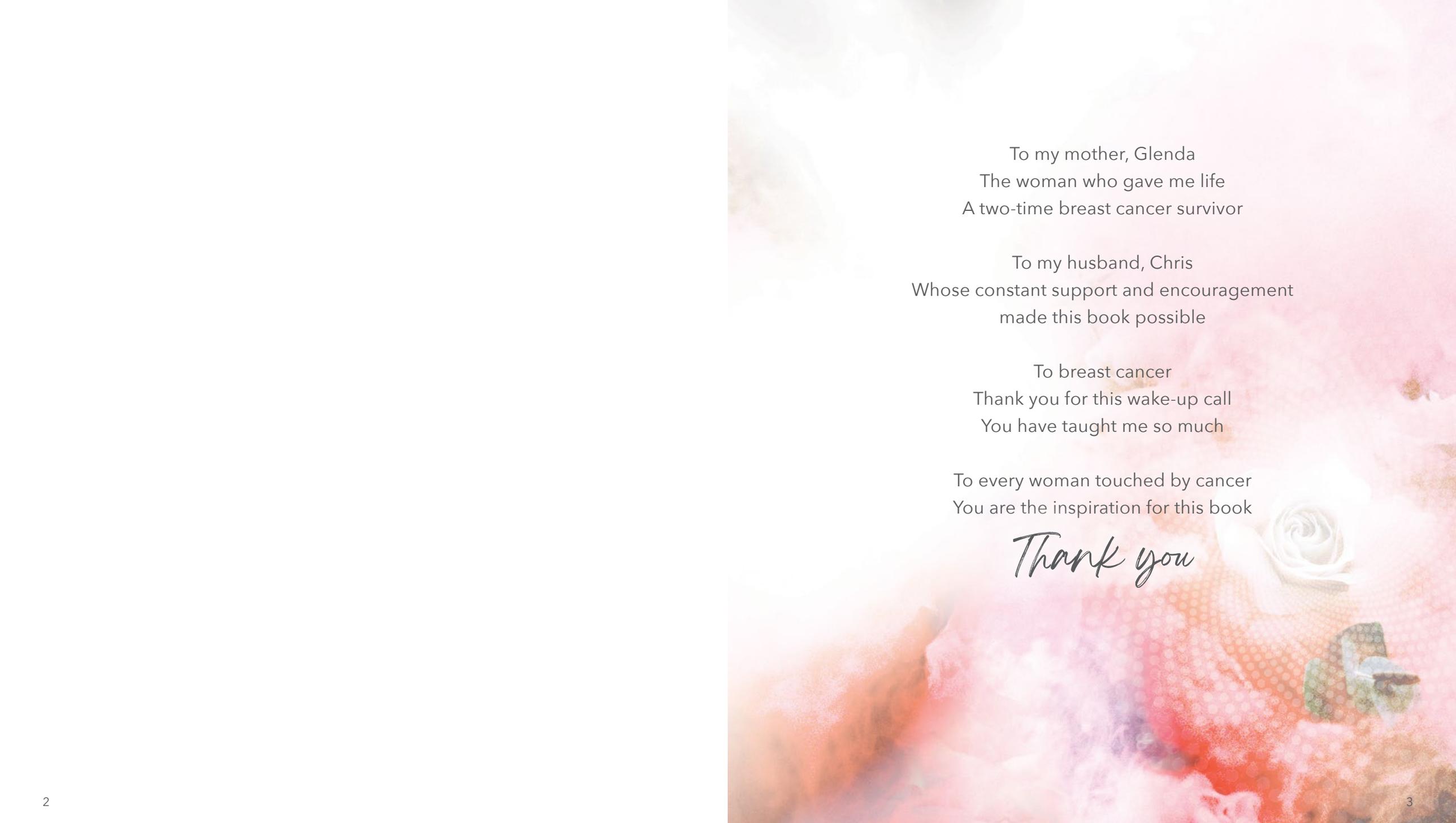
A woman's hand is shown in the foreground, palm facing up, wearing a gold ring with a red gemstone and a large, ornate gold bracelet. The background is a vibrant, artistic illustration of a woman's face and hair, rendered in a style that blends soft colors with more textured, painterly elements. The overall mood is warm and healing.

Healing Journal

THE GIFT OF CANCER





To my mother, Glenda
The woman who gave me life
A two-time breast cancer survivor

To my husband, Chris
Whose constant support and encouragement
made this book possible

To breast cancer
Thank you for this wake-up call
You have taught me so much

To every woman touched by cancer
You are the inspiration for this book

Thank you

Dearest Sister

If you are reading this now, it's likely that you, or someone close to you is travelling the challenging path of cancer.

It's not a path that anyone would deliberately choose, but having to travel it now for the second time, I'm called to share how I've been navigating it and offer you my companionship on this rocky, yet wondrous road of healing.

I can't know of course, how it is for you, but I do know when this powerful teacher showed up in my life again, so abruptly and shockingly, I wished for the company and guidance of someone who had travelled this path before. I longed for the wisdom of someone who had entered the unknown, dreaded territory and was willing to serve as a guide and companion to my frightened, overwhelmed yet courageous self who was facing this mysterious path and all its powerful gifts.

So, this is that book. It was written for you and the many women around our world whose lives are touched by cancer. It's my hand extended to yours to hold as you navigate your way, to respect you have your own wisest healer within. It's to provide space to uncover what's true for you, to listen to an inner voice that needs to be heard or perhaps to awaken some part of you that's ready to heal and to cherish the life you have now.

On that fateful Friday afternoon when my surgeon confirmed I had breast cancer I was almost paralysed by the force of conflicting, swirling emotions. Anger, frustration, disappointment, denial, grief and devastation. Why me, why now?

Somewhere through all the tears, shock and confusion, once I'd had time to stop, breathe and feel myself, there was a quieter voice rising up in me, calling me to pay attention, to listen and heed the call. I intuitively knew it was time to go within, to meet my pain and transform it. With a second visit from cancer, I chose to meet this unwanted visitor and discover why it was here.

So, I am the wounded healer, sharing my journey even as I travel it.

As I write, I'm in the middle of chemotherapy, deep in my own journey and navigating all manner of insight, pain, confusion, forgotten hurts, beauty and buried treasures. All of it! I have no time to waste as who knows how it's going to turn out but, I want to share with you some of the things that have helped me navigate my treatment with more ease, perspective and tenderness. I am determined to live a rich, meaningful life before, during and after cancer! And I wish this for you too.



I have created this book as the gift I would've liked to receive at the beginning of my soul journey through breast cancer. In sharing my story, I'm validating yours.

I'm here with you, celebrating each step in your unique journey and offering sanctuary, some inspiration and a place to capture your thoughts and feelings, to unearth the treasures of your discoveries and nurture your soul growth.

May this become a gift you pay forward, in time. As each woman's journey is shared, bravely and authentically, it makes an unimaginable difference. To know your suffering has served a purpose and had meaning for another, is a powerful medicine we have almost entirely forgotten. In a culture that values the light, the young, beautiful, functional and healthy, where we deny the inevitability of sickness, aging, death and dying, we are robbed of the rich rewards of travelling to these darker seasons and are collectively the poorer for it.

May you bring your gifts into the light, for yourself, your loved ones and us all.

From my heart to yours.

With so much gratitude,

Cindy Scott xx



"SOMEONE I LOVED ONCE GAVE ME
A BOX FULL OF DARKNESS.

IT TOOK ME YEARS TO UNDERSTAND
THAT THIS TOO,
WAS A GIFT."

Mary Oliver

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HOW TO GET THE MOST FROM THIS BOOK

I've written this book more or less as it came to me over these last months. It's been a huge journey in itself and the content isn't necessarily chronological.

The index suggests what is covered in each section, and you may follow the order in which they are presented or feel free to open and dive in wherever you feel drawn, tarot style!

As well as my personal story, each chapter offers inspiration, guidance, self-care practices and rituals. There are resources to follow and plenty of room for you to journal your own experience, using the guided prompts for self-inquiry and insight, if you choose.

Acknowledgements

I wish to thank *Nirado Griffin*, my dear friend and my editor for walking with me every step of the way, masterfully midwifing the birth of this book;

Melissa Williams for artistically designing the book cover to my imagination's desire;

Stephanie Crane for her patience and magic in creating the internal design and layout;

Benay Dyor who despite my reluctance, kept insisting I was a writer;

and most especially *Chris Scott*, my beloved husband, for showing me everyday how to live with love and compassion in my heart.

Finally, I want to thank the *Sunshine Coast* of Australia, for holding me in its beautiful serene surrounds and being the place I most feel at home in the world to write this book.

UNDERSTANDING AND MANAGING

Shock, Fear & Anxiety

I recognise from my own experience, that a diagnosis such as breast cancer invariably comes as a shock.

We are hard-wired for survival, so you may not recognise the symptoms of shock immediately. As your system tries to take in this new information, many neuro-chemical responses are happening at lightning speed in your brain and body and it's likely you'll be functioning in 'survival mode'. This means the more primitive parts of the brain, the brainstem, limbic system and amygdala are activated as the nervous system tries to assess the priorities for your immediate survival. It does however often mean that your higher functioning neo-cortex, where speech, problem solving and complex analysis can go 'offline' as survival takes priority.

Without understanding what's happening physiologically, in an attempt to override the disbelief, or appear 'normal', cope and 'get on with it' you can actually miss important information being shared by your medical practitioners.

Unfortunately, many doctors are not 'trauma-informed' and lack awareness of the impact of a diagnosis as well as treatment on the nervous system.

This is where a friend or ally is so beneficial, as they can support and ground you, take care of your well-being in the moments when you can't and can advocate in your best interests. It is always good to have someone who can accompany you to crucial appointments when needing to take in information and ask questions, particularly about diagnosis and treatment options.

It is a good idea to have some education about the impact of shock on your nervous system as this is likely to come and go throughout your journey.

Everyone responds differently in challenging situations as we have all developed different survival strategies from early childhood, and these are some general guidelines that should be helpful.

Shock is known as the 'freeze' response and indeed, you may feel frozen to the spot, unable to move or take action. There is usually a sudden drop in blood pressure or blood flow throughout the body and you may feel cold, clammy, faint (literally sometimes!) and become dry-mouthed. Your breathing may become shallow, you may hyper-ventilate, feel tingling all over or lose touch with 'reality' and be unable to hear or comprehend what is being spoken.

Whilst it may be a surprise or feel uncomfortable, this is totally normal and part of being in a human body!

Shock can also manifest as a 'flight' response and you feel like running as fast as possible to leave the situation, mobilising all the muscles and narrowing your focus towards 'getting out of here'! Ungrounded, disembodied feelings also result here and if you can be aware enough to stop, breathe, bring yourself 'back into your body', in awareness of the present time and place, it's of benefit to your wellbeing.

Occasionally shock will elicit an unprompted 'fight' response and you can experience the urge to push back, hit out and stop the bearer of bad news. Again, this is an instinctual mechanism of the body trying to protect and defend itself against threat. The breath shortens, skin reddens, muscles may bunch, the fists clench, jaw jutting out in an aggressive stance, ready to fight what's threatening survival.

This response is less common, but is good to know what can occur, so anyone accompanying you knows not to take it personally and with understanding and support can allow this reaction to subside. Tears are very often right under the surface needing to be released and this can help to 'down-regulate' the nervous system to a more tolerable level of experience.

We are often in shock for quite some time after a life-changing diagnosis and you may have a lingering sense of being a bit disconnected, or disassociated, not functioning at your normal level. It comes and goes and you might feel 'just fine' some days and then on others, completely 'out of your body'; light headed, foggy, unfocused, ungrounded, or have a sense of being in a 'parallel universe' where nothing makes sense and you function by rote.

Having compassion for yourself and recognising you deserve care and kindness as you navigate this new territory is the best approach.

There are many practices in this book to help you integrate your experience and allow the body its natural healing processes. There is also more detailed information on the autonomic nervous system in chapter 7 with practises to support the regulation of the sympathetic and parasympathetic branches of the nervous system and increase resilience.

For now, it's good to have some shock 'First Aid' and know how to ground yourself into the present time where you can take the most appropriate choice of action.

Stabilising practices

WHEN IN CRISIS OR UNDER STRESS

Do any of these that feel right in the moment, in no particular order. Practise when you are less activated so you become familiar and can trust your body to know its way to more ease and peace. **Self-resourced. Self love, self care.**

1. SLOW DOWN. Take 10 steps very slowly, mindfully, feeling the sensations in your feet and legs, feeling the pull of gravity so you feel solid, heavy and weighted.

2. Sit on something solid where you feel safe enough to give over to the sensations of being supported, held or cradled. You can tuck yourself in with a blanket if you are cold or just need to feel swaddled and safe.

Feel the pull of gravity so you feel solid, heavy and weighted, and can feel the sensation where the surface meets your body. See if you can soften and welcome more of that sensation. Notice any places that ease, or release as you follow or track what feels good and pleasurable.

As much as you can, slow your breathing, become curious and bring your focus to the sensations of the body without attaching any 'story' to them.

3. Slow your breathing to 5 breaths in, hold for 3, then 7 breaths out. Start with less counts if you can't manage 5 and gradually build up to a steady slow rhythm. Breathe in through your nose, close your eyes if that helps, let the outbreath be gentle and complete easily, holding for a couple of counts before taking the next inbreath. Notice what happens in your body.

4. Orient. Ideally sitting somewhere safe, look slowly around, notice the colours and shapes of your surroundings, take in your whole environment with curiosity, letting your gaze rest on something that brings pleasure. Turn slowly to look behind you if you can do so easily, but keep the sensation pleasant. This is literally letting your brain know where you are, that you are safe in this moment and that there are many viewpoints; you have options. Notice what happens in your body.

5. Connect with your body. Cross your legs at your ankles, wrap your arms around your body tucking hands under your armpits, lower your head and breathe slowly. Feel the safety and containment of being held. Stay as long as you need to feel calm and more settled.

6. You can do a version of no 5, above, by wrapping yourself up tight with a blanket, a towel or a sarong. The pressure on the arms particularly lets you know you are safe and able to let breathing and heart-rate return to normal.

7. Wrap your arms around you, as above, instead of tucking your hands into your armpits, let them gently squeeze the muscles of the upper arms, or gently tap from shoulder to elbow. Turn your gaze down or close your eyes, Make it pleasurable and rhythmic, continuing until you feel settled and calm.

8. Head Hold. Put one hand over your forehead and one behind at the base of your neck. Feel the warmth and security of your hands and apply the amount of pressure that feels right. Breathe slowly, notice the sensations in the rest of your body and allow any subtle release, trembling or let go. Sometimes the eyes can flicker and twitch behind the lids, the jaw may unclench and any sighing will indicate the parasympathetic nervous system is engaged.

9. Social engagement. Sometimes the presence of another human can be reassuring, comforting and supportive. If feeling anxious, it can help to just be around people in normal day to day interactions, so any sense of isolation or disconnection can be eased, If you feel the need to share how you are feeling, make sure you have someone you respect and trust to listen compassionately, without giving unsolicited advice and who can maintain confidentiality.

10. Touch. Be really attuned to what kind of touch is helpful if at all when you are really anxious, activated or upset. Sometimes just having someone resting hands on your shoulders as you lean back into a chair with eyes closed can be really settling, or gently holding your feet while you breathe to ground yourself. Make sure you stay responsive to what is the right pressure, quality and length of time you receive touch. And sometimes a good long hug from just the right person who can hold you while you wail, or let go is perfect.

11. Non-human company. The unconditional loving company of a pet can be a perfect way to settle and regulate yourself when in stress or anxiety. Often dogs, cats, horses and other pets have a very attuned sense for what is needed when their human is upset, so avail yourself of their cuddling and attention if needed.

12. Hydrate/ Nourish your body. If ever you've been given bad news, had a medical procedure, or had blood drawn, you may have been offered hot sweet tea and a biscuit in recovery. There is good reason for this, as shock slows the blood flow and you feel cold and numb. Warmth, sugar and hydration can bring you out of the cold of shock, increase circulation and rebalance your blood sugar.



PART 1

Why Me?

*"Try not to resist the changes
that come your way.
Instead let life live through you.
And do not worry
that your life is turning upside down.
How do you know that this side
you are used to is better
than the one to come?"*

- Rumi

THANKSGIVING

As I looked around our beautiful dining table complete with crisp white linen tablecloth, flickering candles and crystal glassware, my heart was bursting with so much warmth and joy to be in the company of such an amazing group of people. Thanksgiving is a special time of year for most Canadians and a holiday I love to celebrate. Turkey and pumpkin pie also happen to be some of my favourite foods.

My partner and I had only just moved interstate to the Sunshine Coast in Queensland a few months before but had already met so many wonderful new friends we could invite. As a Canadian living abroad, it feels wonderful to bring some of our customs and traditions to Australia and to offer others an experience of this special time.

As we gathered to share the stunning feast, I took pause and truly gave thanks for that moment, one that will always be imprinted on my heart. You see, I believe we are all powerful manifesters, creators of our reality, so I looked with so much pride at what I had called into my life: a wonderful partner, a move to tropical paradise, a new home, a successful business, beautiful new friends and an abundance of wholesome and delicious food spread before us.

Could life really be any better than this moment?

Following lunch, I asked each of our guests to express something they were thankful for. This is a tradition my mother always insisted on and one I loathed growing up, but now, as the host, I felt inspired to invite everyone to join in this beautiful practise of giving thanks. I was deeply moved by what people shared. I don't think there was a dry eye in the house! So, when the talking stick came around to me, I had so much to be thankful for. In that moment, my life was pretty darn close to perfect.

DISHES

With our bellies full and our hearts even more so, it was time to clean up a mountain of dishes. Some guests had left, others were deep in conversation as Jill and I hovered over the kitchen sink sharing this ordinary moment of domesticity. Despite it being a pretty tedious job, the quieter moments doing dishes together have often led to some of the most profound and intimate conversations I've experienced. We chatted away about my business ambitions and how much I had on my plate. So, when Jill said in her no-nonsense way 'you are such an over-giver, when do you take time to receive from others?', she may as well have spoken in Mandarin. I heard her words but they bounced off me. I was simply not able to comprehend this foreign concept.

TAKE TWO

Just three months later, in a very different setting, I lay there in disbelief as the sonographer, Greg, gently guided his wand over my left breast and said, 'you have a lump'. He said it so quietly I asked him to repeat it. He said it again in a more confident, yet compassionate tone, 'you have a lump'. I fumbled to feel the lump beneath my fingers, my mind racing and vehemently rejecting the notion that breast cancer had returned. It couldn't be. No, not again!

My mind flashed back to my first diagnosis five years earlier. I have already been down this path once before. 'Wasn't that enough?' I silently screamed into the ether, as if someone might hear me or even supply an answer. Inexplicably it seemed, breast cancer was visiting me a second time.

The sonographer handed me some towels to wipe off the gel he used for the ultrasound and I could feel a cold wave of disbelief wash over me. I was like a deer frozen in the headlights as the shock set in. I struggled to form any rational, sensible thoughts at all and stumbled out of the clinic in a blur.

It was like there were two parts of me. My hyperactive, logical mind went into overdrive. In panic, I questioned the prospect of having cancer again and doubted, denied and resisted this reality. I didn't want to believe that cancer had returned. I hadn't even had the biopsy to discover whether it was fatty tissue or in fact a cancerous growth. Maybe they had made a mistake! Meanwhile another part of me, from way deeper down, had already recognised the truth and had determined my diagnosis. I was scrambling to reconcile these opposing voices.

STRIPPED BARE

I had booked to have my annual ultrasound and mammogram just six weeks before our wedding; just another item ticked off my 'to-do' list in the lead up to getting married. With guests flying in from around the world and other parts of Australia, there was absolutely no time for illness, let alone treatment!

However, on that fateful Friday afternoon, my worst fears were realised. As Chris and I sat across from Emma, my breast surgeon, her facial expression communicated her findings before her words did. 'You have cancer', she said. I felt as if someone had knocked the air out of me. I tried to make light of it and put on my brave face but nothing could stop the tears. Words were coming out of her mouth but I don't think I heard anything after the word 'cancer'. Everything inside started reeling as I tried desperately to comprehend what she had said. 'N-n-n-n-o-o-o-o, not again!' went around and around in my head. My body went numb. I went into auto-pilot as we left the clinic.

Outside, nothing had changed; the flowers on the trees shone brightly, the sun beamed in the sky and people went on their merry way. Yet learning the reality of what was happening within me had instantly changed my whole world. I was so grateful to have Chris there to chauffeur me home and take care of me.

With only weeks to go before our wedding date, despite my fear and uncertainty, I went straight into 'handling it'. I had two lots of surgery; one for a lumpectomy and the second, to have a port-a-cath (port) embedded in my chest to make the chemotherapy infusions easier to receive. My oncologist was anxious about leaving my chemotherapy treatments for so long but *nothing* was going to get in the way of our epic, gorgeous, 3-day marriage celebrations.

Life, however, seemed to have other plans, as simultaneously the corona virus was taking centre-stage across the globe. As this unprecedented global pandemic and the rising international panic led to lockdowns and closed borders everywhere, we were forced to cancel our wedding celebrations just two weeks out from the date.

Within the span of just a few short weeks I found myself immersed in a new and frightening world, like a ghastly merry-go-round I couldn't get off. The fear of cancer now gripped me like a vice. I tried to comprehend and digest my diagnosis, was undergoing a barrage of tests and scans, had cancelled our wedding, shut-down my business, commenced chemotherapy and gone into self-isolation with COVID-19. My year was nothing like the one I had envisioned! I felt completely stripped bare of the life I once knew and was in free-fall much of the time, trying to find ground, where there was none.

DETOUR

I didn't need a biopsy to verify what my inner knowing already knew, that I had an aggressive cancer growing inside me. I also knew the bullet-proof mask I normally wear to hide my pain and endure challenges wasn't going to do the trick this time.

I may have skipped lightly through breast cancer the first time around but my second diagnosis was different. The impact was more amplified, intense, the call for action more urgent. In order for me to fully heal, I was going to need to dig a whole lot deeper. Slapping the proverbial band-aid on my situation and believing a lumpectomy would complete my 'healing' wasn't going to cut it. It was merely the first step toward my full body, mind and soul healing.

In our culture, we're taught to avoid painful situations at all cost so my natural reaction to the diagnosis was to avoid, avoid, avoid! My disbelief was palpable and my new reality, my worst nightmare. If there was a detour to bypass this untenable predicament and the painful emotions it evoked, I would've taken it.

I considered the many ways I have successfully numbed and avoided uncomfortable situations in the past. A few too many vinos, some retail therapy, bingeing on the latest Netflix series or keeping myself busy. I'd graduate top of the class for employing creative ways to distract myself and avoid any discomfort!

I am a well-practised pain-avoider, but with this second diagnosis of breast cancer, I knew it was time to take a different path. I also knew it wasn't going to be easy and most likely, it wasn't going to be pleasant, but it's the road I knew I had to take, no matter what I discovered on the way.

THE VOID

When the biopsy confirmed the aggressive cancer growing inside my breast, I felt as if I had been hit by a truck. I was thrust into a new unfamiliar medical world of tests, scans and surgeries and a multitude of unknowns. The door to my old world slammed shut behind me, with no option to return.

Even after the initial shock wore off, I found myself in uncharted territory. Nothing made sense and I had a sense of the ground going out from underneath me.

I call this place the 'void'. Buddhists call it a 'bardo'; the space between. No woman's land.

I think of it like a hallway with a door on either end. I had been shunted into the hallway against my will with one door slammed and padlocked behind me. Until I had a name for it, I ran from this place at all cost. And now I find myself smack dab in the hallway heading towards another door, the door to my future. A door with no obvious key.

No one tells you how long the hallway is, how many turns there are, how bumpy the carpet is or how long it will take to get to the other end. And if you're pain-avoidant like me, making the journey can be a long and arduous one. As I write this book, I am receiving chemotherapy and still very much in the hallway, grieving the loss of what was my life, still often fearful and reluctant to embrace the uncertainty of what lies ahead.

RISING UP

My hallway feels like a rollercoaster at times. There are highs and lows and Eskimo-rolls and parts that scare me to death. I've asked myself a million times, *'What is this all for? What am I here to learn? Why has cancer visited me, again?'* Believe me, there were many days when all I did was curl up on the couch and cry, feeling sorry for myself and creating pity-parties for anyone who'd listen.

Being a first-class victim, however, has never been my style. I have always preferred to be a victor rather than a victim so as I sit in my hallway, contemplating the best way forward, I know this journey is going to be a bumpy and unfamiliar one. However, from a deeper, more tender place inside, I have made a commitment to myself that I am prepared to surrender to any discomfort or vulnerability and trust the process, to allow the insights of this journey to arise.

As I lay in the hospital following my lumpectomy, something radical happened. It seemed as though time stood still. In that moment, any fear I had been feeling was replaced with a sense of calm and a quiet, inner knowing spoke from within. I sensed I had been given a big 'wake-up call' and that in fact, this tumour was a gift. I believe this tumour has something important to teach me.

I knew there would be much more involved to genuinely heal than a quick lick of surgery and to slap a band-aid on my health. To truly heal at a cellular level, I needed to be present to this experience, allowing myself to fully feel my emotions rather than disassociate from them as I so often did. I know this is the key to meeting whatever truth lay buried inside.

In order for some of us to wake up,

we need a wake-up call.

- JOE DISPENZA

THE WAKE-UP CALL

I have always been open to all kinds of healers and am innately curious about the more mystical aspects of life beyond our physical realm. I believe there is a spiritual dimension to life that underlies our everyday experience and connects us all.

I had been having regular treatments with Merryn prior to my diagnosis. She knew me quite well and was already familiar with my physical body when I learned I had cancer. Her treatments were like a lifeline to me, helping me process pain both physically and emotionally. I chose to continue my regular appointments with her as a way of honouring myself and committing to my healing journey.

Merryn is gifted at tuning into the body and has a way of bringing that which is unseen into the light. As I lay on her mat in the chaos of my new reality, crying like a baby, she offered something so profound. *'Your soul will be getting something it wants from all of this'*, she said. And my soul immediately replied with a sigh, *'Yes, I am getting to rest, finally'*.

I have spent much of my life aiming to please others, desperately trying to fit in and not burden others with my needs. In my early life programming, being invisible is much easier than being needy. However, it's also a great way to get overlooked and never receive help.

The truth was, I was exhausted ... to the core. Adrenal fatigue wouldn't begin to describe the absolute lethargy I felt. I could barely move. I had nothing left to give.

I was finally able to feel everything I had resisted and repressed for years. I had to acknowledge that desperate feeling that I had to be responsible for it all, could never ask for help, had to keep doing it alone, holding it all together for myself and my son. Desperately trying to keep control of the many fragments that made up my life had finally failed. The cost of those outworn strategies had left me depleted, with no juice left in my tank. I was running on empty.

My breast cancer diagnosis was like hitting a pause button on my life. A wake-up call, waking me up to aspects of my life I was unwilling to see. And at long last, an invitation to rest. Truly, deeply rest.

THE INVITATION

I heard a story once that each of us comes into this life with an essence like a pure and perfect diamond. As we navigate life's challenges, in order to function in the world, we learn to adopt different roles or identities to have our needs met in a variety of ways. These masks, or personalities form subtle layers of protection and armour, slowly building up and gradually, imperceptibly concealing the light of this diamond. Whilst playing these roles can be useful, as we habitually operate through these familiar layers, we start to believe this is who we really are.

The cost however, is this innate brilliance slowly becomes distorted, dulled and buried. Occupied in our daily routines of busyness, relating, care-taking, working and surviving, we may not notice immediately how much of our vital life-force is being drained, diluted and exhausted.

I had a nagging feeling I had lost touch with my true self, I felt like a watered-down version of myself, living a less vibrant life than I knew I was capable of, yet nothing was bad enough or urgent enough to inspire me to change or break out of this habitual, familiar holding pattern.

Until, *THIS!*

Life presented me with a gift - a 'wake-up call' that cracked through my surface armouring, shaking loose those encrusted layers and shining a light on the radiant brilliance buried deep within.

I knew it was time to allow myself to be cracked wide open; to face and feel whatever had been avoided and denied, buried and forgotten for so long.

This journal is my personal story of that radical but necessary rupture. It is a story of heading into the unknown, meeting the fear, the pain, the awkward vulnerability, yet still trusting and following the glimmers of light in the dark. It is about resilience and the capacity of the human spirit to endure and to thrive through adversity. In many ways it's my journey home, my response to my soul's incessant call to recognise the brilliance inside.

As LEONARD COHEN wrote in his beautiful song, ANTHEM:

Ring the bells that still can ring
Forget your perfect offering
There is a crack, a crack in everything

That's how the light gets in.



PART 2

Prioritising Myself

SELFISHNESS

"I heard a woman on the beach say to her little girl...

"Don't be selfish"

What sad advice.

I would give her better.

Be selfish, little girl.

*Love yourself well, love yourself first,
then you will love others far, far better*

*Not with grudging show, nor with unfeeling ritual or ... numb duty,
Or self-congratulating sacrifice or stuttering terror of loss*

Be selfish, little girl

*Be best to yourself and rest assured that you will always be...
Joyfully, unstintingly, and if you will give to others, give them most
Help them to be best to themselves too."*

- Stanley M. Herman

SOMEDAY ISLE

If you're like most women, you've been taught to put everyone else's needs first. Isn't that what a 'good' woman should do? Generously giving of yourself to make life easier for others, you make sure your husband, your children, your family, friends and others are cared for as priority. You tell yourself that 'someday isle' get around to doing things for yourself; one day when everything else is done.

And if you're like me, you get to the end of the day, exhausted and collapse into bed, failing to etch out any time at all for yourself. Day after day, year after year. You justify to yourself that it's okay because you are being of service, selflessly giving to your loved ones and bringing harmony to your world. 'Someday isle' is more a mirage off in the distance filled with dreams and passions, more like a utopian tropical island than anything that resembles the life you're living.

BREAST CANCER PERSONA

Being of service, nurturing and supporting others to succeed is a wonderful pursuit if it comes from a place of love and abundance. However, many of us continue to give even when we're running on empty. If this way of life becomes habitual, over time it can become the road to resentment, unfulfilled dreams and potentially to ill-health or breast cancer.

In her bestselling book *'The Secret Language of Your Body'*, author Inna Segal unveils the secrets to understanding the messages of our body and reveals the underlying mental, emotional and energetic causes of physical symptoms and specific medical conditions.

Inna suggests there's actually a persona for women who develop breast cancer. She calls it the 'slave' archetype; a woman who feels a lack of nurturing, gentleness and love for herself whilst habitually showering love and compassion onto others.

The
greatest gift
we can give ourselves
is time.

- OPRAH WINFREY

See if any of these persona indicators apply to you, as they did for me!

BREAST CANCER PERSONA

- Never relaxed and calm, always keeping busy doing things
- Tendency to become a workaholic
- Has difficulty saying 'no'
- Desire to please everyone and feeling torn in different directions
- May have feelings of being a victim
- Often overwhelmed and overpowered by others
- Tries to keep everything in control in order not to fall apart
- Difficulty connecting with her own femininity
- Difficulty receiving love, affection and kindness
- Feeling like she doesn't need help from others, she can take care of herself
- Overburdening herself with responsibilities
- Not having any clear boundaries
- Always worrying about everyone and everything
- Deep need to be liked and please others

On that morning when my surgeon shared the news of my diagnosis, I was conflicted. I recalled my first encounter with breast cancer, just five years earlier and was reminded of how I responded to its appearance back then.

I was a single Mom then and chose to traverse my journey alone. I shared my diagnosis with only a select few close friends, I continued to 'soldier' on with my work and retreated from the world socially as I went through my treatment feeling separate and alone.

I wore my bullet-proof armour, put my big-girl pants on and decided I could handle this myself. I never really let people know what I was going through, in some way denying that my diagnosis was actually real. I refused to accept there was anything 'wrong' with me and would not take any time to acknowledge what was taking place in my body nor give myself any time to rest and heal. I was just too busy. I had a business to run and bills to pay. Following my lumpectomy, I really couldn't be bothered with radiation and taking time to rest, so I refused further treatment entirely.

Without realising it, I had been a classic 'slave' for much of my life. Trying to fit in, trying to make life easier for my husband, to placate him when he became my ex-husband, to run my business and make sure I had enough money to raise my son as a single Mom. My life has always been busy and full so the notion of taking time out for me has always been a luxury. It actually felt too self-indulgent and not something I could justify for myself.

DENIAL

When confronted with a second diagnosis of breast cancer, my immediate reaction was the same as the first time around; sweep it under the carpet and it will go away. I told myself, just have the lumpectomy and get on with things. You haven't got time for this. You have a business to run, a wedding to organise, a son to put through university. There is absolutely no time or space in your life for this insidious, unwelcome visitor.

However, when my biopsy results showed I had an aggressive cancer growing in my breast as well as in my lymph nodes, I knew I really needed to pay attention. This time, I had to do things differently. I may have escaped it the first time around, but my inner knowing advised I wouldn't be able to pull it off a second time.

So, when my friend Stacy shared the potential emotional and energetic causes of breast cancer in Inna Segal's book, I intuitively knew there was a gift in this for me that was worth exploring.

Your own self-realisation
is the greatest service
you can render the world.

- RAMANA MAHARSHI

THE DILEMMA

A cancer diagnosis is like hitting the pause button on your life. Whether you are ready for it or not, the universe is insisting you stop and focus on yourself. There is little alternative.

As I weighed up all the elements of my life and determined what would need to go, my business was the hardest. I am like many women who love the sense of purpose and achievement I get from it. Would I be able to continue working throughout my treatment? Would I have the energy and focus that my work demanded? At the same time, would I be giving myself the appropriate time to rest and repair if I continued working?

I was conflicted. The egoic part of me wanted desperately to put on a brave face and continue working, be strong and 'soldier on', while the quieter voice within me was saying, 'just stop', give up the struggle.

I sat with my plight for several days and consulted some of the sage elders I am blessed to call friends. When you're in the midst of chaos, I find getting an objective, unemotional perspective invaluable. After sharing my situation, my dear friend Vida asked me the golden question, 'What would you advise another woman to do in your situation?'

And in that moment, I knew I would never advise another woman to push through her diagnosis and treatment, choosing her career over giving herself the much-needed time to rest and heal. So why was I not prepared to give that to myself?

It was time to get real with others and more importantly, with myself. To be honest and v-v-vulnerable. Oh God, that's something I don't know how to do! I have no idea how to let others see my soft underbelly, to acknowledge that I am not okay and that I actually need help.

HEALTHY BOUNDARIES

One of the most profound ways we take care of ourselves is through setting loving boundaries. Boundaries can be emotional, psychological, energetic or physical. In a very real way, a healthy felt sense of our boundaries lets us know the extent of what is 'me' and what is not. Our boundaries protect what is most important to us. They help us to acknowledge where we have control within our domain and show us how to respect the boundaries of others.

I needed to re-evaluate the boundaries that defined my life. *Were they working for me? Did they need re-defining? Did I need to create new ones to ensure I protected myself in the coming months?*



*The best time to relax
is when you don't have time.*

- CHINESE PROVERB

BEING SEEN

With my heart in my throat, I reluctantly began to write an email to my customer base. If I was going to be the type of leader I would admire, I needed to accept my diagnosis as the seismic thunderbolt it was and come clean with my clients, but more importantly with myself. I would demonstrate this by establishing a healthy loving boundary for myself and my business.

Writing that email was one of the hardest things I've had to do. I wrote a heart-felt letter informing them of my diagnosis, letting them know that I would be closing my business indefinitely to give myself the space and time I needed to seek treatment, to rest and fully heal. This was a massive, courageous, painful step for me to put myself first and make my treatment a priority. How crazy is that?

I was so worried what people would think. I assumed that my customers and business collaborators would be upset with me. I felt I had let them down and they would be disappointed in me. With dread in my heart, I hit send.

The response was amazing. In just minutes, I was overwhelmed by an outpouring of love, understanding and generosity. My thoughts of being a burden and disappointing others, was met with so much support. I felt seen, heard and loved because I was willing to share my truth. And a small crack began to show in my stoic, polished veneer.

Where had I learned to put everyone else's needs before my own, to shower love and support on others and not give any to myself, first? Even with such a loud call to pay attention to my body, I struggled to give myself permission to be a priority in my own life. It felt like a well-worn path of martyrdom that kept me on a slow boil of resentment and it was beginning to bubble over. Boy, did I have some work to do!

STOP SHOULD-ING

One of my favourite authors and greatest teachers is Louise Hay. In her wonderful book *'Heal Your Life'*, Louise challenges us to consider where the 'shoulds' are in our life. Are you living from a place of 'you should do this or that' or from a place of inspiration, love and joy?

As the eldest child, I felt a strong sense of responsibility to be a 'good' girl and do the 'right' things. Without ever questioning it, my life had become a long list of *'shoulds'*. *'You should do this'*, and *'don't do that'*, I could hear my parents' well-intentioned voices in my head, guiding me. They wanted me to be the best person I could be and to be a role model for my sisters.

I did the best I could, but what I realised is that living from a place of *'should'* and to please others expectations, rather than inspiration, is a sure-fire way to suck any joy and happiness out of any activity, even when it's something you love to do.

I decided it was time to stop 'should-ing' myself and instead, choose joy. I started paying attention to *why* I was doing what I was doing, noticing whether my actions were motivated from a place of love and joy or was I acting out of duty? Like loosening the rigid gates of a lock, I gradually began to allow the stream of joy to flow through me with greater ease.

LOVE IN ACTION

INNER PRACTICE

Being in the Present

Fostering a quiet connection with yourself is one of the most important ways to calm an overwhelmed nervous system, reduce stress and bring you back into a balanced state. Even in all the busy-ness of it's possible to find small chunks of time for yourself and practice meditation to cultivate an inner life.

Meditation offers great health benefits as it activates the parasympathetic nervous system, decreases cortisol, reduces respiration and heart rate. The increased blood flow to the brain oxygenates the cells and allows a greater state of relaxation.

As I have a hyper-active monkey mind, I prefer a guided meditation that gently gives my monkey something to do so I can more easily find the quiet within. I have created a number of guided meditations just for you... can I suggest starting with the Breathing Meditation which you can find on my website.

OUTER PRACTICE

My Healing Sanctuary

Create a lovely space in your home that is your healing space. Find items that you love like candles, fresh flowers, essential oils, diffuser, Healing Journal, favourite pens, a soft blanket; anything that makes it feel as though it is your sanctuary, and it is sacred.

Claim this space as your special place to honour yourself and practice many of the techniques throughout this book. Dedicating a space as your sanctuary can literally gather and hold the cumulative energy of all your intentions. This creates a strong anchor so that every time you enter this space it becomes easier and easier to find your centre.

just breathe



MY CLINICAL TREATMENTS
SURGERY

Date Doctor Location

Reflections...

Date Doctor Location

Reflections...

Date Doctor Location

Reflections...

You are braver than you believe,
Stronger than you seem,
Smarter than you think,
And loved more than you'll ever know.

- A.A. MILNE
From the book *WINNIE THE POOH*

MY CHEMOTHERAPY TREATMENTS

Doctor _____ Location of Treatment _____

Date _____ Medication _____

Reflections/Comments... _____

Date Medication

Reflections/Comments...

MY RADIATION TREATMENTS

Doctor _____ Area Radiated _____

Date _____ Reflections/Comments _____

Date _____ Reflections/Comments... _____

Date _____ Reflections/Comments... _____

Date _____ Reflections/Comments... _____

Date _____ Reflections/Comments... _____

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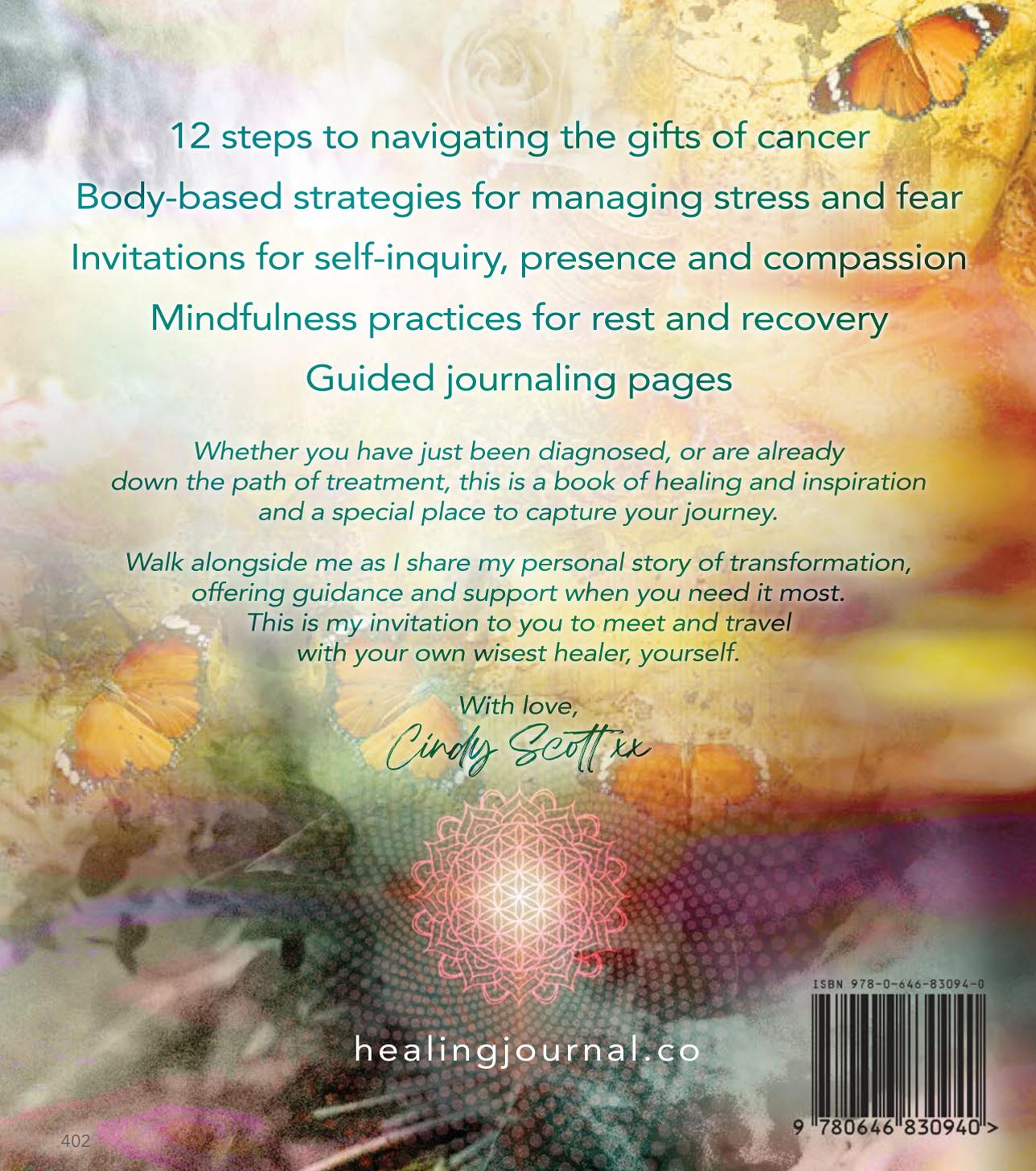
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12 steps to navigating the gifts of cancer
Body-based strategies for managing stress and fear
Invitations for self-inquiry, presence and compassion
Mindfulness practices for rest and recovery
Guided journaling pages

Whether you have just been diagnosed, or are already down the path of treatment, this is a book of healing and inspiration and a special place to capture your journey.

Walk alongside me as I share my personal story of transformation, offering guidance and support when you need it most. This is my invitation to you to meet and travel with your own wisest healer, yourself.

With love,
Cindy Scott xx

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