



# MIRACLES Happen Every Day

Ever since I wrote *Love, Medicine & Miracles* I have been asked many times for more—more tales of inspiration, more miracles of self-healing. I've thought about it and I've realized one thing: The miracle is not the cure, the miracle is the wonder of people learning to love and sharing that love with others. And in the process of living and loving, a wonderful by-product, physical healing, often occurs.

Max Cleland, a friend of mine, while on a tour of duty in Vietnam, picked up what he thought was a dead hand grenade. It turned out to be live and exploded in his hand. Max lost an arm and both legs. Since the accident, he has entered politics and is now the secretary of state of Georgia. He is an inspiration to everyone who meets him. His autobiography, *Strong at the Broken Places*, carries a message we might all take to heart. The title is from Hemingway: "The world breaks everyone and afterward many are strong at the broken places." The patients I meet in my practice, the survivors, are the ones who are strong at the broken places.

Woody Allen once said, "Life is full of miserableness, loneliness, unhappiness and suffering—and it is all over much too quickly." It is true, but even living to a hundred is not the answer—you could outlive everyone you love. What is the answer? It is finding new people to love, keeping going, creating a new reality, treating every affliction as a new challenge.

A teenager with metastatic cancer was told by her oncologist that she had one year to live. Her chemotherapy did not seem to be working and she and the doctor agreed to discontinue it.

At that point she decided to leave a terrible home situation, get her own apartment and take a newspaper ad of-

Christmas is the season of miracles, but Dr. Bernie Siegel, author of the best-selling book, *Love, Medicine & Miracles*, says miracles can happen all year round and love knows no holiday.

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fering to share with others her experiences with cancer:

Several spiritual events occurred during this period in her life, opening her to love and making her believe she had nothing to fear.

On her next visit to the oncologist, he wrote something on his prescription pad, tore off the page and handed it to her. When she told him she didn't need another prescription he told her to read it. It said, "Your cancer is gone."

A year later, with a twinkle in her eye, she called her oncologist to ask where to send the casket.

I know what doctors are like. If you recover from an illness that had been labeled incurable, they either give the disease credit for being a nice disease or claim an error in diagnosis. If they acknowledge the diagnosis and report on it in medical journals, they invariably leave out the patient's life story entirely. (Except one journal's report, which said, "Her much hated husband died, whereupon she got well.") However, if you talk to patients who have survived, 97 percent will tell a story about a complete change in their existence.

One day as I was making my clerical rounds (a phrase my wife, Bobbie, coined) I stopped to see Anna. I asked, "How are you doing?" expecting to give her a hug and move on. Instead, I was stopped when she said, "The doctor told me I'm dying." I said, "Well, then, if

you're dying why don't you just disconnect everything and go home and sit on your lovely front porch?" A glint came into her eye and she said, "That sounds like a good idea!" I could see life stir as she thought about it. In that moment she stopped dying and started living again. Within five days her tests showed improvement. Shortly thereafter she was discharged from the hospital. Her recovery was a

gift to her family and to me.

I have seen many hospice dropouts. People who, in preparing to die, felt so good they changed their minds.

A couple came to my office to discuss difficulties they were having because of his cancer. I asked each of them to describe the disease. The wife said, "It is a blossom, a chance for growth and change." The husband said, "Something is eating me alive."

I said, "I can see why you're having trouble; you are each living different experiences." To the husband I asked, "What is really eating you alive?"

He discussed his passive existence and we talked about change. Two hours later his wife called and told me how he'd taken charge of directing their route home from the office, telling her how fast to drive and just where to park the car to make it easier for him. He was finally verbalizing his feelings and taking charge once again.

How and why does this happen? When one has the courage to confront the illness and use it as a reset button some wonderful gifts can occur.

We know that everyone dies eventually—lovers, joggers, vegetarians and nonsmokers. Accept your mortality and live your life. Years ago a report revealed that more housewives contracted cancer than women who went out to work. Research was begun to find a carcinogen in (continued on page 26)