

PART ONE

Georgie's Story



This section is my in-depth healing story, including how I made crucial decisions for healing my “incurable,” disfiguring disease. I also share my spiritual transformation into the life I now live.

I Am Who I Am

Yet

I Continue To Find More

Of Me

CHAPTER ONE

Disease Doesn't Just Happen!



Who was I before being labeled with a disease? My life certainly looked “Joy-Full” from the outside. I was a business consultant specializing in solving employee, financial, and marketing problems and helping businesses turn a higher profit. Business problems were never “incurable” in my mind. The more difficult the task, the more thrill it gave me. It felt good to know I was needed, and I was rewarded handsomely for my efforts. I had a hefty salary, new cars, homes, wardrobes, material possessions, financial stock, and top-rated credit. I rarely got sick or was inconvenienced by physical pain.

Then suddenly the inevitable, which I had said “would never happen to me,” happened as if overnight. I was diagnosed with an incurable and deforming disease. For the next seven years fear, trauma, and uncertainty consumed my life like a raging fire. I felt humiliated to be seen in public, spent all my money and resources in search of a cure, and couldn't see to drive my car or read a book. My life appeared to be over.

For many years I had taken my health for granted. I raced my mind and treated my body like a machine, demanding top performance with little maintenance. I ignored being physically and mentally exhausted. I never turned down a project and became trapped in a compulsive system. Like an alcoholic, work was my “fix,” my drug of choice; yet because workaholism is a socially acceptable addiction, I was rewarded and admired for it. I had lost my joy—I was “running on empty.” Suddenly, instead of trying to solve my clients' corporate problems, I was forced to focus fully on my own health.

Thank God this was enough of an emergency that I finally took my health seriously, or else I would have continued on my destructive path and probably been driven to an early death of isolation. My God-given talents were wise, intuitive, and extraordinary, yet I had been living a life that, honestly, was less than happy.

My routine was rigid and unyielding, consisting of eating, sleeping, and working. There was no time for playing or being in touch with my own per-

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sonality, my core, or, as some call it, my spirituality. My own body had been trying to tell me something, but I had been too busy to listen. Each day stressed my body like a steady dripping of water onto a piece of concrete—one drip at a time, day after day, unnoticed—eventually wearing a hole large enough that it could not be denied.

Severe allergies were the first sign that my body was rebelling. Then, after five months of allergy shots, the first noticeable symptoms appeared. The skin on my face became very dry and turned bright red. My family physicians agreed the dryness and redness were the result of something I was eating, my hair spray, or my toothpaste. For the next couple of years they treated my condition accordingly. They kept looking for causes in the physical things I was doing or ingesting.

Two years later, with still no results, I met with a skin cancer doctor. He took blood samples and diagnosed me with rosacea, an incurable and disfiguring disease consisting of a chronic fiery red coloration caused by dilation of capillaries, and the appearance of pimples and boils.

I not only got a second opinion, but several other opinions. Giving me little hope, the doctors explained that the disease results in the irreversible deformation of the faces of middle-aged and elderly persons, and



Artist's rendering of face with rosacea

that it is more common in women than in men. Most often this deformation includes an irregular thickening of the skin, which forms knob-like lumps on the face and an enlarged nose; doctors declared that my face would deform in the third year. The disease can also affect the eyes, resulting in a mild to severe decrease in vision.

My future was considered predetermined. Most of the doctors recommended hospitalization. One doctor even called me at home, insisting that I go to the hospital. They wanted to medicate me and then let the disease run its bleak course. In my stubbornness I would not surrender to the doctors' recommendations.

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I trusted my own judgment and continued to seek answers, knowing that healing was possible.

As time went by, my face became a brighter red, raw, and covered with boils. The embarrassment of being a female in midlife with a face that looked like it had been in a fire caused me deep emotional pain. I dreaded being seen in public but taught myself how to act callused to others' comments when I was. Innocent children screamed with fear when they saw me in the supermarket or on the sidewalk, thinking they had seen a monster. Their honesty left deep, long-lasting scars on my psyche. Adults were no more helpful with their constant questions of, "How did it happen?" "What kind of disease do you have?" "What happened to you!?" They bombarded me with remedies from helpful to ridiculous, day after day and year after year. My wounded spirit felt very helpless, and I suffered enormous shame about my appearance.

During the first few years of my disease, I assumed that all physicians had detailed information about human physiology, and I expected them to know how a healthy cell changes to become unhealthy or, in my case, how healthy facial skin turns red and develops boils. No matter how often I asked, however, I couldn't get this core information.

But I never gave up hope. "What caused this disease to develop?" I kept asking, wanting a doctor to explain how my immune system works and how my body heals. I searched diligently for doctors and specialists who might lead me to the answers I was seeking. I asked each doctor I contacted for the names of other doctors who might have more information. I contacted these people by phone, in person, or by mail. I found centers that specialized in rare diseases, but none specialized in rosacea. Some doctors suggested new drugs on the market that offered a possibility, but they really were only wild guesses. Most doctors were not knowledgeable or interested in dietary issues, so there was little guidance about what foods, if any, to avoid or consume. There certainly was no concern expressed for how this diagnosis affected me emotionally.

The only consistent recommendations I received were drugs, topical creams, and hospitalization. Even then, the doctors indicated this course of treatment would be experimental with no real guarantees or knowledge of potentially dangerous side effects. Many of the doctors did not agree with each other about the types of drugs to use. Some offered me free samples of drugs to try, but I decided the real price was too expensive. I believed that once I was drugged, I would be out of control and I would no longer be able to make important decisions about my life. In my belief system, this would be just copping out and hoping the rosacea would go away. I was also afraid of how these drugs would affect my

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organs, such as the liver and kidneys, which appeared to be functioning normally.

I prayed daily not to deform as badly as the pictures I was shown, but I was convinced I would deform. I was driven by two internal voices: One was the business consultant who demanded, “Don’t tell me I can’t heal!” I couldn’t even comprehend the thought of not getting well. Business problems were never unsolvable, and certainly not forever. The other voice was of the scared child who wanted to cry and plead, “Please don’t tell me I can’t heal.”

Later I met two other people with rosacea. One who was on cortisone was now scarred for life, her facial skin twisted with lesions the size of quarters. The other was in a nursing home because her entire face was now disfigured and she couldn’t stand the pain of being seen in public. After meeting them, I was certain I would never, ever be strong enough to live the rest of my life looking so ugly and grotesque, and losing any part of my eyesight. After this I would not allow my mind ever to consider what I would do if the worst did happen. I built a solid wall in my mind and never asked myself the “what if” questions.

I had a lot invested in the direction I was choosing, really stepping out and not following what “they” told me. I knew I was walking a strange path, feeling alone yet determined that any problem had to have a solution. In the meantime weeks were passing, and my condition wasn’t waiting for me to get educated.

My search for answers included health food stores, libraries, health agencies, holistic healers, healed people, books, healing magazines, and massage therapy. I also asked for referrals at many of these places and diligently investigated each lead.

I tried fasting from nine to fourteen days in hopes of resting my organs and assisting my immune system to function more effectively. Each time I observed how this fasting affected my body. I learned to feel the difference between a fruit and vegetable juice diet. I learned which foods made me feel good and which made me feel sluggish, which foods gave me indigestion, and which foods resulted in aches and pains. I had professional colonics to clean my colon. I learned to give myself an enema so that I could keep my colon cleaned of toxins. I cautiously applied various natural ointments and creams to my face, but even aloe vera felt like acid. I studied with every natural healer I could find and tried anything that made sense and even some suggestions that seemed far-fetched. Following the Bible’s promise, “Seek and ye shall find,” I was not just seeking, but seeking desperately.

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After about three years I met a doctor's wife who convinced me that her 75-year-old husband, a dermatologist specializing in skin diseases, could help me. She was convincing, so I traveled a long distance to meet with him.

I remember having such high hopes of getting answers from him. He was very gentle, but after examining me said that in thirty-five years of practice he had never seen a case of this disease that didn't result in deformation. He had no suggestions or recommendations. I felt like a hot-air balloon filled with faith and hope that was instantly punctured and ripped open, tumbling emotionally down, frayed and torn into nervous threads from one more disappointing lead.

I gathered myself up and I did the only thing I knew how: I pushed on. I wondered how long it would be before I began to deform. A friend told me much later that I **had** begun to deform, but I did not admit it to myself, and of course, no one pointed that fact out to me. If I had realized my true state, I might have given up.

Later that year, in the extreme heat of the summer, I flew from North Carolina to Alabama. I checked into a holistic medical center located on 25 acres of beautiful rolling hills and forest and began three weeks of evaluations. The five medical doctors there used a program consisting of patient education, lifestyle evaluation, medical exams, and natural treatments and remedies. This center attracted people from all over the world with major health problems—cancer, diabetes, coronary disease, and arthritis, among others. I was very impressed by the results the patients were experiencing and determined that body chemistry and the natural harmony of our bodies must be similar. Seeing these similarities, I wondered why our world made healing so complicated. Would I ever uncover the necessary information to see healing in my life?

This center sent people into the country to find God, peace of mind, and healing in nature. It was a haven of beauty and holistic medicine. Part of the therapy included exercise, sunshine, rest, gardening, cooking classes, herbs, and water therapy. Gathering together daily to pray for each other, the patients had created an environment that encouraged healing by bringing the body back into a more natural state of peacefulness and harmony.

My three-week regimen included a walking program, a diet consisting of homegrown fresh fruits and vegetables, juices, and homemade breads, and large quantities of garlic, known to help cleanse the blood. I had a private room, and the staff did everything possible to see that I was comfortable. I noticed the treatments didn't hurt me physically or make me feel bad. I might have felt a little weak at times, but I recovered quickly.

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I had hydrotherapy (water treatments) five to six days a week. I was placed in a steam chamber, and my temperature was raised to 104 degrees. Although I lost so much weight by sweating that I could eventually count my ribs, my facial skin never showed any signs of moisture or opening up to breathe.

After three weeks my face was even more raw and a much brighter red. The doctors met with me and said they had no answers. Their observation was that every layer of skin on my face was like a scar. I asked about having my face sanded to attract healing from deeper layers, but they doubted this was possible in my case, because a scar is a scar in the deep inner skin also.

Although the people at this center did not offer emotionally supportive therapy, only physical treatments and spiritual practices, I detected that they were on to something significant in what they did offer. I had witnessed people with chronic problems healing at this same center and had read testimonies from others. I also felt more accepted there than out in the world. I felt ugly, in the way I suspect lepers do. I wanted to find a safe place to live away from the stress of being judged bad, incurable, or diseased. I went home and convinced my husband that I wanted to go back and live at this center to study, work, and be a patient.

Between the cost of my husband's education (he had received his master of divinity degree) and my frantic search for my health, funds were not available for a move across the country. I didn't feel that I had any choice, though, so we proceeded to sell all our valuables, including treasured pieces of jewelry from my business days. Everything was sold, stripping us down to bare necessities. We knew we would have to work once we arrived at the health facility. For me, the stress of work wasn't in my best interest as a patient, but it was a risk I was willing to take.

Once we arrived and got settled at the center, my schooling began. I was fascinated by the results these people were getting. I studied with both the staff and patients, looking for any clues to my own perplexing problem. The entire experience was very educational, but frustrating as well. After two years of treatment I had gotten progressively worse, losing nearly eighty percent of my eyesight. The first stage of deforming was apparent. When my husband received a ministerial opportunity in Oregon, we sadly moved on.

From what I had experienced up until now, I came to the conclusion that, in order to heal, we must consider our entire lifestyle. A balance is necessary for healing to take place, and nutrition plays a major part because we become what we eat. Exercise, rest, sunshine, and getting out in nature are all basic ingredients for healing.

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All of this time, though, I never addressed the issue of what I was feeling, nor did anyone else. No one was sensitive enough to notice or ask the painful questions: “How do you deal emotionally with having people stare at you like you are turning their stomachs?” or, “How does it feel to be diseased, knowing that deforming could begin any day?” “Do you consider suicide?” “Are you angry?” “How do you cope with the enormous grief of losing your eyesight and appearance?” “How does it feel to continue to research and try over and over again, yet be given no real hope?” “How does it feel to lance boils every day with a sterile needle and watch your facial skin become more and more leathery?” “Do you need a friend to confide in?” No one came to me with an open heart asking how I felt about living with this dreadful ordeal. I felt isolated and terrorized. My emotions froze deep inside of me. I disassociated from myself and those around me, just trying to survive.

How did my husband respond to my having a disease? I suspect he was very scared, and in his fear separated emotionally from my desperate attempts to get help. He did the best he knew how. He could see I was hurting but couldn't feel or empathize with my pain.

Both of us continued in workaholic fashion not to talk about the tragedy that was taking place. The doctors had predicted, and therefore we expected, permanent deforming to happen any day after the second year. On occasion my husband would sit across the table from me while eating and look at my face. He would say things like, “I think your nose is starting to enlarge,” or “I'm noticing your face getting worse.” I would panic and run into the bathroom to check. Interestingly, I never could see the changes he pointed out. Either I was in denial or just not convinced.

There were occasions when he showed sympathy. Once he went with me to a doctor's office and helped two nurses hold me down on a table while the doctor surgically removed an infected, large, hard boil the size of a pea from my eyelid. He responded when I needed help, but most of the time I kept my thoughts, feelings, and needs to myself.

Our health insurance would have paid for my complete hospitalization, and my husband tended to side with the doctors to have me go that route. From his perspective it appeared to be the most economical and medically wise course to take. The doctors' recommendations were persuasive, but I was never convinced. Looking back, I realize it took a lot of courage to stand by my truth and be willing to put my money where my heart was.

Up until now, mostly unknown to me, only God and the angels kept me from destroying myself as I continually sought help. I didn't

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have much faith in God. Instead I felt separated from God and frustrated that the answers were so slow in coming. I was anointed and prayed over for healing many times, but the requests appeared to go unnoticed. By this time I was exhausted from trying so hard to get results, but doors did open and I continued to walk through them as if God was leading me by the hand.

I was led next to a dermatology and skin specialist conference where more than 150 doctors gathered to share information about rare skin diseases. I had the dubious honor of being selected as one of their case studies. Again, I was very hopeful about finding the answers I had been looking for. I felt grateful and positive.

Then came the letdown. I had gone way beyond the three-year time frame when deforming normally took place. The doctors wanted to know what I was doing differently, because I was so much better off than most patients they had seen with this disease were. The roles were reversed. I was giving them answers. I didn't learn anything except that they were very impressed with the results I was getting. I knew from their comments that what I had learned to do for myself was having a positive impact.

After six years of holistic remedies and the advice of countless medical experts, I still had not given up hope, but disappointments had left me feeling defeated over and over again. I felt angry, sad, lonely, helpless, and beaten down by the medical system. Life was very difficult, almost impossible to comprehend, and nearly unbearable. Where was God? Was God really going to let me deform and become nearly blind or even lose my eyesight because I couldn't find in the world what my heart knew was always possible: a solution? **Was it pointless to fight against such devastating odds?**

