perceptions that formed them – and behind your perceptions the beliefs that created them.

This is where you live your life from. It is from here you make your decisions. This is what forms the automated responses which have created your life so far. I want you to uncover these beliefs and I will teach you more about how to do this in the next few chapters.

If you are feeling overwhelmed by your observations, now is a good time to write in your Heal Me Journal. Use this as a tool to unburden your feelings, cry your tears

and vent your anger. It is called a Heal Me Journal for a reason. It is only by getting your feelings and thoughts on paper that you can see them for what they are and begin to heal the pain behind the words. It's this healing process that will give you the strength, knowledge and insight to change your life forever.

'your perceptions are based upon your beliefs and your perceptions form your expectations about how life *should* be'

Chapter Four

LISTEN

Receive

Now we have learned to stop, step back and look, it's time to add another often overlooked skill; listening. Most people are so busy trying to talk and tell the world how things are for them they never take the time to listen. You cannot learn anything new without listening; you will forever be trapped in your own reality. Remember your reality is created by your perceptions. Only by adding a new perspective can you open your mind to the possibility of something different. So listening is just about the most important skill you have.

Even more powerful is the art of both looking and listening. Take the television news for example. The combination of pictures and sound has a twofold impact on your brain. The message goes in faster, clearer and more easily. Sometimes it seems to bypass the thinking part of our brain altogether as we accept that what we are seeing and hearing is the truth. But is it? Or is it only a part of the truth presented from a certain point of view. How would you know? How much of what we think we know is actually tied up with the reporter or network's perspective about their subject? This is example of how our beliefs are created without us being part of the process.

We hear and see things as a child, and from a child's perspective the world is huge and our parents are gods (for a few years at least). Your memories of childhood events are coloured by your emotions, which are a result of an immature mind-set. If you have children yourself you will have seen how quickly they can react to the smallest thing, and often in an extreme way. Whilst we as parents may see it as a small thing, in their minds it is momentous. **The bigger the event from your perspective, the more likely it is to form a memory.**

Thinking about this for a second, is it not possible, perhaps even likely, that many of our memories from childhood are based upon an extreme reaction to a set of circumstances? Maybe we felt aggrieved when one of our siblings was bought new shoes and we didn't get any. We forgot we'd had a pair four months before when our sibling still fitted theirs. This simple incident could form a belief in our mind that our sibling is favoured over us. From this perspective we will continue to see incidents reinforcing this belief.

Neural Pathways

The beliefs we form create neural pathways (electrical wiring) in the brain, unique to us. As an electrical current will always travel down the path of least resistance, so too the pathways we have created will be used to build our future experiences. Everything that occurs will be viewed in the light of the past. The brain will process new information based upon what it already knows.

In addition to this, the mind is constantly filtering the messages it receives and looking for things it recognises. Imagine that at the base of your brain there is a neural net that like a fishing net, has specific sized holes for catching information. As we go through life and we are surrounded by data every day, this neural net allows information it recognises to pass through into our consciousness and the data it doesn't to bounce off. It will automatically recognise events that appear similar and group them together as the same thing. In this way our perceptions become reinforced and narrow without us being aware of it. Without engaging our mind we allow this information to enter our brain and become part of our truth.

Whilst the storage capacity of the brain is immense, it takes work to build new pathways rather than continue to travel the old route. This is because the brain is on autopilot, automatically processing based on what it already knows. In the mind, the same (or similar) event will cause the same reaction as in the past.

This is how brain connections are built and is perhaps an explanation for escalating anger or emotional shut-down. If you never learn to build new pathways, you will forever repeat the experiences of the past. What if a lot of what you believe is a lie? What if these lies have shaped your entire life including your relationship with your ex-partner? What if their beliefs are also based on lies? How could the interaction between the two of you ever work?

Take Mary and David for example. Mary had trouble trusting David because her ex-husband had cheated on her. Even when she found a man who was everything she hoped for, her insecurities about the past created a lie she believed. David was determined never to give up his independence as the pain of a past break-up and the adjustments to a life on his own had been too painful to repeat. He believed if he kept his own place and some physical distance, he would be less likely to be hurt.

Each of them had a belief about relationships based upon past pain. Neither of them had faced their fears and learned to let them go. They had each carried them into the future only to find the very outcome they feared most had come to pass. If they had only taken the time to heal themselves and move beyond their pain they may have created something wonderful.

Therefore the listening I am talking about is not a passive skill but an active one. One that is constantly seeking answers to questions that may never have been asked.

Communication

Have you ever had an argument with your partner, attacking him for what you see as unreasonable behaviour, only to find out later he had a traumatic week at work or was about to be fired? Perhaps he had some bad news from the doctor. You feel terrible when you find out how much stress he had been under. You didn't even notice he was under stress. You just assumed he was in a bad mood or sulking about something. It stands to reason if you have lived with someone for a few years, you can recognise when things aren't right. But we can be so wrapped up in our own view of life we don't stop to look and listen to our partner. When the truth comes out, we understand it was actually us who were being unreasonable.

Sometimes we forget our partner has his own thoughts, feelings, perceptions and beliefs. We are not the centre of their world every single minute any more than they are of ours. What about what they may want? What they need? A partnership is two people who have equal worth working together; where each respects the other for their unique attributes, failings and perceptions; where they listen to each other and appreciate that a difference of opinion is simply the result of two individual lines of thought.

Each of you is responding from your own experiences – from your core beliefs if you like. If this is true, is it fair to react with anger when they don't agree with the things you say? Perhaps you haven't realised it is the differences between you which attracted you in the first place. It is the combined energy created when you are together that keeps you interested in each other. Without this connection nothing exists apart from duty and a shared goal to hold you together, and whilst this may be necessary for a while, it will eventually end in the dissolution of your relationship.

We've all heard about the importance of communication, but most of us believe this involves telling our partner how things are for us. True communication is about taking the time to listen and find out the truth about each other. The lines of communication break down when we talk before we ask, tell before we listen and accuse without knowing the facts. By taking the time to listen to each other, many arguments and disappointments can be avoided.

Self-Talk

You might be asking why I'm talking about the benefits of communication in a relationship when this book is about moving beyond the pain of separation and divorce. The truth is, communication is the basis for every relationship including the one with yourself.

Have you ever thought about what would happen if you went shopping with a girlfriend and told her the things you tell yourself? How big her backside looks in that dress; how she has a new wrinkle today; how ugly she is first thing in the morning. How do you think she would feel if you grabbed her thighs and wobbled them to show how out of shape she is? She would probably hit you and never speak to you again!

Most of us choose every day to be kind to others. To endeavour to treat others how we would like to be treated. But how do you treat yourself? **Do you come even close to giving yourself the kind of respect you give to others?** You may have heard the term 'self-talk' but if you haven't, I'll explain. Self-talk is the constant conversations we have with ourselves. They are private and often we are not even conscious of them. I can tell you though, that whether you are aware or not, it is happening. So if you are constantly talking to yourself, what are you saying? Are you continuing the criticisms that dogged your childhood or adolescence? Can you see now how important your awareness is?

Let's take a look for a minute at the words **should, ought and must**. Have you ever thought about these words?

Almost every time we use them they are voiced with a sigh and a sense of obligation. Why is this, do you think? Should, ought and must are not words you use for things you want to do. Therefore they are not about your desires at all, but based in other people's expectations and the belief that if you 'don't' you will be judged in some way. When you don't do something you **should**, you often feel you **must** make an excuse or justify it in some way, either to yourself or to others. This is not Power and Freedom. The choice is yours. Decide you want to do something or not. If you decide not, just say no. No excuses, no reasons why, just no. You never have to explain or justify yourself. It's your life. You choose how to live it.

It's such a tiny word and yet so difficult for many of us to say. Just say **NO**. I personally tend to say 'thank you but no'. That way I don't need to make an excuse, but I am also considering the request as a compliment by the asker. If you have thought of an appropriate response ahead of time, you will be prepared to decline the things that don't add to your life or you choose not to do. You are not responsible for how the other person chooses to respond either. That's in their hands.

Without becoming fully aware of our thoughts we cannot change them, and without change we will continue to repeat the choices of the past and stay in the never-ending cycle of unfulfilled expectations which have caused us so much pain. Learning to listen then is at the heart of any process of change. Listen to your heart, listen to your mind and listen to your spirit.

Listening Exercise

How do you develop the very important art of listening? Like all things new it comes about with practice. There are opportunities to listen all around you. Let's start with some simple exercises.

Close your eyes and listen to the sounds around you. Can you hear the birds singing, the sound of the car passing, the laughter of children playing, the rustle of the breeze in the trees? Focus on each sound and absorb it fully. As your mind wanders, give it a new sound to focus on. Practise this as often as you can. Wherever there are sounds to be heard – in the supermarket, in the car, at the school, in a business meeting, at the gym. Places that are inherently noisy are a great way to practise your skills. When there are sounds all around you, it can be very hard to listen.

Beyond the listening is the skill of processing the sounds. What would it be like to be the little bird in the nest that tweets for its mother? Or the mother who flies backwards and forwards all day long in search of food for her baby? The rustle of the leaves on the trees let us follow the movement of the air, the wind. Listen to its ebbs and flows for a few minutes. As the car passes your window on its way down the street, ask yourself where it might be going. Who is behind the wheel and what is their story? As you hear the children's voices in the schoolyard, see if you can identify the game they are playing. Even in the silence there is something to hear if you listen closely. The constant beating of your heart and the sound of your breathing is with you always. If you can hear these quiet, regular sounds that give you life, you will start to hear the world around you with a new intensity. The quieter your mind, the more you can hear.

Listening in Action

Once you have mastered the basics of listening to the passive sounds around you, it is time to turn your skills to the active ones. Meet a friend for coffee and ask her about herself. Ask her for her opinion on something you know she is passionate about. Sit back and truly listen. Listen to the words; listen to her tone of voice. What did you learn about your friend that you never knew before?

Ask your child about their day and take the time to listen to the answer – all of the answer. In behind the words, which seem to spew forth in a constant stream, is their feeling about their day; the perceptions they have created about the way things are supposed to be. What are they not telling you? Have you failed to listen so many times they only tell you the exciting stuff to keep your interest? How are they really coping with school and life amongst their peers? If you do not listen fully, you may miss the quiet plea for help your child may expect you to hear. They may not have the words to tell you what life is like for them as they look to you for guidance.

I use this example to illustrate the highest form of listening which is actually the most important; listening with your mind and your spirit. Here I am really talking about listening beyond the words. A wealth of information can be learned by opening up your mind and heart and listening with more than your ears. Using your eyes and ears will allow you to see and hear but you will only receive part of the information. Ninety per cent of communication is unspoken. Listening only to the words will not get you to the truth about what someone is saying. You need your eyes to watch body language but also your heart to hear the emotion behind the words.

The term for this is empathy – the skill of listening with every part of you – taking every bit of information from all your sensors and really hearing what someone is saying (or not saying). Can you hear the pain behind the words? The passion, the enthusiasm, fear, bravado and joy? Can you hear the response they need from you? Or do you miss it in the need to say your piece as soon as they take a breath?

I know plenty of people who don't know how to listen. If you ask them what you've just said, they can repeat your words back to you – a small part of their brain is noticing that you are speaking and able to process the words – however, every other sense is engaged on the inward conversation they are having with themselves. They truly believe they are having a conversation with you but in truth they are using your words simply as a tool to tell you even more about themselves. In some cases, they are so oblivious to your presence you may not speak a word in 30 minutes or more and by the time you get a chance to speak, they are too busy to listen and must rush.

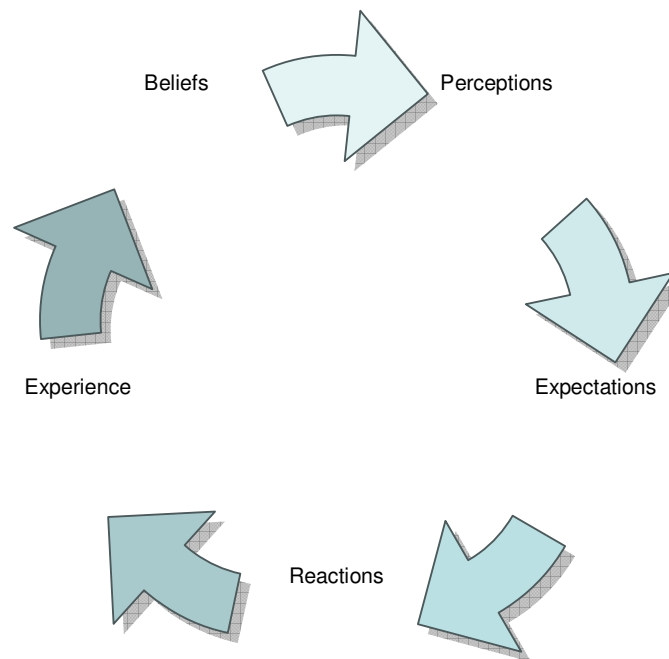
In their minds they just spent a lovely time in deep, meaningful conversation with you. They go away feeling refreshed and invigorated. Your experience is very different. You blow out the breath you have been holding, roll your eyes and thank the universe they have left. Listening to them has exhausted you. In actual fact they have sapped your energy leaving you drained and tired. Being with them does not add to your life.

Or have you ever experienced this? A time when you have turned to a friend in your hour of need to find they are so self-absorbed they do not notice? That later when they find out through the grapevine that your father has just died, or you have been diagnosed with cancer, won a prestigious award, or been invited to present an important speech, they phone and ask why you didn't say anything. This is an example of the worst kind of communication but unfortunately its one we frequently engage in, particularly with our partner. No wonder they feel as isolated and alone as we do. Each of us is so engrossed in surviving our own dramas we cannot look and truly listen.

These illustrations may give you some insight into what listening really is. Try and practise this with your friends and family until you can get outside your own mind enough to engage with someone else.

How Does Listening Help You Heal Yourself?

How do you recognise the beliefs that have created your life so far? If we understand our **beliefs create our perceptions, our perceptions create our expectations, our expectations create our reactions and our reactions create our experience which in turn creates/reinforces our beliefs**, then working backwards will get us to the beginning. Looking at the diagram below we can see exactly how this works.



Your feelings are simply a reaction to your thoughts, and your thoughts are created from your perceptions about how life **should** be. Your expectations of what your life **should** look like. But if your **perceptions** are based on a **belief** that isn't true, or at least not a truth for you, then the **expectation** you have created as a result is not based in anything real either. Therefore your **reactions**, thoughts and emotions are coming from a place of incorrect understanding.

As these are creating your life, it is imperative to discover whether the beliefs you hold to are in fact a truth for you. How can you do this?

Start with your Heal Me Journal. If you have been completely open about your thoughts, feelings and emotions in these pages you will begin to discover the expectations, perceptions and beliefs that have created your life.

Imagine you are your own best friend. When your emotions come and you step back to look at your thoughts, listen. Use all your senses to understand where the thought has come from. Ask yourself if this is really a truth for you or some imported understanding that actually has nothing to do with you at all. Why would you waste energy on emotions that are not even based in anything real? Just let them float away in the knowledge that you don't ever need to feel this way again.

By truly listening with your mind, your heart and your body (remember the physiological changes in the first chapter) you will begin to challenge old perceptions and learn your truth. We will talk more about how to unlock the beliefs which sit behind the words and emotions you have written, in the second part of this book.

Intuition

Have you ever experienced what we could call a hunch? A little nagging feeling that you should be doing something? Have you ever been thinking about a friend and when the phone rings, it's them? Ever had someone you haven't seen for many years on your mind and then out of the blue you run into them in the street? Been about to go somewhere and then for some reason you get held up or decide not to go only to find out afterwards that a tragedy occurred you could have been part of?

People call these coincidences. But are they really? Or are they the whispers of your intuition that once in a while manages to break through the noise that is your life?

We live in such a fast-paced world that our heads are full of sounds. The time we need to be at work, when the children have their activities, what we are going to make for dinner, a new outfit for a special occasion, how we are going to pay the bills this month – the sounds of our thoughts reminding us of where we need to be and what we **should** be doing.

Do you ever take the time to stop the noise and relax? Perhaps you watch television and think this is 'time out', but in reality you are just adding to the confusion that already exists in your mind. It may be 'mindless' and therefore less pressurised than your day-to-day life but it is not what your body, mind and spirit crave. Perhaps you read for relaxation – and this is certainly less noisy than the television – but this is still not the quiet I am talking about. The quiet I mean is actually stillness. The ability to quiet the mind, still the body and listen to your spirit.

I want to clarify what I mean when I say spirit. Beyond your mind, which whirls around day and often at night, is a knowingness that is silent and steady. Almost like the beating of your heart or your breathing. We are usually unaware of these two functions of the body and yet without them we die. In the same way, our spirit is there whether we are aware of it or not, ready and able to guide us, heal us, bring us

joy and help us create the life we want. It is the essence of who you are and the only place to engage with the real you is in the quiet. To stop, step back and listen to the voice that is as soft as the breeze through the trees on a sunny day. You will not find yourself in the busyness that is your life. You will not find yourself in the pages of a book or a television show, and you will not find yourself in a relationship either. You can only go within to find the real you. Once you do, your life will change forever. The connection you will find is unlike anything you have ever experienced.

Have you see the movie Ghost? With Whoopi Goldberg? There is a part in the film where she allows the main character, Sam Wheat (played by Patrick Swayze) to 'use' her body to connect with his fiancé after he is killed. Oda May Brown (the character played by Whoopi) sits quietly and willingly in her chair and as Sam's spirit enters her body there is a gentle rush of air and then a settling. As she looks up she has a new expression as it is Sam who looks through her eyes.

I have used this example to describe what it feels like to finally become one with yourself and look out at the world through new eyes – with eyes that see so differently, with a new awareness that only the full integration of your three parts – body, mind and spirit – can bring. Only by learning to listen fully can you hope to find this quiet gentle and loving part of yourself that for many people is missing.

Listen With Your Heart

So listening, as we have seen, is about so much more than using your ears. If you can learn to listen to the sounds in the silence, you will become more aware of the subtle changes in energy around you. As you do so, you will be listening with your heart. From here, you can start to heal yourself – here, where true love abides. As you begin to tap into the essence within, you will find you have an abundance to share with those who walk alongside you. The world will look much clearer and you will feel connected to everything around you. With this awareness you will never feel alone, as you will know you are a part of something so much bigger than yourself.

Using the breathing and relaxing techniques we have already covered, make time to rest in quiet contemplation. Learn to recognise the sounds in the stillness. Learn to hear the beating of your own heart, the sound of your breathing. Hear the quiet voice that speaks in the stillness; that sings in the quiet and soars in wonder as it celebrates your return.

Meditation techniques are a great way to help your reconnect with your inner self. If this is something you are interested in, there are various free courses available to get you started. Practise your listening skills every day until they are honed to perfection. Listen to the feeling, the emotions behind the words and begin to connect to those who are important to you. You will be amazed at what you learn. Nothing is what it seems and behind the façade of every person is a story that is their experience. Most important to all is to listen to you. Listen to your thoughts, your feelings, your emotions, your pain, your joy, your sadness, your fear and uncertainty of the future.

Writing in your Heal Me Journal is just one way to get the jumbled thoughts out of your head. There are lots of ways to represent your feelings. You could cut pictures

out of magazines. Put together a collage which represents the colours of your pain. You could sketch shapes or images that tell a story only you understand.

Whatever medium you choose, the key is to get your feelings and thoughts on paper. Once they are out there you have the chance to see and hear them. Remember how powerful looking and listening can be when you use them together? By using creative imagery, you are accessing a different side of your brain than is used to write. This will give you even more information to work with as you learn to interpret your emotions; as you learn who you truly are and the things that have formed you to this point. Your current life is a reflection of who you **were** and has nothing to do with who you choose to be now.

The truth is that unless you actively choose something different, you will continue to recreate the experiences of the past.

Mary

Mary was devastated when she and David broke up. She had loved him so passionately and yet with her new understanding she realised there was a part of her that had held back from the intimacy she craved. She just could not let go of her fear of betrayal.

She also realised her fear had nothing to do with David and everything to do with her own pain. It took her some time, but as she listened to the truth that spoke from the heart of her, she began to realise she had the power to heal her life. She was the only person who could. No matter how sad she was, no matter how devastated she felt, the truth was she had created her own reality.

Through fear she had allowed her past to create her future. She had been so focused on her own sense of having been betrayed, she had failed to see David was also in pain, that he had been trying to tell her his own truth. If she had taken the time to listen perhaps they could have shared their fears and learned to move beyond them to a new life.

Remember how our perceptions create our reality? Mary's perceptions cost her dearly. She built up a fear in her mind until it had a life of its own. Even when her own observations told her she had met a good man who loved her, she let her fear dictate the outcome of her life. This may seem like a crazy thing to do, but maybe you've done the same thing. The details and situations will be different but haven't we all shut down our hearts and minds and adhered steadfastly to a belief? And what has that choice cost us?

Perhaps it is time to stop, step back, look and listen.

'unless you actively choose something different you will continue to recreate the experiences of the past'

Chapter Five

LEARN

Discover

As we come to the final dialogue in our awareness section, take a minute to look back over what you have read so far. If you have been following closely, you will have learned some new skills along the way.

In chapter one, we **stopped** to explore stress and the effect it can have on your body. You worked through the stress chart to determine just how much stress you have been under over the past twelve months. I introduced you to the powerful tool of Journal Writing, and we learned simple breathing techniques to help you quiet your mind and give you the space you need to be able to step back.

In Chapter two, we **stepped back** and took a look at grief and how our thoughts create our emotions. We learned that grief encompasses a wide range of emotions and that it is different for everyone.

Chapter three was **looking** at our perceptions and how they create our reality. You worked through a couple of exercises to challenge you to be honest with yourself, to challenge the image you have of yourself and therefore what you project to the world.

In chapter four we discovered how actively **listening** will get to the truth. Learning to listen with your mind, your body, your spirit and using relaxing techniques to allow you to hear your intuition.

The culmination of all these skills leads us to this point.

In this chapter you are going to **learn** how to amalgamate your new skills as you look at your life and work to heal your pain. You can choose to ignore the creeping awareness that lets you know your belief is only part of the truth, or you can allow that knowledge to help you gain a new perspective and understanding about yourself. You can learn to take responsibility for your choices and actions or continue to blame your partner for what you see as their shortcomings.

You may even choose to go to another extreme and take all the blame for the breakdown of your relationship. But responsibility for self and guilt are complete opposites. Guilt is a wasted emotion. Punishing yourself for your perceived sins is just another way of avoiding the truth. True responsibility is the honesty and understanding that you have made a choice, and that for every choice there is a consequence. You may not have had any intention of ending up where you currently are but I can assure you that you **chose** it.

Little by little, day by day, your decisions have created the outcome you face today. Many of your choices may have been passive ones where you went along with

whatever came your way without really thinking about where it might lead. Others probably came about through reactions to circumstances and interactions when your brain was on autopilot. Many people live their whole lives like this. They never get to a place where they understand they have a choice. **Most people don't have the life they want, but they all have the life they have created.**

Before we look closely at how to create the life you want, let's have a look at how to heal your current reality. Using the skills you have learned, take a moment right now to close your eyes and relax.

Concentrate on your breathing and listen to your heartbeat until they slow to a matching pace. Tilt your head back and with your eyes still closed, turn your face to the sky. Take a deep breath in and let it out slowly. With a calmness of body and mind, become aware of any negative emotions you have been feeling (these could be anger, sadness, disillusionment, grief or fear or any combination). Do not allow the emotion to overtake you.

Remember to stop and step back. Have a look at your pain. What does it look like? Does it have a colour? A shape? What does it sound like? Does it roar or whimper quietly? Where does it come from? What is the thought behind the emotion? Is it based in the truth or is it a distortion?

Using the objectivity we talked about in chapter two ensure you are detached enough from the emotion itself to be using the logical part of your brain. Listen closely to your intuition that always tells you the truth. **Have you been holding on to a pain that has no basis in fact?** How long do you want to do this for? You can carry this with you for the rest of your life if you choose, or you can decide to put it down now and learn. Learn a new truth.

So what is the truth? You decide. However, there are some natural laws that are true whether you choose to believe them or not. Your beliefs create your perceptions, your perceptions create your expectations and your expectations dictate your reactions, which will result in choices and behaviours with consequences both now and in the future. This new understanding can free you to take responsibility for your own life.

In Tricia's case, the abuse she experienced during her marriage to Nick allowed her to understand other women who had been in a similar situation. She was able to move past her own pain as she began to understand that, as a result of her childhood, she had formed certain beliefs which attracted Nick into her life. It was not a conscious invitation but her experiences about life had been coloured by her upbringing – and believe it or not, so had Nick's.

From his perspective, his father was a man who never seemed to stand up to his wife. She yelled at him constantly, ordered him around and told him how worthless he was. As a result, Nick vowed never to let a woman tell him what to do. He would be the man in his household. He had seen the dysfunction that had been his parents' marriage, and in his bid to be stronger than his father, he had mirrored his mother's behaviour. It wasn't until a long time after Tricia left that he began to acknowledge

his abusive behaviour toward her and get the help he needed to live the life he truly wanted.

Neither Tricia nor Nick was to **blame** for the situation they found themselves in, but they were jointly **responsible**.

Taking Responsibility

These two words have very different meanings. **Blame** is based in a victim mentality whereas **responsibility** allows for acceptance and change. **Blame** results in guilt and anger but **responsibility** gives power to build anew.

So many people are imprisoned in a life they don't want – stuck in patterns of repetitive behaviour with no understanding of the power they have to change their experience. Yet only by taking **responsibility** for your life can you begin to move beyond your current experience. **Blame** and guilt will keep you stuck whereas responsibility creates freedom.

Many children are not taught to take responsibility for their actions. Their parents bail them out of any trouble depriving their youngsters of very important life lessons. Children are protected and wrapped in cotton wool, and then we wonder why they grow up and create mayhem. Or why they seem unable to make simple decisions about their lives and their future. But we have not taught them the skills they need to live independent and fulfilling lives. As a society we have laid the blame for their actions on their parents, their childhood, their environment or any number of other factors, thereby eliminating the need for true responsibility and inhibiting the growth to full potential. In this way our children really are a product of their environment. Thus they grow up with very little empathy, understanding or ability to recognise the fallout they are creating around them.

Whilst as adults we may have learned to take some responsibility for our actions, and certainly from a societal point of view understand there are consequences for our behaviours, we often operate from a place of blame and condemnation. If things don't go the way we want them to, we look for something or someone to blame. This is classic denial behaviour and is guaranteed to keep you stuck in the same place you are now. In fact the choice to look outside of yourself for the cause of your pain is the primary reason you do not have the life you want. Only by looking within – through the awareness that it is your choices that have got you to this place in your life, and by addressing the underlying belief patterns that have formed your experience, can you move beyond your pain into a life of freedom.

Responsibility is a place of supreme personal power. It's like choosing to sit in the driver's seat of your life.

Balancing Perceptions

The following exercise will help you understand the concept of responsibility a little more clearly. For every time you feel someone was cruel, controlling and ignorant or behaved in any way you consider unfair, unreasonable or painful, there will likely be occasions where you have behaved in the same way yourself. It is easy to feel

aggrieved when someone 'hurts' us but much more difficult to recognise the times we cause someone else pain.

This task will open your mind to a new perspective. As we have already learned, the only way to change our beliefs is by adding new information. Knowledge has always been, and will always be power; the key to opening your mind and heart to the truth that will always set you free.

Open a fresh page in your Heal Me Journal and head it up as the example below or use your workbook to complete this exercise.

Their Behaviour	My Behaviour

Using your new skills of **stop, step back, look and listen**, select an occasion when you feel a friend has hurt you. It may be easier to start with a friend as perhaps the emotions are not as raw as they may be with regards your partner. With the particular event in mind, write the behaviour you feel your friend exhibited toward you. Describe the behaviour in one word. It may be that you feel betrayed, ignored, snubbed, accused, misunderstood or any number of other emotions. Just focus on the one which hurts the most. At the top of each column write a subheading that is the one-word description of your friend's hurtful behaviour.

In this exercise I want you to try to reconnect with your feelings at the time this happened. Concentrate on the event until you can conjure up the depth of emotion you felt as a result of this occurrence. In the left-hand column write all the feelings you can recall. Be specific and use words that portray the depth of your emotion. Look at the words you have written. Feel the emotions that go along with them.

Now comes the challenging part. In the right-hand column, write an occasion when **you** behaved in a similar way to someone else. It could be a friend, family member or your partner. You may have trouble with this to start off with, but persevere as this is an excellent way to add to your awareness.

Remember those feelings you had in reaction to your friend's behaviour to you? Is it possible someone may have had similar emotions in reaction to yours? It can be hard for us to face the fact that sometimes, as a result of our own choices, someone else feels hurt. This is an inevitable part of life, and in truth we are each responsible for our own emotional responses. How we react to a set of circumstances is a choice, and we start to recognise this as our awareness increases. Whilst it is important to consider others as we walk through life, it is not our responsibility to alter the decisions that are right for us in order to protect someone else. Remember each of us has a life to live, and change is an integral part of that life. Some changes we are in control of and make for ourselves, whilst others are as a result of someone else's choice. We can choose to respect their decision or rail against it. Remember, **the longer you wish for the way things were, the longer you will stay in pain.**

This is not just true for you but for everyone everywhere. Let this knowledge set you free from any feelings of guilt you may have.

How are you feeling after this exercise? Do you feel as if you have created a new perception around the event you described? Perhaps you have been able to step back enough to allow your strong emotions to fade a little.

Over-Responsibility

Women often have a tendency to get over-involved in the welfare and emotions of the people they love, particularly if they are mothers. This can lead to a 'rescue' mind-set. A rescue mind-set is one where we try to fix things in the lives of the people who are important to us – where we want to see them happy and do everything we can to help them avoid making mistakes. We take on too much responsibility for their feelings as if we have the power to change their lives by our sheer will. Whilst our intentions may be pure we take away the personal power of the person we are aiming to help. When we act like this with the men in our life it is called emasculation. Our over-responsibility results in the diminishment of them in our eyes if not in their own. This is true for our children too. In fact, people learn best through their own experiences and when we constantly try to 'rescue' them, we take away their personal responsibility for their own lives.

Individuals need to be empowered to build their lives and to become as independent as possible. The fastest way to do this is by ensuring each takes responsibility for their actions. Just as you need to take responsibility for yours, you also need to step back enough to see them fall from time to time. If you are constantly concerned about what the other person is thinking, whether they are coping, and basically living vicariously through them, you will never have the freedom you deserve. You will carry a burden that will weigh you down until eventually you feel resentful of their very presence in your life. Yet if they left, you would no longer know who you are or what your purpose is. Given that our children will leave one day, it is imperative we teach them to live with responsibility and ensure we have our own sense of self.

Jennifer

As Jennifer started to come to terms with the truth about her relationship with Michael, she also recognised that perhaps she had treated him like one of the kids. In some ways, by providing so fully on the domestic front, maybe she had reminded him of his mother. In amongst the day-to-day roles they each played they had lost the fun, the chemistry and the intimacy they had once shared. Her role as mother and homemaker had left little room for 'wife and lover'. She recognised, too, that Michael had tried to keep the romance alive by suggesting things they could do together without the children, but it had always seemed too difficult to get someone to watch the kids. She could see that she could have done more to ensure Michael felt like a man in their relationship rather than just a family member.

Jennifer was sad as realised it wouldn't have taken a lot of effort for each of them to keep their romance alive, that things could have been so different for their family if she had remembered to be a woman first and a mother second. Somewhere in amongst all the domesticity she had lost herself and as a result, her husband.

She had however, gained a new, more balanced perspective about the death of her marriage and she was able to let Michael go without guilt or anger. By taking responsibility for her part in the breakdown of their relationship she was able to free herself from the anger and resentment she had been feeling when Michael betrayed her. She understood he was making a choice for himself and her reaction or response to that was up to her. She chose to accept the changes and started on the road to building a new life for herself.

I spent many years living my life for my husband and children. I was always available when they needed anything – always there when the children came home from school, spent the hours they were away at school taking care of the house and garden. I ensured everything ran smoothly so my husband and children had the security that everything was okay in their world.

But things weren't okay in my world. I had no life or identity of my own. I was simply a shadow in the background of their lives. My efforts were appreciated but I felt isolated and lonely, and as a result my feelings seeped into their world. When my marriage broke down, the shock of suddenly finding myself alone was incredibly stressful. It took me several months to 'get real' and look at what I needed to do to build a life. It was not until I stood up and realised it was up to me that I took responsibility for my own life and started on the path to freedom.

Freedom of Choice

Looking back at the exercise you have just completed, have you discovered a new truth?

Everyone makes choices for themselves. Sometimes on the road to living your best life another may feel hurt by your decisions. How they deal with their emotions is not your responsibility. It is theirs. The same is true for you. Other people's decisions very seldom have anything to do with you. They are just choosing the path that is right for them. They are not doing anything **to** you. You must take responsibility for your **own** feelings and live your life for **you**. This is where your power is.

I had an epiphany many years ago as I 'people watched'. I suddenly realised each and every person I could see was looking at life through their own eyes, just as I was. I understood in that moment they didn't even see me. I was part of the periphery of their life – part of the mass of humanity that surrounds us all. Each of them had their own experiences, their own thoughts, their own concerns, problems, happiness and life. And each of them is making choices each day about the life they want.

From this understanding came a new perspective. We are all the same. No matter what colour, gender, age, height, weight or religion. Each one of us is coloured by our experiences of life, and each of us has a unique perception of the world around us based upon those experiences. Only with a new awareness can you step back long enough to understand this.

The Impact of Societal Stereotypes

We know that the preconceived ideas about the roles men and women play in society create expectations about how relationships should be. But there's a more sinister and subtle side to these stereotypes you may not be aware of. Have you ever eavesdropped on, or been part of a conversation women are having about their partners or men in general? For some reason when women get together they seem to talk about men as stupid, selfish, childish, helpless, inferior and generally not much use for anything.

If you are surrounded by conversations that include anecdotes that reinforce this kind of thinking, where women laugh scornfully at men's differences rather than being appreciative, it's possible you may take some of these ideas as your own. Perhaps this could form the basis of a belief that has nothing to do with men as individuals.

You may have experienced times where the reverse is true. Perhaps you have felt diminished as a result of a preconception that your man or another has expressed about you or women in general. I know I have been in situations where men talk about women as if they are the enemy. I was bewildered as I recognised their thinking had nothing to do with who I am. It's just a stereotype that breeds contempt, derision, disrespect and sarcasm.

Not only do these beliefs seep into the fabric of our society, but they are passed down to the next generation. Children learn so much by watching and absorbing what goes on around them. As adults we can to some extent recognise the stereotypes are not true and perhaps think of them as a bit of fun, but our children do not understand this so for them it starts to create their thinking.

The worst part of this stereotypic thinking is that it becomes self-perpetuating. If in any part of your mind you allow for the possibility that these stereotypes are accurate, you will see instances in the behaviour of the men around you that reinforce this view. Remember the little neural net sitting at the base of our brain? It constantly searches for information that matches our thinking – **you will always see what you expect to see.**

Is it possible that the way we relate to the men in our lives could in part be influenced by these perceptions? If even in some small way you subscribe to these societal stereotypes, could this not diminish your respect and appreciation of the man you love? If you adopt a condescending attitude based on your perceptions surely he will feel it? Perhaps he will feel less as a result of the reflection of himself he sees in your eyes.

So how do you see men? Have your perceptions been altered, coloured or changed as a result of your experience with your ex-partner? Are you prepared to allow this to impact on a future relationship? Perhaps you've decided you will never get into a relationship again because of the beliefs you have formed based on your perception of your experience; as if all men are the same and therefore to be avoided. Perhaps

through the work you do on these pages your perceptions will change allowing you to let go of preconceived notions.

If you want a different experience you need to do things differently. At every turn you have the choice to take these stereotypes on board as your own beliefs or to think differently and find out who each person actually is.

Learn About You

I promised in the first chapter we would readdress your journal writing later in our journey. So firstly we are going to take a look at your Heal Me Journal. Take the time right now before we go any further, to read over the words you have written. What can you see? What can you hear? Is there desperation behind the words that you no longer feel so acutely? How have your perceptions changed from when you started? I am constantly amazed when I reread my own journalistic scribble, how quickly my feelings change. Sometimes just the pure exercise of writing it down frees the intensity enough for me to see how distorted my thinking has been.

It takes time to break the patterns of a lifetime but once you begin to recognise the perceptions you have lived your life from, you will naturally start to question if they are still true for you, or if they ever were. This mental shift (awareness) will start you on a path to the new life you create as you go along.

In Part Two we are going to explore how to take what you have learned up to this point and apply it to your life. If you have not kept a journal so far, I would encourage you to start one now. As you **stop** and do this you will be able to **step back, look, listen** and **learn** about any patterns of repetitive thinking.

Using the tools I have given you allows you to look at life from the two opposite and equal viewpoints we spoke about earlier. This creates a balanced perspective that frees you to choose, to decide each and every day who you are, who you choose to be and what is true for you. **Your** truth is what's important, not the beliefs of the world around you.

Stop and **Step back** to view the world through your new eyes and decide for yourself what is real. Learn to **look** and **listen**. **Learn** to question the beliefs which have shaped your life thus far. Learn a new truth and grasp the freedom that has always been yours, and as you learn, you will begin to understand. This understanding creates the awareness that has been the basis of Part One; the awareness that can change your life forever; that will finally let you live your best life; a life free from other people's expectations; where you take responsibility for your life and yours alone. Only by making choices day by day and staying true to what is right for you will you begin to experience life; a life unlike anything you could possibly imagine and one consciously created by you.

To end Part One, take your Thank You Journal to a place of natural beauty and read it aloud to the universe. Fill your mind and heart with the wonder this world has to offer. Feel the gratitude flood your being as you rediscover the love and kindness that surrounds you.

Finally write an entry today in your Thank You Journal that details your progress to date, and be thankful you are on a new path that comes from the truth of your very soul.

'you will always see what you expect to see'

PART TWO

ACCEPTANCE

and as her heart was breaking
she saw herself as it
from some deep and dark
dream awakening
aware at last
that she was all alone
her dreams were but a myth
an ideal that she
had tried to hone
for years gone by
what did they mean those years
they seemed a waste of time
more than half her life
through pain and tears
she understood
her life it was her own
it always had been so
a cloud was lifting
she had been shown
the truth at last
what would she like to do
now with this life of hers
choices she now had
decisions too
a path to take
scary though this future
and all that it could hold
she would need to find
a way to cure
her pain inside
'i need to learn to love
and be my own best friend
start to treat myself
with soft kid glove
take care of me'
with hand on heart she vowed
to find herself again
to be the woman
she was endowed
with gifts to be

In our lives, change is unavoidable, loss is unavoidable. In the adaptability and ease with which we experience change lie our happiness and freedom. *Buddha*

ACCEPTANCE

The first step toward change is awareness. The second step is acceptance of your current reality and deciding what you're going to do about it. You can continue with the understanding of life as you know it or choose to grow beyond your current experience to a world as yet untraveled.

It is your willingness to accept responsibility for your life which allows you to move beyond the past with greater self-esteem and the power to create anew. You cannot change the events of the past but you can decide how you choose to see them.

With acceptance, your altered perception allows you to see your past so differently that it no longer has any power over your present. In fact it seems to just float away and become a series of events that happened once upon a time in a place far, far away ...

Chapter Six

CLARITY

Perspective

I hope Part One of this book challenged some of your beliefs about how life **should** be. How are you feeling? Are you stronger? Or lost and confused? It's all very well to recognise that some of your beliefs don't have any relevance to you, but what's the truth? Don't you still need something to believe in? The answer is yes. Your beliefs are the foundation from which you live your life. Therefore you must replace irrelevant beliefs with new ones.

One of the fundamental beliefs we seem to adhere to as a society is that once we find our romantic partner, we will be complete. But you can never be complete with another person until you are complete within yourself. People will come and go but your relationship with yourself will last your whole life long. We live in a finite world. Everything has a beginning and an end; it is the natural order of things. We are born and we die, and no matter how precious our relationships are with the people we love, they too change and come to an end. Every relationship ends as some point, even if only through death, it's just a matter of when.

Therefore what's the most important relationship you will ever have in your life? The one with yourself. I've heard people say they have a great home, lovely kids, a fulfilling career, a loving partner but something is missing. Do you know what's missing? They are. They're so busy looking externally for their happiness, they never find it. They can't because it isn't out there, it's inside them.

Many people who have faced the reality of separation and divorce are lost, alone and scared, waiting for a new partner to come into their lives to make them happy. This is a huge expectation to place on another person and as unrealistic as the belief that you can flap your wings and fly to the moon. Only you can make you happy. It's a choice.

Reactions and Responses

In chapter one, we talked about the fact that the only person you have influence over is yourself and that you can choose how to respond to circumstances around you. Do you choose to react or respond? Have you ever thought about these two words? Ever thought they were just another way of saying the same thing? They are actually two very different actions, which will give you two very different outcomes.

A response is an active choice and therefore one over which you have complete control. A reaction is an automated action **against** a particular stimulus. To react is,

in effect, not to choose, and by not choosing, your path is dictated by the past. Are you beginning to see how so many of us continue to repeat patterns of behaviour?

In order to create something new you need to do things differently. If the truth is that what we put out into the world is what we get back and that how we feel about ourselves is reflected in how people treat us, isn't it time to gain some clarity; to be completely honest with yourself; to look at yourself naked (so to speak) in the mirror and be real? If you want a life different from the current reality you see, you need to learn how to take what you have learned and apply it to your life.

I worked for many years as an interior designer. Like any other specialised profession, we use specific industry language and terminology. I have heard contractors say their clients don't understand them and that they are stupid. But the customer has no frame of reference to work from and therefore can't know the questions to ask. They don't know what they don't know. Without communication, through listening and explanation, we designers are working in the dark with a vision we have not shared with our client. Why, then would we be surprised when they turn around and say that what we've created is not what they had in mind? It's our job as professionals to guide them through the correct questions to the truth of what they want.

Is this not true in all areas of life? That without asking the questions you will arrive at a destination that will bear very little resemblance to the one you held in your mind. It's not always that we don't ask but rather that we don't know the right questions to ask.

The awareness section has possibly raised more questions than answers for you but without the questions you cannot begin to find the answers. As you travel this road to freedom with me you are on a journey of self-discovery; less a voyage into the past than a journey to this present moment; to discover the truth about who you are. Not who you **were** but who you are today and who you choose to be from this day forward. So getting to know you is the first step. We spent time in Part One looking at core beliefs and how they are created. You have asked questions to get to your own truth. Some of these may have been painful and challenging, others will have been enlightening.

What is Clarity?

So, what is clarity? It is the moment when you know, without a shadow of doubt, the truth of a situation. Have you ever had an occasion when you have been worried about the outcome of something important to you? Perhaps you or a loved one has had medical test to discover the cause of some symptoms that have been of concern. You are anxious as you wait for the answer which could change your life. When the results come back that everything is okay, the relief you feel is overwhelming. This is the feeling you get in a moment of clarity; when all worry and uncertainty disappears.

Clarity is a place of extreme power, a place you can change your experience forever. Therefore getting to this place is a large part of our journey together. As the fog lifts you can see everything clearly like the mist on a frosty morning that burns off to

reveal a perfect sunny day without a cloud in the sky. The light in the darkness allows you to move beyond your current perceptions to a place of new understanding, a place of true awareness. There will be no churning thoughts here, as clarity is a place of calm serenity and certainty; the knowingness that your intuition has been trying to tell you always. In this place there is only peace. From here you can truly change your life and this is the purpose of this book; to help you find your own truth and live a life of Power and Freedom.

Positive Affirmations

Do you remember learning your 'times tables' at school? One time's one is ... did you have to think of the answer just then or did it come straight into your mind? By repeating something over and over often enough it becomes part of our automated response. This, in a nutshell, is how our beliefs are formed.

Have you heard of positive affirmations? Positive affirmations are statements said over and over again to reinforce a new way of thinking. I used to think they were a waste of time, as no matter what I told myself, I knew I still had core beliefs that would make my words a lie. I have learned however, that just like your times tables this constant reinforcement of a new truth will open up new neural pathways in the brain and assist you in your journey towards a new life.

However, I truly believe that before you can use this tool effectively, you must first become aware of the beliefs you hold which are false. Affirmations are a powerful way to replace the void left by outmoded beliefs and build positive new ones based on your own truths. With time, this constant repetitive behaviour will start to become part of your automated response system, ensuring that never again will you fall back into the 'reactions' of the past. We are going to introduce some of these positive affirmations into our healing process.

Before we start the exercise below, let's repeat the relaxing technique we learned in chapter one and two. Find somewhere comfortable to lie down for a moment. With your eyes closed take a deep breath in and gently let it out, feeling your body relax as you do so. Concentrate on your breathing until your heart rate slows to match. Let your mind drift for a moment.

Okay, now you're feeling calm, focus your mind on your body. Starting at your toes concentrate on feeling them relax. Work your way up your feet to your ankles, your calves, your knees and up toward your hips. Your legs should be feeling heavy now. Keeping your focus on your breathing as you release the air from your lungs let your abdomen deflate and relax. Concentrate on breathing only from your diaphragm, which is the little air bag central to the base of your ribs. This should be the only part of your torso that moves as you breathe. Let your chest and shoulders relax into the floor, allowing your head to tilt back naturally. Feel any tension in your head disappear as your thoughts float away on each breath. Stay here until you feel completely relaxed both in body and mind.

Uncovering Beliefs

Starting at the beginning of your Heal Me Journal and using a highlighter pen, read back over your entries, underlining any passages that particularly stand out to you. Read all the way through using every one of the skills you learned in the last section. Listen to the feeling behind the words. Step back to understand the pain behind them. Remember, your perceptions create your expectations.

If you have done the exercise in chapter two you may already have clarified some of your journal entries. Revisit this exercise and work through all your writings so far. What expectation has not been met? What is the perception (thinking) behind the expectation? Where has that perception come from?

Behind the words and emotion is the belief which has created your current reality. I imagine you will find a few in the pages of pain you entered in your journal. This is certainly the point of this exercise and why I encourage you to write whatever you feel without censure or judgement. Highlight whatever stands out for you. Write notations in the margin or on a separate page as you work through this to come back to later.

In order to identify the belief that sits at the base of our expectations about life we need to ask some questions. Draw up the following table on a fresh page in your Heal Me Journal or use your workbook to complete this exercise.

Emotion	Thinking	Expectation	Belief	Truth	Affirmation

The exercise in chapter two is included here again to help you with the first two columns.

Find an entry in your journal that is full of emotion. Where you have written exactly how you feel, not only with the words but in the way you've phrased them. Read it with fresh eyes and work to identify the strongest emotion you see in the chosen passage. Write the emotion or emotions in the left-hand column of your chart.

Next have a look at the circumstances or event you have written about. Perhaps a particular behaviour or set of behaviours has evoked your emotional response.

Now is your chance to step back. Behind the actual events and the emotions you feel is an expectation that has not been met. Somewhere along the line you had an

understanding of how things would be and when your reality didn't match, your response was the emotion you have identified. So what were you thinking? What was it you expected? Write the thoughts you have discovered in column two.

Column One - What is the emotion I have identified?

Column Two - What is the thinking behind the emotion?

Now we are going to take this exercise a step further and ask these additional questions:

Column Three - What is the expectation or assumption that lies behind my thinking (perception)?

Column Four - What is this expectation based on? What belief do I hold that has created this expectation?

As you work through these questions place your answers in the table you have drawn up. By taking the exercise in chapter two to the next level you can drill down to your deepest level to uncover the belief that has created your life so far. Write a sentence that states the untrue belief you have identified. Write it as if it is a statement of fact, as if you were prepared to fight for this belief no matter what the cost.

Acknowledging your false belief is the fastest way to the truth. If one thing is a lie, then it goes without saying that something else is the truth.

In chapter three we met Greta who had never felt loved. Through time she discovered that the lie she had believed for many years was ... 'if my mother who should love me more than anyone, ever, can't love me ... I must be unlovable.' Once she acknowledged her past belief she was able to move beyond it to a new understanding. Her **truth** is that she is lovable, that she has always been surrounded by people who love her even though she couldn't see it for a long time.

Column Five – What is the truth?

Write the truth you have uncovered in the fifth column. Remember this is your truth. It cannot be right or wrong because this is your journey. By listening to your intuition you will soon find the words to write. If you are having trouble with this, go back to the previous section and practise your awareness skill until you can hear the truth clearly. Complete this exercise for each belief you wish to change. You can continue to do this as you move through the healing process, as I know there will be more you will discover along the way.

Your Affirmations

Now you have all but one of the columns filled in, you will see a distinct link between them. You may experience a moment of complete clarity as you see the false beliefs that have formed your life to this point.

For example, perhaps you struggled to excel in the classroom and your peers teased you for wearing spectacles. As a result, the belief you formed was 'I am stupid and ugly'. Looking at the truth you can see you are an attractive woman with an excellent career. Your last three columns might look something like this:

Belief	Truth	Affirmation
I am stupid and ugly	I have a successful career and am attractive	I am an attractive smart and capable woman

The next step is to write an affirmation using only positive language to reinforce the belief you now know is true. Using the example above, I'll explain.

Column Six – My truth as an affirmation

If you were to write a statement that said; 'I am not stupid or ugly'; which are the words you would constantly hear? **Stupid** and **Ugly**. Do you think this would reinforce the new belief or perhaps consolidate the old? 'Not' is such a tiny word that in many cases your brain will not even hear it. Therefore using only positive words your affirmation might look something like this; '**I am** an attractive, smart and capable woman.'

With this statement you are hearing a message that builds your self-esteem, one which allows you to stand a little taller and lift your head a little higher. This is the kind of affirmation you need to write.

This can be a difficult task. There may be many beliefs you uncover as you work this process which actually match your current life. This will show you very clearly how your beliefs have created your life so far. So your new truth needs to be the truth you wish to see.

Mirror Image

Our external world is **always** a reflection of our internal one. Go and take a look in the mirror. Do you recognise yourself? For many years I tried to lose weight, change my hair, dress in lovely clothes, all in an attempt to create on the outside, the person I thought I was inside. Or perhaps I was trying to disguise it. Do you know what happened? No matter what I did, my eyes still looked sad and all my efforts only created an inconsistency which made other people wary.

Have you ever met someone who looks good but there's something about them which turns you off? Nothing you can actually put your finger on but something doesn't quite fit. The reality is that in their efforts to 'look and behave the part' they have created a misalignment you can sense. Whilst they believe they are fooling everyone, including themselves, their outer appearance still reflects the truth of their inner.

When you look in the mirror do you see a reflection of who you believe you are? If, not the truth is you are not being honest with yourself. Your internal self will always be reflected back at you no matter how hard you try to disguise it.

So if the image in the mirror is not the image you wish to project to the world, and not the person you think you are, what affirmation do you need to write in order to change your old belief and reinforce the new? It is perfectly normal, and to be expected, that the statement you write will feel like a lie. This is because of years of conditioning. It will take practice to build new pathways in your brain. You are potentially working to change the 'self-talk' of a lifetime.

Reinforce Your Truths

Continue to write an affirmation which reinforces the new truth you wish to experience for each belief you wish to change. Once you have completed this part of the exercise, step back and have a look at your columns. What have you discovered about yourself? Have you learned some new truths? Are you feeling energised and motivated?

If you are stuck trying to find the positive words to write your affirmations then just give yourself some time. The concepts introduced in this book are possibly new to you and it may take some time to get your head around what it all means. Just continue to read, as at any moment you could find your 'light bulb' moment, when everything you have read suddenly makes sense, when the purpose becomes clear.

In chapter three you did an exercise to determine how you define yourself. You wrote a positive statement about your personal strengths. This is an affirmation. Have a look back at the exercise and note your affirmation in the chart you have just completed. This will allow you to have everything in one place for the next step.

Take the time now to write your affirmation on a separate piece of paper. Put this piece of paper up where you will see it every day. Record your affirmations on your phone or tablet so you can listen to them over and over again. Sometimes it's easier to hear your voice saying the words and to speak along than to say them to yourself alone. Hearing them outside of yourself can assist your mind to accept them. It can be useful to record them over a favourite soothing piece of music. By raising the volume of the music and lowering the volume of your voice speaking your affirmations, the message becomes almost subliminal. This means it bypasses your conscious mind, ensuring the message gets received without the doubt that is created by the incongruence of your previous long-held beliefs. Your unconscious mind can hear and accept the new messages and integrate them into your functioning almost like updating a computer program.

There is one proviso, though. Affirmations should only be played or stated when you are in a calm frame of mind. If you are stressed or in an obsessive thinking pattern of old pain, ensure you practise your relaxing techniques before introducing your affirmations.

It is imperative that you take the time to make your positive affirmations a habit. There are statistics to prove that you must discipline yourself for at least the first 21 days if you wish to change a pattern of behaviour. If you lose interest or give in to the automated part of your brain, you will continue to repeat the patterns of behaviour which have plagued your past. It is no different from the changes required if you wish to stop smoking, for example. Only by changing the situations that trigger your need

for nicotine, as well as dealing with the physical cravings, can you be successful. There is no time limit, however, so if you find yourself forgetting or losing motivation, you can start again from where you are. This will get easier with time and practice.

When I started to mediate in order to quiet my mind and learn to choose my thoughts, I had to force myself to practise twice every day for at least ten minutes. To start off with, the thoughts would continue to swirl around my brain and it was hard to see the benefits however, over a month or so of disciplined action, my mind seemed to accept the new routine and I created space between my thoughts. It was this space that allowed me to change the beliefs which had kept my life in a cyclical pattern.

If you have birthed your own children you will remember the pain of labour and the delivery, not a clear memory but one more intellectual than anything. Many of us choose to go through it more than once as we recognise that the pain and suffering we felt for a few hours is worth the reward of a lifetime. So too, the effort required in the short term is nothing compared with the benefits you will reap for the rest of your life. You are working to create clarity about your past and your present in order to build a future full of Power and Freedom, so that never again will you fall victim to the old patterns of behaviour, but will live with an awareness which will transform your experience. Practise your affirmations every day and at every opportunity. Be aware of your 'self-talk' and constantly replace any lies with the truth. You will be surprised how quickly your mind-set changes and the lies disappear into the nothingness from which they came.

Your Best Friend

As we continue together my aim is to introduce ways for you to see your growth. Like most things in life it can be difficult to persevere if you cannot see any measurable progress. By rereading your Heal Me Journal and observing how your thinking has changed you will come to understand that you are growing every day; that you are becoming someone new who will be forever altered by the work you do.

If the truth is that the relationship with yourself is the most important one you will ever have, what are you going to do about it? Are you going to become your own best friend? In the poem that is a part of the introduction to Part Two are the words 'I need to learn to love and be my own best friend, start to treat myself with soft kid glove, take care of me'. Are you doing this? Do you even know how to start? Isn't it about time you started to get to know yourself?

Schedule some special time with yourself. Plan some reward. What is it that helps you feel good about yourself? Is it a new hairstyle, a new outfit, a day at a spa, a day at the beach? Your rewards don't need to cost anything. Just go where you feel most yourself. Do this every chance you get. Life has a way of pushing us off balance so regenerating your spirit will help you be the person you wish to be.

When you feel tired, stressed or disillusioned, it can be difficult not to fall back into the old patterns of behaviour. If you find yourself doing this, it's a sure sign you are not taking care of yourself as well as you need to. Take some time to be with yourself in quiet contemplation for a few hours every week. It's easy to say you don't

have time, but you need to put yourself at the top of your priority list. You will accomplish so much more with far better results if you spend time with yourself first.

Learn who you are. Choose who you wish to be. Be kind to yourself.

As women we can often feel overwhelmed with caring for those we feel responsible for. Yet how can you truly care for others if you do not take care of yourself? Children need to learn you are a person too. You're not simply there for their convenience. You have your own life, desires and aspirations. If you don't feel you have a life of your own then work to find a way to create one.

Start a book club in your home if you cannot get a babysitter for your children. Have a 'girlie night' once a month where you invite friends to watch a DVD at your place. Get them all to bring a dessert and enjoy a shared supper. Laugh together, cry together, smile together and emote together. If you are fortunate enough to have family or friends who can take care of your children, then join a dance class or attend night school. Learn something new. Expand your horizons and discover more about who you are. As you do, you will learn to love being with yourself. You need never feel alone when you have your best friend beside you every day.

You will be filled with a new understanding of your own worth as you discover the true essence of who you are, the wondrousness that is you, and others around you will be drawn to you. They will see something different in you which makes you stand out from the crowd. Pay attention to the new people who enter your life. Remember the people who surround you are a reflection of what you are projecting. They are a measure of what you are attracting.

As you change your beliefs, your perceptions and expectations, the people you attract will also change. Are you attracting new people who are more self-aware, positive and real? This is a reflection of who you are becoming, almost like looking in the mirror and seeing past the outside to the woman who lives within.

Your Choice

Always remember you have a choice. You have many tools now to create a new experience for yourself. No matter how frightening the present may appear at this moment, the next move is up to you. There is no inevitable, predetermined future path. You have the final say. You decide. Only you can reclaim the power in your life and choose what you want.

Sometimes, as you choose a new path, it can appear very much like a road already travelled. But if you are honest and real with yourself, I assure you both the journey and the destination will be very far from your past experience. Be clear about who you are and who you choose to be. Decide to be the very best version of yourself in every instance. Understand your humanity and be kind and loving with yourself. As a result you will automatically treat others in the same way.

See the person you are reflected back at you by the joy and kindness you bring to others. Know you are a wonderful woman with many supreme talents and abilities to share with the world. You may wish for more than you have right now, and that's

okay, but release yourself from the 'if only I had this or was like that, then I would be happy' talk, and believe you do not need to do anything to prove you are enough. You are perfect just as you are right now. Acceptance is about more than taking responsibility for your life so far, it is about accepting **yourself** and moving beyond the past into a future full of promise.

Raise your head and stand tall in the knowledge you are so much more than your current reality. As you continue this journey with me, you will come to know your truth with a knowingness that lives in every cell in your body. Your mind will be clear, your body strong and your spirit sure in the knowledge that you are all you need. You are all you've ever needed.

Take your new understanding, your clarity, if you will, and grow.

Shine

Be

'Be what?' I hear you say

Just be ...YOU

'only you can reclaim your power and choose the life you want'

Chapter Seven

FORGIVENESS

Compassion

TTrue acceptance is an action. If someone gives you a gift it is not yours until you take it in your hands. If you do not open it you will have no understanding of what you have been given. By unwrapping the package you are preparing to explore the possibilities within. Only by fully opening the gift can you come to place of complete understanding, acceptance and thankfulness.

What does the word forgiveness mean? Does it mean to forget the pain or difficulties you feel have been inflicted upon you?

Many people hold on to the pain or a particular encounter believing if they refuse to forgive, they can make the other suffer. But the other person has no knowledge of the resentment you are harbouring, and even if they did, they are not going to let it affect their life. Would you?

Forgiveness has nothing to do with anyone other than you. Remember the basic truth that we can only influence ourselves? Forgiveness is therefore about choosing to heal **you**; an active choice and often a difficult one; and this includes the decision to forgive *you* which can be the most challenging of all.

Creating Balance

In chapter five we explored the differences between blame and responsibility, and guilt which is just another way to avoid the truth. Understanding the 'pendulum swing' of thoughts can help you recognise where you are in the healing process.

When we look at the world around us and explore societal norms that have altered over time, we can see a swing from one extreme to another. Take 'Woman's Lib' for example. Feminism originally came about as a rebellion against the total lack of rights for women. Historically a woman was a man's property and he could do with her whatever he wished.

It was also a way for women to take a stand against the post-war mind-set, which suggested women should marry, have children and find satisfaction in running a household. You may have seen advertising and marketing from the 1950's which show women with domestic appliances, cooking and vacuuming, all designed to convince women this was the appropriate role for them.

During the Second World War women worked in factories, building munitions, cars, aeroplanes, as drivers for the forces, on farms and in many other capacities in traditionally male-dominated industries. So many men were away at war, that women had to step in the take over these important roles. However, once the war was over

and the men who survived returned to their hometowns, there was a need to rebuild the male population. To do this, women needed to turn their attention away from work and back to domestic matters, hence the push for the 'perfect wife and mother' ideal.

As a result of the feminist movement, women gained a more equal footing in society and certainly the right to choose their own life. The downside is that many women are working harder than ever before, and in many ways we have lost sight of the very things that make us women.

The difference between male and female are narrowing as boys become more feminine and girls more masculine. We now see binge drinking predominately in girls rather than boys. Groups of girls are terrorising the elderly, bullying people of different nationalities and generally causing mayhem. We seem to be in danger of losing the very differences that have always attracted us to each other. The feminist movement has yet to create the balance between the sexes it set out to achieve.

I use this as an example to demonstrate the extremes that can occur when we change our thinking. The pendulum swings from one end of the scale to the other and then bounces around between the two for a while before settling into some sort of balanced view. Your thoughts may shift from blaming your partner to feeling guilt for the hurt you caused them. Neither of these perspectives is the truth, but it can take some time to work through the process to gain the balance you need to live freely. Work hard to ensure your feelings of responsibility do not flow over into guilt. To do so is to continue the negative self-talk that will result in your pain taking a new course, but one that will still keep you stuck.

Jennifer

Jennifer realised her own actions had contributed to Michael's affair and the breakdown of their marriage. Whilst he was the one to betray her with another woman, had she not also betrayed him when she treated him as if he was of no importance – when she hardly even noticed he existed except as an additional burden in her life? When was the last time they had sat down together and been truly in each other's company, completely focused without the distractions of life crowding their minds? She couldn't remember. No wonder he had enjoyed the attentions of another woman. He must have been lonely too.

As Jennifer started to take responsibility for her own part in the breakdown of her marriage, she began to feel guilty. Suddenly what Michael had done didn't seem so incredibly painful. She chose to forgive and by doing so she was able to forgive herself. With a balanced view of the past it no longer had any power to cause her pain. She took responsibility for her own life, wished her husband well in her mind and let the past float away. She squared her shoulders, looked at herself in the mirror and promised to be true to herself from now on.

Forgiveness is not always an easy step as it involves letting go of the last vestiges of your pain. The human ego had a need for drama in order to feel important, however, without forgiveness there can be no freedom. Without freedom there is no life.

Anna

Anna began to see that Terry must have been in an enormous amount of pain to take the step to leave their relationship the way he did. He didn't intend his choice to be an abandonment or rejection of her. He was just following his heart. Anna remembered he had been stressed and tense in the last few weeks they were together, but when she had asked him what was bothering him, he said it was work pressures. She knew now that his was not the truth. She had seen his pain and now understood the toll his decision had taken on him. Poor Terry, she thought. What a burden to live with? Why couldn't he just be honest?

It was then that she realised that in fact it was his truth she was struggling with. It just wasn't the same as hers any more. Everything she had believed about her future had changed, and it was she who was having problems accepting and adjusting. They were her feelings and Terry was not responsible for them. Once the light bulb went off in her head, Anna realised it was time to let the pain go. She had chosen her negative response and she was the only one who could change it. In that moment she understood that Terry had always been an honourable man. He had tried as hard as he could to minimise her pain but the rest was up to her.

It is amazing how quickly your pain can dissipate when you reach a new perspective and by taking this perspective to a place of understanding and acceptance, forgiveness is a natural progression. Participating fully in this journey of self-discovery will not allow you to hold on to the pain, anger and disillusionment of the past. You will have no choice but to move beyond it to a new future.

Mary

Mary had been struggling with the understanding that it was her own fears which had destroyed her relationship with the lovely David. Whilst she acknowledged the truth, she was angry with herself for allowing the past to have so much power in her present life. However, she also knew if she didn't accept and forgive herself she was potentially doomed to repeat the same behaviour in the future. She was determined to learn from her latest loss and ensure the experience was not a waste.

As she looked at herself in the mirror, she saw a woman with wariness in her eyes. She knew she needed to learn to trust the world again, and herself for that matter. She closed her eyes and breathed deeply. When she felt calmer, she raised her eyes again to the mirror and saw a clarity that had not been there a minute ago. She understood she had made a choice in that second to let the past go, accept her fear and overcome her distrust of others. It would take practice, she knew, but the lightness of spirit she felt let her know she was on her way.

If you have ever forgiven a loved one, you will know it is accompanied by a sense of relief, as if you have just put down a heavy burden, and this is exactly the truth. Your pain, resentment, anger, fear and disillusionment are a huge burden that weighs you down. It impacts on your physical and mental health, your sense of enthusiasm for

the world around you, and causes you to respond negatively to the people in your life. You may become insular or completely self-absorbed as you revisit your anger or sadness over and over again. Possibly this is exactly where you were when you picked up this book.

Forgiveness Exercise

In chapter five we explored the possibility that whilst there are occasions when you feel hurt, this can be balanced with the times you have acted in a similar way and caused pain to someone else. If you are feeling strong enough, now is a good time to repeat this exercise but choose your partner's behaviour instead of a friend. Use a new page in your Heal Me Journal and head it up as below or use your workbook to complete this exercise.

Forgiveness	

Think of an action your partner has taken that caused you to have painful emotions. Concentrate on your feelings but do not let them overwhelm you. Use some of the objectivity we talked about in chapter two. Simplify the behaviour down to one word and write this at the top of each column.

On the left-hand side write as many emotions as you can think of that accompany your memory of the particular occasion you have chosen.

In the right-hand column write all the times you have behaved in a similar way to someone else. Chances are, due to the intimacy of the romantic relationship, you may find it hard to think of anything. Rather than thinking about the circumstances that surrounded the behaviour, concentrate on the actual word you have written to describe it. This part of the exercise is the most important. You can gain a completely new perspective here.

Take a moment to revisit your pain and see if it actually has the same power over you as it did when you started. Even if you have not yet followed the exercises described so far, hopefully you are starting to see there are steps to reacquaint yourself with yourself and the world around you. There is a better way to live than the one that has caused you so much pain.

Close your eyes and use the breathing techniques described in the preceding chapters to clear your mind. Remember, you are responsible for your own reactions and responses to the circumstances and changes that occur in your life. Life has not been unkind to you; it just 'is'. It is neutral. It's only your energy added to the circumstances that give them any power. Just as a gun does not kill without the person who holds it, so too, your pain will not exist without your reactions. You can choose to allow the circumstances to hurt and destroy you or let them wash over you with barely a ripple. Bear in mind no one can take your power, but you may have

chosen to give it away. By choosing now to see with a new perspective, to accept and forgive, you are taking back your power and as a result you will find fulfilment, peace and a new view of the world around you.

Linda

Linda missed aspects of her old life, particularly the familiar comfort of being a family of Mum, Dad and the kids, however, she knew in her heart nothing had changed. Her relationship with her boys was intact, and although she and her ex were no longer living together, they still had the opportunity to be a family, albeit in a different form. They could each decide to leave the past behind and build a foundation of friendship even for the sake of the children. Whilst she had decided she didn't want a romantic relationship with her ex any more, she still valued him as a father for her children and remembered the man she had fallen in love with all those years before. Had he really changed or had life just got in the way of their love? She hoped he too could find a way to move beyond his pain to a place where they didn't have to lose each other forever.

Choose now to forgive your partner for his actions. He did not set out to hurt you but was simply following his own path and making decisions for himself. It is quite possible that out of his own pain he was simply reacting based upon a set of beliefs he has lived *his* life from. Perhaps with what you have learned you may begin to feel some empathy and understanding. You do not have to like his choices or agree with them, but in order to forgive you must accept them. Just as you have the right to make choices for yourself, so too does he.

How quick we are to expect others to forgive us for our shortcomings but how slow we are to forgive them. Whilst doing the exercise above, you may have discovered some things about yourself you don't like or respect. I know as I worked through my life there were times I knew I had made my partner responsible for my feelings. I blamed him for the way I felt in response to his choices. I was giving my power away to a situation over which I had no control. For a while I felt incredibly guilty and sad for adding pressure during an already difficult time, however, I chose to forgive myself and let it go in order to move forward in my own life. I cannot change my actions in the past but I work every day to change them in my present.

How are you feeling about the exercise above?

Let me ask you a question. If you have been able to gain a new perspective around the pain you have been feeling with regards to your partner's actions, could you not do the same for your own? If you are working towards a place of forgiving him, surely you can do the same for yourself? Do not give into feelings of guilt. Just understand you were reacting from your own past understandings. Use your new perspective to forgive yourself and decide in this moment to choose your responses actively from now on. There may be times where the old, reactionary feelings arise but with your new awareness you will be able to recognise them and make a new choice.

Changing The Past

We have been taught we cannot change the past. But I challenge that belief. When we look back on times that have come before, we see through our memory. But our

memory is coloured by our feelings, emotions, perceptions and reactions to a series of events. Therefore, is what we see the truth? Or is it only the truth from a certain perspective? If you could see the past from the viewpoint of everyone surrounding a particular event, you would experience a very different truth. You would understand that the circumstances themselves are completely neutral and you are the one who has labelled them either good or bad. You have decided the outcome of the situation for yourself. By challenging your own beliefs and perceptions, even the past can look completely different. It has no power over you unless you let it. The past, the present and the future are just part of the continuum that is life.

In the Dennis Quaid movie, *Vantage Point*, a murder occurs. As the viewer, you are shown the events which precede the shooting several times, through several character's eyes, as if it was happening in the now. Each version has the same outcome but the circumstances surrounding it appear very different. The culmination of the various viewpoints allows the viewer to build up a complete picture of the series of actions which bring about the final outcome. The film is intense and often confusing but at the end you have the whole picture and understand the truth. By creating the movie in this way, the director has enabled us to see the range of differing perspectives that make up the truth.

This is true of your life as well. There is a wider truth to the circumstances that have created your experience so far. Only with a shift in consciousness can you begin to see beyond your own insular reactions to the broader truth; the shift in consciousness though awareness we have been working toward in this book. You will never view the past in the same light as before, it is impossible, as your perception has changed, and this alteration has in essence changed the past for you. Even if you try to recapture the feelings you once had, they will feel like a shadow without any real substance. Forgiveness will free you from your pain.

Forgiveness in Action

After a time, or perhaps immediately, you will begin to see your whole life as just a series of events which have no power over you at all. As you practice, your objectivity will become finely honed, and you will start to see all the different sides of any occurrence. You will no longer be trapped in an old pattern of behaviour based upon a reactionary state. You will reclaim the power in your life and choose a new way to be, a way of forgiveness that allows you to move to a place of love. When there is love, pain cannot survive. It vanishes like a mist that clears with the advent of the sun.

Once I realised I was living my life from some preconceived notion told to me from my earliest moments by a society that needed to build a particular picture in order to continue the status quo, I became angry and resentful. What about you? Will you harbour resentment against those who taught you the version of life which formed your beliefs? Will you choose to blame others for the way your life turned out? Step back for a moment and understand that there was a moment when you made a choice, even if passively. Perhaps you got pregnant and ended up married because of societal or familial pressure. Maybe you were brought up in a religious environment where you were taught a woman has no value unless she is married with children, that she should be fulfilled by this, as it is her birthright. Or perhaps

due to cultural beliefs, you never asked yourself what you truly wanted. In any case, somewhere you made either an active or passive decision which has brought you to this place in your life.

Forgive Others

The bigger picture is perhaps you have other people to forgive; perhaps your parents for instilling a certain belief pattern that has created expectations for you; maybe forgiveness for a societal structure which has an agenda that has nothing to do with you as an individual.

Look back on the 'Uncovering Beliefs' exercise you completed in chapter six. Are you able to pinpoint where the false belief originated? This can help your understanding in two ways.

Firstly, recognising where your beliefs have come from will raise your awareness of your own behaviour and how this can affect your children. What assumptions might they make as a result of watching the way you live your life?

Secondly, there could be an incident or occurrence which has formed beliefs with far-reaching ramifications. You may feel resentment towards someone as you see the impact his event has had in your life and perhaps how different things could have been. It may appear this one occurrence has coloured how you see the world, and the belief you formed as a result is the primary reason your relationship with your partner has ended. This could open up a new flood of emotional pain for you. Resist the urge to place blame. Choose to forgive and let any feelings of resentment go. They do not serve you and you cannot change the world all by yourself, however, you can change your world. You can create a new reality for yourself and work toward what you truly want. Face your fears and choose to move beyond them to a place of freedom.

If you are motivated by fear then you will continue to feel imprisoned. To react *against* fear is not a choice. It is a perpetual motion of flight away from some imagined outcome that has no basis in anything other than your imagination. Look at the word fear:

F.E.A.R. False Evidence Appearing Real

Your fears are only as real as you allow them to be. What are you afraid of? You are in the drivers' seat of your life.

Photo Exercise Two

Have a new photo taken either by a friend or in a photo booth. Paste this photo on to a new page in your Heal Me Journal or use your workbook to complete this exercise.

Name	Date
(Paste photo here)	Your Impressions

Work through the same process as in chapter three and jot down your impressions of the person in the photo. Start again with the superficial things; hair, clothing etc before moving on to the emotions you sense behind the exterior. Finally write you emotions based on how you feel about the 'you' in the photo. Treat this as a completely new process and avoid looking back at your previous conclusions.

Using the two sets of observations (the ones in chapter three and the ones you have just completed) we are going to analyse further. Use a clean piece of paper or your workbook for this task as it will be easier to cross-reference with your journal observations this way.

Head up this page as follows:

Who am I?	
Then	Now

Copy the impressions you had about yourself from the first photo into the 'then' column. Use as much paper as you need, leaving plenty of space for notations along the way. Using the right-hand 'now' column, complete the same process for your impressions based upon the second photo.

If you have been following the processes in each chapter as we have gone along, you may see a marked difference between the two photos. Perhaps the external things look very similar but hopefully a new 'aliveness' emanates from the picture. Perhaps your eyes are brighter, your posture is more upright or maybe there is just a calmness that wasn't there before. It could just be a sense that something has changed that you can't put your finger on. Write a summation of how you feel about the differences you see.

If this is not a positive experience for you then perhaps you need to give yourself permission to take things slowly. This is a personal journey and you will find your way in time. My hope is that this book will give you some of the building blocks to get started on the path to freedom. Remember the neural net that sits at the base of your brain? It may only be by persevering for some time that the contents of these pages will begin to make sense to you.

A New You

Stand in front of a full-length mirror for a moment. Raise your head and look at yourself in the eye. As you do this put your shoulders back, straighten your spine and lengthen your neck. Close your eyes for a second whilst taking a cleansing breath in and out.

Raise your eyes to the mirror again.

Who do you see?

Look behind the exterior to see the real you behind your eyes. They say the eyes are the window to the soul. Do you see the woman you wish to be? Are you a woman full of confidence with a twinkle in her eyes, a sure and ready smile, someone who sees the world around her full of empathy, understanding and forgiveness? Remember, forgiveness is a choice. It is not always easy but it is necessary if you are to move beyond your current reality to a new version of you, a new vision for your life. One where you are your own best friend; where you understand from your heart that you are all you need; that no matter what the world throws at you, you decide the outcome for yourself; where you forgive yourself for any past pain, hurt or difficulties you have caused others and accept that this is who you *were*. It need not have anything to do with who you choose to be now. That choice, like every other is up to you.

Look at yourself in the eye and smile. This may feel very strange to you but how would you greet a good friend? Would you look at her with wariness as if you didn't trust her? You would not choose to be her friend if this is how you felt.

Take this first step to becoming someone new by stepping out of guilt, anger, fear and resentment and into the light of opportunity and possibility. See your life as a yet unwritten book. Write your story on every page, day by day, as you move through this world. *Your story*. Not the version you think others expect but one which comes from the essence of who you are.

The *you* who wants to be free

The *you* who wants to know the truth

The *you* who has been waiting for you your whole life

**'without forgiveness there can be no freedom and
without freedom there is no life'**

Chapter Eight

LOVE

Appreciation

What is love? Is it the euphoric feeling that accompanies a new lover? Is it the overwhelming feeling when you hold your newborn child? Is it perhaps the care and respect you have for your parents no matter how old you get? Maybe it's the feeling that overwhelms you when your child is sick or injured. Or is it the feeling of comfort you have with an old friend?

Love is all of these, and the deep, abiding contentment you feel when all is right with your world. Depending on how you choose to react to the circumstances that occur around you, life can seem hard at times. Remember, a response is a choice, a place of power. Events do not need to impact on your sense of self. Society has trained us to see certain events as bad and other as good. But is this really true? Why do we see the death of a young man in war as a noble sacrifice whilst his death in a car accident is tragic? A young man has still died. Our social conditioning creates our perspective. If we lose our job, is it really a devastating event that should cause us fear or an opportunity in disguise?

We have discussed that change is an inevitable part of this finite world. Why therefore, are we shocked and disillusioned when things are altered? Our expectation that life should be a certain way causes us to lose balance. If we could truly accept that the world around us is constantly changing, that we ourselves are constantly evolving, perhaps we would not feel so tossed about by the situations around us. The ability to stay safe and secure in the knowledge of who you are and to choose how to respond to events is called serenity.

Serenity comes when you trade expectations for acceptance. Serenity has been my goal for more than ten years or so; to be able to walk this world secure in the knowledge that no harm can come to me; to know that every event is neither good nor bad and therefore has no power until I make a judgement about it and that I have a choice in that judgement. I still get tossed about with uncertainty at times and catch myself thinking about the past. Occasionally I cry for the losses I have faced and my own part in creating them, however, with acceptance and forgiveness, I have found a love I never knew I could feel.

For so many years I felt rejected. My feelings were based in my perception of the judgement of others. Notice I said 'my' perception. I had never bothered to ask what they thought of me, I just made assumptions, and those assumptions created my reality.

Why wasn't I good enough? Whilst I lived in an environment where certain perhaps unreasonable and unrealistic expectations were placed upon me, at some stage as I matured it was up to me to decide the truth. I chose for a long time to be angry and

resentful of the missed opportunities that could have been mine; to feel justified in my anger and resentment and at times to use this as an excuse for my behaviour; to wallow in a 'poor me' victim mentality whilst telling myself I had been through so much and yet 'look at me'; wasn't I doing well?

All my life I had been looking for love and when I met my husband-to-be I believed I had found it. Neither of us had any idea of who we were as individuals, what life was about, or the first clue about what a successful relationship should look like. For years I was miserable as I continued to hold on to my distorted perceptions. I looked for fault in the people around me, as surely they must be responsible for my misery? It was only after I left my marriage that I started to understand the truth; that I was responsible for my own feelings; that all the pain I had been feeling was self-inflicted; that at some stage I could choose something different.

With the help of an excellent counsellor I learned to take responsibility for my own actions, my own choices. I grew to recognise the core beliefs that kept me from believing I was a good person; someone with any worth. Because the truth was, although I was busy trying to find blame in the people around me, I was sure it was my fault. There had to be something fundamentally wrong with me.

It wasn't until my 36th birthday that I had a light-bulb moment. I had arranged a party for myself, with a few friends and their partners. That morning my husband and I had an argument and hurtful words were said. I was tempted to cancel the dinner, as I was devastated, however, I decided instead not to allow my birthday to be spoiled no matter how terrible I felt. As the dinner came to a close, a friend got up and went to the piano. The eight couples in the room sang happy birthday and for the first time in my life I realised they were there for me. They weren't there for the sake of my husband or my children. They weren't there for the free food either. They actually liked me. I realised I had held the belief that people were doing me a favour by spending time with me.

In that one moment my life changed. I discovered the truth that **I am** enough and I have learned to love myself warts and all, and there are plenty of them, but do you know what? It doesn't matter. I have come to a place of acceptance, forgiveness and love. And that's more than enough.

Love Yourself

As your beliefs change so too will your experience. Remember we talked about the fact that in order to have something different, you need to do something differently? Armed with a new belief structure you will be living your life from somewhere new. Therefore the outcome will be new; almost as if you have put on 3D glasses and suddenly everything looks different. The situation you are in has probably not altered, but your new perspective makes it appear so.

As you go about your life from this new viewpoint the choices you make along the way will ensure your experiences are vastly different from those in your past. As your belief system is reprogrammed your life will be lived from a completely new set of values. As you move into a place of forgiveness and love, you will notice the fabulous world you live in.

I am not talking about the external life you lead but the beauty of nature, the kindness of people, and the fantastic opportunities that surround you. It's as if you have floated out of your own mind to a new plane where you operate from a place of empathy and love; empathy and love for yourself as well as the world around you.

The energy you put out will be reflected back at you. Suddenly you will find yourself surrounded by forgiveness and love, and as you reflect and accept these wonderful qualities you will move to an even higher plane where there is serenity, joy and freedom; where you will emanate even more radiance, and those around you will be strengthened by their association with you.

So when I ask you what love is, this is it. The certain knowledge of who you are, the awareness to accept the circumstances of your life, the grace to forgive both yourself and those you believe caused you pain, and the knowledge you can be whomever you choose.

As this love, which comes from true awareness and acceptance starts to flood your mind, body and spirit, any fear for the future just disappears. You have certain knowledge that no matter what life throws at you, you will be fine. Never again do you need to be tossed around on the winds of circumstances. Your life is up to you now. You are truly in the driver's seat of your life and you can choose each and every moment the path your life will take.

Jennifer

As Jennifer came to forgive both Michael and herself, she felt lighter than ever before. Her heart was singing and as she gazed at herself in the mirror, the reflection that looked back at her was calm and serene. She had never seen herself like this before. There had always been a sense of urgency in her eyes and posture, as if she was always on edge waiting for the next event or occurrence that would require her immediate attention.

She realised it have been many years since she had made any time for herself. She had been so busy running her family and their lives, including her husband's, she had lost herself in the confusion of trying to be all things to all people. She realised now that this new woman she was becoming was more real, more truthful, more honest and capable every day. She saw a confidence that hadn't been there before.

As her now steady eyes looked back at her she felt, and saw, a smile start to curve at the corners of her mouth. It was a bit of a wry smile as she finally understood just how absorbed she had been in the motions of living a life in which she had ceased to exist. She also realised that in fact she had needed to be needed. It was this need she had identified in herself that had created her behaviour of putting her family first at the exclusion of herself. As a result she had become a shadow version of the woman Michael had met, a shadow version of the woman she knew you could be, would be, was. It was up to her now. She was determined to grab this opportunity and revel in her newfound identity. She was becoming a new woman, one who vowed never again to

lose herself, who would take this precious gift she had been given in both hands and create anew, a new life, a new experience, a new future.

Jennifer learned through her journey from pain to love that she was completely responsible for her own life, that she could create whatever experience she chose, and she chose to continue to be a good mother but one who was real, who showed her children who she was as a person, to build a relationship with each of her boys based upon a meaningful interaction with them.

She was determined too, to take her new independence of spirit and explore new paths for herself, to show her children by example that she was someone worthy of respect, to put boundaries in place which would ensure that never again did she become so absorbed in the raising of her boys that she lost herself.

She finally understood that she was her first priority, not in a way which was selfish or excluded her kids, but one where she took care of her own needs first, and in doing so she was a much better mother, more balanced, loving and real. As she took care of herself, she had so much more to offer the people around her, including her children. Instead of feeling depleted by their needs, she felt proud to be their mother, and in time, after a few adjustments, she found the love she had for her children returned as they, in turn, learned to respect and love her not only as their mother but as a woman in her own right.

Anna

Anna grew to a place where she was thankful to Terry for his decision to end their relationship. Whilst it had been a painful journey, the eyes that looked back at her in the mirror each morning were kind, soft and loving, full of vitality and hope. Without the heartache of their break-up she would probably never have had this opportunity to explore her own truth and discover who she wanted to be.

With her focus firmly on the dream of their life together, she had never really stopped to ask herself who she was. In hindsight she realised that to some extent she had been on a road she had never thought about, one she had believed with all her heart would bring her the happiness she had always sought. She knew now that happiness could not be found in a relationship alone. She understood that whilst the interaction between two people who love each other is wonderful, without herself she had nothing.

Anna now got up each morning with a sense of purpose. She no longer went automatically through the motions of her life but radiated a confidence that was contagious. She was attracting many interesting people into her life and she had noticed the attention she'd been getting lately. Something had definitely changed and she was proud of what she had achieved, who she had become. She knew that if she decided she wanted a partner in her life as some stage, she would attract someone wonderful. For now though, she was content to explore the world on her own, to discover new places, new people and get to know herself; to take the time to become a woman with a strong and positive belief system, who asked herself the questions that would form her experiences, to live actively and fully in a world where her life was her own; where she could decide each and every moment what she

wanted to experience and who she wanted to be; who recognised the wondrous opportunities she knew surrounded her every day.

A few years later, at Anna's wedding to the handsome man by her side, she vowed to be true to herself, to be true to him and to love him every day for the rest of her life. She understood finally that love is a choice, one she was determined to make every minute throughout her lifetime. No matter what the future held for them as a couple, she would never again lose herself in a dream that had no basis in reality. She knew that 'happy ever after' had to come from inside her. It was up to her to create her own experience.

Mary

Mary was finally able to let go of her anger at herself for destroying her relationship with David. She acknowledged her fear and distrust had been a large part of the reason things had not worked out for them. She also recognised it was due in part to David's experiences. They each had issues they needed to work out before they could ever have hoped to have a future together. It took some time but when she stopped thinking about David and put her energies into her own life, she learned to heal herself.

Suddenly it wasn't about her loss but rather about her gain. She had found herself, and it was as if she had been waiting her entire life for this. She felt complete and whole. She knew then that she had been missing from the centre of her life. Everywhere she looked she saw beauty. Her journey had transformed her experience, and she knew she would never look at the world in the same way again. Her perceptions had altered. She was free for the first time in her life.

By deciding to let her pain and guilt go, Mary was able to move beyond her disappointment over the loss of her relationship with David to a place of personal power, forgiveness and love. She took responsibility for her life, and from her disillusionment came a new reality.

She discovered she was a strong and independent woman with the world at her feet. She could create her life in any direction she chose. She was no longer bound by her old beliefs and understandings but free to move into a life completely her own. Now and again she wondered how David was getting on but she had let any possibility of the two of them together, go. His life was up to him just as she had discovered she was the creator of her own.

From a place of love anything is possible because where love exists there can be no fear. In this world of ours there are only two things that motivate us; love or fear. Everything comes back to one of these.

To be motivated by fear is to live in a reactionary state forever. From here you are constantly choosing to avoid a certain presumed outcome.

To live from love is to choose to respond to the circumstances that surround you with the certainty of your own self-awareness, to live always in a place where you are true to you, no matter what the cost. This is not a place of selfishness but one of

assurance in the knowledge that whatever life throws at you, you will be fine because you have you. And you, is all you need.

Creating Congruence

I promise as you work through from awareness to forgiveness and love, you will see a marked difference in your outward appearance. This will happen in two ways.

Firstly, there will be a new spring in your step, your eyes will be brighter and clearer, your posture will be more upright and there will be a slight upturn to your mouth that may not have been there before.

Secondly, you will start to take better care of yourself. You may not be aware this is happening to begin with but suddenly you will find yourself spending more time on your appearance when you get ready in the morning. You may find that you have lost weight without consciously changing your eating habits. You might decide to start an exercise programme or join a night class. Maybe you'll find the things you have talked about doing for years to improve yourself, but never had the motivation to do, suddenly seem effortless.

Let's go back to the mirror for a moment. Does the image you see on the outside match the inside? When we get to this part of our journey and so much has been achieved in terms of letting go of the past and getting real about the present, you might be surprised to see the you, who is reflected is clothed in a way which does not reflect who you are now.

Ask a good friend to help you with this next task as you will need to take photos along the way. Open your wardrobe, take all your clothes out and place them on the bed. Pick each item up and try it on. Look at yourself in the mirror and ask yourself these questions:

- Does this item of clothing compliment my new sense of self or is it dragging me down?
- Does the colour make my complexion appear brighter and my eyes shine? Or do I look drab and overwhelmed?
- Does the style make the most of my figure or is it hiding my best attributes?
- How do I feel when I put this outfit on?
- Am I proud of the way I look when I am wearing this?

Mix and match different pieces to see whether each piece reflects how you see yourself now. Anything that creates a negative response should be put in a pile on the floor in the hallway. Put the pieces that bring a smile to your face on a fresh hanger and place them in the wardrobe. Continue with his task until there is nothing left on the bed.

You may have created another pile of garments you are unsure about. Go back through this pile and decide yes or no. Repeat this exercise for any clothes stored in drawers. Discard the pieces that don't work and hang the 'keepers' on hangers to be placed in the wardrobe.

Arrange the clothes you have hung in the wardrobe by colour so you can select pieces easily based on the shade you feel like wearing on any day. If you are unsure about your ability to select outfits that work well together, get your friend to help you with a labelling system based on your trial today. For example, you may have a well-fitting pair of trousers in a neutral colour. Place a number on the hanger of these pants and the same number on any tops that work with it. Continue to do this for each item in your wardrobe so you are confident about the choices you make each day. Photograph yourself in each outfit you put together for future reference.

Once you have arranged your wardrobe, take all the clothes in the hallway and bag them up to give to charity. Take them out of the house immediately and place them in the boot of your car to dispose of the next day. Shut the boot and symbolically wipe your hands of the contents. Square your shoulders and return to the house and make a cup of tea or coffee for you and your friend to share as you work on the next exercise.

Fake It Till You Make It

Head up a fresh page in your Heal Me Journal as shown below or use your workbook to complete this exercise.

Fake it till you make it	
(Paste photo here)	I feel ...

Print out the photos of the outfits you have chosen and paste them in the left-hand column. In the right hand column write any compliments your friend paid and how you felt when you were trying on the outfit. Keeping a record of this will allow you to 'fake it till you make it'.

By choosing clothing by how you felt when you were wearing it, you can replicate that feeling no matter how difficult your day may be. Knowing you look good on the outside, and in the process of doing the work on the inside, can give you the confidence to go out into the world with a spring in your step and a smile on your face.

You may choose to do the above exercise electronically but it is worth printing out the pages and pasting them into you journal or workbook so all your work is in the same place.

Creating Your Own Style

Looking at the photos now, is there something missing? Do any of your outfits look incomplete? Adding a chunky necklace or bangle, a hat or scarf could make all the difference and bring your outfit to life. Perhaps as you hung up your clothes, you identified that you are lacking a particular style of item – maybe a skirt or a dress. Make a note of it and the required colour. When you are in a position to buy something new, ensure what you buy works with the contents of your new wardrobe.

Take copies of your photos with you to select new pieces based on the styles and colours you have identified as adding to your image. Doing this will teach you the basics of wardrobe building and set you on the road to looking your best.

There are computer programs available online which allow you to upload a head shot of yourself on to the screen and then select different hairstyles to determine how they may look in reality. Use this tool to select a style and colour that compliments your complexion and skin tone. Save your selection to be visited next time you go to the hairdresser for a cut or colour.

Do the same thing with cosmetics. Research different application techniques and practise at home till you find a look that feels right for you. Ask a friend you trust to help you with these tasks. Make it a 'girlie' day or evening and have fun with it. Host a cosmetics party and offer to be the model. You may find a completely new look without the pain of figuring it out for yourself. Use all the tools at your disposal to learn the skills you need to complete your outward reflection of the new you inside.

Work within your own budget to make choices about your external appearance to compliment your inner beauty. We have all seen 'makeover' shows where a complete transformation takes place in front of our eyes, and certainly the results are dramatic. Most of us are not in a position to recreate ourselves in such an extreme way and a slow transition which follows your inner journey is much more valuable than an overnight metamorphosis. You must first develop the confidence to carry off a new look. If you do not do this all important first step you will find yourself in a place where you are presenting an incongruent image which could set you back. You must work at a pace where the inner creates the outer, not the other way around. The purpose of 'fake it till you make it' is to support your internal journey every step of the way as you gain in strength.

Individuality

Listen to that small and certain voice inside that lets you know what is perfect for you. Trust your instincts and go with what you know in your heart. This might all be new to you, as you may never have taken the time to address your appearance before. As you grow in confidence you will discover how to dress the outside to match the inside. This is what I mean by the congruence we talked about earlier in this book. A sense of rightness that is comfortable and sure.

Go out into the world armed with your new knowledge and image and watch the responses you get. Do people treat you differently than previously? Do you find yourself feeling more confident and assured than you were before this exercise? Understand that the way people treat you is a reflection of what you are projecting. If you are finding people are drawn to you then take this as confirmation you are on the right road. Be proud of yourself for all you have achieved. Look yourself in the eye and smile in appreciation for your journey so far. This is part of loving yourself and no more than you would do for someone you care about. If you truly care about yourself you will celebrate your successes. Raise a symbolic glass to you in salute of the new woman you are becoming.

So what is your truth? Who do you want to be?

If what you put out into the world is what you get back, then looking at what you are creating will get you to the truth of your beliefs. Heal yourself and become the woman you were born to be. Explore your abilities and find a way to use these to the betterment of yourself and those around you. Live your life with love, understanding, knowledge and empathy. Remember, you have started a journey that will take you somewhere you have never been, to a place that will bring you certain joy.

Love yourself and as you do, not only will you love others but the love you express will come flooding back to you from more sources than you can possibly imagine.

‘from a place of love anything is possible; where love exists there can be no fear’

PART THREE

CELEBRATION & FREEDOM

and this time as she turned
her face up to the sky
she thanked the universe
for what she'd learned
freedom was hers
all she had to do now
was take her life in hand
learn to stand alone
give past a bow
and move beyond
the dream she never knew
was fantasy at best
a figment of her mind's
distorted view
a trick of light
the sunlight bathed her face
with golden light so pure
as slowly there dawned
a smile of grace
and gratitude
then joyful bubbles grew
from deep within her heart
her smile was wider
her spirit flew
as love began
to flood her body whole
her mind was free to fly
to places never been
to free her soul
her eyes were bright
with tears of happiness
that she had never known
even though her life
seemed such a mess
she was alive
in the knowledge that she
was free in deed and thought
to create herself
anew to be
herself alone

**The more you praise and celebrate your life,
the more there is in life to celebrate. *Oprah Winfrey***

CELBRATION and FREEDOM

With all that you have learned so far, my wish is that you are well on the road to finding your personal Power and Freedom within. It does not matter how bleak your external world looks. You may have lost all your money. You may be scared of a future alone. But with the skills you have learned on our journey together you can know that joy is yours.

When you learn to look within rather than without, you will find you have abundance beyond your wildest dreams. Perhaps not in the way you thought when you first started this journey, but with clarity of mind, calmness of body, purpose of spirit and certain knowledge that you are fine. In fact, you are more than fine and always will be.

In that knowledge there is much to be celebrated. Celebrate your life and the path that has brought you to this place. Celebrate you! As you do, know there will be much more to celebrate as you go about building the life of your new dreams.

Chapter Nine

JOY

Celebration

Have you ever felt true joy? There are many different types of joy but the one I want to talk about is the overwhelming feeling of exhilaration which comes from the knowledge you are completely present in your own life.

I remember the first time I truly felt this way. I think I must have been in my late thirties. I was living in an unfamiliar place, my life as I knew it had disintegrated and I had no idea what the future held for me. I took myself to a beach for the day as I was not coping, crying and in fear. I spent about three hours just sitting on this beach watching the waves before I headed toward home.

Along the way I had the urge to buy an ice cream. I stopped at another beach, one with vast sand and huge skies. The sun was shining and making the waves glisten with delight. I bought myself an ice cream and wandered onto this wonderful beach to enjoy it. As I walked along, this feeling of absolute joy bubbled up within me, seemingly out of the blue. I turned my face to the sky and laughed in sheer bliss. I wanted to twirl, to dance in abandonment. I cannot tell you where it came from exactly. All I know is that by spending time with me and taking the time to look within, I found a connection I had never known.

Not only was I connected with myself, I felt a connection with everything around me; the sky; the sun, the waves and the sand. All of it was an extension of me, and me of it. There was a oneness with the universe which reminded me I am only a small part of a wider world, that there is much more than my perceived problems. I felt so powerful in that moment. I had no fear, no worries and if I had died right then, I felt I had reached the pinnacle of perfection.

This feeling of sheer unadulterated joy surpassed any moment of ecstasy I had ever experienced. It was bubbling out of me like a fountain of fizzy pop. My eyes filled with tears of happiness and gratitude, for though my life had felt like a disaster of my own making, here was the truth. Here was everything. Right here in this moment. I have spoken to other people who have experienced this, and it is a moment they never forget, a feeling you can conjure up and remember forever.

I realised in that moment everything I had believed in so strongly was an illusion, no more than a trick of the light. All my efforts had been in vain. I had been caught up in a fantasy of how I wanted thing to be. In that moment I let go of my struggle. I threw my hands in the air and revelled in the feeling. As I left the beach in the late afternoon, I had a new strength of purpose.

I stopped feeling sorry for myself, wallowing in the sorrow that I felt, fighting the fear of aloneness, and surrendered. I discovered my power within and began to build a new life. As I did so, things started to fall into place as if by magic. By taking control of my life I was able to create my life anew.

No matter where you are in your life or how you got there, you are the one who has created your current reality. Once you accept this and move beyond any repetitive patterns of behaviour, you will experience something completely new.

What do you want? How do you want your life to look?

Create it!

If you have created a life you don't want by passivity, then surely through activity you can create one you do? Stands to reason doesn't it?

Meditation

I cannot spend each day at the beach, but I have found other ways to add a sense of connectedness into my everyday life. I have introduced the practise of meditation into my day. I start every day with thirty minutes of meditation and end it again in the same way. After I finish, I take the time to write in my Thank You Journal. Doing this each day ensures I go to sleep with a healthy mindset which not only allows me to sleep peacefully, but keeps my unconscious mind in a great healing space throughout the night. As the unconscious mind is the place our beliefs are stored, cementing a positive thought process supports me in my decision to see the best in every situation, to operate from a place of power and achieve freedom in my thoughts and emotions.

The dictionary defines meditation as contemplation or reflection. To me it means taking the time to quiet my mind and find a place of peace and serenity.

For many years my thoughts would run riot in my head with at least ten different things going on at the same time. I wished constantly for my brain to be quiet so I could get some peace, even if only for a few minutes. To concentrate on anything for more than a very short time seemed impossible. It was not until I started to learn the techniques of meditation that I was able to gain some space between me and my thoughts. The relief this gave me was immediate. Suddenly, not only could I concentrate clearly, I was able to identify one thought at a time instead of the jumbled noise in my head that seemed to have not let-up. I found space between my thoughts and the emotions they created. I learned to control my thoughts rather than let them control me and as a result I began to choose them. When a thought came that was unhelpful to me, I was able to recognise it and replace it with another, healthier one. With practise, I have been able to change my experience. I feel more connected to myself than ever before. I am more efficient in my actions as my mind can focus on the task at hand, and my emotions do not rule me in the way they used to. By becoming aware of my thoughts I learned to choose both them and the emotion which follows.

Meditation techniques are a learned skill and therefore, like anything else, require practise to integrate them into your way of being. Setting a time each day creates a habit to stand you in good stead throughout your life. If we go back to basics and remember your thoughts create your reality, then the art of meditation, which allows you to control your thoughts gently and with purpose, becomes yet another key to creating real freedom.

We talked about positive affirmation in chapter six, and you did an exercise to create your own statements of truth. Setting aside time for meditation puts you in a great mental state to say your affirmations. With your conscious mind somewhat subdued, your unconscious mind is more accessible and likely to absorb the new truths you wish to reinforce. If you have recorded your affirmations subliminally, (a quiet voice over music), then you can play these whilst you meditate. Or you can read them to yourself as you end your meditation session before writing in your Thank You Journal. Even if you don't like the idea of a structured meditation time, you can use the breathing and relaxing techniques in the first two chapters to calm your mind and create some space between you and your thoughts. From this space you can state your affirmations and write in your journal, crating a joyful and positive mindset for yourself.

Laughter

How wonderful it is to laugh. It's infectious.

When laughter is shared it bonds people together and creates intimacy. Laughter also triggers healthy physical changes in the body, It helps to strengthen your immune system, boost energy, diminish pain and protect against the harmful effects of stress, and it's free! Laughter is one of the fastest ways to bring balance back to your body and mind. It lightens your burdens, brings hope and keeps you grounded, focused and alert.

Laughter triggers the release of endorphins in the body which makes you feel good. Humour helps you keep an optimistic attitude even through disappointments, loss and grief. More importantly it gives us the courage and strength to find new meaning and hope for the future. Even in the most difficult times, a laugh or even a smile will lift your mood. Laughter helps you be more spontaneous, and it lets you forget judgements, criticism and doubt. Your inhibitions are also reduced when you laugh giving you the chance to connect with the real you.

You've probably heard the saying 'laughter is the best medicine'. Laughter really does help to heal your body and mind. The flow of lymph fluid is increased by the simple convulsions that occur when we laugh. This boosts immune system functionality and cleans out old dead and waste products from your organs. As you laugh you take in big gasps of air causing the oxygen levels in your blood to rise. This ensures all the organs in your body receive rich, oxygenated blood to repair tissue and provide healing. Studies have shown that cancer cells are destroyed in the presence of oxygen, as are certain parasites and bacteria. Therefore increasing the levels of oxygen in the body can help with both the healing and prevention of various diseases.

Laughing boosts circulation due to the very fact that as you laugh, you are exercising your abdominal muscles, the muscles in your face and enhancing flexibility throughout the body. The harder you laugh, the greater this effect.

The skin is the biggest organ in your body and in times of stress our faces can look drawn and tired. Increasing the flow of oxygen to our skin will improve the colour, reduce wrinkles and improve the overall texture. Add to this the sparkle your eyes will have as you add joy to your life, and you will look and feel more attractive.

Serotonin is essential for balancing brain chemistry. It aids in fighting depression, compulsive and obsessive thinking and reduces the harmful effects of stress on the body. Serotonin is a naturally occurring chemical in the brain, however, in times of stress and grief the body's ability to produce it can be severely reduced. Sunshine and laughter can aid the body in producing this chemical naturally thereby improving your mood and overall mindset.

Health Benefits of Laughter

- Boosts Immunity
- Lowers Stress Hormones
- Decreases Pain
- Relaxes Muscles
- Prevents Heart Disease
- Eases Anxiety and Fear
- Relieves Stress
- Enhances Resilience
- Attracts People to Us
- Helps Diffuse Conflict
- Enhances Teamwork

Due to the significant difference healthy brain chemistry can make to your life, adding laughter on a daily basis makes a lot of sense. You can build laughter and joy into your everyday life in the same way you would add exercise. Easy ways to add joy include the following:

- Watch a funny movie or television show
- Share a good joke or funny story
- Host a game night with friends
- Play with a pet
- Do something silly
- Play with children
- Seek out funny people
- Do a fun activity (bowling, mine-golf, karaoke)
- Go to a 'laughter yoga' class
- Check out your bookstore humour section

When we are struggling with major adjustments we can take life much too seriously. Lighten your mood by adding some fun into your day. Choose to find the funny side of a situation.

- Share your embarrassing moments and don't take yourself so seriously
- Look for the humour, the irony and absurdity of life in a bad situation
- Keep a toy on your desk, a photo of you having fun or a funny poster in your office
- Pay attention to children and emulate them

The ability to laugh, have fun and play with others not only makes life more enjoyable but it also makes you more creative helping you solve problems and connect with other people in your life. Life brings challenges which can either 'get the best of you' or which you can use to become 'the best you can be'. When you become the problem and take yourself too seriously, it can be hard to think outside the box and find new solutions. When children are confused or afraid they make their problems into a game and thereby have the ability to step back and find creative solutions. We can learn a lot from the way children view life.

Gain Perspective

Adding laughter into your day is a great way to gain some perspective too. In chapter one, I discussed the importance of creating some space between you and your emotions, how doing this reduces stress, allows you to step back from how you feel and engage your brain. Laughter is another way to do this. It gets you out of your head and helps put you in a positive mood. From here your problems and pain do not look so insurmountable. From a place of feeling good you can make active choices rather than slip back into reactionary or automated behaviours. Look for opportunities everyday to smile and laugh. Make it a habit even if it's the last thing you feel like doing.

At times we get stuck in sadness and start to wallow. We feel sorry for ourselves and get into a pattern of 'poor me'. Sometimes we can choose to stay in this space as we like the drama of our thinking. It can almost be like creating your own blockbuster movie in your mind. The problem is that you cannot make informed or rational decisions here. You are stuck in thoughts that play over and over in your mind like a cracked record. This kind of thinking causes a downward spiral and leaves you in powerlessness. Adding laughter to your day by consciously choosing activities that bring joy will shift your mood immediately, moving you one step closer to the life you want.

Adding Joy to Others

Everywhere around you there are opportunities to create joy. One of the easiest ways to build joy in your life is to give it to others. It is so simple and so rewarding. Smile at a stranger as you pass them in the street. Compliment a gardener on their beautiful creation, stop a while and ask them questions about the plants they have chosen and why. Take a child on a special date, spend time getting to know them as an individual and build a personal relationship with them. Never forget children are individuals with their own needs, desires and dreams. Spending one-on-one time with them will give you a new perspective and allow you to see into their hearts.

If you have time, volunteer at a local retirement home or do a day of care work. Many elderly people are lonely and frightened. By taking a few hours to visit them and

listen to their stories, you will be amazed to see that, just like you, they too had dreams and goals. Who are they? They are so much more than the tired body you see. Watch their eyes light up as you take the time to get to know who they are. The joy and comfort you can bring will fill you with so much satisfaction, and even more importantly you may gain a completely new perception about the role these people had in shaping the world we see today. It is such a shame their wonderful contributions are so undervalued in favour of the young and inexperienced.

If you hear a friend is feeling down or uncertain, bring her afternoon tea. Set up a small table with a cloth, pretty china and buy or make some cupcakes to share. Serve your friend and take a moment to be with her. Even a small gesture will bring enormous joy to her, and therefore to you as you see yourself behaving in a way that speaks of you, the true you that lives inside your heart and mind.

On a cold, wet afternoon take time to settle down and spend some time with you. Rent a favourite movie, make yourself a pot of tea, place a few biscuits on a plate, grab a blanket and pillow and curl up in the corner of your settee. If you have a young child at home, snuggle them in with you and let them sleep. These are precious moments you can share with yourself whenever you choose.

If you have small children take them on a picnic. Take the trouble to make sandwiches with their favourite fillings and cut them with a cookie cutter into fancy shapes. Bake some special biscuits and decorate the tops in a fun way. Fold serviettes into birds or other shapes. Choose a beautiful spot for your picnic where you can perhaps read your children a new story, play a game or just reconnect with them. As you watch them appreciate this special day, your heart will soar with love and joy. If you live near a beach, pack the kids in the car with their boots, jackets and hats. Make a snack to share whilst you are out and tell them you are going on a crab hunt. Explore the rock pools and share the excitement and joy on your children's faces as they discover the wondrous creatures that live on the shoreline.

This is how memories are formed. These special moments stand out in a lifetime of what can often seem like monotony. Do not allow yourself to get bogged down in the routine of your life. Make time to feel the joy and beauty that surrounds you always. If you are feeling low, take yourself to a funny movie at your local cinema. Have you ever done this by yourself? It's a great feeling to sit in a room with strangers and share a laugh. You will come out feeling more balanced and ready to carry on with your day. Go to a children's playground and watch how they interact with each other. See how they overcome their fears as they slide, swing, climb and spin.

If you are alone at this point in your life then go where there are other people. Take yourself out to dinner. I used to do this often when I was on my own and even now if I'm away from home, I enjoy this opportunity. It is a unique chance to sit and experience the energy that surrounds you. Practise your awareness skills as you see the interaction between different parties; families, groups, couples. The energy that emanates is interesting and exciting. Take a book if you like but be open to any conversation that comes your way. You never know who you may meet and what opportunities lay in your brief encounter. Some people believe there are no coincidences in life and that if you catch the eye of someone they have a message

for you, and you also have one for them. Don't pass the chance by to bring something new to whomever you meet.

Start going to a night class or join a gym. Many communities have a local hall where they hold exercise classes. This can be a great way of becoming involved in your immediate environment, making friends and building connections in your life. We have become so insular. We live in our little houses, go to work and spend time with a few friends and family members from time to time. But there is so much more out there in the world to experience and the more you expand your horizons, the wider your perceptions become. And the wider your perceptions, the greater the joy you can bring to others and therefore to yourself.

Remember we talked in the last chapter about raising a glass in salute to the wonderful woman you are? Well do this often. Celebrate yourself. Celebrate your friends. Bring some recognition and self-worth into your everyday life. Start to look for opportunities to compliment the people around you. Say how lovely a work colleague looks in her new dress. Let your children know how proud you are of them. Celebrate friendship by having a night out with your best girlfriends. Tell a friend how important she is to you and let her know you appreciate her. List the things you love about her.

In our society we spend very little time building up the people we love. Everything seems to be a competition and unless you are a 'winner' you are overlooked. Celebrating achievement is fantastic but is that person any more valuable than the one who came second? Celebrating the person just as they are and appreciating them is the fastest way to build self-worth. You may strike resistance as most people are not used to being complimented. Persevere. As you do, you will find in time this comes back to you. Look for the fabulous. Look for the amazing. Look beyond the ordinary to the extraordinary that lies within each of us. Make it a part of your day to compliment at least one person.

As you add these simple things to your life you will find yourself surrounded by a positive energy that feeds your soul. You will be operating from a place of love. Walk with confidence with your head up, eyes alight and a ready smile for all you see. You will be amazed what you attract into your life with just this simple change of motivation. Write about your experiences in your Thank You Journal every day. Capture the moments when you felt happiness and joy flood your body.

I am fortunate to work in a position where I am interacting with people all day long. I always work to provide the best individual service to each and every person who crosses my path. My aim is that they go away having benefited from their interaction with me. It is not just about finding a solution to their needs but also building rapport by listening and hearing their concerns. Because I do this, my clients feel they have been heard, understood and appreciated. They are relieved that I treat them with respect and take their concerns seriously. I endeavour on every occasion to provide a personalised solution to their particular situation. Not only do I feel a huge sense of self-satisfaction when I am successful but the thanks which comes back is heartfelt and adds to my day. Instead of going home exhausted by the constant needs of others, I am often exhilarated by my time with them. It is so easy to add to the lives

of the people we meet. It does not need to be anything dramatic but as you truly care and value them, they recognise and appreciate you too.

Be Open to New Experiences

Embrace change. As your beliefs change, and therefore the actions which create your life, you will find things not only look different but become different. When you live with joy and love you are creating abundance in your life. As you grow in confidence, new opportunities will be offered to you. At every stage you have the choice to accept or reject what the world is showing you.

Think about this for a moment. If you are living your life actively and creating it as you go along, then surely much of what surrounds you is the material creation of your choices?

We hold a vision in our head of the life we want and often accompanying this is the path we think will get us there. But the universe doesn't work that way. It will always provide the quickest, best way to your vision but it may not look the way you expect. Remember how our expectations can stand in the way of what we want? By having a preconceived notion of *how* something will come to fruition, we can miss the most glorious and perfect solution which is staring us in the face.

Get out of your own way and be open to what comes. Embrace it. Celebrate it and as you do, you are adding positive energy, which will create opportunities of which you could never have dreamed.

Have you ever been so stubborn in your thinking that you have dismissed a suggestion only to realise later it was the perfect opportunity for you if only you had seen it? If you assume, based on your past experience, something will happen a certain way, perhaps you will fail to recognise a much better path when one is offered to you.

Open your mind to the possibility of more than you could ever imagine and make your decisions in the now. You have no power in either the past or the future so make the now count. Choose wisely. Use your honed awareness skills to look beyond what you already know to the possibilities you have yet to experience. Celebrate changes in the knowledge you are growing and creating anew. Isn't this what you set out to do? Do not be afraid. Live from love and all will be well.

Inner Child

Right now choose some music from your CD collection, your iPod or MP3 player. Select a song or piece of music you love; something which always brings a smile to your face; something you can dance to. Move the settee or coffee to create some space in the middle of your living room. Turn the volume up on your music player and let yourself go. Sing, dance, laugh and twirl. Ignore any feelings of embarrassment or the voice which tells you its silly. Let your inner child show you the way of joy.

We have learned that adults are supposed to act with a certain level or decorum but have you seen the way most grown-ups behave? Certainly if you look at many politicians or leaders of industry they appear boring and staid on one hand and behave like small children scrapping in the playground on the other; arguing over petty issues and getting embroiled in a debate they probably don't even care about. So don't look to adults for your example of how to live freely. Look to the smallest child who dances, laughs and finds delight in the tiniest thing. Model yourself on the uninhibited joy a child shows at each new experience. Twirl and laugh out loud. Throw your arms in the air and feel the energy that surrounds you flow through your fingertips and fill your soul.

Be With Yourself

How can you find the exhilaration I talked about at the beginning of this chapter? I have a suggestion for you.

Take your wonderful Thank You Journal, a pillow and blanket on a fine day to the beach, river or forest. Go where you feel most yourself. Spend time there as often as you can. Read your journal and at each entry, stop and thank the universe. Start to feel the presence of nature all around you. Sit quietly and contemplate the surrounding beauty. Listen carefully to all the sounds of life. Can you hear a tree growing, the birds singing, a blade of grass swaying gently in the breeze? What about the water running over the stones in the river, or the waves lapping gently at the shore? Can you feel your heart beating in time with everything else?

Know that you are but a part of the whole of everything. The joy I am talking about can only come when you are at one with yourself, never in the company of others. I believe it is the integration of your mind, body and spirit; a moment when you are completely present with all your senses, seen and unseen.

This is what it means to become truly aware, using all your sensors to experience life within and without. As you feel this awareness, you will come to a place of acceptance, forgiveness and sheer joy. This is the celebration of how far you have come, the celebration of how much you have learned. You are finally learning to live your life in a way which reflects you, no longer controlled by the beliefs and expectations of others but living consciously in each moment. The fantasy you held so tightly to has disappeared and you are learning to build a life full of abundance, joy and freedom. Celebrate you every day. Be proud of the woman you are, the woman you are becoming and the woman you choose to be. Shout to the heavens your vision. Laugh with the birds that screech in sheer joy as they soar through the air in abandonment.

I hold my memory of my most joyful experiences close to my heart like a treasure box I can think of and smile. I hold myself gently with my arms wrapped around me, not for security or to protect me from harm, but to remind me I am never alone. Every chance I get I raise my head to the sunny skies and breathe in the everything that surrounds me. I add my own energy to the whole as I breathe my serenity out and give myself up to the silence. It only takes a moment or two but I am instantly re-energised and calmed in the perfection of that moment.

If I have a spare hour, I will sit in my garden and close my eyes listening to the sound of nature going about its daily business. The birds tweet and sing in celebration of the day, the leaves rustle as the breeze gently stirs their repose and small animals scurry about as they gather food in gratitude for the abundance that Mother Nature provides. As I sit with the sun gently stroking my face, any worries or fear float away into the oblivion from which they came and I am one with the energy that gives me life. Serenity is here. I embrace it and celebrate the wonder of me

‘as you take control of your life, you can create it anew’

Chapter Ten

LIVE

Be

We are almost at the end of our travels together so I want to let you know a secret. You are free. Free from the pain of the past. Free from the lies that formed the basis of your experience. Your life is your own. It always was.

It can be scary to face the reality of a life that is in your hands. If you have been used to living your life in a passive way, where you have allowed the circumstances that occur to create your experiences, then it takes time and practice to live actively. On our journey you have learned the skills you need to live anew.

All you have to do now is walk forward. You don't need to have a plan of where you are going. You certainly don't need a dream of how things should be. Just start walking, and as you do, keep yourself in sight at all time. Look always through the eyes of love and joy. Our world is a wonderful place full of fabulous opportunities and experiences. When you decide to do something, do it with the knowledge that this is what you want, that no matter how it turns out, you have chosen it. Take responsibility for each step on your path. Keep checking in with yourself that it is still what you want. At any stage you can change it.

There may be times you feel lost or off balance. Use your Heal Me Journal at these times and write until you feel you have regained a balanced perspective. Recognise you are possibly feeling this way because you have not taken the time to be with yourself. Perhaps circumstances have dictated your energies be directed toward caring for someone else. Go back to basics. Take care of yourself first so you can be there for your loved ones. Do not get over-involved in someone else's life to the detriment of your own.

Family and friends can be demanding but pace yourself. Don't take on their emotions as if they are your own. Show empathy and understanding but only from a place where you are not compromising your own well-being. Keep your energy levels high. Live from love, love for yourself, love for others and love for the world around you. Re-energise yourself in nature.

Live Your Life

'But how do I start?'

You've already started. Have you seen the film **P.S. I Love You** with Hillary Swank and Gerard Butler? This is a poignant look at a woman's journey from grief and loss to wholeness. One particular scene shows the two of them having an argument and Holly, (played by Hillary) says, "I'm so afraid our life is never going to start". Gerry

(played by Gerard) replied, “Baby, you’re already in your life. It’s already started. This is it. You gotta stop waiting, baby”.

How long will you wait to start your life? You’ve been living it ever since you were born. Perhaps though, you have lived without any awareness of the journey you are taking or the destination that will follow; thinking you were on one path only to wake up one day and find it had disappeared from under your feet.

Maybe you are wandering aimlessly about trying to find a similar path where you can feel secure again. You will never find security in the world as it is constantly changing. You can only learn to have faith in yourself.

In another scene from the same movie Holly breaks down and runs into her mother’s arm. She turns to her mother and tells her how she is feeling.

“I’m alone, and it doesn’t matter what job I have or what I do or what I don’t do, or what friends I have. I mean, you’re alone no matter what.”

“True. But alone or not,” her mother replies, “you have to walk ahead. The thing to remember is, if we are all alone; we are all together in that too. It helps me sometimes.”

If you haven’t seen this film, it is worth renting or downloading it. Whilst it is a journey from the death of a partner, separation and divorce are a type of death. The death of something you thought you knew about your life, a part of your identity, your place in the world. Only by letting go of your expectations about life, through new awareness, can you move forward confident and assured in the knowledge that your life is your own; that you have the strength to create it any way you choose.

Grief is a very real emotion and many people never move beyond it. No matter how long you choose to try to hold on to the past, it is over. That was then. This is now, and this is your place of power. Each of us in on an individual journey that leads from birth to death. What you do with the time in between is up to you. You can choose to spend time in misery and hopelessness or decide to live.

Trust Yourself

Many years ago when I left my marriage there was a song from Cirque de Soliel sung by Josh Groban called ‘Let Me Fall’ that helped to sustain me. The words are available online to view but the message is this. The person you *are* is waiting for you to stand up for yourself. Not someone you *were* or *will be* one day. *Someone you are now*. You already have everything you need. Do not give in to thinking one day when you get it together you can have the life you want. Let that *now* be today. This minute stand up, square your shoulders and breathe. The song says the one you want, the one you will become will catch you. What is there to be afraid of?

You have two choices – fear and love. Fear will leave you exactly where you are now. Love on the other hand will give you the strength to fly. I’m sure if someone you cared about was struggling or hurting, you would hold them gently so they didn’t fall. If you can do this for them, why not do it for you? There’s no reason to miss this one

perfect moment. Dance freely. Don't allow other people to hold you back. You can always find a reason not to do something if you are afraid, or make excuses why you can't do it now. Maybe later when ... when is **NOW!** There is no power in the past or the future. All you have is now.

Putting It All Together

Let's have a look at how to take everything you have learned and apply it to your life. Your happiness is not dependant on outward details, but on you. Perhaps like the woman in the poem at the start of this section, you feel your life is a mess. Maybe you are living in a basement flat or a friend's spare room. Perhaps you don't have a job and are terrified of how to pay the bills. Or maybe you have all the trappings of wealth but are lonely and scared. Whatever your personal circumstances, as difficult as it is, you are the only one who can change your life. Perhaps you are unable, due to current circumstances to change the outward appearance but you can certainly alter your perceptions about it.

Turn to a fresh page in your Heal Me Journal and head it up as follows or use your workbook to complete this exercise.

Your Current Situation	
Difficulties	Opportunities

Using the five awareness skills you have learned, select a current situation causing you concern and write it at the top of the page. **Stop** for a moment and breathe. **Step back** and using your objectivity, read the heading as if it were someone else's problem. Okay? **Look** at the heading and write in the left-hand column ten negatives or difficulties you see in this situation.

In the right-hand column write ten positives or opportunities that exist around this same issue. I can hear you telling me there is nothing good about it. Step away from your emotions and with a clear mind look for the positives. I promise you they are there.

Do you find this difficult? You are working to change your perceptions about things. When you judge something as good or bad, you are choosing your response to it at the same time. If you resist putting a label on events and accept they have no power until you choose a response, your experience will be very different.

Listen to the emotion that accompanies each of your responses to this exercise. Can you feel the difference in energy between the two lists? Listen to the self-talk that is part of your constant experience. The first column may cause you to feel tense whilst the second brings a sense of relief. Just by opening your mind to new possibilities you have instantly changed your reality.

Objectivity is the most important tool we have when it comes to problem solving. It is the ability to see all sides of an issue and balance them up to find the best solution with the least amount of compromise, or at least a compromise you can live with. Using the objectivity you discovered in the awareness section, list five possible options to change the physicality of your current circumstances. Use your right-hand list to remind you of the possibilities that exist for you. Even if you cannot find any instant possibilities, this process will help you recognise you have choices. It may be you can formulate a plan to work towards over the coming months. You may find by changing one seemingly tiny thing, your entire direction is altered and you are suddenly on a new path. Even though it feels like you are stuck with no way out, you are in fact free.

Finding and focusing on at least one thing you can be grateful for about your current situation is a great place to start. You could be grateful for a roof over your head; for a societal system which ensures you are not starving on the street; or for the fact you are still alive – where there is life there is hope.

Your Journey

Let's do a quick summary of what we have learned on our journey together.

Part One of this book is about the path to awareness; a place where you can discover the choices that have given you the life you currently have. You cannot change anything you are not aware of so working through this part of the book is the first step on your road to freedom. Awareness brings you knowledge, but unless you take an action it is just stuff in your head you have memorised, a bit like algebra at school. You know at some point you understood what it was all about, but these days it's all a bit of a blur. You can't even think of an occasion when you would use it. Knowledge is power but inert unless you pick it up and *do* something with it.

Part Two teaches about acceptance. Together we have worked through some difficult exercises designed to challenge your beliefs and understandings about your motivation and actions. Learning to accept the things which have happened in your life and take responsibility for your part in creating them can be a painful process. You need to work through the pain, anger and guilt to get to a full understanding of the power you have to create your own life. In fact you have created your life to this point. Maybe this isn't how you intended it to be but nonetheless your choices have got you here. From a place of clarity comes forgiveness and love, a way to let go of your feelings about the past and move into the present moment free from your burden of pain.

Part Three creates new understanding from which comes joy, laughter and the chance for the serenity which is a natural progression from acceptance. Here you will find true freedom. The freedom I am talking about is when you take responsibility for your choices with a preparedness to accept whatever comes along. Freedom and responsibility always go hand in hand. In fact freedom cannot exist without responsibility. Not the burden of responsibility for someone else, or one of guilt but the choice to be fully present in your own life, to step up and take your life in your hands and create it anew. Knowingly, willingly, gracefully and with faith, forgiveness and love.

Self Care

Focus on supporting yourself. Add some exercise into your day. Thirty minutes will improve your fitness and allow your brain to release feel-good chemicals. Improve your diet. Eat plenty of fresh fruit and vegetables. Cut down on bread and biscuits and your digestive system will work more efficiently.

Many people underestimate the impact food has on the body but if you think about it, it makes perfect sense. Your body is a bit like a machine. For it to run efficiently it needs the correct fuel, a proper amount of use and the right amount of rest. If you work a machine on poor-quality fuel and run it twenty-four hours a day, sooner or later it will break down and become unreliable. Your body reacts in the same way. Living a life filled with stress and emotional heartache slowly breaks down your cell structure until cracks appear. There are times when reducing your stress level seems next to impossible. It is particularly important at these times to minimise additional stress on your body by eating well, exercising and getting a good nights sleep.

I have times where I sleep poorly, waking several times in the night. This is particularly noticeable when I have a lot on my mind. I have also noticed that if I have a few days where I eat food that is heavy or difficult for my body to digest, my ability to sleep and my energy levels are severely compromised. I have learned to listen to my body, and as soon as I notice things are out of balance, I return to my routine and things get back to normal pretty quickly. If I do have a particular issue filling my mind, I use my Heal Me Journal to write until my anxiety reduces and I have exhausted my thinking. I also mediate to relax my mind so I can sleep.

We talked in the first chapter about the physiological changes that occur in the body when you are under stress and the importance of listening to your body. Pay attention to the automatic systems your body goes through each day. Changes in your digestion are a sign your body is working overtime to eliminate waste. Pay attention to what you eat and the body's reaction to it. Keep a food diary if necessary. Notice how your energy levels change based upon what you eat. For example, if you eat bread you may feel sluggish and lethargic. Sugar may have a similar effect although you may experience an initial rush as if your heart is racing. This puts enormous pressure on the body as it speeds up to eliminate the harmful effects as quickly as possible. Drinking water will help your body to cleanse itself of the build-up of toxins from our everyday world, as well as to assist you in your thinking as dehydration affects your mind's ability to function.

By listening to your body you are taking care of yourself. In times of distress and pain many people turn to some form of self-medication. Alcohol, drugs, food, gambling, smoking and other addictive behaviours are a way of avoiding the truth of your life, as if by numbing yourself you can pretend all is well. Although it appears at that moment that you feel better, the longer term effects prove otherwise. Sooner or later you will still have to deal with your reality. Alcohol and drugs have a mind-altering

effect. If you truly want to work through your pain and grief to a place of power and freedom, you must remove these substances from your body. Your mind cannot heal and you cannot find your spirit within if you are artificially stimulating your body.

Over time, the constant lack of care for our physical body results in the shutdown of systems. Have you ever heard of people who get hypothermia after falling through a frozen lake? In some cases it is possible to revive the person as their body has shutdown all but the most vital functions. When your body is no longer able to support a function due to sever damage, it will switch its focus to protecting the remaining systems in order to survive.

Support your body. Feed it correctly. Work it lovingly. Enjoy and love your body and in return it will give you many years of good health.

There are certainly times when due to prolonged stress and grief it is appropriate to balance the chemistry of the brain with serotonin-stimulating chemicals. You can do things however, that will help support your body ensuring these are a short-term necessity. Sunshine, fresh air, good food, good company, self-care, exercise, laughter, friendship and most importantly, time with you. This is the recipe for a happy and fulfilling life and a natural progression from the love you have created for yourself.

Choose Freedom

Freedom is yours but you have to choose it. It is not yours until you embrace it, feel it, live it. Just like the gift in chapter seven it will not become real to you until you unwrap it, look at it, hold it and accept it. There is only fear or love. It's your choice.

Live from fear and you will continue to create your current reality. You will be bound by useless fears and chains. Choose to live from love and you will transform your experience, your life and your future.

Take note of this moment. Whatever you choose you are doing it actively. You have been offered two options. Choose wisely and know from this choice will come consequences. You decide whether they are good or bad, positive or negative. Whether they add to your life or keep you stuck in a place of powerlessness. Don't delay. Don't procrastinate. Act. Now, in this moment, choose life. Choose you. Walk forward in the certain knowledge that freedom is yours.

Let Go

Find yourself a quiet, beautiful place in nature. Go where there are big skies and an open landscape. Walk until you feel drawn to a particular spot. Imagine you are a waif in Victorian England at the time of Charles Dickens. You are carrying a stick and on the end, tied up in a handkerchief, are the last vestiges of your past, just a tiny bundle now but still big enough to hold in one hand. On these last pages we are going to perform a magic trick.

Spear the ground with your stick as if it was an umbrella stand. Hold the handkerchief bundle carefully in your hand whilst you untie it from the end of the

stick. Keep the ends folded around your package and with your eyes closed, when you are ready, throw it swiftly into the air. Open your eyes and see your pain has been transformed into a beautiful dove that soars effortlessly into the everything from whence it came. As it flies away, breathe a cleansing breath, blow a kiss and walk away.

What would you like to do now? On wings of a dove, let your mind soar to places beyond your most vivid imaginings. As you do, step by step, you will create a life beyond your wildest dreams. A life of Power and Freedom.

'there's no reason to miss this perfect moment; this moment is now'

**I can think of no better way to end this book
than to place here, in its entirety
the poem I wrote even before
I started the narrative on these pages**

this has been your journey ...

there in the road she saw
her shattered dreams where they
lay torn and broken
like victims of war
lifeless and cold
and she sobbed as she cried
to a universe that seemed
not to care that she
had toiled and tried
to no avail
she turned her face to the sky
as her tears flowed unchecked
she formed the question
she begged to know why
this pain was hers
she could not understand
how life could be so cruel
when she had given
her all to their plan
her very soul
how could it all have gone
so very far awry
as far as she could see
so terribly wrong
a nightmare lived
then as she stood she stopped
and looked back at her life
the world she had created
like a bubble popped
no trace to see
invisible this life
that she had once believed
was everything and more
she felt as if a knife
had pierced her soul
but as her heart was breaking
she saw herself as if
from some deep and dark
dream awakening
aware at last
that she was all alone
her dreams were but a myth
an ideal that she
had tried to hone
for years gone by
what did they mean those years
they seemed a waste of time
more than half her life
through pain and tears

she understood
her life it was her own
it always had been so
a cloud was lifting
she had been shown
the truth at last
what would she like to do
now with this life of hers
choices she now had
decisions too
a path to take
scary though this future
and all that it could hold
she would need to find
a way to cure
her pain inside
'i need to learn to love
and be my own best friend
start to treat myself
with soft kid glove
take care of me'
with hand on heart she vowed
to find herself again
to be the woman
she was endowed
with gifts to be
and this time as she turned
her face up to the sky
she thanked the universe
for what she'd learned
freedom was hers
all she had to do now
was take her life in hand
learn to stand alone
give past a bow
and move beyond
the dream she never knew
was fantasy at best
a figment of her mind's
distorted view
a trick of light
the sunlight bathed her face
with golden light so pure
as slowly there dawned
a smile of grace
and gratitude
then joyful bubbles grew
from deep within her heart
her smile grew wider
her spirit flew

as love began
to flood her body whole
her mind was free to fly
to places never been
to free her soul
her eyes were bright
with tears of happiness
that she had never known
even though her life
seemed such a mess
she was alive
in the knowledge that she
was free in deed and thought
to create herself
anew to be
herself alone