



HEART First

Part 1: A Journey to Purpose

An amazing true story.

A story I never intentionally set out to write or share.

This is the story behind HEART First.

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Table Of Contents

Dedication	2
Preface	4
Introduction	7
Heaven	8
Search	9
Enlistment	10
1-Minute	11
Law	12
Death	13
Training	14
Questions	15
Backtrack	16
Alert	17
Ride	18
Blindsided	19
Lifelines	20
52 Reasons	21
Choices	22
Breakdown	23
4	24
“You Have Colon Cancer.”	25

Truth	26
3	27
Coasting	28
BFF	29
Jilted	30
Silver	31
Edge	32
« BIG 3 »	33
3 Booms!	34
Intuition #1	35
Intuition #2	36
Intuition #3	37
Reply	38
Silence	39
Synchronicities #1-#3	40
Synchronicity #4	41
Synchronicity #5	42
Truth	43
Critical	44
Devastated	45
Solved	46
Pause	47
3 + 5	48

Clarity	49
Clueless	50
“To-Be”	51
Purpose	53
Chosen	54
VIP	55

Dedication

The experience of having cancer draws two teams into your sphere of life support:

(1) Familiar faces: immediate and extended family, children, old and newer friends

(2) Unfamiliar faces: doctors, nurses, support staff, integrated health specialists

In recognition of such, "HEART First™ is dedicated to the following special people:

My three children:

Erin: You're art and beauty in motion, a gift to the world you touch

Bennett: Your energetic spirit and warmth lights up the world around you

Brooke: You see and are the beauty that makes this world more special

My parents, Alvin (RIP 2016) and Joan: thank you for helping to shape who I am, persisting in your belief in me, being there for me in my toughest hours.

My three sisters, Alison, Gail and Karen, your love means the world to me

Arlene Barlin, fate works in mysteriously ways, thank you for being you, for being there for me, for inspiring me in more ways than you'll ever know. RIP

Wendy Landes, a light being and warrior spirit who lit up the world with her grace and dignity during a courageous 3-year battle with Liposarcoma cancer. RIP

To all of HEART First's Contributors: thank you for believing in me, the cause, and then creating such incredible artistic compositions for the App

HEART First™

To all cancer patients: men, women, young adults and children experiencing cancer - warriors all - involuntary members of a non-discriminatory club, automatically connected to each other in our mind-body-soul health experience

Caregivers: people in caring and loving support of the cancer patient: recognizing the personal challenges and sacrifices you make plus the mind+soul health issues you face as our caregivers

My Gastroenterologist: Dr. Mark Pochapin, NYU Langone Medical Center, NY

My Surgeon's: Dr. Leon Pachter and Dr. Steven Hofstetter, NYU Langone Medical Center, NY and Dr. Robert Mckenna and Dr. Hakim Soukiasian, Cedar Sinai Medical Center, Los Angeles, CA

Oncologists: Dr. Leonard Saltz, Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center, NY, Dr. Alan Venook, UCSF Medical Center, San Francisco, CA, and Dr. Leland Green, Cedar Sinai Medical Center, Los Angeles, CA

Cardiologists: Dr. Michael Chaikin and Dr. Raj Makkar Cedar Sinai Medical Center, Los Angeles, CA

Rosen, Demarco and Todd Families: timeless friendships, extended family all.

Karen Leder, Rose Satz, Teresa Vella, Dean Valentino, thank you for your heartfelt caring and support of me through my cancer experience.

Dave P, Helen D, Caroline C, Alison C, Thomas S, Christopher S, Andrew T, John L, Ford M, Yaz S, John K: life-long friends, whether near or afar.

My Editor, Sherry Suib Cohen, channeled to me by Judith Kelman, founder of MSKCC's Visible Ink Program; helping cancer patients record and share their stories of beauty, pain, humor, introspection, determination

Integrated Health Program, NYU Langone Medical Center, Diane Rosenstein, Executive Director

The medical universe of doctors, nurses, integrated health specialists, researchers, employees, volunteers, acknowledging your compassion, dedication

The men and women in the therapeutic arts dedicated to the passion of their craft and using that gift to bring inspiration and comfort to cancer patients

Preface

Any life-altering health challenge means sudden immersion into uncharted territory. Dropped into an alien landscape disorientation sets in. You're forced to enter an unknown zone, to find your way, at great risk, with imperfect information. And the territory is never static. It's revealed anew day-by-day, changing with time's passage. Along with disorientation arrives an anxious, time-sensitive need; to understand and familiarize yourself with your health challenge and the benefits and risks of curative treatments. Overwhelmed, an attempt to gain control ensues. I've been there 3 times by cancer's design. You think it'll never happen to you. Guess again. When a disease reaches epidemic classification - all bets are off.

In this type of health journey new people intersect your life path, each there to fulfill a role of some sort in your life's awakening to its new circumstances. The actualization of HEART First, and making so many new life-long friends along the way is one of the many exciting and positive outcomes resulting from my journey's experience. That fact that the HEART First App will soon exist, ready to launch your senses into an alternative world of mind-+soul care is a dream fulfilled for me. Better yet, may it have a positive effect on you.

Whether challenged by a life-altering health challenge like Cancer, another disease-type or perfectly healthy but feeling stressed-out, or somewhere in-between, think of HEART First as your personal multi-dimensional 'experience'. A personal meditative-like coping and relief channel available to you any time, anywhere to tune into. All at once a :

Serene and safe place to visit

A place to drift in and out of reality

A place in which to lose yourself

A place to go to fill your mind and soul with positive intention

These are the places with the most extraordinary potential for personal awakening, growth and transformation even in the face of extreme adversity. The truth is that the experience of having cancer is a tricky balancing act. You must be proactive about addressing your medical condition, trust in experts, all the while simultaneously surrendering to the fact the experts and the disease and its treatments often control you. While cancer brings clarity and expanded awareness, cancer also breeds 20 well-documented types of mind+soul suffering:

(1) Fear of Dying

(2) Purpose of Life Questions

- (3) Loss
- (4) Grief
- (5) Anxiety
- (6) Anger
- (7) Angst
- (8) Burn-out
- (9) Depression
- (10) Helplessness
- (11) Hopelessness
- (12) Grief
- (13) Frustration
- (14) Mental fatigue
- (15) Emotional Exhaustion
- (16) Living with Chronic Pain
- (17) Suicidal Thoughts
- (18) Disfigurement/Loss of Physical Function
- (19) Dealing with Leaving Behind the People You Love
- (20) Cynicism

I experienced each and every mind+soul suffering-type in varying degrees, at varying times, in different combinations. No person is immune from these feelings. As importantly, caregivers, be they family, friends, or one of the many types of healthcare specialists, suffer from many of the above feelings. They are an overlooked, marginalized group deserving of respect and mind+soul care as well. We are all in this boat called life together, never knowing whether we might be the patient or the caregiver. And now, my story.

Introduction

HEART First is the true story of my dance between, and with, two intertwining storylines - storylines that “chose” me - not the other way around:

(1) The first storyline is otherworldly - a series of 10 connected occurrences over 3-years' time - *whose happenings can't be explained by any ordinary means*. Every time I've recounted their tale, without fail, its put goosebumps on the arms of or sent chills down the spine of the listener. Magical happenings do exactly that.

(2) The second storyline is grounded in familiar Earthy realities: (1) Belief in oneself to do the seemingly impossible, (2) Resilience, (3) Forging relationships around trust, (4) Learning life lessons that only pain and suffering can teach, (5) Taking a vision from ideation into reality and (6) Love, purpose and helping others.

With each passing month, my 2 storylines became increasingly inseparable from one another; a stop-go, give-take dance between two seemingly opposite, but turns out, aligned energetic forces. Two unique elements typify this type of story; (1) Once chosen you're 1 of 3 main protagonists and (2) Its *eventual* ending is death.

My first clue I'd been “chosen” as 1 of the 3 lead roles was the dance's unusual start date: 11/11/11. But, unaware at the time of that dates' cosmic numerological significance, I missed its implication. Other dates memorialize *improbable, unexplainable, occurrences and outcomes* in my storyline. Unlike me, the other 2 protagonists needed no choosing. They were “regulars” used to their starring roles.

Heaven

HEART First, at its core, is a story of personal awakening to one's purpose. While it's my story, you could substitute countless other names for mine as the Earth-bound lead role; names I am certain could recount related Cosmic-to-Earth experiences. My awakening is a story about life learning. *The hard way*. Forged from suffering. Cancer my primary teacher. 3 times. Heaven on Earth - until death - my reward.

Heaven in the sense that experiencing cancer opened my eyes and heart to new truths. Each truth like winning a prize. The prize being a deeper understanding and appreciation of life's meaning. A meaning describing and blending 2 life-force-types:

(1) Heaven on Earth; a descriptor for our physical-based existence and experience - one grounded in love and purpose - pain & suffering their counterparts.

(2) Heaven on Above; a descriptor for our metaphysical experience - one challenging us to expand our attention and minds to embrace existence of a "Cosmic place" populated by "Guardian Angels" - there to help guide us thru this maze called life; intuition their voice, synchronicity their handiwork, "Listen-Act" their mantra.

Each life-force-type is a prize waiting for our taking, but only when ready to self-commit. Commitment requires taking leaps of faith into the unknown. The unknown breeds fear, uncertainty and vulnerability; chief hurdles to knowing both life-forces. Ironically, those are the 3 places where deep learning happens. Commit to that leap and your landing is 2-fold: inner peace and knowing death without fear.

Search

11/11/11 was the date the storied dance called “HEART First” was set into motion by a “Heaven on Above” life-force. HEART First’s oversight was assigned to a heaven-based team of Cosmic Executive Producers; acting as “one” they fulfilled the 1st of this story’s 3 lead roles. Team Cosmo’s 1st task was to choose an Earth-bound protagonist to fulfill the 2nd lead role. To fulfill their script’s two storylines that being needed to personify 4 character traits: (1) Strong-willed, (2) History of dealing with adverse events well, (3) Endless positive attitude, and (4) Most important, *clueless they’d be facing their demise* within the year. After surveying the planet I was their 1st choice. Their next challenge: how to notify then enlist Earth-bound me in a way that would grab and hold onto my attention - *in a way I couldn’t dismiss*. More on that to come.

Team Cosmo knew their 3rd lead role in advance. A regular “partner” of theirs, but a name feared by many Earthlings. A consummate, seasoned pro, known world-wide and in high demand - he was easy for Team Cosmo to contact then enlist. A multi-tasker by trade, his reputation - being strong-willed and a storied lead in all his past performances - was well-earned. His name: Death. The leading roles were now cast: Team Cosmo, Death & Me. And in support of me, another Earth-being”: Arlene Barlin.

4 cosmic rules govern this dance-type - “life lessons” their Earthly name: (1) Live in the moment, (2) Let go of control of outcomes, (3) Vulnerability is a strength, (4) Stay positive; never give up. Recognizing I was new (unfair deficit) to this storyline-type, as it unfolded I’d be afforded 2 lifelines (1 Cosmic, 1 Earthly) to help me cope. Amen.

Enlistment

Given Team Cosmo positioned these two storylines, metaphorically-speaking, as a “dance”, rather than reinvent the wheel they borrowed a page from the time-tested formula making the mega-hit reality-TV show, “Dancing with the Stars” (<http://abc.go.com/shows/dancing-with-the-stars>); pair a world-class dance professional with a neophyte dancer. Instead of an episodic week-after-week show with a defined end date and winner it'd be up to Team Cosmo to decide how and when HEART First's story ended. Up until that moment, the series would include episode after episode of ultra-high tension “life or death” dance training routines.

Expert at sending messages, Team Cosmo purposefully initiated contact on the “angels date,” 11/11/11, to enlist my participation; their next communication medium to me being 3 intuitions I experienced over 1-minute's time that evening. Each an invitation to participate in a story I, unknowingly, would be the one writing.

Intuition #1 was super-hard-hitting. A very unsettling message that, frustratingly for me, carried no supporting details. So, rather than act, I *chose* to *dismiss* its possibility. Mistake. Team Cosmo, knowing Intuition #1 would be tough for me to digest, were *temporarily* ok with that decision. They knew exactly how and when to compel me to act. Intuitions #2 and #3, while remarkably strange in their action request, I felt compelled to act on. The second I acted I'd unwittingly accepted my lead role invitation. Had I'd realized I'd just agreed to board a roller coaster ride purposed to test every fiber of my mind, body and soul I might not have acted at all. Too late.

1-Minute

5/10/12, Team Cosmo, knowing Death was arriving at my doorstep any moment, finally had to *compel me* to act on Intuition #1. To place this date in context, best to backtrack to the story's start date 11/11/11 - the day my ordinary evening shifted into a intuition-guided cosmic one. The date Team Cosmo made 1st contact; sending me those 3 mystifying intuitions that commandeered my focus unlike any others before. Each passed as quickly as it arrived, leaving me with 3 action-oriented decisions:

Intuition #1 forced me to consider and evaluate a frightening scenario

#1 told me I was going to die in the next year ... no details as to the how, when or why.

Should I see a doctor to eliminate a health issue? I didn't. (Would you?)

Intuition #2 left me baffled, scratching my head, asking "Why this question?":

#2 directed me to answer the question, "What is the purpose of life?" Not once, but 26 times! 26 because each Answer *had* to start with a letter of the Alphabet 'A to Z'

Should I initiate this exercise even when it seemed so non-sensical? I did.

Intuition #3 made zero sense. It left me asking "Why a partner? Why Arlene?"

#3 directed me to reach out to and co-create the 'A to Z' answers with a woman, living in another country, whom only recently had come into my life. Arlene Barlin.

Do I dare ask Arlene to participate in such an oddball request? I asked.

I'd no idea the *impact* my acting (or not) on these 3 intuition-driven decisions were to be to my life looking forward.

Turns out, 5/10/12 was my reveal date: *how and why I was going to die*. How did Team Cosmo know my future on 11/11/11? I'll never know.

Law

What I came to learn - a universal *law* governs this type of reality dance show; if you *don't* give your intuition the due respect it deserves you pay a steep price called *regret*. You need to listen, trust, act, when “contacted” even if it doesn't make sense. 6 months later Team Cosmo made that precept clear. They'd seen a future I couldn't see. They'd tried to warn me. May 10, 2012 became their “wake-up-and-listen” date; the date they finished setting the stage for the Cosmic-to-Earth story to come.

Me playing their lead role required huge self-sacrifice: putting my entire life on hold - children, family, friends, job, leisure activities - literally overnight, to participate. Worse, no matter my effort level, I'd no guarantees I'd survive the grueling training my dance partner would subject me to. When I learned my partner's name and the *prize* I was fighting for my answer was an easy, “Yes!!”

May 10th I became the latest member of what's currently still a global epidemic; a community started decades ago, called “cancer patient.” In the blink of an eye, nothing in my life would ever be the same again. Turns out, my body was in the final stages of breaking down - about to cease life. I was suddenly facing my mortality. Yes, I harbored angst. Yes, I felt intimidated and scared. Yes, I kept asking myself, “Why me? Why now? Why cancer?” But I never second-guessed my decision or my partner. Instead of choosing the role of victim I made 2 commitments: (1) Postpone Death from prevailing, if I could, and (2) To learn and practice whatever life-changing lessons he came to teach in this miracle of a dance - we call life.

Death

It was unsettling enough I'd been chosen for a dance role I didn't seek, want or feel qualified for at only age 54. But being matched with Death, a highly polished, very demanding, *infamous*, celebrity of sorts, whose presence struck fear into the hearts of most people, upped the ante. Most unsettling was that my partner had been studying me closely for years, giving him first-mover advantage. Though I knew he existed, I'd rarely given him much thought. I knew he was my end-game, but that was always far in the future. But here he was, my oh-too-real dance partner.

In my wildest dreams I couldn't envision how my pairing with a partner I would've never purposefully chosen *early* could become a cohesive dance team. Death had a larger than life ego and reputation as a bully and poor listener. Like a marine drill Sergeant, they saw inflicting pain and suffering as part of their job description. Death's aim was to force their partner, *with impunity*, to either throw in the towel and leave the dance *for good*, or find mind-soul-body strength they didn't know they had. But, I'd heard rumors: the specter of Death could also be one of life's most gifted teachers if their partner was open to receiving his lessons no matter how the dance ended.

Given this dance had an indeterminate end date, Death had plenty of time to achieve their aim. So, my strategy was simple. Take it 1 day at a time. Stay positive. Easier said than done. Wasting no time, Death took the lead, subjecting me to levels of mind-soul-body pain I didn't know existed - or could withstand - without throwing in the towel and surrendering. Make it hour-to-hour my new goal.

Most interesting to me was that, from the *moment* Death took the lead, one soul-based question more than any other arose and stuck around, looking for answers. That question was, "What is the purpose of life?"

As part of the dance, Death has a way of making this particular question his partner's main mind-soul focus. It was actually quite a worthy endeavor.

Training

To answer the “Purpose of Life” question required training. Nothing could’ve pre-prepared me for the intensity of the gut-wrenching physical, emotional and soulful suffering that training wrought. I felt like a lightweight rookie thrown into the ring with a heavy-weight fighter. I was pushed to the limits of my endurance.

As each training session ended, I found myself hanging on for dear life, medical personnel on call, with the crowd watching in awe and fear at my unfolding dilemma. It was clear I was the latest target in a dance routine many didn’t survive.

Death had spent an eternity fine-tuning and testing their training methods, giving them an extreme, unfair advantage. They were relentless, taking perverse joy in testing my mind-body-soul boundaries; stripping me bare, forcing me into surrender mode, making me vulnerable in ways I never imagined. No pain no gain. Right?

As time passed pain changed my perspective. As I survived each successive round, I came to see each as a cosmically-sanctioned lesson; a destiny-driven part of my life path. The truth is, nobody said life was fair or its lessons would come easy.

I began viewing my partner with reverence, not fear. After all the innuendos I’d heard about my partner, never in a million years did I ever think I’d end up characterizing the two of us as *a match made in heaven*. Now, in hindsight, I can say with certainty: *we were a match*. As I unveil the rest of our story, you’ll see why.

Questions

Since Death is a dance partner we all eventually partner with, to help decide whether you agree with my characterization "a match made in heaven", or not, try to frame your own evaluation process around these 2 questions I asked of myself:

Could it be awareness of the specter of death, a pre-ordained part of each our life's path, is a blessing in disguise, inseparable from our beings, an energy not to be feared *but embraced, making every day of life more dear*, awaiting us to awaken to such realization, no matter its timing or how it happens?

or

An insidious, evil adversary to be feared, an unnatural life partner that should be ignored, chastised, and rebuked until the end - till death do us part?

While I do believe there is only one right answer, I'd never *wish* Death *prematurely or grotesquely* upon anyone. Yet it happens all the time. How and when our life ends remains a mystery. Often, it's only when you're forced to participate in an unexpected storyline, like cancer, that chooses you, not the other way around, your perspective sharpens. Mine did just that. The lessons I learned and baked into my soul were worth the costs I paid to learn. My answer is #1. I'm *forever indebted* to Death, my partner, for teaching me an invaluable lesson - *the power inherent in letting go of fear and living in the moment* - the most liberating force, second only to *love and purpose*, there is. In the absence of fear of death, I found, and truly understood, what love really means and what the purpose of life is. Blessings all.

Backtrack

I recall 11/11/11, the fateful date my storied dance with Death began, with enduring fascination. The date was significant because it was the date: (1) I was officially “chosen”, (2) Team Cosmo attempted to signal death was on its way to meet me, (3) Start of an epic mind-body-soul roller coaster ride and (4) I *unwittingly* began my journey to knowing about the purpose of life and other insightful lessons.

Knowing your purpose in life. Throughout our lives many, if not most of us, think about, read books about and search for life’s purpose. It’s generally a patient quest for most of us. In my case, as years, then decades passed, my purpose seemed liked: (1) An out-of-focus picture I couldn’t fine-tune, (2) A moving target I couldn’t pin down or (3) Circumstances outside my control intervened, derailing its pursuit.

I never expected those 3 scenarios to be reversed – that I was the one who was the moving target - my purpose patiently waiting for the right moment *to pick me*. My purpose found me in the most bizarre and unexpected of ways; enlisting my participation *without my even realizing it* was happening to me. How you may ask?

That’s where the otherworldly portion of my story begins. With the notion that unseen “cosmic higher powers” exist to help *each of us* find and understand the purpose of life in general, and our own life in particular. Team Cosmo is a grouping of guardian angels (particular to the person in question) whose purpose is to have our back and guide us through this maze called life. Listen by tuning into their being.

Alert

11/11/11 was Team Cosmo's numerological attempt to alert me I'd been called to know my purpose. It was the 1st of many of the story's cosmic-driven signal flags they sent me. It's an exceptionally rare date, happening just once every 100 years. A date associated with *significant* cosmic and angelic meaning by those who study numerology. A number signifying spiritual awakening and powerful new beginnings. 11; their means of letting me know they're here. I see it all the time now.

Magically, to ascertain I was the right person to orchestrate their complex purpose-driven project assignment, they *had* to have had *access* to 2 types of *privileged* personal information: one type I call explainable, the other unexplainable:

(1) Explainable information is Earthly knowledge; the sum total of my life's prior educational and professional experiences, its successes and miscues, that had helped me gain and fine-tune the requisite skill sets I'd need to fulfill their vision. (2) Unexplainable information involved highly personal, inaccessible information: knowledge of my life's personal experiences - but most amazingly, experiences that *hadn't even happened to me yet* - ordained knowledge of my *future - its* challenges and outcomes - especially important to fulfilling their project's vision.

Since signaling me with the number 11 wasn't catching my attention as planned - Team Cosmo initiated 'Plan B': buy me a seat on one of the scariest virtual amusement park roller coaster rides known to man to awaken me to my purpose.

Ride

While 11/11/11 marked the start date of my *journey* to purpose, 5/10/12, my cancer diagnosis date, marked the start date of my *awakening* to purpose. Team Cosmo, to ensure I wouldn't decline their roller coaster ride invitation, graciously prepaid my ride's ticket, no less a VIP ticket, whose status automatically bumped me to the front of the multi-hour-wait line. This ride was obviously a hot ticket? Not! As most of us know, there's no such thing as a free ride. And this was no exception.

Surprise after surprise then followed. One of the two seats in the front car - the scariest seating position of all - they reserved just for me. The other they reserved for another VIP ticketholder, held up by heavy traffic but soon to arrive. I was next surprised to see the empty seats immediately behind me starting to fill up with *familiar* faces: my children, my parents, my sisters, extended family, friends. Surprised because they, like me, suffered an aversion to intense roller coaster rides.

The remaining open seats soon filled with unfamiliar faces, oddly, mostly from the medical profession. There were to be no empty seats. Turns out these unfamiliar faces were on board for a vital reason: their skillset in saving your life. They knew this could be my first, and last, roller coaster ride of this type. *That turned out to be quite the Godsend.* Given it was Death who took the seat next to me. The final surprise: to make the ride more intense, all the rides' passengers were told we had to keep our hands above our heads *the entire ride*. No exceptions allowed. This ride was to be about "letting go": of fear. We started to move down the track.

Blindsided

Atypical for a Late Stage Cancer diagnosis, few physical symptoms alerted me to death's imminent arrival. Death just showed up and took his seat next to me, introducing themselves as my partner to be. Blindsided. I was totally unprepared.

Turns out a wild roller coaster ride was, metaphorically, Death's preferred mode of travel to and from every dance routine; a ready means to weaken and create fear and vulnerability around their partner's physical, emotional and mindful state of being. It worked. My life in turmoil, I started looking for mind-soul lifelines.

Blessedly, the ride was punctuated by occasional breaks in the action. Each break allowed me time to regroup, regain some composure, catch my breath, and, to the best of my ability, prepare for what might lay ahead. I came to realize, however, advance preparation wasn't possible. You had to go wherever the roller coaster ride took you, which included being left in the dark as to when or how the ride ended.

This mode of transportation served a purpose; it was Death's way of trying to keep the upper hand - the lead role - in a winner takes all dance. Sometimes the best strategy against an opponent stronger than you is to simply forgo trying to win the tug-of-war outright in favor of taking advantage of your partner's momentum, looking for ways to convert their energetic output into your gain. I was able to affect this strategy thanks to the help of several lifelines that kept me in the dance and on the ride. The most vital mind-soul lifeline was the one I began creating: HEART First.

Lifelines

Partnering with Death shifts your thoughts to finding coping and relief mind-soul lifelines you don't normally spend time looking for. Up until my diagnosis, everything I knew about specific mind-soul thoughts and feelings accompanying facing your mortality were gleaned from 3 types of secondhand observations: (1) In loving support of a family member or friend in a life-threatening situation (2) Reading a book on the subject matter or (3) Reading the obituaries of someone I'd admired or who intrigued me who'd died. With roles now reversed, similar to what I'd observed and heard, my own thoughts immediately began swirling back and forth between 5 of the 6 most commonplace mind-soul thought topics:

(2) Life's impermanence

(3) Digesting and mentally overcoming the hurdles suddenly laying ahead

(4) Managing rapidly intensifying physical pain and emotional discomfort

(5) Regrets; are there any you're harboring and need to make peace with?

(6) Love and forgiveness; of self and significant others

Conspicuously absent were thoughts around the that list's #1 mind-soul topic, "What was the purpose of life?" Generally speaking, and specifically one's own life.

I had an *otherworldly* reason why #1 was conspicuously absent from my focus. In fact, weirder yet ... I had *52 reasons why*. Team Cosmo had me set those 52 reasons into motion on 11/11/11, the date I received my 3 Intuitions - two of which directed me to answer *that very question* - but in partnership with a light-being.

52 Reasons

3/11/12, a mere 2 months before partnering with Death, I finished writing, with a new Earth-bound character in my story - a light-being named Arlene Barlin - the last of 2 different sets of 26 *answers* to the question, "What is the purpose of life?" A light being is an awakened soul who's developed the natural skill of working within the akashic vibration of source, or God. And a perfect choice for this task.

I'd undertaken this highly unusual quest because I'd been directed by the 2nd and 3rd intuitions I received 11/11/11 to do exactly that. I decided it best to act. As it turned out, 11/11/11, 3/11/12 and 5/10/12 were the first three in a series of milestone dates in HEART First's *cosmic-driven* timeline. Dates delineating powerful intuitions and unexplainable synchronicities foreshadowing real-life events and personal and professional possibilities. Had I understood in advance the extreme toll my health roller coaster ride would extract from my mind, body and soul, I would've harbored doubt as to making it to ride's end. Accepting death as part of your life path shifts that thinking from an ending to new beginnings.

As I experienced and survived each harrowing curve and stomach-churning drop I realized each scare was placed there to teach me a profound lesson - *to learn to let go of outcomes* by: (1) Taking leaps of faith, (2) Excising preconceived notions, (3) Trusting the process and (4) Valuing (extreme) patience. In learning each lesson, I found, despite unnerving uncertainty, immense liberating joys, and the chance to fine-tune the art of living in the moment, because death *is* ever-present.

Choices

Before 11/11/11, I never gave much thought to if guardian angels existed. I'm now a believer. Guardian angels are cosmic beings there to care for our well-being. We feel their existence through 2 types of Cosmic-to-Earth communications: (1) Intuitions; a surrogate word for their voices and (2) Synchronicity; a surrogate word for their handiwork. While each communication type may be impossible to explain scientifically, they're very real events when happening. They're forces we've *all* experienced and as such, can speak to the truth of, though we can't explain them.

Guardian angels are all-knowing and patient advisors, always giving us two choices: (1) To either ignore, or listen to, trust, then act upon, our intuitions and (2) To either ignore, or look for the meaning in, synchronistic happenings. During my 7+ year dance I made their celestial guidance easier in two ways: (1) Consciously *choosing* to honor and act on all my intuitions without hesitation (except one) and (2) Being grateful for and seeking meaning in every synchronistic happening. The intuition I didn't act upon - I regret. Life lesson: Intuition = Listen. Trust. Act. Know.

One question kept nagging at me, "How did my guardian angels know, from above, that: (1) I possessed the requisite qualities - fearless mental fortitude, outside the box thinker and highly specialized professional skill sets and confidence needed to undertake leading a massive, groundbreaking project - to create HEART First?" and (2) that I was going to die within a year? The answer is simple: many things in life aren't meant to be explained with science or math. BELIEVE IN MAGIC.

Breakdown

I have no doubt my guardian angels knew each of my health set-backs served a higher purpose; to guide, shape and craft the heart and soul of both this project and me, the two inseparable from each other. Breakdowns lead to breakthroughs.

Sometimes you have to breakdown (multiple times) and be pushed to the edge of reason and pain to summon strength you didn't know you even had - to breakthrough to places, feelings and realizations of profound proportion.

While the personal costs of breakdowns are high, in my case, each carried an eye-opening silver lining of indeterminable value: deep self-awareness, that in turn made me a better person. We should never stop learning and growing as we age.

My health journey most importantly spotlighted the fact that western medical practice (without which I wouldn't be alive today) sole focuses on treating the body, ignoring the mind and soul even though it's proven all three are neurologically and psychologically connected, and as such, affect each other. It's been proven that when mind, body and soul are treated simultaneously, starting at point of diagnosis, 3 outcomes occur: (1) Decreased patient suffering, (2) Improved patient quality of life and (3) lower operating costs for treatment centers. However, mind-soul treatment options tend to only exist independent from body treatment. Worse, they're never readily accessible to the patient in one place, at one time. That's why the HEART First App exists. Self-help mind-soul treatment has arrived.

4

The first of 4 major health set-backs I endured, considering its high death-threat level, was captured in a *paltry* “4-words”. 4-words whose power threw my mind, body and soul into instantaneous freefall. 4-words, collectively just 18 letters, when uttered to me by my Gastroenterologist - *carried the force of a knockout punch*.

I was sitting at a conference room table staring out over the East River in New York City. It was a crystal clear sunny morning, my concerned parents at my side. We were at New York University Langone Medical Center. Next to me sat Dr. Mark Pochapin, Director of the Division of Gastroenterology. It was May 10th, 2012, 11am –my appointment time another numerological alert my guardian angels were by my side. None of us Earthlings were expecting the shocking news Doc delivered.

4-words caused time to stop dead in its tracks - suspended disbelief. 4 words became forever etched into my memory. 4-words you’re never prepared to hear, no matter which part of your body the disease describes then strikes.

“You Have Colon Cancer.”

Dr. Pochapin continued talking, his next words, given my state of shock, sounding as if spoken in slow motion, “We’ve got to move *very* quickly. Thank God, we caught it in the nick of time. There’ll be several major hurdles. You’re going to beat this. You’ll be OK and go on to live a long, productive life.” I trusted his perspective but he, like me, had no way of foreseeing the shocking twists and turns my health roller coaster ride would subject me to the next 4 years. Cancer *3-times*.

Truth

I never expected a doctor to be the one to formally introduce me to Death. I thought I had an easy-to-fix stomach issue. As hard as cancer was for me to hear, the look on Dr. Pochapin's face betrayed how much he dreaded telling me the truth.

For my own sanity and out of caring, he spared me immediate details; he didn't tell me I had *Advanced Stage 3c Colon Cancer* (I didn't even know cancer had Stages!). I was *very lucky* he caught it right when he did. I was any day away from a Stage 4 diagnosis, a health situation, statistically speaking, with the highest morbidity risk and highly correlated to a shortened overall life-span. *This was an emergency situation.* Overnight I had to prepare myself mentally and emotionally for a roller coaster ride that would test my limits of pain tolerance, patience, and beliefs.

My body was shutting down. Two accompanying medical situations further complicated matters. With the collapse of my immune system I developed Late Adult Onset Type 1 Diabetes and my white blood cell count, a measure of your immune system's ability to stave off infection and disease, was ominously low. And I still had to withstand the medical procedures ahead: emergency surgery to remove a portion of my colon and lymph nodes, 6 months of chemotherapy and long, painful recovery periods from each treatment. It would take four highly specialized western-trained doctors, utilizing cutting-edge medical technologies around life-saving procedures to save my life. There's a time-honored adage in life, "The truth will set you free." Pain is a quick path to finding your truths. I found mine.

3

The 3 hurdles Dr. Pochapin alluded to were no walk-in-the-park: (1) Surviving life-saving surgery (5/17/12), (2) 6 months of chemotherapy (June-Dec. 2012) and (3) Dealing with and overcoming disabling side effects from each.

Each hurdle was exacerbated by sudden extreme weight loss (40lbs. off my 185lb. body in 4 weeks), depleted physical strength, a resurgence of high blood sugar levels (Type I Diabetes) and a shocking, consistently very low white blood count (Leukopenia), which also made dealing with chemotherapy tougher.

My chemotherapy regimen required an intravenous drug drip 3 days straight - 11 days off, 3 days on again - 12 sessions total over a 6-month period. Negative side effects included 2-3 hours sleep/night, nausea, troublesome swallowing, severe itching and deep body, mind and soul physical fatigue. Over and over again.

To help keep my sanity, I turned to: (1) A Physical therapy-type that always made me feel better afterwards: regular exercise. I made it a goal to commit to two 1-hour sessions of strength rehabilitation twice every other week and walking 1 hour, 3-4 days/week, around Central Park Reservoir (86 block subway ride from my apartment) and (2) Writing; spending hours every day channeling HEART First's story onto paper. Then 10 days *after* my chemo treatments ended more bad news hit: a disabling side effect with just 2% odds of happening - a delayed reaction to a chemo drug called Oxaliplatin - stole a part of my life from me I took for granted.

Coasting

Oxaliplatin has well-documented side effects that usually show themselves *during* chemo treatments. Had the side effect occurred then, the doctor would've limited or entirely removed this toxic drug therapy. It didn't. It showed up 10-days post my 6-month treatment, a delayed medical reaction referred to as "coasting."

Suddenly, as if someone flicked a switch in a body, I awoke on the tenth morning to find, with my 1st step I'd developed a debilitating foot nerve condition, peripheral neuropathy, limiting my ability to walk very far without extreme, disabling discomfort, persisting to this day. All my favorite forms of exercise were stolen from me literally overnight - possibly forever. Its discomfort never leaves me.

Every time I put pressure on the pads on my feet my brain is now fooled into believing I'm walking on rocks, as if they were inserted under the skin in my feet 24/7, a sensation few can withstand for very long. I was also still suffering from chronic physical and emotional fatigue. This side effect upended my life. What drove me, anchored me and buoyed my spirits day in and day out were 3 focus-types:

Incorporating regular exercise into my recovery even when my body said no

Daily focus on knowing and fulfilling my purpose in life: creating HEART First (3) Anxiously looking forward to the day my Oncologist would (hopefully) introduce me to his best buddy, NED, a friend only he could introduce to me, a friend that every single cancer patient wants to make their "BFF" or "Best Friend Forever.

BFF

Every cancer patient's new "BFF" or "Best Friend Forever" is "NED", short for "No Evidence of Disease." Six months after my chemo treatments ended, I found myself sitting in my Oncologists office, nervous with anticipation, waiting to meet, greet and give a big bear hug to "NED" for the first time ever. We needed each other.

NED's arrival is announced and delivered through (frequent) CT scans. Like a radar tracking airplanes, a CT scan delivers visual news to the Doctor cancer is gone and NED has taken its place, safely arriving so you can reclaim your body's house.

My first two check-ups in May and December 2013 NED landed safely - I was cancer-free. Like a long-distance love relationship, I would always wait with eager anticipation at the airport gate to greet NED as he exited the plane bearing the gift of a cancer-free life ahead. After two back-to-back visits it began to feel natural to assume NED would always be coming to see me bearing another gift of cancer-free.

In between my first two cancer-free checkups I had an unexpected medical hiccup: a complication at the site of my colon cancer surgery requiring a *routine* hernia surgery. I learned the hard way, there's no such thing as a routine surgery.

The surgical site became infected shortly after the procedure bringing 4 months of unexpected and prolonged pain, misery and recovery. The silver lining: at least *a hernia wasn't life-threatening*. Then the unthinkable happened, again: Stage 4.

Jilted

May 8th, 2014, my 3rd checkup, NED was a no-show *at the airport gate*. Like a jilted lover, my heart, and the hearts of family and friends, sank like rocks in water.

The CT scan highlighted theretofore unseen “spots” in my left lung, worse, finding refuge in an impossible place to biopsy for testing for malignancy.

The spots were still small. They appeared to be slow growth, affording my doctor and me, unlike my first cancer experience 2 years earlier, the luxury of time to monitor its growth and determine the best course of action. Growth is not good.

5 anxious months later a PET scan confirmed their growth. It was time to pull the surgical trigger. My Colon Cancer had metastasized to my upper left lung. I chose a VATS lobectomy – a robotic surgical removal of a portion of that lung (11/3/14).

I was now reclassified as a Stage IV Colon Cancer patient. If the surgery was successful at removing the cancer tumor, and no further evidence of it was found in lymph nodes that were removed as part of the surgical procedure, there was some good news - I wouldn't have to undergo chemo treatments again. That was the case.

The surgery was a Godsend in a second, blessed, way. Thanks to the fact NED jilted me my Doctor discovered a new life-threatening issue. I found out I now had *each* of the “BIG 3 Disease” killers: Cancer, Diabetes and Advanced Heart Disease.

Silver

It's always been my inclination to look for the silver lining in life's dark clouds. Turns out my cancer's return had a *high-value* silver lining - if you can call discovering and being diagnosed with *another life-threatening medical issue - good*.

My body should've been giving me signals my life was in danger again, but without knowing it, I suffered from another medical condition, silent neuropathy in my chest (Type 1 diabetes-caused). This condition mutes normal warning signals that would normally alert me I was any day away from a disabling stroke or life-threatening heart attack. Turns out chemo took an already bad situation and made it worse. The cardio doctor was amazed my heart issue hadn't already taken my life.

By one heart measure, a calcification score, (mine was 2500) I placed in the top 1% of men for risk of an imminent killer heart attack. The process of this discovery began when a nuclear heart stress test (10/2014), a requisite for lung surgery, uncovered a "small abnormality" in my heart. *At the time it was improperly deemed non-life-threatening by the Cardiologist in charge* clearing the way for surgical removal of my lung-based cancer, placing my life in even greater danger.

Meanwhile I'd switched my medical team to Cedar Sinai Los Angeles from UCSF San Francisco (where heart exam was done) given their doctors pioneered the VATS lung surgery I was to undergo (11/3/14). Months after, when I met my new Cardiologist, he ordered a Heart Scan to "play it safe". That decision saved my life.

Edge

6 heart stents later, a multi-hour operation, I was lucky to be alive. Again. My growing team of doctors at Cedar Sinai Hospital came to a quick consensus:

I was a medical marvel; continuously beating long statistical survival odds

I was a medical mess (internally); battling 3 killer diseases simultaneously

I was using *mind over matter* to help me continually beat not just long odds, but thrive - prompting my doctors to caution me with a smile and a wink - *to never lose that "secret edge"*.

What my doctors had no way of knowing was that my "secret edge" was HEART First. I'd been receiving its therapeutic art content from the growing roster of talented artists aligned with the project; using their pieces to help me manage the mindful and soulful pain and suffering I was feeling. And it was working its magic!

HEART First's therapeutic artistic content can be your secret edge too. HEART First was instrumental in helping me nurture the mindful and soulful part of my being, push through extreme pain, and improve my overall well-being; providing much needed holistic relief, on-demand, when nothing else could in the same way.

The last part of the HEART First story will give you cause for pause, possibly even blow your mind. *It blows my mind to this day still*. To finish the story, we need to once again backtrack to 11/11/11, the start date of the otherworldly, *unexplainable*, portion of this story. The day I experienced the "BIG 3" intuitions.

« BIG 3 »

I'll never forget Friday evening 11/11/11, the day Team Cosmo sent me my "BIG 3" intuitions. The sun was setting outside my floor-to-ceiling windows. Sun-fired hues of deep orange and red colors reflected off large billowy clouds. Concerns about my health or living to a ripe old age were nowhere to be found. *Life was good.*

As usual, it'd been a demanding week work-wise and then after work I hit the gym. I was home, tired and ready to relax. I made myself a TGIF (Thank God It's Friday) cocktail, kicked off my shoes, docked my iPhone in a speaker port and selected a chill album to listen to: "Parachutes" by the band Coldplay. I began the process of unwinding into the weekend, as I had many times before. *Life felt good.*

Then '*it*' happened. '*It*' set into motion a string of events that would change my life. '*It*' was 3 hard-hitting 'intuitions' I felt over just 1 minute's time. Boom! Boom! Boom! Coming one right after the other. Loud and clear. Then as quickly as they came, they faded away into the silence of a single question, "What should I do?"

I knew finding the answer to that question was extremely important. I felt like I'd just been pushed out the door of an airplane in flight, thousands of feet high in the air - but without a parachute - giving me just a small window of time to decide to act. My answer was to act on two of the three intuitions, disregarding the one about me dying in the next year. Turns out that was a mistake. I should've seen a doctor.

3 Booms!

My Friday evening peaceful vibe suddenly shattered when my mind's radar picked up Team Cosmo's entrance into its mind-space, an invisible voice disguised as a gut feeling communicating 3 intuitions - each forcefully grabbing my attention.

Each intuition, unbeknownst to me at the time, was a seed, which if tended, would blossom into my life's purpose and help save my life, a life I'd zero clue was in jeopardy at that point in time.

The first intuition rocked my soul. It made zero sense to me.

The second intuition made me feel I might actually be losing my mind.

The third intuition left my head spinning and me asking, "Why Arlene?"

Each intuition's intensity tested, as unexplainable feelings do, faith in their certainty. Each begged a decision whether to act upon their guidance - or not. Given the deeply intense nature of what I'd just felt, fearing inevitable regret, without hesitation I acted with conviction on two of the three intuitions I'd received.

Amazingly, I wouldn't solve the mystery of how my 3 back-to-back-to-back intuitions connected to each other, nor grasp the magnitude the impact of my immediate follow-through on #2 and #3 would have on my life and that of countless others, *until a year later*. My guardian angels foresaw a future I didn't see coming.

Intuition #1

Boom! The first intuition was the strongest and single most *unsettling intuition* I've ever experienced, rocking my soul to the core. A voice deep inside me telling me with *dire warning, a month shy of my 54th birthday, 12/11/11* (more 11's!):

"You are going to *die* sometime before your 55th birthday, 12/11/12."

Frustratingly, my intuition's words stopped there. I was left hanging - no clues as to the how, why, when or where - I only felt *certain* I would be facing my own mortality, and relatively *soon*. If it were health-related I could go to see a doctor right away.

The scenario confounded me because I *considered* myself in great health and *resolutely* worked on maintaining a healthy lifestyle going back decades.

Therefore, as regards Intuition #1, with no more clues about my demise, I passed on getting a check-up to see if I might have a life-threatening health issue.

Further, rather than drive myself crazy by venturing guesses or playing "what if" scenarios as to how my demise in the next year might happen, that is, if it were to happen at all, I decided it was best to give Intuition #1 as little attention as possible, not wanting to manifest it by giving it unnecessary mindshare.

Plus, I saw no reason to run to spend the time or money to go see a doctor for a checkup based on an intuition when I felt and looked so healthy. Turns out the old adage "looks can be deceiving" is true. Things were going wrong inside me big-time.

Intuition #2

Boom #2! A second intuition immediately followed the first, thankfully much less unnerving, but still highly inexplicable:

I was being *called*, in no uncertain terms, with no reason given, to *answer* the question,

“What is the purpose of life?”

What’s more, I was being guided to:

“Create not one, but *26 different* answers to the question, each answer starting with a different letter of the English alphabet ‘A to Z’!

Was I going crazy? ‘A to Z’? Why? Why? Why? was all I could think!

At the time, I never connected the thought of my intuition about dying soon as being the catalyst for asking the question, ‘What is the purpose of Life?’

Without pause, my mind still reeling from the utter peculiarity of the first two intuitions, a third intuition immediately followed.

Intuition #3

Boom #3! I wasn't supposed to create 26 answers to the question - alone.

Intuition #3 guided me to reach out to Arlene Barlin. She was a woman my age I'd recently met the past year, felt a connection to, and was getting to know from afar, as she lived in Toronto, Canada, a city and a country away from New York City and the United States where I lived. Intuition #3 directed me to invite her to co-create the lettered answers 'A to Z' with me.

You can only imagine the expression gracing my face at that point in time. Why were these 3 intuitions happening now, and to me? Many, maybe most people would've stopped then and there, dismissing each intuition, going on with their lives. I did a partial. I ignored acting on Intuition #1 but not the other two. Given the soul-rocking *intensity* of my first intuition, I still felt I needed to respect the remote possibility of my death within the year by *giving respect* to the other 2 intuitions.

Therefore, without indecision or hesitation, I wrote Arlene an e-mail inviting her to participate in answering the question, "What is the purpose of life?" 'A to Z' style. Using my intuition to pick which letter to start off the dialogue, I chose 'F', wrote my answer and included it to jump-start the e-mail invitation to participate. Given the most unusual nature of my request, I thought it best *not* to mention my first intuition about dying in the next year, lest I give her further reason to question my sanity and not participate. I hit send. And anxiously waited.

Reply

Blessedly, and I have to admit, to my surprise, with no hesitation on her part, Arlene replied 24 hours later with her own answer to the letter 'F', bringing a huge smile to my heart and relief to my soul. This intuition-directed exercise was a go!

A profound and enlightening e-mail correspondence ensued - shining a revealing spotlight on the purpose of life, each other's beliefs and life in general.

No timetable in hand, letter-by-letter, working our way through the alphabet, week-after-week, and only when our respective intuitions guided us to do so, we co-generated and shared our separate answers by e-mail. 5 months later, March 2012, finished, we had 52 total answers in hand, fittingly representing both our male and female energies and the yin and yang of life. An aggregation of private thoughts and feelings between two people getting to know each other more deeply. But, they were more than Answers. Each had a special, timeless quality; its own unique soul.

Poetic verse had naturally become our writing style, turning what were supposed to be "Answers" into sublime "Meditations." At the time, there was no way either of us could have foreseen our Meditations 'A to Z' would become the heart and soul of HEART First - what was to turn out to be a massive Cancer-related Wellness project. A project counting 65 gifted artisan contributors creating original pieces for the Wellness App using our own lettered Meditations 'A to Z' as their creative inspiration and compass. Cosmic it was.

Silence

Crazier still, given my intuition I was going to die within a year's time, my body remained silent. For whatever reasons it refused to transmit a single warning sign that day-after-day Cancer, Heart Disease, Type I Diabetes and Leukopenia (low white blood cell count) were co-conspiring to end my life at literally, any minute.

Seeing my body wasn't receiving the physical warning signals it should've been sending, and the intuition I was going to die in the next year was being ignored by me, Team Cosmo determined it was time for a new communication strategy to take me to that awareness. After all, I needed to live to make HEART First a reality and they had been investing a lot of time and faith in me. To do this they deployed their second communication tool, *synchronicity*, to move me to realize there was a health-related time bomb ticking to zero inside me - that had to be defused *quickly*.

They arranged a series of impossible-to-explain synchronicities packaged together one after the other as their means to take me to that awareness; to help me save my own life. This was also their way of letting me know they had my back; that I wasn't alone on the roller coaster I was unwittingly about to take a wild ride on.

Albert Einstein once remarked: "Coincidence is God's way of staying anonymous." My translation: we have guardian angels communicating with us, using synchronicity as a sign of their handiwork. There is no such thing as coincidence.

Synchronicities #1-#3

In the absence of self-knowledge I had immediate life-threatening Late Stage Colon Cancer, Team Cosmo, with little time to waste, orchestrated a series of 5 synchronicities in a short timeframe to bring me to that discovery.

Synchronicity #1: An unexpected, very timely encounter with an old high school friend (several years younger), Mark Pochapin, who I hadn't seen *in 35 years*.

Synchronicity #2: Mark and I reconnected at, of all places, a *Cancer fundraiser* for his first cousin Wendy Landes. Wendy had been diagnosed with Liposarcoma, a rare terminal cancer with no known cure (www.wendywalk.org). I was in the audience of 200 because I was best friends with Michael, Wendy's brother, going back 40 years. I was like an extended member of their family.

Synchronicity #3: Wendy took the stage and microphone and *began* her conversation with the audience by saying. "The first question you ask yourself when diagnosed with cancer is, "What is the purpose of life?" *That grabbed my attention!*

I was amazed because this was a thought topic I was intimately familiar with having just finished co-crafting 52 answers with Arlene while both of us *were in great health*. Like a *deja-vu*, Wendy's insights and feelings grabbed and held me. I hung onto her every word. I drew connection after connection to, and similarities between, the answers Arlene and I had written to Wendy's answers conceived in failing health; a time she fearlessly faced her mortality on a daily basis (sadly, Wendy passed 10 months later). A coincidence?? No! It was synchronicity - on fire.

Synchronicity #4

After Wendy's inspirational talk, Mark and I reminisced about old times and talked about our respective families. True to his understated, humble style, he shared he'd become a doctor but elaborated no further.

35 years later, Mark and I were back in contact, exchanging cell phone numbers and agreeing to get together for dinner sometime in the very near future. We hugged and parted ways.

Turns out, it wasn't going to be the type of personal contact we both envisioned.

Like the anticipation that precedes a 4th of July firework's finale display, Team Cosmo saved the best, most unexpected, most implausible synchronicity, #5, for their grand finale!

Synchronicity #5

The night immediately following Wendy's Cancer fundraiser, and increasing in intensity in the days to follow, I began to experience atypical pain in my lower left abdomen accompanied by nausea and stomach cramps. I assigned my symptoms to a self-diagnosed stomach muscle pull from a recent gym workout where I upped my weight resistance. Experience taught me this type of injury was little more than a nuisance, healing on its own given time away from the gym. Soon, the increasing frequency of these symptoms painted a picture something was terribly awry.

Up to that point, healthy, I'd never sought a doctor's examination during the 18 months since I'd moved to New York City. With Mark's cell phone number now in hand, he became the natural go-to person for a recommendation to a stomach specialist. Before texting Mark I figured it'd be smart to google his name to see what kind of doctor he was as he'd neglected to mention it during our last conversation.

You can only imagine my *astonishment* when I discovered Mark was a *renowned Gastroenterologist*, a doctor specializing in diseases associated with the stomach, recently hired away from another prestigious hospital by NYU Langone Medical Center, to head its own Gastroenterology department! I texted Mark my symptoms. He responded immediately. He wasted no time in his assessment, asking if I could see him at 8am the next morning in his office. I showed up. I could tell my health was rapidly deteriorating. I looked forward to his answers.

Truth

One colonoscopy later Mark immediately knew the answer. He was as surprised as I was. I don't envy him, or any doctor for that matter, having to break this kind of news to their patient, let alone a patient who's a long-time family friend.

What I thought was discomfort caused by a pulled stomach muscle was actually discomfort caused by a *large cancerous tumor* inside my colon on my lower left side – a tumor that had started growing *five-to-ten years earlier*. I was dying.

The colonoscopy showed the cancerous tumor may have broken through my colon wall, possibly spreading cancerous cells to my lymph nodes, the last line of biological defense stopping it from spreading, or what's called metastasizing, to your kidney, lung or liver, considered a Stage 4, higher risk, high morbidity diagnosis.

Unfortunately, Mark had no way of knowing how far the cancer had progressed until I was in surgery to remove the tumor and a portion of my colon.

Looking back, I'd experienced a few slight telltale signs something was amiss in the weeks prior to the fundraiser where I reconnected with Mark. I attributed each sign to normal things: wear and tear of living in New York City, life in general, muscle recovery effects of a dedicated gym workout regimen, being constantly on-the-go in my job, but mostly to the stomach muscle (I thought) I had pulled earlier.

Critical

As a critical aside, every person should undergo a colonoscopy, generally speaking a painless procedure, at age 50. Sooner, age 35, if you have diabetes or history or other types of cancer in your family (www.monahacenter.org).

I would've had a colonoscopy years earlier but I was still under the (misinformed) impression the procedure was invasive, painful and that general anesthesia wasn't used. I was wrong on all three counts. My bad for not knowing.

A colonoscopy is not invasive. The doctor does knock you out with anesthesia. You're home that day after a relatively short period of time with no pain or after-effects. Had I undergone a colonoscopy at age 50, my cancer would've been- a Stage I or II diagnosis - a big difference in treatment options and mortality outlook.

Devastated

When I shared the distressing news I'd been diagnosed with Advanced Stage 3 Colon Cancer with Arlene, she confided for the first time she herself was a cancer veteran, having survived cervical cancer 10 years earlier.

Like an Earth-bound guardian angel in physical form, she flew down from Toronto on her own dime and time to be by my side and help prepare me spiritually for the journey ahead. I was indebted. She was truly a "light being". A gift to me in a time of darkness. A being connected to source; she was there to help guide me on how to connect to source too. She explained it was important to see cancer as part of my life path – a teacher of sorts. Wise words they were, words anchored in her own experience with the disease.

3 months later, the half-way point of my chemotherapy treatments, *a second mind-numbing shockwave hit*. It was the missing piece connecting the dots linking the "Why?" of my "BIG 3" intuitions to each other.

I had finally solved the mystery of why Team Cosmo communicated the "Big 3" intuitions to me and orchestrated the 5-synchronicities that happened to me, specifically, over the past 9 months.

The news left me devastated.

Solved

Solving a mystery usually feels satisfying. Not in this case. August, 11, 2012, in midst of my 6th chemotherapy treatment, I received a call from Arlene sharing *implausible, jaw-dropping* news. She'd just been diagnosed Stage 3 Breast Cancer.

She was undergoing immediate surgery, followed by chemo and radiation treatments. My heart and my spirit sank as I digested her news. Disbelief set in.

Arlene, like I, had considered herself in great health too, committing to an incredibly healthy lifestyle after her bout with cervical cancer 10 years earlier. Like me, looking back, she too had felt few telltale warning signs, attributing those symptoms to a virus she'd picked up on a trip to India earlier in the year; *not cancer*.

While the why and when of what happened to Arlene and me was hard to make sense of, I could finally make perfect sense of my 3 intuitions. *Team Cosmo, seeing the future, knew Arlene and I both would be dancing with Death. Given this, they guided me to her to co-create 26 answers each to the question, "What is the purpose of life?" while still in good, not failing health. They also somehow knew we'd both survive, ensuring our Answers turned into Meditation's 'A to Z' could serve a much higher purpose looking forward; the centerpiece of what would become HEART First.*

Pause

I'm hitting the "Pause" button now.

Unpredictably, Arlene and I, two people developing a deeper understanding and appreciation of each other and life by creating and sharing our answers to the question, "What is the purpose of life", living in two different countries, barely having spent quality time with each other, still scratching the surface of knowing about each other's lives, were now connected in a number of deeply intimate ways:

Facing our mortality simultaneously, unexpectedly.

Locked in parallel battles for our respective lives.

Fighting two different types of late stage life-threatening cancer.

Suffering through surgery and follow-on curative treatments - chemotherapy, radiation and physical rehabilitation - and their debilitating side effects.

Eyebrows raised?

Goosebumps yet?

Chills down your spine?

"PAUSE" button released ... because there's more ... surprises to come ...

3 + 5

Intuition and synchronicity: I wouldn't be alive today nor have known my life's purpose without experiencing:

(1) The "BIG 3" intuitions that jumpstarted this story on 11/11/11 and,

(2) The 5 synchronicities linking Cancer, Wendy, Dr. Pochapin and I together

I ascribe this good fortune to the work of my guardian angels who, once certain they'd grabbed my undivided attention, never let go! We were now a team.

Blessedly, the intuition they sent me warning me I wouldn't live past my 55th birthday melted into oblivion May 17, 2012, the day Dr. Leon Pachter, Department of Surgery Chair at New York University Langone Medical Center, performed emergency surgery. One month later he'd tell me my surgery was, "a nightmare to perform". I'm indebted to him for the medical magic he performed. Thank you.

As great things often do, the gift of life carried an exacting physical and emotional toll: pain, suffering and extreme uncertainty unlike any I'd experienced before. It didn't take long to realize each toll had its own purpose – to open doors to deep self-awareness, *a requisite part of coming to know and be one's purpose*. It was in-between the 3-week period post-surgery and the start of chemotherapy that another heaven-sent intuition, #4, offered clarity to a key unanswered question: "What did the 52 answers Arlene and I co-crafted to the question, "What is the purpose of life" have in common with fulfilling my life's purpose which I knew included helping to improve the lives of others?"
Drum roll please

Clarity

In the midst of so much pain, clarity was a hard-earned trait. Post-surgery, 11 straight days, I experienced excruciating periodic pain, an 11 on a pain scale of 1-10, necessitating use of narcotic painkillers for relief every four hours during that time period. Sleep was hard to come by. I found strength I didn't know existed inside me.

On the 11th day the pain broke, freeing me from my narcotic painkiller's foggy embrace. With my newfound clarity, as if on cue, I received Intuition #4 from Team Cosmo – and it was huge - my life's purpose:

“To commit to making a positive mind-soul difference in other people's lives journeying with, or in caring support of, people with cancer.”

I'd make this happen by creating and orchestrating an innovative, inspirational, eBook and Coping and Relief Wellness App. The App would use, as its centerpiece, the lettered Meditations 'A to Z' Arlene and I had co-created. Bingo! The eBook would have 2 Parts: PART 1 “The HEART First Story” and Part 2 “The ‘To Be’ Guidebook to Life's Purpose.” The App's epicenter, its heart and soul, would be 7 types of artistic therapeutic “experiences” inspired by the Lettered Meditations. A Wellness “eToolkit”, its eTool's would be divided amongst: Written words, their Narration, Art, Music, Videos, Movies (and packaged separately Aromatherapy), each a means to effortlessly draw a person's attention into their message and away from pain, stress and hardship. This vision made sense but it was a daunting task.

Clueless

My life's new-found purpose felt right but one *big* problem remained: *I hadn't a clue how I'd make the project happen single-handedly, while in health-crisis mode, and my strength and energy levels severely compromised.* Team Cosmo directed me to dig deep. It was time to find, summon and release the warrior spirit from within.

Blessedly so, my cosmically-driven vision for the eBook/App project was right on target: the therapeutic mind-soul relief combination I wish'd existed to help me but couldn't find. That is, a product I could buy, then download onto my electronic devices and into my hands as a means to help reduce my suffering and improve my quality of life and well-being as I journeyed with the cancer experience.

Wasting little time, seeing momentum but my concerns too, Team Cosmo then zapped me with Intuition #5 the very next day. Within minutes of rising from my first decent night's sleep since surgery, I awakened to intuit a lengthy "To-Be" list ... a map of how to take the project from ideation to reality. My To-Do list described a massive undertaking. The breadth and scope of envisioning then executing it all left my head spinning for 2 reasons: (1) I was a one-man show and (2) I was starting a 6-month chemotherapy treatment plan in 2 weeks - an extreme challenge on its own merit. Trusting Team Cosmo, I made the instantaneous decision to make HEART First happen - hurdles be damned. It was the best decision I could've made because focusing on its creation - my purpose - put me at peace.

“To-Be”

Two weeks before starting chemo treatments, Intuition #5 guided me to enlist a large group of artistic contributors to create original artistic therapeutic pieces for the App; just one facet of a multi-faceted project with far-reaching scope and impact. I knew a small handful of gifted artisans (two being my daughters) but certainly nothing close to the dozens I needed to enroll to complete the project. Nonetheless I chose to orchestrate and professionally manage this endeavor in midst of my health chaos. I knew the project's focus would align my inner purpose, the light and energy defining who I was, with my outer purpose - to enrich other people's lives.

My “To-Be” list had 6 major areas of focus:

Unite Arlene's “Answers” with my own to create *one* “Meditation” for each letter ‘A to Z’ and include alphabetical nuances to keep people engaged.

Create a Wellness App shifting a passive experience - reading or listening - into a multi-dimensional, multi-sensory coping and relief experience.

Write two complementary parts to the App project:

Part I, the storyline of how the eBook and Meditations came to be along with lessons learned and insights gained from my journey

Part II, a place for my audience to think about and record their thoughts on the purpose of life; a healing therapy on its own merit

Find, enlist, then assign a different Lettered Meditation ‘A to Z’ to:

26 gifted visual artists assigning each a Meditation as inspiration from which to create an interpretive contemplative art piece.

26 gifted musicians to create an 11-minute meditative instrumental composition reflecting the soul of their specific lettered Meditation.

A small group of talented filmmakers whose short meditative video vignettes would capture the heart of each Meditation in motion form.

An Aromatherapist matching a scent to each Meditation's essence.

Separately Identify:

2 trained voice specialists, one male, one female, to recite in soothing voice, each Meditation over specially created meditative intro music

A separate voice specialist to narrate Parts I and II into an audiobook

Integrate 3 social missions around the book's messaging:

Creating then using a non-profit Foundation called "HEART-1st" as my messaging medium

Direct global conversation around the need to *mandate* mind-soul relief therapies beginning *at point of diagnosis*

One-for-One Gifting: For every App sold, donate a copy of the HF App to a cancer patient who otherwise couldn't afford its purchase.

One thing was clear: intuition and synchronicity were going to continue to be, the hallmark of, and guides to, completing each facet of this Health and Wellness project.

Purpose

Anchored by the certainty that HEART First was *my life's purpose*, I rose to each challenge on my "To-Be" list. I devoted, full-time focus to the project's completion every day my strength allowed me to, forsaking other life commitments.

It didn't take me long to discover that focus on your life's purpose is a therapeutic healing remedy in and of itself. A guiding light during your darkest days. I realized working on your "Life's Purpose" was an overlooked therapeutic remedy that must accompany and be added to the "Big 7" artistic relief therapies list: Written Words, Narrative, Visual Art, Music, Video, Movies and Aromatherapy. This is the reason why I created the guided tool that is Part II, "The 'To Be' Guide to Creating Your Own Purpose of Life Statement." And research backs this notion up!

My journey to purpose taught me an extraordinary amount about the fabric, beauty and miracle of life. It taught me we're *all* "chosen ones"; we just never know when it's our time to be chosen. And then it's up to you to decide to commit, or not. After all, we never know our birth date in advance, and certainly not our death date. It's an undeniable fact death has always been, and will always be, inseparable from who we are. Your death date loses import once you know and find love and your life's purpose. Quite simply, when you've found each, you'll be at inner peace with yourself and the world around you. Any fears associated with dying, melt away. Leaving our task to be taking 1 risk - *to be alive* - to hold life and love as dear.

Chosen

We never know when it's our time to be "chosen". Chosen to start life on Earth as a human being. Chosen for a Cosmic-to-Earth assignment like HEART First. Chosen to find then know your purpose in life. Chosen to die.

Arlene, like me, had survived Stage 3 cancer. She too had NED as her BFF. Then, like me, she was diagnosed Stage 4 Cancer. After a multi-year battle, unlike me, she passed on June 10th, 2018. Arlene had an insatiable passion for life, dynamic spirit, and left a lasting impact on so many people whose lives she intersected with. Another kindred spirit to HEART First, one of its music contributors, Buddy Hendrickson also passed from Cancer in 2017. HEART First lost two of its own.

Their passings are but two more reminders that Cancer is still a worldwide epidemic, as declared by the World Health Organization in 2011. Then there's the overlooked stars of the day: Caregivers. For every person diagnosed there are at least 10 or more people, split between health professionals, family and caring friends, in supporting roles to the patient. It's a group that's been marginalized when it comes to attention to and treatment of their own mind-soul suffering issues.

It's time we, those diagnosed with cancer or 1 degree of separation removed, demand that treatment center decision-makers do the right thing; treat the entire patient - their mind-body-soul - from point of diagnosis forward. And resources be devoted to caregivers too. HEART First exists to make a possibility - *the new normal*.

VIP

May my shared experience shine the light of like discovery on your own life's journey. May HEART First help re-align your mind and soul into lightness of being, bringing relief from that which ails you. May you find the warrior spirit you house within and use that spirit to find, then be, your purpose in life - no matter the odds.

The HEART First story finished, you're a VIP in my book of life. Download the App and start your own experiential journey, 'A to Z' style with access to the 184 therapeutic artistic eTools in its Relief eToolkit. Take comfort, in that each of the 7 artistic expression-types used in the eToolkit have been proven, in clinical studies, to trigger unseen neurological and physiological processes that bring mind-soul suffering relief, help people push through pain until it becomes more manageable, and improve their health and well-being, all in real-time. Magic backed by science.

I want to make clear, I'm not a doctor or medical expert nor do I pretend to be. Numerous research studies back up the precepts HEART First champions. While I cannot guarantee the App will provide relief from your mind-soul suffering, as a 3-time cancer survivor I can say, with certainty, HEART First was a contributing factor to my postponing death and finding stress relief 5 times. In fact, my 5 year NED Cancerversary is 11/3/19. My odds of making it to then were just 1%. I remain seated in the front row of the roller coaster ride given all my health issues. Yet, I've never felt better or more at peace - which opened the door to finishing the project.

My heartfelt hope for you is this: May the HEART First App help you push through suffering, trigger pain-relief and improve your well-being. May my story and HEART First's "To Be" Guidebook help you to think about and pursue your purpose in life as it helped me do. At the very least, I guarantee the quality of HEART First App's diverse artistic content: it offers something for everyone no matter your tastes. Please know, it's not important you feel an affinity for or understanding of every therapeutic artistic composition's meaning. Each Artist wrote a short 3-sentence interpretation of their piece to help you understand their intention. Meditations, Art, Music, Video, Movies and Aromatherapy are subjective measures, individual to each of us, plus our own tastes change with time, mood and need. What one person loves about a Meditation, Art, Music, Video or Movie composition, another may dislike. There's no right or wrong artistic eTool in this eToolkit.

Think of each individual artistic piece as an island - with its own unique heart and soul - a part of an artistic archipelago. It's the *collective power of their integrated experience*, that's HEART First's highest use - that delivers its greatest relief power.

Finally, to those that buy the App, thank you. You're joined a community of people doing good in the world: your purchase of the HF App automatically gifts a free HF App to a cancer patient in need of relief somewhere in the world who otherwise couldn't afford to buy it. Together we can and will make a difference.

My thoughts and prayers are with you in this roller coaster of a ride, we call *life*.