

MIGRAINE A Journey in Healing

By June Bradley

For seven years I was never without drugs. My body was reeling from the side effects of migraine medication. My Tylenol 3 intake increased to seventy a month, including a daily intake of “migraine prevention” drugs. I tried a total of 20 pharmaceuticals and fifteen non-pharmaceutical treatments. I gained 15 lbs, was constantly fatigued and sluggish, concentration became difficult, my eyes were hazy and I was in a continual state of mild depression. Different drugs and dosages were tried to alleviate the side effects. When this didn’t help, the doctors said these necessary evils were better than experiencing direct pain. I literally dragged myself on.

Everything I read confirmed what I was being told by the professionals: that there was no cure for migraine, only management.

Instinctively I knew this was not true.

I am now migraine free. I am experiencing a miracle. For two years I have been free from the constant enslavement to chronic, severe pain. Free from fearing migraines, free from thinking about them, experiencing them, explaining them, recovering from them.

No more apprehensive tuning in to the slightest change in my body. Is that a fuzziness in my head I’m starting to feel? Is that a bright light flashing in my line of vision? Am I starting to talk a lot? Have I got an extra, intense, driven energy this morning? All signs to let me know it was coming – the migraine.

Sometimes I would get five minutes before the pain started, sometimes eight hours. Sometimes, and these were the most dreaded, I woke in the middle of the night or in the morning with the pain already raging. Too late for anything. I would sink into depression and reach for the drugs I knew would not really help at this point. But I was willing to take the small amount of relief they might offer.

Everyone in the family knew when Mom had a migraine. A familiar routine of plans being changed, outings cancelled, going places without Mom. Grandma coming over to look after children, my husband’s chosen silence and emotional withdrawal.

The worst was when I felt the pain mounting long after I knew the medication should be working. Instead, the intensity of the pain increased, searing into my skull, my face, my eyes, my jaw, my teeth. Then a panicked call for help and a drive to the emergency ward of the hospital. Waiting and suffering, crying, white as a ghost, the doctors and nurses trying to determine if I had a migraine or if I was a drug addict going through withdrawal. And, in fact, I was a drug addict, but in the socially acceptable way. Sometimes even the injections did not help and the migraine raged on.

I tried preventing them. I tried ignoring them. I tried understanding them. I tried making friends with them. They were an entity unto themselves. The migraines became the most important thing in my life.

This message from my body started in 1987, a year after the birth of my third child and persisted for eight years. I had migraines three to five days a week. Some would last as long as three weeks without a break. They were so intense, so insistent, so unyieldingly persistent that I could not ignore them.

I had the support of many professionals in my quest to relieve the pain and disruption to my life. My family doctor, a renowned migraine specialist, another specialist in migraines and hormones, a doctor from a respected pain Management Clinic and two medical allergy specialists. I was involved in a number of research studies for new medications.

Sometimes as I began a new treatment the migraines faded in their intensity for a short time, only to return with what felt like a vengeance. Time and again my body built up resistance to these attempts to suppress the symptoms while the root cause remained untouched. I pursued all avenues of possible relief, yet the migraines stayed with me.

Always a believer in the body's own self healing abilities, I also sought out alternative therapies. An avid yoga practitioner, meditator and vegetarian for over 15 years, I continued to utilize preventive techniques to keep my body healthy and my mind free from stress. I identified my individual migraine triggers – perfume, incense, cigarette smoke, alcohol, certain foods and sudden barometric weather changes – and avoided them when I could. I pursued acupuncture, massage, herbs, chiropractic work, naturopathy, biofeedback, diet change, homeopathy and psychotherapy.

My yoga teacher of 18 years, Yogi Krishan from the Universal Ashram in Toronto, opened me to the benefits of meditation, discipline and the spirit within. A Toronto psychotherapist specializing in body work also played a vital role. She led me back to the value of honestly connecting with others and allowing myself to receive support. All these pursuits improved the quality of my life and brought in more balance. Yet they barely touched the migraines themselves.

Early in 1994 I began working with a holistic physician and psychotherapist in Mississauga. Then the miracle happened. I accessed a powerful healing energy and the migraines cracked.

Ironically, it was the same energy that tore through my body just before a migraine. Most migraine sufferers will testify to its presence. For me it was an intense, driven force manifesting itself through a strong need to talk and talk as I tackled numerous tasks with a frenetic speed and ferocity. I could not sit still.

Journal entry: November 10, 1992

"I have this migraine energy tearing through me. I feel drunk and out of control with it. I don't know what to do with it. I tried physically releasing it but it is still there."

During my work the holistic physician and psychotherapist, I began to see how blocking this amazing energy flow created a migraine headache. Gradually I learned to liberate this force, allowing it to flow freely without any resistance.

At first, I did not recognize my part in this. Then we began to uncover the layers of fear and conditioned reactions that were smothering this life force. These discoveries amazed me because I had so masterfully camouflaged them over the years. We started to examine every aspect of my life, down to the tiniest details - my thought patterns, my beliefs, my emotions, my choices, my reactions, my relationships - they all came under close scrutiny. My personal resistances and blocks came to light. With the doctor's help I took this awareness to its next level. I discovered how to go beyond these barriers. A wonderful transformation occurred.

Journal entry: May 30, 1994

"Today I felt my body alive. I literally felt the blood flowing through my veins. My toes, feet and legs were tingling, so were my arms, back and torso. The life force was tremendous. I am so happy, so excited at this coming alive. I intend to keep this feeling. My energy has been incredible all day."

What was this awareness, this catalyst for healing? How was this power released? How were my fears, my blocks dissolved?

I made truth the focus of my life. I actively chose to tell the whole truth all the time, everywhere, with everyone, no matter what. Most important I stopped lying to myself.

Paradoxically, I would never have been considered a liar by our society's standards. In fact, I was very honest. I am talking about another level of lying. My standards changed. I pursued scrupulous honesty. I became diligent. I took risks. I challenged many deeply ingrained beliefs:

It is necessary to hold my truth inside me and not offend others.

If I speak what I truly think and feel, I will lose love.

I am supposed to settle for less than I deserve.

It is necessary to be nice at all costs, even if it means being with people I do not want to be with, doing things I do not want to do.

I am supposed to over-ride what I really want to keep everyone happy.

There is not enough for everyone if we have what we truly want.

I held these beliefs up against this new measure of truth. I started the process of changing some to embody truth. Others I let go of completely.

Changes were made one by one. Some changes I embraced willingly. Some I resisted with every fiber of my being. But I learned to open up, with each change leading me on to the next.

It was not easy to take risks and say what I really felt – when I feared it would not be well received. I started to do it anyway.

It was not easy to pay scrupulous attention to my feelings and my body so that I could be consciously aware of any lie I told myself, even the smallest cover up.

It was not easy to confront lies when I heard them.

It was not easy to tell myself and my husband that I did not like sex, that I was not happy in my marriage, to tell my children that I needed time away from them.

It was not easy to acknowledge that I was truly sad, that I was not as confident as I believed.

It was not easy to stop blaming other people for how I was feeling.

It was not easy to stand up to my husband, my father, my therapist, my boss, my women friends.

It was not easy to do all these things, but I did.

I stopped being nice all the time.

I stopped pretending.

I stopped giving away my power to others.

I got selfish with my time.

I gave up people in my life that I did not really want to be with.

I started doing what I wanted, even if others did not like it.

I started asking for what I want.

I started asking directly for love.

I started showing my true feeling of affection for people – letting go of inhibitions and letting go of pretending I don't care as deeply as I do.

I started asking for the same from them, for honesty with me, for no pretense.

I started to trust myself.

I am still opening. I am still learning. I am still welcoming some learning and resisting others. But now the path is easier. I experience less fear, less resistance and less game playing to fool myself and others – replaced with excitement for and trust in the process of life.

It has been almost two years since I requested a medical prescription. I rarely experience the migraine energy starting and when I do I shift it within minutes without the use of any medication or external remedy.

This is when I call in the other crucial factor in my healing process – spiritual surrender.

Surrender to the higher consciousness, to my true self, God, Goddess, the power within the universe, whatever term we choose to describe this primal power. On these occasions I meditate, pray and then ask “Where is my inner truth and my outward expression at odds?” This being “out” creates the painful energy.

I shift the physical pain by calling in the spiritual and physical flow of energy. The same energy which used to precede migraines. But now it takes a different form. It is focused not chaotic. It is steady not frantic. It clears out any blocks in its way. Then I surrender, wait and receive. Within moments my body physically trembles with the incoming rush of energy which I believe is the life force. It leaves me physically breathless. I am filled with profound joy and deep peace. It is a spiritual and physical orgasm.

Then I heed the message from my inner self. I take practical steps to resolve the incongruency between my inner wisdom and my outer actions. I stop withholding what I am truly feeling and speak my truth. I acknowledge the inner wisdom I am hiding from myself.

The fusion of this spiritual surrender to healing and its practical manifestation through the pursuit of truth, literally blew the migraines right out of my system.

My experience does not discount the physical reality of migraine. I know only too well how real it is in the physical realm. I know the reality of physical triggers. Yet when I reached inside and touched the deepest root cause, all the physical migraine triggers lost their power over me.

In our present society, it is not common practice to go beyond the physical body when searching for the causes and cures of physical illness. It is not common practice to take responsibility for every area of our life, especially illness. So we play our part in creating sickness, give our healing power away and remain sick.

I acknowledge the wisdom of my body as it led me to listen, act and receive joy during this journey in healing. I believe we all hold this wisdom. It is available for much more than migraine headaches. It has the power to heal many physical conditions.

The most wonderful result of this personal process goes well beyond the vanishing of migraine headaches. I am overwhelmed with unexpected benefits. The presence of deep joy the likes of which I have rarely experienced before. The intensely vibrant reconnection with my husband, my reawakened sexuality, the rediscovered love of dancing, the delight in being with my family, the freedom of speaking out, the power of actively making choices, the flow of creativity in my work and the opening of my heart.

Journal entry: August 24, 1995

“I am experiencing wholeness. I am like the continents on the globe all coming back together to join into their original form of oneness. I feel the disintegration of my separate parts. They are coming together. I am so excited! I am filling up with delicious peace. I feel ecstasy coming on. I am voracious for life. I am powerfully sexual.”

The journey continues.

2008 Update to **Migraine A Journey in Healing**

It is now thirteen years since I wrote the preceding article. For ten years I enjoyed a migraine free existence. The last three years have seen the return of some migraine energy although it has been infrequent and much milder.

What brought about this change I wondered. True, the migraines are not frequent or intense but I am curious to know the root cause of the return to this particular type of pain.

Yes I had to learn how to gain control of a life that I had handed over to external influences. I also had to learn that my personal choices only go so far. This led me to increasingly surrender to the process of life,

Is it possible that the migraine energy has returned to show me the beauty of the truth that I am not in control? That the greater choice is to accept that once I have done my best to stay committed to my own truth, then I am to surrender to the greater Truth that there is much I do not know nor am I meant to. And to rest in peace with the perfection of my imperfection.

The deep joy I discovered is still here and my gratitude is great.
Sincerely, June

June Bradley is a Social Worker with a psychotherapy private practice in Mississauga, Ontario.
She specializes in the mind-body connection.
Tel: 416-884-1738 email: me@junebradley.com

