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THE
Beauty
OF *Wings*

*A True Story of Transformation from
Near Death to Unconditional Love*

ALEXANDRA MIKA



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This book is dedicated to Mother Earth.

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As I feel the intense heat of change, transformation, and growth within my inner workings, the land reminds me of my greater purpose and the greater whole. As I watch the summer flowers wither away and the birds flying south, I am reminded of my own rhythms and I start to remember why I am here.



CHAPTER 1

The Heat of Transformation

Alexandra Mika

August 12, 2009

Dear Diary,

A beautiful pink butterfly began to emerge from my heart during a deep meditation. She was exquisitely detailed and radiant with massive pink and silver iridescent wings. Her thick feet were strong and grounded, and her green eyes glowed with deep strength. She came to me for a specific purpose.

One Month Later

A small orange butterfly landed on my running shoe while I was stretching in preparation for a ten-mile trail run. The butterfly's feet were small enough to coil tightly around a single shoelace, and her beautiful orange wings fluttered in the wind. As she took off from my shoe, another butterfly appeared. The two butterflies began to dance together. They circled each other, flew up and down together, and landed on the same flower simultaneously. As I watched them flirt, I fantasized about true love; an unconditional love that was deeper than flesh and bones.

After this mesmerizing encounter with the butterflies, I headed up the mountain trail in Ashland, Oregon's Tolman Creek Park. The dusty trail and the sound of my pink running shorts flapping in the wind brought a smile to my face. As I ran past the towering forest of trees, I thought about my mother. She was coming to visit soon. My mother had come from Minnesota every few months since I moved to Oregon to attend Lewis and Clark College and then the University of Portland for nursing school. Each visit from my mother felt like a first. Anticipation and excitement always preceded her arrival. My mother always showed up when I needed her most, and that September stay was nothing short of an extraordinary blessing, a visit neither of us will forget. That visit was divinely orchestrated for a purpose greater than both of us.

My mother arrived at the Medford airport at 5:30 p.m. on September 2, 2009. I had called her earlier that day informing her

that I would not be able to pick her up from the airport because I had become ill. I had left work early and was lying in bed with a burning sore throat, fever, and fatigue so severe that I felt my body was made of lead. In my eight years of living in Oregon, I was always able to pick my mother up from the airport; that Wednesday evening was highly unusual for both of us. My mother instead took a taxi to my country cottage in Ashland. As she arrived, I was drifting in and out of alertness. The sound of her knocking on my door and the cows mooing outside woke me from my daze. As I stood up from bed to greet her, I felt very dizzy. I waited for the dizziness to subside and slowly walked towards the door. As I opened the door, my mother was thrilled to see me. She walked in, gave me a hug, and asked how I was doing. I told her how ill I was feeling, and she agreed that I looked unusually tired. After she unloaded her belongings, she spoke in depth about my home; the beautiful rafters on the ceiling, the gorgeous windows, and the breathtaking landscape surrounding it. I lay in bed too tired to stand.

After settling in, she helped herself to a glass of water and sat next to me. Assuming my sore throat and fever would be gone by morning, I told my mother, "I think I will be able to go for a run in the morning and then we can go to our favorite restaurant in town, Morning Glory." Little did we both know that this was the beginning of a journey of a lifetime. The day my mother arrived was the day I started the inward journey of going into a dark cocoon to prepare for a butterfly emergence.

The next morning I awoke to birds chirping outside my window, my mother lying to my right, and an unwanted, persistent sore throat. I knew I would not be able to enjoy an early morning run through the forested trails, which meant I was truly ill. During the previous ten years, I spent the majority of my free moments running through beautiful pastures, mystical landscapes, snow-covered mountain peaks, and alongside glistening streams. My adventurous side loved climbing to new heights, soaring through the wind, and discovering secret trails. Every morning I would put

on my old t-shirt, pink running shorts, and dirt-covered running shoes, and head for the trails. As soon as my feet hit the raw earth, my heart would thump with excitement. I used my long legs to carry me up steep mountain trails where I would see breathtaking views of the sun rising across mountains in the distance. The routine of running each morning brought me to a heightened state of joy. Being surrounded by enormous green trees, viewing deer off in the distance, climbing to heights where I felt close to the clouds and near the soaring birds, feeling wind across my cheeks, sweating from my core, feeling my muscles working with each heartbeat, moving my body to the sound of rustling leaves – the combination of all the elements of this experience brought me to a blissful state where I felt powerful and limitless. While running through green pastures I felt as though I was flying like the birds. I felt safe and accepted on the dirt trails among the animals and forest. It brought me to another world, a world of imagination, vivid colors, earth tones, wild animals, mystical trees, and beautiful views. I loved running on the trails, and I knew them from the core of my heart.

It was Thursday, September 3, 2009 at 9:00 a.m., and I was in need of medical attention. I felt weak, dizzy, and dehydrated. While lying in bed I drank as much water as I could choke down. My mother convinced me we needed to go into the urgent care center. I was always reluctant to seek help, a trait I inherited from my father – an attitude of independence and self-reliance. I was not sure I was going to be able to make it to the urgent care center that morning when, upon standing, I felt like I was going to faint. We decided to take it one step at a time. First, my mother helped me get dressed while I was still lying in bed. We then tried to make it to my car. My mother wrapped her hands around my waist and we stumbled across the dirt path through the vine-covered gate to my silver Camry parked on a gravel road. My mother opened the door, lowered down the passenger seat, and then helped me in. I lay down with one hand on my chest and one hand on my stomach, and I prayed to my angels. As my mother was not familiar with the

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area, I gave her directions and we made it to the doctor within an hour, slowed by road construction along the way. As we entered the urgent care center, I sat down and my mother spoke to the front desk attendant to see if I was able to be seen quickly. My mother's anxiety was heightened, urgency seeping through her words. Any time I was sick she did everything in her power to make me well. As a young child I was very asthmatic; my mother took me to the best asthma specialists in town. Her love for me was expressed in the best way she knew how. She tried to protect me from illness and sadness with her hovering nature. I felt restricted.

Within minutes the nurse called out for me. My mother and I walked back with her. She took my vital signs and discovered that I had low blood pressure, a high heart rate, and a temperature. We were then escorted to another room where we waited patiently for the doctor. After several minutes the doctor walked in and asked how I was doing. I explained to him how sick I was feeling. He listened to my heartbeat, lungs, and stomach, and then told me he thought I had the stomach flu and needed some IV fluids. I agreed to receive the fluids. Then, a nurse came in to start the IV. As a registered nurse I was not afraid of needles. Within minutes the fluids were dripping into my bloodstream. After the whole bag of fluids worked its way into my body, the doctor came back and told me to get some rest. He instructed me to drink a lot of water and said I would be better in a few days.

That night my fever progressed, I awoke to severe sharp pains in my left side, and I sweated profusely. By morning the sheets were drenched. My mother did laundry all morning, hung the sheets out in the sunshine to dry and fed me vegetables, vitamin C, and healing spices. However, that night was worse; I experienced more high fever, more sweats, and sharp pains on my left side. Days inched by, filled with more vitamin C, more laundry, more sheets drying in the sun, and more trips to the grocery store. My adventurous nature felt trapped, constrained, and dampened.

The next day my mother suggested we take a walk through Lithia Park so I could receive some quality sunshine. We drove to the park and strolled through the wooded covered trails next to the glistening blue river which came down from Mt. Ashland. The sunshine against my skin felt warm and soothing. The sound of the river was reassuring, and it felt good to be walking in nature. It was a park I loved and cherished; it was beautiful and magical. After walking several miles I told my mother that I needed to sit down. The left-sided pain had been worsening throughout the morning and for a moment it became very intense. I rested on a bench, hunched over holding my left side. I sat quietly in severe pain and prayed to my angels for help. Without feeling any improvement in the pain, I told my mom to call an ambulance. I told her the pain was so severe I could not move. After five excruciatingly long minutes, we both agreed she would drive me back to the urgent care center.

This time after listening to my lungs, the doctor took a chest x-ray. After reviewing the x-ray, he diagnosed me with left lower lobe pneumonia. I was devastated and in shock; as a nurse I knew how severe pneumonia could be. He prescribed antibiotics and pain medication and told me to follow up in one week.

A week passed. My mother returned home to Minnesota, and I was feeling stronger. I had not yet coughed up mucous or phlegm from the pneumonia, which was highly unusual, but my fever was gone, and the pain had diminished. I was ready to return to work and to my active lifestyle. During a follow-up visit, the doctor took another chest x-ray. He told me I was doing great and could return to work. I asked the doctor when I could run again. He told me I could run the next day. My heart pounded with excitement. I felt relieved that I did not have to wait days or weeks to run again. I was excited to return to my running routine. After growing up in an externally focused culture and becoming an athlete, my body had become my identity; it was my shell. Little did I know that my shell had begun to break wide open.

After visiting with the doctor, I went home to rest. The next morning, I woke up, put on my old t-shirt and pink running shorts, and tied my dirt-covered running shoes, then headed straight to the trails. I always had a strong drive to maintain my endurance, slim physique, and athletic abilities. That morning I jogged up a steep dirt trail winding through thick forested trees. About one mile uphill, I reached an overlook where I could see the sun rising and mountains in the distance. I continued along the trail, passing a beautiful deer off in the woods, two squirrels, and several huge birds flying above me. I felt at home. At about three miles into the run I felt very short of breath and winded, so I returned home and lay down. My left-sided pain came back even more severely than before and my right lung began to hurt. My childhood asthma had returned with full force.

After about one hour of severe pain and discomfort, I went back to the doctor who gave me a nebulizer treatment which did not help. He recommended I return home to rest. The medication in the nebulizer treatment made me jittery. I drove home, even though my hands were shaking. Once home I tried to rest, but was edgy from the nebulizer treatment and anxious about my lungs; resting was not easy. The pain was sharp and severe, so I called the doctor. His advice was to allow my lungs time to heal. I lay in bed anxiously gasping for air. Nothing helped – inhalers, medications, teas, spices, remedies, herbs, and vitamin C were all useless. My world had begun to shatter as my lung capacity shriveled to that of a mouse. I spent the next two weeks in bed short of breath, filled with emotional and physical pain, crying, praying, and distressed about my state of health.

After years of running through snow-covered mountains, mystical forests, and on thrilling trails, lying in bed with minimal air intake and severe pain was heart wrenching. It felt like a fire was smoldering inside me and I could not soothe it. I was in the midst of a heated transformation. My lungs were inflamed and filled with phlegm, and unconditional love was the instrument I needed to stitch my life back together. Patience was vital. Day after day went

by; setbacks, shortness of breath, wheezing, and pains were common themes of my daily life that year. As fire consumed the Oregon valley floor that fall, inflammation filled my lungs.

Every morning I spent time meditating next to a burning candle. I spent quiet time feeling my inner world. I began to feel deep sensations within my heart-space. It felt like my heart was beginning to open as a butterfly emerges from a cocoon. I was in the process of awakening to my soul and unconditional love within my heart. Often I would use my third eye (my inner eye) to see the pink, beautiful, enormous butterfly emerging from my heart-space. During my meditations, I set intentions for full healing, full recovery, abundance, happiness, and well-being. I spent time writing in my journal and reading inspirational quotes, one of my favorites said by Helen Keller: “we can do anything we want if we stick to it long enough.” Often I would watch the trees sway in the wind and wonder if I would ever be able to run again. I was learning how to be still and tap into the spiritual world.

The quiet time gave me an opportunity to reflect on my childhood. As a sensitive child I was in tune with nature and animals. The trails and creatures understood me, and I in turn understood them. I spent most of my time developing a deep relationship with the natural world and animals. The trees gave me strength, the animals spoke to my heart, and the trails brought out my adventurous spirit. I felt safe in nature and with animals, especially horses. I rode horses daily as a child and teen. The horses and nature were my source of unconditional love.

I was teased and tormented in school, during sports, at the horseback riding stable, and at home; as a result, I turned towards nature and horses for comfort and safety. I grew unusually fast and by the sixth grade I measured six feet tall. In junior high I was teased daily for being a gross giant, too big and too tall. I was laughed at, ridiculed, excluded, and called “ostrich legs.” I was shunned everywhere I went. At home my older brother tormented me. He threw things at me, shoved me into dark spaces, and told me I was

too ugly to ever have a boyfriend. My father was emotionally absent or loud with anger, and my mother was highly judgmental. I was a very asthmatic child.

As a result, I developed a very poor body image, seeing myself as a “gross giant.” I felt like the ugly duckling who no one would ever love. I wanted to be small and petite. I did not feel safe around humans nor did I trust them, but I did trust nature and animals. My free time was spent with the horses and in the outdoors. I began running in high school which became a physical release for me. By college I was dieting and running obsessively, still struggling with a very poor body image. My world felt broken when I became ill and was not able to run on the trails and commune with nature in the way I was accustomed. My safe haven and emotional release was gone. A new way of being was emerging within me, and the future years would reveal my true essence.

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As I let go of strings, cords, and heavy rocks, I expand my wings even more and start to feel the ground beneath my feet, the air against my cheek and the heat of the sun. As I allow my inner spark to warm my body with radiant light, I shed what is no longer needed and I step clearly into my light.



CHAPTER 2

Trials and Tribulations

That October tested me in ways I had never been tested before, and I have since come to realize that the pains of that autumn propelled me to open my heart to unconditional love. During this month, my physical and emotional pain motivated me to look deep within, become aware of the childhood wounds I was carrying, search for healing and meaning, connect with my heart and intuition, sit still, write, and set intentions for each day and for my life.

A month had gone by since I became ill with pneumonia, and I ached to run. I missed everything about it, the motion and the wind across my face, the adrenaline induced high, the scenic trails, and the tenderness of my tired muscles. I missed the feeling I had while running and afterwards. Running had been part of my routine before work. It brought a smile to my face and gave me the strength to deal with each day. One morning, even though my lung pain persisted, I decided to go for a 3-mile run, which was short for me. I was conditioned to run between eight and ten miles daily. It was dark and cold out, but I longed for the movement of feeling like I was flying. During the run, the pain increased in my left lower side where my left lung resides. It felt like a deep wound was living inside my lung tissue, but I kept going. I not only loved running, but I was addicted to it; I could not stop. When I returned from the run I started wheezing and could barely breathe. I had to work that day because I had used all of my allotted sick days. The long twelve hours of standing on my feet, answering pages, and caring for patients with a wide range of injuries and needs was very taxing on my weakened physical state. I took care of patients coming back from open-heart surgery, diagnosed with brain cancer, dying from COPD, in severe pain, and suffering from many other life-altering illnesses. On that October day, I barely made it to the end of my shift, the only thing keeping me alive being the connection I had with my patients.

There was a particular patient that day that touched my heart. He was diagnosed with COPD and was very short of breath. As he gasped for air, I could empathize completely. I knew what it was like to be in his shoes because I was wearing the same pair. He

told me the medications were not helping, and again, I understood completely as my inhalers had not relieved my shortness of breath or wheezing either. He asked me what to do, and I said, "Pray." His eyes filled with tears, but I was somehow able to keep mine back. Later that day he gave me a postcard with a picture of a beautiful Native American woman. She had a white feather in her hair which reminded me of my delicate soul. He told me I was amazing and that I could do anything I wanted to in this life. I will never forget him or the gift he gave me. He gave me the strength to continue on my treacherous journey.

I was grieving the loss of running. My love of running began at the age of fourteen. By the time I was twenty-one, I was running collegiately. During my junior year of college, I dropped weight, my running times decreased, and I started hearing compliments on my looks for the first time in my life. I was becoming an excellent athlete, something I always strived to be. I attributed the fast running times and compliments to my thinness. My identity and self-esteem were dependent on my ability to run well and maintain a slim athletic physique. It was at this point that my childhood wounds had begun to manifest in the form of anorexia.

Not only did I try to run that particular October morning, but I also tried several mornings after. I was desperate to run. Each time I ran, I felt more ill, more short of breath, and more lung pain. It felt like the wound in my left lung was growing. It hurt to touch my left side, and I could not completely fill my left lung with air. At times I felt like I was suffocating. I was extremely anxious and terrified to gain weight because I was unable to run. I was fasting for days, eating only fruit for breakfast and skipping meals. My immune system was depleted. I had internalized the nasty comments of my childhood and did everything in my power to not be "too big" or "too tall." I controlled my food intake because I was terrified to gain even a pound. Subconsciously, gaining weight meant becoming a "gross giant" and never being loved. Being loved was ultimately what I was striving for.

Being called an ugly giant every day for several years during my childhood left a deep scar on my mind and body. Running brought me a false sense of safety, peace, and bliss. No matter how hard I tried, I could not run that fall. I was being faced with the challenge of confronting my deep-rooted childhood wounds. The future months and years would reveal the gifts I ultimately received from that fall.

I went to see a new doctor because of the intense and persistent left lung pain. This doctor took another chest x-ray and gave me a breathing test. He diagnosed me with severe asthma and put me on steroids. He was also a runner. I asked him when I would be able to run again, and he said by spring. He said while I am not running I should watch my calories so I would not gain weight. He reinforced my urge to maintain a strict diet. My anxiety heightened from the steroids and malnutrition. Anxiety is a common side effect of steroids. Also, low protein and low fat levels affect the brain which also causes an increase in anxiety. My illness worsened after that visit. The doctor only saw my asthma and pneumonia, and his recommendation to watch my calories was very harmful for me. He did not recognize that I had anorexia; neither did anyone else in Oregon, and neither did I.

I was getting worse each day, so I went to see an herbalist and nutritionist. The herbalist gave me a bottle of herbs to take daily, and the nutritionist recommended I stay away from wheat, dairy, and sugar and eat many fruits and vegetables. After following this advice, I became even more ill. I was dropping weight and was confused why my lungs were worsening. I was terrified. No one understood what I was enduring. I was all alone, in a dark cocoon, deepening my spiritual connection, opening my heart-space, and preparing for an extraordinary transformation.

My lung capacity was minimal; working twelve-hour shifts exhausted every cell in my body, and simply being able to breathe was at the forefront of my world. My pink running shorts and running shoes sat neglected at my front door. The days of running through

green pastures, under vivid blue skies, and over glistening streams seemed long gone. Barely could I remember what it felt like to have full lung capacity. I could literally feel the wound within my lung tissues growing each day. I was living with severe lung pain, panic, and shortness of breath day in and day out. Chronic inflammation from severe asthma, panic, and malnourishment delayed the healing process. Questions flooded my mind. How long would this last? Would I ever fully heal? How long would the pain continue? When would I be able to take a full breath? What would I do with my life now? Who was I really?

Before I became ill, I was known as a runner. My friends were runners, I ran every day, I shopped at the running store, and I wore running shoes. My life was centered on running, being in nature, and maintaining a thin frame. My home was on the running trails. Running brought me to remote places within nature that gave me that sense of love I longed to feel. Nature recognized me and I felt unconditionally loved and accepted on the trails. My happiness and peace of mind was dictated by my ability to run. After trying to run several times that fall and becoming increasingly ill with each run, I realized I had to let go of running. I simply could not run. I started to feel depressed, lonely, and like the ugly giant I was called in junior high. I was barely eating or breathing. My home, the running trails, and my body were disappearing.

Maureen, a gentle, kind woman, came to me when I needed her the most. One fall day I was working at the hospital and feeling very short of breath. I entered the break room to get my inhaler, and Maureen, a registered nurse, sat there munching on her morning snack and asked me how I was. I told her I was short of breath and my left lower side was in severe pain near where my lung was. Maureen believed in the ancient healing powers of Epsom salt baths, and she invited me to enjoy Epsom salt baths in her home, as I did not have a bathtub in mine.

After a long twelve-hour shift at the hospital, my lungs were exhausted and painful. I drove to Maureen's home. That night and

for many nights to follow I took Epsom salt baths and spoke with this wise woman. Hearing about her journey of healing and self-discovery gave me more strength and wisdom to walk through my own journey. She gave me books, herbs, bath salts, and a gentle heart to reach for in a rocky time. She referred me to an extraordinary healer, Dr. Katherine, a woman who changed my life. Because this healer lived far away, I made an appointment with her for a phone session. I waited eagerly for my appointment.

Late that fall rain came to the valley; humidity filled the air, yet the inflammation and phlegm persisted in my lung tissues. My days were filled with Epsom salt baths, herbs, inhalers, medicines, daily meditations, prayer, angels, butterflies, and inner reflections. When I meditated, I felt my heart-space. It felt warm and loving. It felt as though my heart was trying to emerge and expand. I could feel incredible sensations within and around my heart, sensations of tingling, opening, and heat. Butterflies surrounded me constantly that year and in years to follow. They landed on my shoes. They came to me in times of need and in times of joy. They were messengers from the divine. I felt a sense of belonging with the butterflies.

On a sunny fall day, I dialed the phone of Dr. Katherine, energy worker, intuitive, and naturopath. Eagerness and excitement filled my body when a peaceful, gentle voice answered the phone, "How can we help?" Dr. Katherine channeled a group of beings called Guidance. They were high vibration beings (angels and ascended masters) that could read energy and answer deeply personal questions. After an hour of phone conversation, my life began to change. I gained a new perspective. As the rain washed away the fog in the valley, I was becoming clearer about my inner purpose and my true gifts. During my phone conversation with Dr. Katherine, Guidance told me I was sick for a very specific purpose. They told me I was learning unconditional love for myself. They said my soul had come to this planet to embody unconditional love, and learning self-love was an important step on my path. All my life I had been searching for love and acceptance outside of myself, and it was now

time to learn it from within. They suggested I keep a self-love journal and begin writing a list every morning of things I appreciate about myself. They said it was very important to monitor each thought I have and chose loving thoughts. They told me my thoughts affect my energy field, my body, and my reality. They told me my soul had come to Earth to help awaken humanity and part of my journey was learning unconditional love, divine love, love that is beyond height, weight, skin, and flesh; true, non-judgmental love. They also told me that I was here to live in an awakened state of bliss, and through this illness I would completely awaken and live from my soul's true perspective. They also told me my chakras (the body's centers of spiritual powers) and energy fields were starting to open, and in three to four years I would be able to channel very strong healing energy. They told me I had extraordinary healing gifts and that I was a healer and a teacher.

This information was both wonderful and frightening. Dr. Katherine validated what I had always felt since a child; I was here for a higher purpose. I had always known that I had an inner calling. Yet, I was terrified to awaken to it. Would others judge my spiritual and healing gifts? Could I really awaken to my gifts? I did not want to be seen as weird, like I was as a child and teen. I desperately wanted to feel accepted by others, yet I knew I had a strong calling of the heart.

That day on the phone with Dr. Katherine I realized that this lung illness was a gateway to my calling. My inner calling of love and service started to become reality. From that day forward I was able to see more clearly than ever before that I was here for a purpose, and health and bliss were my natural states of being.

I started to listen to a song about the courage to stand in your light. I listened to this song daily during my breaks at work, in the morning, and at night. The focus of my life began to shift from being depressed because I could not run and was ill, to cultivating the light within and unconditional love for myself. Guidance gave me the motivation to look deeper within my inner workings.

I started a self-love journal that fall. I wrote things that I appreciated about myself. I painted daily affirmation cards that read “my life is balanced, my lungs are healed, and I am gentle and loving with myself.” I posted loving messages all around my home. I was training my mind to think loving thoughts, and I was learning how to love myself.

I spent more time journaling, meditating, and questioning the world around me. I began to feel that serving my heart and my inner calling was my main focus in life, rather than running. I still feared gaining weight and kept myself on a restricted diet, but I slowly started to let go of running. Left-sided lung pain, anorexia, panic, and shortness of breath continued to dominate my physical state, but my internal world was changing. I spent time alone in nature sitting under the trees and watching the birds, journaling, reading, and getting in touch with my heart. I was planting internal seeds of resilience, love, radiance, compassion, joy and forgiveness. I began to question why I was here and what I really wanted from life. As my physical body weakened, my internal state began strengthening. At times I thought I might die from my physical condition, but I knew I had a higher purpose, a calling that kept me alive. I missed having full lung capacity and running through mystical trails, but my deep longing to serve a higher purpose gave me the strength I needed to face the physical limitations. It was in the quiet moments of feeling my heart and connecting with nature where I found the grace and courage to face my present life challenge.