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Interview Questions for Carl Greer, PhD, PsyD

Change the Story of Your Health: Using Shamanic and Jungian Techniques for Healing

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Q: Your book is called Change the Story of Your Health. What is a person's story of her health?

A: Our stories are what we tell ourselves about the events we've experienced. Is your story that you are a cancer patient, a cancer warrior, a cancer survivor, or someone who has had cancer? We are the storytellers and can tell a different story about our health, which may in turn lead to a different experience of our health.

Q. Have you used the practices in your book to affect your own health story at some point, and how did that work out for you?

A. A few years ago, I had a blocked artery in my kidney that my physician told me might require surgery. I tried to release that blockage energetically, and afterward, tests showed it had disappeared. In Change the Story of Your Health, I share other stories from my own experience as well as stories from clients I've worked with in my shamanic practice, and from people who have attended my workshops. Many people have seemingly reversed or improved health conditions by using Jungian and shamanic techniques described in the book. That said, I always recommend that people work with Western, allopathic physicians if they have health issues but also consider using the techniques I recommend to complement any medical treatment.

Q. Your previous book, which won three book awards, was called Change Your Story, Change Your Life. Why did you choose to focus this time on people's health stories and how to transform them?

A. First, my health concerns are taking more attention than they have in the past—I have prostate cancer that is under control, and I want to live according to a health story I find satisfying and experience the best possible health and wellness despite my cancer.

Second, I noticed that many people who bought my previous book, Change Your Story, Change Your Life, were dealing with health issues or have overcome serious health issues and become healers of others. I wanted to help them learn techniques for gaining insights into their health situation and even possibly improving it. In fact, I've heard the techniques have been extremely helpful for some readers, and one reviewer has said she will be using them as a healer helping her clients in her practice.

Q. You offer a lot of journaling exercises with questions that include "if there's a saying, song, book, or movie title that expresses your story about this aspect of your health, what would it be." A couple examples are "Keep on keeping on, no matter the cost" and "I deserve it, I earned it, I'm eating it!" This sounds like an interesting, playful exercise, but can you tell us a bit about why it might be very helpful to think of a title or song that sums up what your attitude and experience of your health is?

A. Our stories about health have a certain momentum or energy to them and those energies can become more obvious to us when we put them into words. "It's all downhill from here" is a health story you might want to change, or "I'm not getting older, I'm getting better," which is an old advertising slogan you might want to adopt as your new story.

Research shows our attitude toward our health in the past, present, and future really can determine our experience of our health and lead to better health. And since research also shows that younger people tend to overestimate how likely it is that they will experience dementia and disability when they get older, it is important to question old, pessimistic stories about your health.

Q. You talk about dancing your health story to learn more about what you've experienced and to gain some insights about, for example, your feelings about aging, or losing some of your strength and stamina after an injury. What would dancing your health story involve?

A. I'll offer an example from my own life. As a result of insights I received through shamanic journeying, I now take time out to dance to my recordings of fifties and sixties songs from my youth. As I dance, I combine my martial arts and qigong practices into a spontaneous series of movements. At the literal and psychological level, while dancing, I am playing with the metaphors of constriction, rigidity, and imbalance to move toward expansiveness, flexibility, and balance.

The body often has wisdom the conscious mind lacks. That's an idea that a Jungian psychologist named Marion Woodman has written about. You might be able to discover things about your health by setting that intention and then dancing to music or without it. Your body might send you a message like "Don't take life so seriously. Have fun." Or "Be more conscious of your body and not just your mind and your thoughts." Those insights might apply to your health challenges.

Q. You also offer something you call expanded-awareness practices that can help people gain insights and energies for healing. Can you talk a little about one of those practices and how a person could use it to change his or her health story?

A. Shamans say we journey to transpersonal realms in order to receive insights and energy for healing. The expanded awareness practices in Change the Story of Your Health quiet the activity of your conscious mind which generates a lot of thoughts very quickly and opens a portal to your wise, unconscious mind, so that you can receive insights and energy for healing.

One of those practices is what I call healing with the help of the earth. You lie on the earth, and do some mindful breathing to quiet your mind, and then you ask three questions of the earth: What message do you have for me? Because that can give you an insight. Second, What do I need to let go of and release to you for healing? And third, What do I need to take in so that I can experience healing?" Those three questions provide insights but also might cause you to experience an energetic shift. Maybe you let go of your fear of some test results you received from your doctor, and what you need to take in is strength that comes from the earth and helps you remember not to get too caught up in your fearful thoughts and instead, take time to nourish your body and your spirit. I have a free audio giveaway of this expanded-awareness practice that you can access by going to CarlGreer.com and signing up for my email newsletter.

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