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## 2008 QUEST FOR HEALTH SEPTEMBER 2008 NEWSLETTER

**I've been holding my stomach in almost my whole life.** As a child, my mom and I lived with her family for some time, and one or two of her teen brothers (my uncles) had Playboy pinups on their bedroom walls. This is my earliest memory of "media influence" regarding body image, and I remember looking at these shrines to the female form and envying the beautiful flat stomachs they all had. The relevance of this will become clearer to you later as you read on.

Some fairly personal health stuff I'm going to share with you ...

In January '08 (right around "resolution" time!) I was looking at turning 40 this year and had to start making some changes in my life. I wasn't sleeping well, and had dark circles and the beginnings of bags under my eyes. My face was puffy, I was a few pounds overweight, and often felt bloated and "thick in the middle". My upper body was achy and tight, and I had to do massage on myself quite frequently especially after a day's work. I acquired red, flakey bumps around my nose, was quite annoyed that I had to take medication for cholesterol issues, and some mornings I had a *very* subtle rattle in my lungs when I inhaled deeply – odd for a non-smoker, yes? Recent blood work indicated my kidneys were functioning at only 63%, yet ultrasound results showed them as being normal. Many little things were adding up and I didn't like the way it was heading.

First thing, I enlisted a terrific exercise physiologist and personal trainer, Jonathan Chant of <http://fitnessforfreedom.com/> to

create a program which would interest me in strength training again, and I have him make me a new one every 3 months or so to keep me challenged and motivated. I quit coffee for 2 weeks in May, but found I was still foggy brained anyway and decided to restart for clarity of mind! I did more gardening and lots of weeding, and used the weeding metaphor for eliminating unnecessary obligations in my life and nurturing/tending what was important to me. Along the way, a couple of angels gave me books that were very meaningful for me. The first one is "A New Earth" by Eckhart Tolle – thank you Eric Peters! Eric is a local and very experienced yoga therapist, and you can find out more about him at <http://www.hopeformyback.com/> The second book is "The Introvert Advantage" by Marti Laney – thank you Lianne! These books taught me that:

- I need to live in the Now and to live Now with acceptance, enthusiasm and enjoyment
- it's a common human affliction to have mind chatter and to always be looking to the future for happiness (ie: I'll be truly happy when I finally have that flat stomach)
- it's okay to take breaks and have quiet time for myself
- I finally now understand why too much noise bothers even me, a hearing impaired individual!

Another angel is my friend Bill, who came to see me with "proof" of how effective Tim Wu's treatments are. Tim is a Traditional Chinese Medical Therapist <http://uniquetherapy.com/tim/> whom I've seen for 6 sessions, and on his advice, I quit coffee again and switched to red tea. I also cut back wine consumption from 4



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glasses a week to 1 or 2, and am taming my sweet tooth yet again. Tim's been teaching a group of us qigong (chee-gong) lessons at Bill's new business centre <http://www.shaklee.ca/billmcburney> and I'm finding this, this, **THIS!** to be the most life and health changing thing of all, and probably what I've been seeking for a long time. There is a lot more to the qigong lessons than what I'll get into here, but the fundamentals are about breathing. Tim says that when you control the breathing, you control the mind. So I've been practicing for an hour a day, and it took me almost a week to realize that I was mainly chest breathing, which is why I felt so light headed afterwards, couldn't get a regular rhythm going during, and my neck, shoulders and left arm felt so tense! When it finally occurred to me to push my belly out as far as I could with my diaphragm to fill my lungs (instead of raising my chest), I was amazed at how relaxed my shoulders, arms and neck became. What?!?! Push my belly out? But I've been holding it in all my life, trying to achieve that flat, maybe even concave look!) But the proof was in how much less effort breathing was and more rhythmical, and the hour flew by faster instead of dragging on forever. I'm beginning to notice and correct my breathing patterns accordingly throughout the day as well, but it's still not easy or automatic after a lifetime of doing it my way. I realize now that I was taxing myself additionally by chest breathing while doing physical labour as a therapist! As an RMT, I know intellectually that chest breathing takes a lot of work and effort for many muscles to lift the ribcage, and I feel

the effect of it on the people I work on every day. Heck, I even did a newsletter on the diaphragm back in March! To experience the difference in myself is another thing altogether. Many of these musings in this article have come from mind wanderings in my daily hour of focused breathing – which means that I still have a ways to go in controlling the mind!

A new client asked me recently if getting regular massages will make her more "healthy", and I had to explain that vibrant health, vitality, and energy is a combination of many parts, often what seem like puzzle pieces. As humans, the basic pieces are the same, but might look different for each individual. Look carefully at the quantity and quality of what you're ingesting for food, drink, chemicals, alcohol and medications. Are you getting regular exercise? Are you managing your stress? This means cutting back on obligations and dealing with other stressors where possible, NOT just *coping* with them. And of course, how are you breathing? Practice makes perfect in all these areas.

I hope that story of my journey this year motivates you, or helps you in yours. There are many messages I wished to convey in all this, but an important one is this: If you keep seeking, you will find; and if your ears and heart are open and listening, you will hear. We have the answers within us (which we tend to ignore or doubt), and so the universe sends people our way to help guide us. In the meantime, as my 40<sup>th</sup> birthday draws ever closer, I'll continue to contemplate my navel, but with *more acceptance, enthusiasm and enjoyment*.