



## Dr. Stram on Healthcare Reform- a Personal Story



We are all aware that the great national issue of the moment is healthcare reform. Each of us has a story that reflects the need for change or knows someone who has been affected by the failure of our current health insurance system. We are

on the cusp of urgently needed reform. Here is Mary Tracy's story, a testament to this failure, but more a story of courage and strength of individual spirit and community despite the roadblocks placed before her by the current health insurance system.

Over the past several months I have had the opportunity to work with Mary, a gifted physician's assistant. From the start, I was struck by the depth of her compassion towards every single patient she encountered in the busy emergency room setting of St. Mary's Hospital in Amsterdam, New York. She advocated for their treatment as if she were a family member and demonstrated an abundance of knowledge in her clinical skills. Seeing this unwavering blend of compassion and depth of knowledge with which she practiced, prompted me to ask her how she had developed these skills. Her response to me was simple: "I just care about people"; to which I asked, "Why?" trusting there was something more unique about her story. Mary answered quietly, with confidence and humility: "I had Hodgkin's Lymphoma."

***"I was vomiting, dehydrated and could barely walk when I came home from my Chemotherapy treatment to find a Fed-Ex letter from my health insurance. My second fight was to begin. The letter informed me that I had been dropped due to a 'pre-existing condition'."***

In the spring of 2004, just 23 years old, Mary Tracy noticed a hard lump over her left clavicle. She decided to see a family practice doctor in Nashville Tennessee where she was attending physician assistant school. The doctor told her he thought it was a displaced neck node and likely just a result from an upper respiratory infection. He wrote her a prescription for antibiotics and told Mary to return in ten weeks if it was still present. Mary's mother had passed away during her childhood from breast cancer so the thought of cancer quickly surfaced Mary's mind. She tried to rationalize the doctor's reasoning and adhered to his prescription. Two weeks later, the antibiotics were finished, however Mary had developed weakness, tingling, and pain in the effected arm. She went back to the doctor, only this time, he suggested weight lifting to strengthen her weak arm. Mary knew something was wrong. She mentioned the lump above her clavicle persisting and despite his temptation to brush it off once again, he finally referred her to an Ear Nose and Throat (ENT) doctor.

**The next day Mary's life changed forever.** The ENT doctor examined Mary's vocal cords and they appeared sluggish. He examined the now adherent lump on her clavicle. After the examination, Mary was sent a few miles away for a CT scan. The nurse told Mary to be sure to follow up with her doctor. As she walked to her car her cell phone rang. It was the ENT's office asking Mary to return immediately. The fear of what was to come weighed on her like a brick the whole ride



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back to the office.

**Mary was told she had a tumor in her chest.** She was immediately scheduled for a biopsy. Fortunately, it revealed Hodgkin's Lymphoma, which has a high cure rate. However, this meant a hold on her career and an immediate trip home to Speculator, NY to begin treatment at once.

Well into treatment, financial problems began to grow as her health hung in the balance; she was told by the oncology office staff that they were having "trouble" with payments from her insurance. Mary began losing her hair and was also having difficulty tolerating the side effects of the chemo; vomiting and weight loss forced her to be in a wheelchair when traveling any distance.

It was at the \$188,000 unpaid health bill point, that the Fed-Ex letter arrived in the mail. A medical chart from years prior which diagnosed a sore throat accompanied by swollen neck lymph nodes (which, by the way, is a common physical finding) excluded Mary from her current policy due to this "pre-existing condition". Besides her physical frailty Mary was now emotionally overwhelmed. How was she to meet this financial burden? Nearly bankrupt, she was unable to continue treatment until Medicaid coverage began, risking her cure during the wait period.

**Mary was still responsible for the \$188,000.**

Fortunately an organization called SPEC: Supporting People and Everyday Causes heard about her story. The support her community showed was overwhelming, her spirit of hope rekindled. Businesses and local people came out to a spaghetti dinner fundraiser and raised \$22,000 to help Mary. She applied for some tax write-offs from the billing agencies and hospitals, and soon the bills stopped piling up. Her Medicaid card came and she finally resumed treatment.

Three or four months after the famous spaghetti fundraiser dinner, the president of SPEC asked Mary out to dinner; she was shocked! She had lost all her hair including her eyebrows and eyelashes. What could he see in her? But beauty runs deep and a few dates and dinners later they were engaged. Both emotionally and physically cured, Mary returned to Tennessee to complete her education and married her soul mate soon after.

As Mary looks back on her battles with the insurance agency and the overwhelming medical bills, she feels angry. ***"I should have been able to fight for my health and focus on my healing, instead of arguing with an insurance company and stressing over mounting medical bills."***

***"I am almost to my five year mark from diagnosis and will be considered cured soon! I now work in an ER, where most of my patients do not have health insurance or are on Medicaid or Medicare programs and are unemployed. I count it a privilege to serve them, as I was in their shoes not too long ago."***

Mary's story is one of so many across the country. Let's make Health Insurance Reform happen!



Mary Tracy on her wedding day

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## Stories from the Center

### In Her Own Words: Thriving While Surviving

Mary Ibbetson

Mary's inspiring story, infused with some healthy humor, is one of courage, perseverance and the power of one's spirit to heal.

***"I was the happiest and healthiest person I knew.***

I ran, I lifted weights, I ate well and I got breast cancer. People weren't sad when I told them, they were shocked! Even more so when they found out I was diagnosed at stage 3 at 39 years old and would require a mastectomy, chemotherapy, radiation and anything else the doctors could throw at the beast.

I was recovering from knee surgery last May – chomping at the bit to get back to running when I found a lump while showering. I met with a surgeon the next day who was so sure it was nothing (I was "too young", of course) that he didn't even want to bother with a biopsy, just remove the whole lump and very carefully place my incision along my nipple so I wouldn't have a scar to live with. Little did he know then that just a month later, I wouldn't even have those breasts.

When the surgeon gave my husband and I the results, he cried. Not very comforting at all! The hardest part of that day, though, was not hearing those words "you have cancer", it was watching my husband's heart break. My husband and daughters are my whole world. I felt, after being diagnosed, that I was letting them down.

Things went from bad to worse as we found that rather than the very treatable stage 1 breast cancer that was assumed, it was actually going to be a tougher fight and a longer road. My treatment plan was a bilateral mastectomy with immediate reconstruction, 8 rounds of chemotherapy and 5 ½ weeks of radiation. In between chemo and radiation I had my breast exchange surgery and a preventative total hysterectomy. I continue to take Tamoxifen and supplements recommended by Dr. Stram daily.

The first thing I did after being diagnosed was to go to the gym. I walked into the gym on shaking legs and with a broken heart and after 30 minutes on the treadmill, I walked out just a little bit stronger. The one advantage to being diagnosed with breast cancer within weeks of having knee surgery is that it was a forced recovery. Though I would have loved nothing better than a good long run, I had to pace myself and took this time to re-train.

***I couldn't lie in bed and wait to get better...***

After my mastectomy, I was out of bed and pacing the halls before I could see straight. I couldn't lie in bed and wait to get better. I needed to be better now! The nurses kept getting annoyed because they couldn't find me to do my vitals! When I got home from surgery, my husband set me up in bed and came back two hours later with a treadmill!

Exercise was my way of staying in control and proving to myself that I was healthy and strong. Losing my hair was devastating; losing my calf muscles was just not an option too!

Most days throughout my chemo treatments, I walked with my running group. My husband and my friends would take turns "walking me". Depending on how I felt and where I was in my "chemo week", sometimes I would only make it a mile but days when I felt good, I would walk 3 – 5 miles.

As soon as I got the "all clear", I began running again and a week after my last chemo treatment, I ran in a 5k. It was slow but I was surrounded by my husband and my friends (who could have probably walked faster than I ran) and when I crossed that finish line without walking a step I felt like I won (too bad there was no category for "Under 40 female who just

finished chemo").

Running has given me my health back. There are no guarantees for my future, I know. But it has given me my health today! My hair is now "chic", my calf muscles are strong, and I have a tan line from my running shorts again. I am training several people from work to run in a 5k. I have founded a [Team Survivor](#) affiliate which helps women with a past or present cancer diagnosis to regain and maintain their physical and emotional well-being and am working on my personal trainer certificate. I am aiming for my first half marathon in October.

I finished chemotherapy in November and radiation in February. In May I ran my best time ever. I SO won that day, breast cancer didn't have a chance!

***I am the happiest and healthiest person I know and I HAD breast cancer. "***

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## Do You Have a Food Allergy?

Korey DiRoma, ND



Many of us probably know someone with a serious food allergy to nuts or shrimp, that if they were to even ingest a small amount, they would break out in hives or go into anaphylaxis. Yet, there is increasing talk about people having food "sensitivities" and food "intolerances". So what is the difference between these and "allergies"? Why does someone have a "sensitivity" to wheat gluten, an "allergy" to shrimp", and an "intolerance" to dairy"? In this article, I hope to clear up some of the confusion, and make it easy for you to find out what foods may be affecting your health and may subtly be giving you aggravating symptoms.

**What is an allergy?** An allergy is a *systemic* response to an external allergen, whether that may be pollen, dust, cats, or shrimp. A systemic response means that the entire body can be affected, because the allergen causes an immune response. This response is mediated by something called an immunoglobulin, or Ig. There are four types of immunoglobulin; IgE, IgG, IgA, and IgM. **IgE** is responsible for creating a *very fast* response to an allergen, and does this by activating cells to release *histamines*. These histamines are what create an allergic reaction of hives, lip swelling, throat closing if ingested, and itchy, watery eyes, sneezing, and fatigue if inhaled. *Antihistamines* work then by blocking histamine release, therefore relieving these symptoms. So how are allergies tested for? Typically you can do a skin prick test; since IgE reactions respond quickly, if your skin is exposed to an allergen, it will swell or become red if positive.

**What is a food sensitivity?** A food sensitivity is an allergy by definition, meaning that the allergen causes a systemic immune response, but the immunoglobulin responsible is different! Unlike a food allergy mediated by IgE, which is very fast, food sensitivities are mediated by IgG. **IgG** causes a *delayed reaction*. Therefore, symptoms are often felt hours after ingesting the food, and can include fatigue, muscle aches, joint pain, as well as gastrointestinal discomfort. Some conditions possibly related to food sensitivities include Celiac's disease, IBS, chronic sinusitis and ear infections, asthma, chronic bronchitis, skin conditions, ADHD, Autism, migraines, weight gain, chronic fatigue syndrome, and fibromyalgia. Celiac's disease is probably the best known IgG food sensitivity.

A food *intolerance* does not mount an immune response. A common example is lactose intolerance. There are no systemic symptoms, because there is no immune response; the symptoms stay in the GI tract.

**Testing for Food Sensitivities** At the Center, we have access to specialized diagnostic laboratories for testing IgG

allergies to as many as 200 foods, including wheat gluten and dairy proteins, casein and whey. This test has helped many of our patients with not only their gastrointestinal symptoms, but has led to improved energy and weight loss. An elimination diet can be done as well, but this is very time intensive, and one might still miss a particular food or spice that they thought was harmless. Unfortunately, this type of IgG food allergy testing is often not covered by insurance. Yet, our experience at the Center, having tested and treated many of our patients, shows a definite correlation between a person's health and their food sensitivities supporting current food allergy research.

**Prevention of Disease is Our Goal** One must remember that chronic illness and disease occurs as a process over time. Conventional labs offer a wide range of "normal" and traditional medicine treats the disease state. This strategy does not address where one may be along a spectrum heading *towards* chronic illness. It is our goal to provide care that is focused on *prevention* of disease.

**Do you have a food sensitivity?**

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## Too Much of a Good Thing

*Chris Reilly, L.AC*



When taking herbal or nutritional supplements, it is important to take the correct amount. Too little may not be strong enough to bring about the desired results, whereas too much can cause unwanted side-effects and other problems.

Even common minerals such as potassium and magnesium, although both are essential, can cause problems if taken at too high of a dosage.

The same is true of traditional Chinese medicine. The herbs used in this tradition have a good track record of providing health benefits with very limited side-effects. Just because these herbs are natural, though, does not mean that one can take them haphazardly and in excessive amounts. Most of the news coverage on the negative side-effects of herbs surrounds cases where they were being taken in doses which were well over three times the amount traditionally used. A perfect example is the FDA's ban on products containing ma huang (also known as ephedra) in response to several deaths associated with its use. Traditionally the herb was used to treat asthma and congestion in the respiratory tract. The ephedrine and pseudoephedrine within the plant also have stimulant and energizing properties which led to the abuse of the herb at very high doses by many athletes, and tragedy ensued as a result.

**The Right Amount** It's important to realize that just like commonly used pharmaceuticals such as tylenol- which as we have seen from [Dr. DiRoma's blog post](#) can be quite toxic- natural herbs are biologically active, and so many are capable of causing moderate to severe problems when taken inappropriately. In the currently unregulated supplement industry, there are far too many products out there that have poor dosing (usually too little of the product in question) and may be recommended by well-meaning, but poorly informed laypeople who are unaware of possible side-effects or interactions. If you are unable or unwilling to work with a professional, at the very least do your own thorough research into the safe use and dosing of whatever herbs you are planning on taking.

**More Isn't Always Better** The same holds true with acupuncture. When, after a few treatments clients begin to see positive changes, they often encourage me to use as many needles as possible, and that they "can take it." For reasons similar to those listed above, acupuncture is an art of balance. Too little stimulation may not bring about the desired result. Too much stimulation also may not bring about the desired result and can cause fatigue, soreness or possibly irritation of areas that are already inflamed.

Just like food, where the right amount fuels a healthy and energetic body, but too much can lead to obesity and diabetes, good things must be taken at the right pace. Natural often coincides with healthier, but also remember that snake venom and cyanide are found in nature alongside milk thistle and astragalus. "It's a jungle out there," so find yourself a well-trained guide who you trust, have a healthy amount of skepticism and do your homework!

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## Massage Techniques for Treating TMJ

*Sue Coughtry, LMT*

### Do you have TMJ?



TMJ syndrome refers to pain, clicking, snapping and/or locking of the temporo-mandibular joint - the joint where your lower jaw attaches to your skull. It can be caused by misalignment of the jaw, injury, constant muscle tension, and grinding of

the teeth. Since that joint is used in our daily eating and talking, when there is a problem with it we notice it a lot. And now that we're into the back-to-school time of year, many people are starting to tense up after the relaxing summer - and that includes clenching their jaws and grinding their teeth.

Muscle tension is a very common cause or aggravating factor in TMJ syndrome issues. When people get tense they tighten the jaw muscles, the neck muscles, and perhaps grind their teeth. Often the tension continues throughout sleep - causing grinding of the teeth at night and pain in the joint when you awake.

### What you can do

When you have TMJ syndrome symptoms, come see what some massage and craniosacral therapy can do for you. Massage and positional release therapy on the shoulders, upper back, neck, jaw and face releases the tension in all the affected and contributing muscles. Craniosacral therapy gently encourages realignment. There are gentle techniques within the mouth - totally pain free - that can help the jaw settle back into place. In some cases the new Myokinesthetic system or lymphatic drainage would be appropriate. By relieving the tension and encouraging realignment, many if not all the symptoms can be relieved, even in conditions that have lasted for years. Depending on the severity of the problem and how long the client has suffered from it, getting a treatment once a week or once every other week for a few sessions will loosen things up and break the tension patterns. After that, regular sessions once every month or two keep the problem in check. If nothing improves within a few sessions then it would be time to seek another specialist, for there may be structural problems that these therapies can't address.

Also, if you ever have jaw or mouth pain after dental procedures, massage and craniosacral therapy can relieve that tension and residual pain and prevent further problems.

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## Tasty Gluten Free Pumpkin Bread

*Rebecca Rice, L.Ac*



I have always enjoyed baking breads, cookies, muffins, and pies. When I realized that eating the gluten in the flour I was using in my baked goods was creating discomfort in the form of joint aches and malaise I explored other



ways to still enjoy some favorite baked goods. I have been using gluten free flours and grains to simulate an enjoyable eating experience with great success. The non-gluten grains and products like quinoa, amaranth, millet, fava

bean, garbanzo bean, brown rice, tapioca and sorghum are popular in gluten free baking. They can be bought as single grains or in premixed packages for baking things such as cookies, cakes, breads and brownies. This recipe includes ground flax seeds which are high in omega 3 fatty acids and pumpkin which has a significant amount of potassium and vitamin A. The spices: cinnamon, ginger, nutmeg, and clove are warming and used to strengthen the body's resistance to colds. Agave syrup replaces cane sugar because of its lower glycemic index.

This recipe results in a gluten free pumpkin bread that will be easy to digest and provide sustainable energy-great as a morning or afternoon snack. Enjoy!

### **Tasty Gluten Free Pumpkin Bread**

One 15oz. can organic cooked pumpkin  
2 eggs  
1/3 cup agave syrup  
1.5 cups Bob's Red Mill All Purpose Gluten Free Baking Flour  
1 tsp. cinnamon  
1/2 tsp. ginger  
1/4 tsp. nutmeg  
1/4 tsp. cloves  
1 1/2 tsp. baking powder  
1/2 to 3/4 cup ground flax seed (flax meal)

Preheat oven to 375 degrees. In mixing bowl, beat the eggs. Add agave syrup and pumpkin, mixing thoroughly. Then add spices and baking powder, mix thoroughly. Add flour a little at a time. Then add ground flax seeds, mixing well. Place batter in a greased 5 x 9 loaf dish. Bake for 55 minutes. The bread will be very moist, refrigerate after cooling.

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## **Preparing for the Flu Season**

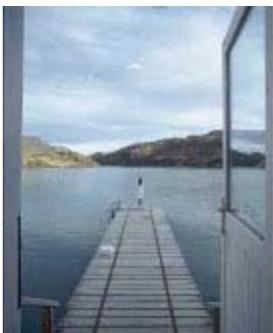
With the higher anticipation of outbreaks this flu season, please read a previously posted article on how you can prevent cold and flu naturally this flu season [READ MORE>>>](#)

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## **Easy, Natural Mind-Body Techniques for Stress Relief**

*Beth Netter, MD*



It is back to school time which means reading, writing, homework and exams for the students in the home. It also means much busier schedules for many moms and dads. Feeling a best stressed? That would be understandable. When you are trying to navigate all the schedules, to-do lists, as well as your personal and professional creative work, it can place quite a burden on your mind and body. Is your body beginning to show signs of this stress with increased headaches, sinus pain, back discomfort, bowel changes, or agitated sleep?

### **Finding Greater Calm, Clarity and Health Can Take Just One Minute a Day**

If you answered "yes" to any of these questions, then mind-body medicine would be an easy-to-learn, and highly beneficial medical therapy for you. Mind-body medicine is based on the idea that our body is directly influenced by our

thoughts and what our senses experience. By learning to use the breath and the mind more effectively, you will be able to find greater calm, clarity, and enhanced health throughout the day. I teach my patients a very simple "**1-Minute Meditation**" which has helped most of them greatly. A common response I hear is: *"I am able to use this practice throughout the day. It helps me 'erase the blackboard' of my mind. I am able to think straight, my blood pressure goes down, and I am able to diffuse anger and other emotions more easily."*

Meditation supports healing for nearly any mental disease, or physical illness. It helps decrease acute and chronic pain, has been shown to decrease hot flashes for 90% of women, lowers blood pressure, helps alleviate the symptoms of PMS and menopause, promotes relaxation, and improves quality of life. Although studies continue to confirm these positive effects, the proof of relief comes in the experience.

These mind-body therapies, which also include [Reiki energy healing](#), are non-invasive, have no negative side effects, and may be used in conjunction with any current medical treatments including chemotherapy, radiation therapy, surgery, or any pharmaceutical therapies. In fact, they often improve the effectiveness of these other treatments!

Jim Whiting, the Center's [yoga](#) instructor, and I hold a free meditation class every Wednesday evening at 7:30 p.m. Even if you have never meditated or think you can't, please join us one evening and begin to discover the wonderfully healing and health-promoting benefits of meditation and other holistic mind-body practices.

If you have any questions or would like to know more, you are welcomed to call me here at the Center: (518) 689-2244 or email me at: [BNetter@CIHH.net](mailto:BNetter@CIHH.net). Let us help you breeze through this new school year.

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## Sukhasana, Easy Seated Pose

*Jim Whiting, Certified Kripalu Yoga Teacher*



As Fall comes and the seasons change, we shift our awareness into the grounding effect of Fall. We can ground the body as well, to help prepare for the coming season, with the *Sukhasana* posture.

A sitting position that brings awareness to breathing and grounds the

body, *Sukhasana* helps strengthen lower back and open the hips. Sit cross-legged with hands on your knees. Focus on your breathing. Keep the spine straight and push the sit bones down toward the ground. If your knees rise above your hips, sit on a pillow or cushion. Lifting the spine can add support for your lower back and take pressure off of the hamstrings, while sitting. Take 5-10 slow, deep breaths. Raise your arms over your head, as you inhale. Exhale, bringing your arms down slowly. Repeat 5-10 times.

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## *What's New in Holistic Medicine at the Center*

### **IV Therapy for Chronic Illness and Chronic Fatigue**

If you suffer from chronic illness or chronic fatigue, Intravenous Nutrient Therapy may be an excellent therapeutic option for you. Due to aging or illness, the body is not always

able to absorb its required dietary nutrients effectively. IV nutrient therapy allows for optimal utilization of these required nutrients by being introduced directly into the body's circulation. Further, IV therapy allows for the administration of therapeutic doses of nutrients that are not available to the body by oral routes for the treatment of disease.

Please consult with Jennifer Enos, our holistic Nurse Practitioner to find out if IV therapy can help you. Learn more about [IV Therapy](#)

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## Introducing: Psychiatry and Counseling Services at CIHH with Christine Reeves, FNP-C, NPP



The Center is pleased to introduce and welcome Christine Reeves, Board Certified Family Nurse Practitioner and Psychiatric Nurse Practitioner who will be offering psychiatry and counseling services at the

Center. Christine brings a compassionate and integrative approach to counseling utilizing supplements and prescription therapy when appropriate. Her clients will benefit from the skill and knowledge of the entire staff at the Center as Christine becomes part of the integrative team.

### **Offering individual and family therapy for:**

Marital Difficulties; Parenting Concerns; Depression; Anxiety; Mood Instability; Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity; Eating Disorders

**Insurance:** Christine accepts CDPHP, New York State's Empire Plan and coming soon: Empire Blue Cross Blue Shield, Aetna, Cigna and Blue Shield of Northeast New York.

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## *New Classes and Workshops*

### **Reiki Certification Classes with Beth Netter, MD**

Beth's classes continue to earn the highest regard by her students. [Learn more about Beth](#)

Reiki I Certification Class: Sunday, January 24, 2010:  
9am-4pm

Reiki II Certification Class: Sunday, Nov 1, 2009; 9am-4pm.  
Please note the change of date

Fee: \$150 per class. Space is limited to 10 participants.  
Registration is required by calling our office. Please call:  
518-689-2244.

### **Creating A Self-Care Strategy Through Centering and Creative Journaling**

This is a group for those who are interested in replenishing their inner resources. Through the acts of journaling, self-reflection, mindfulness and poetry, participants will find new tools to help cope with issues related to grief, illness and stress. Come find a safe place to tap into the wellspring of hope!

**When:** Sundays: Oct 25-4:00-6:00pm; Nov 1-4:00-6:00pm;  
Nov 8-4:00-6:00pm; Nov 22-4:00-6:00pm; Dec 6 4:00-6:00

**Where:** Center for Integrative Health and Healing

388 Kenwood Avenue  
Delmar, NY  
12054

**Fee:** \$120

**To Register:** Please call the Center to register before Oct 22:  
(518) 689-2244

**About the Instructor:** *Susan Joy Riback* is a Registered Nurse and Certified Poetry Therapist. In the last ten years, she has worked as a poet in the schools, and as a facilitator of writing workshops integrating poetry and memoir for the purpose of self understanding and personal growth. She is the author of *"Shaking the Sand Out: Poems of Motherhood"* and is co-author of *"Writing Away the Demons: Stories of Creative Coping Through Transformational Writing"*.

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