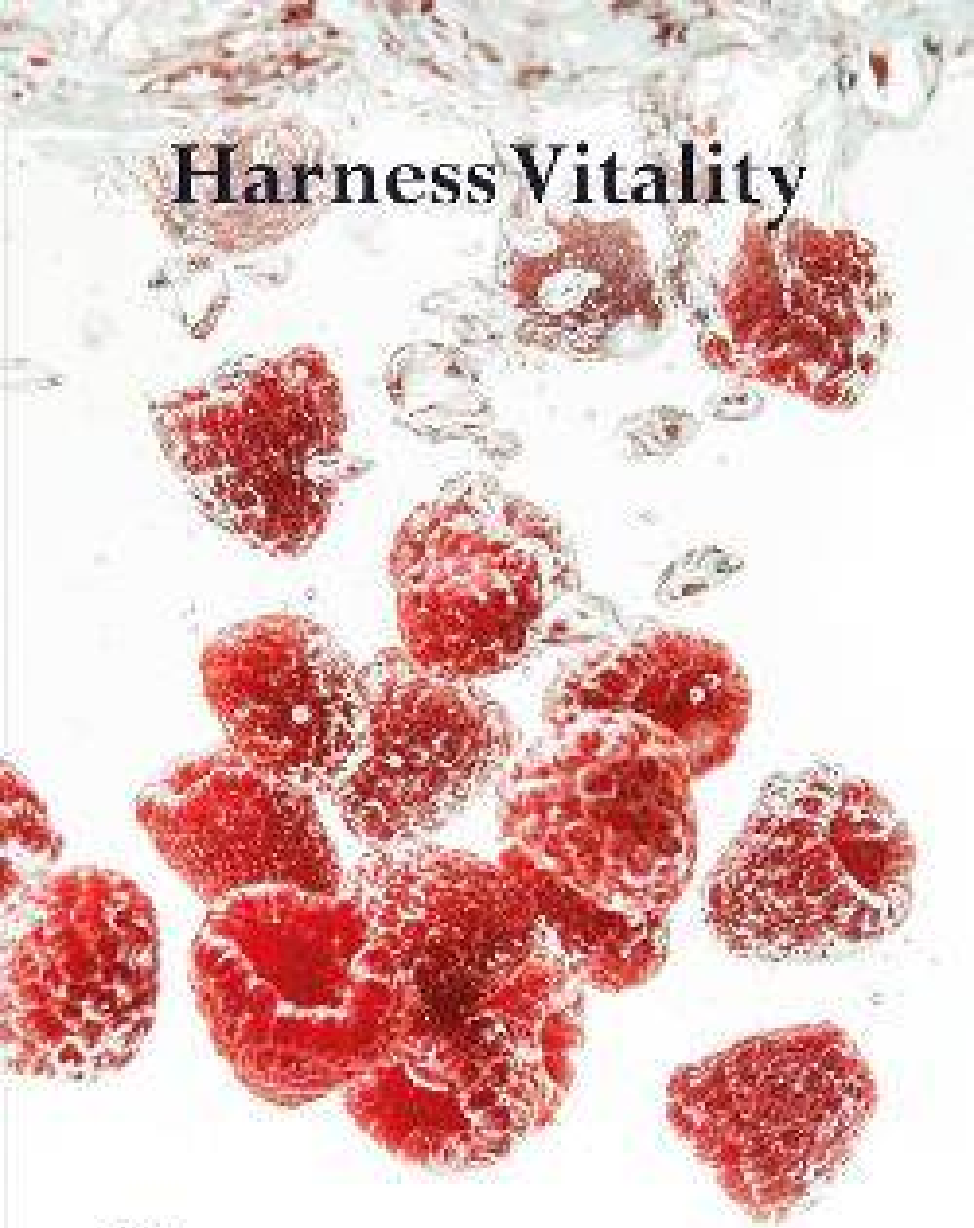
Harness Vitality



Sole Journey

Patricia Lavelle

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PATRICIA LAVELLE



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To Steve, who made room before I knew how to arrive.

To the love of my parents, which shapes every word I write.

And to Angela, the quiet hand leaving traces along the way.

Ireland, where I was held when I wanted only to leave.

Contents

My Note to Wellness Seekers		xi
1	Every Situation is a Lesson to Learn From	3
2	Batteries and Vacuums	15
3	Dark Energy and the Nervous System	25
4	The Loop Cycle	37
5	Friend or Foe	45
Reflection and Reflexology Part 1: The Heart		**51**
6	Adventure Called	61
7	Vision	73
8	Corporate Conflict	83
9	Work 'Til You Drop	91
10	An Island	103
11	A New Skin	111

Reflection and Reflexology Part 2: The Brain **117**

12 The Inner Call 127
13 Bon Voyage, Again 133
14 Getting Back on Track 141
15 Adventurous Heart 149

Reflection and Reflexology Part 3: The Lungs **159**

16 An Irish Footprint 169
17 Rest 177
18 Returning Home 187
19 Finding the Reigns 197
20 Reflexology 207
21 Patricia Lavelle: Reflexologist 217

Reflection and Reflexology Part 4: The Liver **223**

22 Sometimes Things Are Good For Us 233
23 Death Taught Me How to Live 241
24 The Great Flood 249
25 Prevention, Not Cure 257
26 Untethered 267
27 Scotland 277
28 My Mother 287
29 Getting Back to Life 295
30 Narcissist Number One 303

Reflection and Reflexology Part 5: The Kidneys **311**

31 Narcissist Number Two 321
32 Holding the Shield 331
33 Full Circle 343

My Note to Wellness Seekers

My journey through a multiple sclerosis diagnosis, and one consultant's advice to avoid western medicine, led me to seek alternative healing through the discovery of holistic practices. My findings revealed a need for personal reflection as well as the natural healing tradition of reflexology, but not just any reflexology; what I discovered was a universal reflexology. This version supported body, mind and spirit. The practice that I came to know and understand took me on a journey of wellness and vitality and taught me that every single experience, each tiny thought that flits through our minds, and the mileage our spirits clock along the way are all deeply connected to the way we feel in our bodies. If you're still with me after this brief explanation, I invite you to hold on a little longer and continue reading because this book may well have been written entirely for you.

When uncomfortable experiences are felt, when we

bump through life as if we are accepting that this is how life is for us, when we think that bad stuff is all we deserve, when we hold on to all that's happened without checking in and taking stock and letting go of what's not ours, what we do is allow negative external factors – people, situations, experiences – to sit with us, to be carried, to weigh on our soul. When this happens, our body has no other option but to respond to this heaviness, to this limiting idea of who we are. Its response is to manifest in illness, dis-ease, physical discomfort, depression or anxiety, because at times, this is the only language we understand. But I tell you now, and throughout the pages of this book, that it doesn't have to be this way. What if I was to tell you that your body has another language, one that is speaking to you all the time, before illness sets in?

Illness doesn't just happen, it's slowly cultivated through moments of dis-ease, conflict, negative or confusing experiences and general unrest. It is compounded, and if we don't find a way to release these moments, these emotions, these afflictions on our physical and emotional systems, then we invite disharmony into our physical and mental systems.

The signs of our bodies in distress are not what you might expect. That gentle tightening of your chest is not just anxiety, it's a message. Your body is asking you to look around you, to feel your way through the present experience and take note. It might be that you're sitting alone and nobody is around, and if this is the case, you might ask yourself, 'What or who is this feeling about?' and decide to push it aside and move forward without further thought.

Yet, as a new practice, it's worth noting in that moment, any loose thought that you were only barely conscious of that slipped in and out of your mind, so translucent that you could barely grasp it, because it's likely that it may be a thought connected to a past experience, a conversation that made you feel unworthy or the action of another person that made you question your integrity, that's causing your chest to tighten. Take hold of this thought, look at it, thank it, even, for making you aware of its presence, and then imagine yourself gently blowing it away into the distance. These barely conscious thoughts have a lot of power over the way we feel. Their presence lingers like ghostly figures, even though you were barely aware of them stowing away in your physiological system.

The next time this happens to you, at this moment, I ask you to view your negative thoughts as critters that bite into your chest (or other parts of your body that become tense). These critters might make you feel unworthy, not good enough, or undeserving. But they bring with them a choice. You can choose to ignore or you can choose to look deeper, because if you put your mind to it, and you want the best for your mind, body and spirit, you'll have the opportunity to turn these critters into pieces of gold, because once you catch them, tame them and polish them, and send them back into your system reinvigorated and healed, they shine like beaming rays of light and that light makes you feel unstoppable. However, let the critters roam free and they not only multiply but they take over, until your body can respond in the only way you will hear it; through illness.

This was how I got caught out. So I know what I'm talking about. For my entire life I was blown around uncomfortable moments always thinking that this was just the way it was for everyone, and that I wasn't strong enough. But I was wrong. And I learnt the hard way, or the best way, depending on how you choose to look at it. Because I did learn. I took the lesson by both hands and was shown the way to my optimum health. Even with a diagnosis of multiple sclerosis (MS), I live a vibrant life. Possibly more vibrant than some of those without such a condition. The wellness within my body is down to a constant release practice through universal reflexology: a conditioning practice of the body, mind and spirit.

As I tell you my story, I will walk you through all my challenges, my deeply uncomfortable moments as well as times of enlightenment and liberation. I'll show you how, what is meant for us, finds us.

I first encountered reflexology whilst on holiday, shortly after my diagnosis. Whilst everyone around me was championing medication, I always remembered that very first consultant I met. He said "medicine will make your symptoms worse", and for this reason, I was open to other forms of medication. I had no idea that I would experience the gateway to my healing on my way to Robben Island, Cape Town. Yet, this is exactly where my healing journey and my education in the language of the body began. After this first experience, I carried that feeling of euphoria with me that day, into all my other days, knowing that I had found what was meant for me.

After decades of study, and becoming a professional

reflexology practitioner, I made it my mission to reflect on my journey, of my life experiences that made me feel 'less than', 'not good enough', 'isolated' and 'fearful', as well as those times when I was 'lifted', 'inspired', 'liberated' and 'free', and within these stories I offer myself to you, in the hope that if you see yourself reflected back within any of these reflections, you will know when something feels good and when something needs to be released from your body, mind or spirit. From the guidance I provide within the Reflection and Reflexology pages, you will be able to take my reasons and my mini self-reflexology practices and release those experiences, thoughts, situations or limitations from your body. Over the next few pages, I will take you through what reflexology is, how it works, and offer diagrams and guidance into the language of the body.

My journey has led me to understand that there is a yin and yang to living in wellness. For every tumultuous life event there needs to be a release. For me, this came with learning how to listen to the language of the body and heal what was necessary through the wisdom of my personal reflection of situations and the practice of reflexology. It is not just the practice of reflexology that maintains my good health. It is coupled with the intuitive reflective process through my ability to read energy within me and without me which helps me navigate my body, mind and spirit through life. Reflection and reflexology have become an art form for me. These practices helped me to bring my body back into balance and live without discomfort.

Now, twenty years past my diagnosis, I offer to you the practices of self-care that have created a life of vitality for me. The mind-body connection is the gateway to your ultimate wellness. An unhappy mind will eventually manifest into an unhappy body that will lead to countless doctor appointments and avenues of western medicine that will most likely give your body more to complain about than to heal with.

This book is to show you that no one gets up in the morning with the idea that they want to get sick or run into obstacles that derail them, and I want to show you that life's experiences can come at a cost. Through acknowledgement of our own internal power to heal, we can lead the body into restoration and rebalance through inspired healing action, regardless of our experiences.

Use this book as a gateway into your body's natural healing abilities. I hope my story and my practice inspires you to join me in releasing what holds you back, and helps you to step into vitality.

My Understanding and Experience of Reflexology

You may find yourself asking the question, what is reflexology? Questions are always healthy. Reflexology is based on the theory that the feet hold a series of pressure points that directly link to specific regions, organs and systems within the body. When pressure is applied to these points, the parts directly connected are stimulated, activated and give the body the opportunity to cleanse, reignite and reinvigorate.

The feet are also known as the second heart because when blood is pumped out of the left side of the heart to be oxygenated by the lungs, travelling back into the right side for it then to be pumped all the way round the body to give you what you need to function, it is in the feet that the blood is given a boost to defy gravity and pump all the way up through the body again. The feet hold more weight than you might think. When you stand on your feet, it isn't just the mass of your body that they support, it is every single system that enables you to take another step, inhale another breath and live another day.

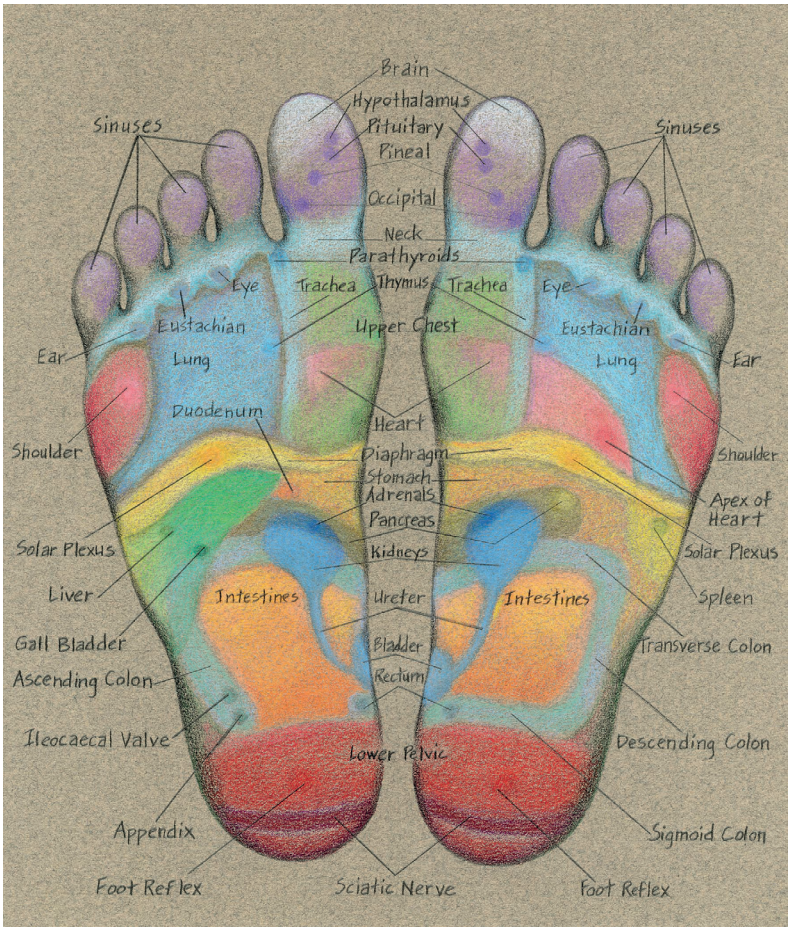
It's my understanding that in order to live in optimum health we must firstly learn to become aware of what we digest and store in this life, and secondly, we must make it a priority to release what doesn't serve us. When I use words such as digest and store, I'm not talking about food and fat reserves, though what I do talk about happens in a similar way. We digest and process the world around us every minute of every day, and we hold on to some of what we see, hear, touch, taste and smell much in the same way that fat builds up inside us if we don't expel enough energy to burn it off. Whilst some of what we hold on to might be good and positive, there will be a portion that will be negative, and in that negativity, whether that be self-doubt, low self-worth, lack of confidence, an argument, the breakdown of a relationship, the death of a loved one, a house move or a job loss, within these moments of doubt or worry or stress, we hold on, simply because we haven't been given permission and taught to let it go.

Through my journey into optimum health with the support of reflection and universal reflexology I have come to understand that there are many ways that people choose to let go. Some will do it through the ritual of burning secrets on an open fire, some will dance and allow movement to gently unfurl what needs to come loose and break free, some will enjoy massage, the energetic healing of reiki, or a return to nature through forest walks and wild swims. Each of these practices have healing power to some degree, and I love all of them, yet for me, reflexology is my optimum key to wellness and vitality, and if it can work for me, it can work for you too.

Before we begin, I want to present to you a diagram of the feet. This picture will illustrate that each part of each foot represents a corresponding part of the body. This illustration also offers amazing insight into just how powerful your feet can be if they're given the opportunity to support your health.

Now you've seen the corresponding points of the body mapped out on the feet diagram, it's important you're given more information on the major systems that currently support your health within your body, and the language we read from the feet. Firstly, let's take a look at what those major systems are:

1. Respiratory system – facilitates the breath in which you breathe in oxygen and breathe out carbon dioxide. If you imagine yourself walking up a hill at a fast pace, when you reach the top, or maybe just halfway up, you may begin to become more aware


Brain
Hypothalamus
Pituitary
Pineal
Occipital
Neck
Parathyroids
Thymus
Sinuses
Sinuses
Eye
Trachea
Trachea
Eye
Eustachian
Upper Chest
Eustachian
Ear
Lung
Lung
Ear
Duodenum
Heart
Shoulder
Diaphragm
Shoulder
Stomach
Adrenals
Apex of Heart
Pancreas
Solar Plexus
Kidneys
Solar Plexus
Liver
Intestines
Ureter
Intestines
Spleen
Gall Bladder
Bladder
Transverse Colon
Ascending Colon
Rectum
Ileocaecal Valve
Descending Colon
Lower Pelvic
Appendix
Sigmoid Colon
Foot Reflex
Sciatic Nerve
Foot Reflex

of your breath. When we rest, we barely notice our respiratory system working like clockwork in the background. But whether we rest or exercise, it's always in operation.

2. Cardiovascular system – circulates oxygenated blood and nutrients throughout the muscles and removes waste. Whilst walking up that same hill, you don't really think about how your body is making the moves, and it's worth noting that without your cardiovascular system pumping oxygenated blood, as well as nutrients from food around your body, your physical form would have no power to move at all.
3. Endocrine system – produces hormones that regulate certain bodily functions. Hormones have a lot to answer for and I don't just mean for women of all ages. When the endocrine system doesn't function properly we can experience everything from fatigue to hallucinations. Hormones don't just swing our moods from one way to another, they control appetite, sleep and brain function.
4. Muscular system – enables movement through flexing and relaxing muscles. The obvious image that comes to mind is a bicep curl. When the bicep carries a weight to the shoulder, the muscle responds, carries, holds and releases. What is less likely to spring to mind is the muscular system being compromised by multiple sclerosis, a chronic, incurable illness that slowly or quickly degenerates muscles, causes spasms and leads to loss of muscular control.

5. Nervous system – coordinates bodily functions and communicates between the brain, spinal cord and the rest of the body. We associate the nervous system with hyper vigilance, anxiety, or trapped nerve pain. What we don't typically consider when talking about this system is how clever it is in communicating what we need, such as coordination and control; both of these things we learn at a very early age. Memory storage and retrieval are another important, and often forgotten, roles of the nervous system. This highlights just two of many other seriously important functions.
6. Lymphatic/immune system – protects the body from disease and infections. This system keeps us safe. It is a warrior on the inside, fighting against things that we often don't even realise are within us. And our lymphatic system wins, over and over again. Even when we have a cold, this is a sign that the system is winning. It is burning out the bad stuff, making our bodies sneeze, cough and drip mucus, expelling it so that it can't harm us.
7. Skeletal system – provides structural support and protection for the body. As we age, bones lose density which means we need to increase our intake of nutrients that are naturally declining. It might surprise you to know that a reflexology practitioner may be able to look at your feet and know whether you need nutrients to support bone health. As we get older, bones will break more easily and recovery will take longer. Supporting bone health now is the

best form of defence. One of the fastest ways to lose independence is to break a bone.

8. Digestive system – breaks down food and absorbs nutrients. This system is integral to every other system within the body. If the digestive system falters, every other system goes along with it.
9. Urinary system – filters waste from the blood and produces urine. Toxins building up in the body will be no one's friend, and we often don't know anything about it until pain rears its head in a UTI (urinary tract infection). This can be painful and debilitating.

10a Reproductive system (male) – enables reproduction. This system only comes into focus when you don't want it to; when you're trying for a baby and nothing is happening.

10b Reproductive system (female) – enables reproduction. The female reproductive system comes into play from as early as ten years of age for females and stays for a huge part of the remainder of a woman's life. It takes women years to understand just how powerful this system is both in identity of gender and the ability to create life and to bring life into the world.

11 Integumentary system – protects the body from external damage and regulates temperature. Imagine you're sitting in the sun on a hot day. Without this system functioning well, you'll overheat, be unable to regulate temperature and be at serious risk of life-threatening illness.

Now that we've covered the 11 major systems of the body, with these systems in mind, let's take a look at how reflexology plays a part in keeping these systems functional. Reflexology stimulates a system through the pressure points within the feet. Through massage, pressure, thumb walking or other motions, reflexology is applied to the feet with finger and thumb movements. The various systems within the body can release blocks of energy, stored tension and discomfort within those corresponding areas, leaving the system unblocked and the person feeling immediately lighter.

Before we move forward, let's take a look at the language of the feet and how our bodies talk to us. This is what I will look for when a person puts their feet into my hands:

1. I will observe a general overview of the feet
2. I will look for any local contraindications
3. I will look at the colour of the feet
4. I will notice how the feet smell
5. I will feel the temperature of the feet
6. I will feel for excess moisture or dryness
7. I will feel the tone of the feet
8. I will look and feel for changes in skin texture
9. I will look and feel for any structural foot disorders
10. I will move the feet to check for mobility and flexibility
11. I will examine the toenails

Each practice, from numbers 1 to 11, will tell me something of how your body is functioning on the inside within all eleven major systems of the body.

If you're new to reflexology, you may have deeper questions, such as where did it come from? Reflexology can be traced back to Egyptian times as early as 2500 BC. Through the hieroglyphics on tomb walls, it was identified that the Egyptians were sensitive to their hands and feet (both primary areas for reflexology). It has been long used in Chinese medicine, and also within the indigenous tribes of North America. The study and practice of reflexology has evolved into its modern-day form, and an understanding of its benefits can be found across the globe, with many studies finding the practice to have direct links to improved health and wellness.

Why use it today?

It's important to understand the connection that exists between the mind, body and spirit. Even if you don't connect with the 'spirit' sense of the practice, it's hard to ignore the mind and body connection. Having a bad day at work causes emotional stress, which if not shifted, can in time lead to physical manifestations within the body. There is a molecular structure to the energy that we breathe in. If oxygen and water meet, the product from this is hydrogen. It manifests into an energy form all of its own. In this same way, we can begin to see that energy of all kinds has the ability to combine, creating new energy forms such as disease and discomfort and even pain. This energy is deposited within the body. When this energy is not acknowledged and released, it creates a store. It multiplies, it causes blocks and one or several of the body systems that we all take for granted, like the air we breathe

through the respiratory system that enables us to walk up that hill, can become polluted, poisoned, toxic, however you want to phrase it, and the outcome is that you stop feeling great and start feeling pain, fatigue, discomfort and dis-ease within the body. This can lead to chronic illness causing more pain and a diluted lifestyle. It can lead to mutations of cells causing more serious afflictions within the body. Whilst this sounds like doom and gloom, I am merely raising points to consider. If you are not aware of how the body and mind is connected already, hopefully this will grant you a little further curiosity into finding out more. Whilst not all disease is caused through lifestyle, there are many that are. And so, there are many that can be avoided or maintained to give you a better quality of life and a better experience within your body.

How can life cause illness within the body?

A very good example of this is to call upon the nervous system. In today's world, we are hyper vigilant, we are chasing goals faster than we can meet them, we are not connecting as well as we could be with nature. This has an impact on the nervous system. If you consider our nervous system to be a cup full of tolerance, you might also consider what the effect on our body might be if this cup was drained dry. The cushion we previously experienced is replaced with sensitivity and a rawness that can't be denied. The effect this has on our bodies is so violent it makes us freeze, it makes us scared and it makes us sick.

When I was younger, I thought that everyone else had life figured out. I channelled all my energy into

relationships that didn't serve me, and this had a violent effect on my nervous system. I carried these afflictions within my body, thinking that they were mine to hold, feeling that I needed to be better at life, and when I grew better at life, these afflictions would simply melt away. My younger self had no idea that I was harvesting a body for chronic illness in doing this.

Chronic illness or dis-ease within the body manifests from external environments and relationships: work, home, family, friendship groups. Manifestations can also come from feelings of isolation, overwhelm, anxiety, depression, anger and frustration, amongst others. Life has a habit of showing us things that we don't care for, but when we look the other way and choose not to deal with something, we invite something much more sinister into our mind and body. It creeps through the side door when it knows no one is watching. But if you choose to look at a problem, head on, and work through it to understand it and to heal it, that side door stays firmly locked because as you work through, you break and detach any hold that the situation has on you and you then release it, let it go and move forward with a spring in your step.

Who is reflexology for?

The mind-body connection is a strong force, and whilst we use reflexology to release build-ups, blockages and toxins from our systems which then supports our physiology to work well, reflexology also works wonders for athletes helping them heal faster, and the lymphatic, the skeletal, the cardiovascular, the endocrine, the digestive and the

muscular system all have to work in optimum form so that optimum performance can be met. In short, you can be anyone from any walk of life going through any experience at any age. If you want to explore ways into vitality, then step into the world of universal reflexology.

Why take my word for it?

I thought you may ask this. So, for the purpose of you finding yourself in one or many of the personal stories, pains and triumphs within the following pages, I simply ask you to join me as I tell you where I began and how far gone I was into the fast-paced life of the West before I realised that I needed to change track and leave it all behind to gain wellness, as well as collect all the pieces of the person I was supposed to become along the way.

THIS IS MY GIFT TO YOU.

I invite you to join me on a journey down memorylane where I collected the lessons that I bring to you now.

Without experience and reflection we are unable to learn about ourselves, and discover how we can live better in our bodies.

Warmly, Patricia

BODY LANGUAGE

What my body taught me:

"Punch me and I bleed.
Break me physically and I will break for all to see."
– Patricia Lavelle, a child's discovery.

Lesson: this is the most basic way of my body communicating to myself and to others. What is seen is easy to understand with a remedy to heal.

Chapter 1

Every Situation is a Lesson to Learn From

When I was three, I broke my leg. I'd been riding my tricycle and fallen off into a sloping rockery spread across shoots of lilac saffron and moss. I remember it distinctly because my accident cancelled a family holiday. I still to this day see Mum walking down the corridor out of the hospital ward. Away she went leaving me behind, left with a bag of my toys, her frame shrinking smaller as the distance grew between us. A distance I'm not sure we ever came back from. I was quite self-sufficient as a toddler and confident enough to allow people in blue and white uniforms to look after me. I remember being quite calm about the whole ordeal, even as I watched the matron share my toys with the other children in the beds alongside mine. I was mesmerised by her candid display of entitlement as if my toys were hospital property, but I didn't say a word in protest.

I was in hospital with my leg in traction for eight weeks. So, it was just as well that I loved to chat to anyone who would listen, and now I had a brand-new audience to charm. I guess you might have called me an auburn-haired Shirley Temple, able to attract people's attention and draw them to me, and I was always eager to turn a dramatic event into something lighter. After all, who wanted heavy drama to fill their life? Even at the age of three, I knew this was not something that I wanted, and so I went out of my way to dance through each day (metaphorically speaking), with a cast on my leg and a smile on my face.

At this age of innocence, we let in the light. As we grow, if we're not mindful of our ability to let it in, we lose it. In fact, we're so full of light when we're young that our minds wonder at curiosities, and our brains act as sponges that delight in seeking out new things. We don't feel danger in the way we might as an adult. We feel safe within the confines of our family unit, and because of this, we can be brave. For me, I felt that the world was a safe place full of people who took in the light. As did I. And so, I thought nothing of dazzling them with mine at every opportunity I got. From my hospital bed, with the nurses, and when my mum came to visit me, my smile would reach my ears. There's something quite precious about smiles, don't you agree? Smiles have the power to cheer hearts, to ease nerves and to infect another person with joy.

Mum would call me her 'wee lamb', and she would call my dad 'Faither' which was her Scottish dialect for

him. My brothers were called by their actual names, Hugh, Michael and Andrew. Whilst I find my history thrilling as I recount my experiences over the years, I'm bringing you the most meaningful ones within these very pages, because I want every word to hold a purpose for you, to offer you your very own window into your own experiences and to show you just how our lives have shaped our present being.

As a small child, I spent most of my time with these people: Dad, Mum and my three brothers. When I wasn't breaking my bones, we were actually able to go on holidays. I would sit in the front seat of the car on my dad's lap as my mother drove our Renault 15. Dad could drive, of course, Mum just didn't trust him to do it the way she wanted; much like I've found myself always wanting to do things my own way, too. We drove to the Highlands, a place that was close to my parents' hearts. "Are we there yet?" we'd ask, hopeful that the next corner would take us to our destination, which of course every corner did take us closer and closer, inch by tiny inch. The journey felt longer than it needed to be, or should have been in our young, impatient minds, and with each corner we held our breath with sheer anticipation of it being the last, only to find another corner lined with trees and open blue sky waiting to be taken in.

This is significant because these winding roads remind me of life and just how long we have to wait sometimes to truly accomplish something. You set yourself a goal. It could be a long road trip such as our family holiday, a career advancement, weight loss or a

healthier version of you in whatever form that looks like. With each corner you inch your way to where you want to be, and just when you think you've made it, you realise that the last few miles travelled, the pounds lost or the extra work projects that you've taken on, were just the first part in your commitment to get where you want to be. A heavy sigh escapes your lips and your chest sinks in disappointment because beyond the corner, lies another corner, seemingly always uphill. After a few of these, your spirit deflates, your energy weakens and your resolve loosens, meaning the weight can go back on, the career advancement can slip through your fingers or the family holiday can begin on a low, setting the tone for the entire duration.

The thing about bends in the road is that they're usually there for a reason. They stop us going off the road, and potentially nose-diving down the side of a cliff. They're to tighten your faith in self. They're to show you that you're in the present moment because you can't see behind the last corner or beyond the next. You can only see what's directly in front of you. Which means, you can only do what's there to be done, in that moment.

I understand this frustration so well. But if you're only looking at the frustration itself then you're missing the glorious signs for what's causing you to feel this way. Looking at things in more detail can come with extreme discomfort because the answers are often not what we seek to find. In my experience some questions go unanswered but greater, unexpected discoveries are made as we pursue them. You could actually find yourself or strengthen your

health and well-being a lot sooner when you pay attention to all the signposts standing before you. In many of my experiences I've found that it's not my drive that held me back but the people around me and my thinking towards them and of myself. But of course, this was not so evident at the time. In fact, far from it. And because of this, my health suffered greatly.

There are times, such as when I broke my leg, when an accident can come out of the blue and derail you. Perhaps, if this has happened to you, you might have asked yourself, 'Why now?', 'Why me?', 'What is this all about?'. And the true answer to this lies within the reflection process during your healing journey.

Something physical, such as a broken bone, is very easy for people to understand. For example: you fall, you break your leg. With this, a new physical layer is added to help the healing process; a cast. Everybody can agree that something is wrong and therefore needs to be fixed. They can see it with their own eyes. But not all dis-ease within the body can be seen by everyone and this leads to more dis-ease within the mind and spirit.

I was a quirky child, which befits the quirky adult I bloomed into. I remember punching myself on the nose to make it bleed. This fascinated me. Not only that my body bled so easily but that people paid attention. Blood evoked a reaction. A thing to be fixed. And oh, how people love to fix things. Have you noticed this? I too love to fix things: objects, situations, people. And as much as I understand the process of fixing a broken leg, or a bloody nose, I understand at an even greater level the process

of healing many other aspects of your health from the nervous system right through to your soul.

When my leg was healed and I returned home from hospital, I did a funny thing. I would walk the 'brick'. The heavier the better as it meant I could challenge my healing leg with more weight. I pushed this brick in my baby doll pram. My 'brick baby' soon became the talk of adults and other kids. "What is she doing pushing that brick around?" I'd hear them say with laughter. But it was never about the brick. It was about healing my leg, carefully, intuitively, giving it the therapy it needed. No one knew or understood this better than I did. Even in my three years of age. It was my body, after all. I didn't care what they all thought. In the same way that I still don't care what others think of me now.

There are far too many single-minded opinions in this world that consider only one form of healing. Yet, there are thousands of years of evidence of many other forms of medicine and healing practices to draw from. The western world has become intoxicated with pharmaceutical organisation agenda that could be described as self-servicing to those money-making machines if you saw fit to regard it in this way. I'm sure it all started for good reason, and I agree that there are forms of western medical practice that have been revolutionary in saving lives, yet there are also millions of individuals prescribed antidepressant medication at the mere whisper of 'my mental health'. Millions of people just like you are turning to pills as a quick fix without realising there is no such thing. The tablets you're taking may help for a short time,

until your stress levels increase and you visit your doctor for a higher dose. Which some happily agree to. Your body is learning to rely upon external sources for internal balance. The pharmaceutical companies are getting richer through this reliance, and your body is getting less reliant on its own natural healing process. Do I need to tell you that it could be much simpler by taking the time to learn the messages your body gives to you, so that you can self-heal?

What if there was a way to truly see the magnificent healing properties residing within your very being right now? Some medications override our natural healing abilities. Of course, it's a wonderful place to be in if you have the privilege of seeking alternative medicine, right? But what if it wasn't a privilege at all? What if it's yours for the taking?

I'm not just talking about those who suffer with mental health conditions; I'm speaking from experience when I share with you that your body has the ability to heal far greater dis-ease within its physical form naturally. After being diagnosed with multiple sclerosis (MS) in my thirties and living a life way beyond the capabilities of others who were given this same diagnosis, I have courage of conviction. I walk. I dance. I run. I sing. I love to move. And more importantly, I don't just practise self-healing, I choose to heal others with my wisdom of the body by teaching them how to learn its language and natural healing abilities.

We have the power to self-heal and just like my body healed my broken leg, my body continues to heal the MS

within me. My body continues to show me what I need in any given situation. This isn't just about physical and mental well-being, this is also about spiritual well-being. There are many things that stand in our way to show us who we are, or who we are not, just as there are many people who stand in our way because they don't want us to be better. But the time has come for you to learn new ways of understanding situations and discovering how they might affect your health, and because I have been party to many deeply uncomfortable mental, physical and spiritual experiences that I'm going to share with you, I'm going to show you that opportunities for healing are all around you.

There are health concerns that you can see and there are those health concerns that are deep within you that no one can reach except you. The things I do to heal myself might be from the road less travelled, but my methods have worked. Every time. I have been on a tremendously turbulent yet incredibly obscure and fulfilling journey where many of my life lessons were uncovered later, but in the case of my leg, that was a pretty quick lesson (I broke my leg and after the right attention and practice, my body healed itself). At the time, this meant that by pushing that brick I was strong enough to walk all the way to my friend's house (with my mum) where we laughed playing shop whilst eating crisps crunched up in cheese. In the case of my MS diagnosis, a window of opportunity was thrown wide open for me to explore, learn and to grow from. And, on a mind and spiritual level, understanding how to attract good people to you that have your back, has

seemingly been one of my life's lessons which has finally been understood (with the help of some very good people in my life). But none of this came easy or fast.

I'd like to share with you a difficult lesson. I'm sure you'll agree that patience takes some will to hold on to. This goes without saying. But smiling through patience, breathing in the good that awaits you, knowing that it's for you and will not pass you by, is a pretty special thing to learn. There's something to be said about patience and smiling. Smiling through the patience gives you an advantage over others who see their falls as problems. Smiling is also considered the new holistic botox. Try it and see how your face smooths out and lifts. I never saw a broken leg as a problem. I never saw MS as a problem. In a way, every challenge has led to a new adventure. I've met lots of new people. I've learned that I can survive and thrive despite dis-ease within my body. I learnt that my inner light didn't have to go out just because I'd been hurt in whatever fashion pain was inflicted on me. In fact, I learnt that when you break you let more light in.

Before we dive into the rest of the book, you can test this theory for yourself. If anything I've said sounds frustrating, a way to help you when facing a multitude of dissatisfying corners, twists, turns and at times blocks on your journey is for you to have a checklist of all the corners you've already been round, all the blocks you've already encountered. From marking each one with a summary of what happened, how you felt, what you learnt and what positive experience came because of it, you can recognise growth and purpose for those corners and blocks, which

in turn will give you peace of mind at the next one. Put all these corner records together and you have yourself an account of the journey so far, and of course, all the ways you've evolved and all the ways these corners have helped you. There might be small ways in which you've changed the way you think about a situation which makes it easier to work within, you might have shifted your mindset on how you view food or types of food, you might have made a list of all the beautiful sights you've passed that you may not have witnessed had you tried to take a shorter journey, or all the beauty you'd have missed had you not journeyed at all. You might have avoided going off a cliff, running into greater trouble or being in a place that you discovered you really didn't like, had it not been for those blocks and corners.

It's not just the destination that enriches our lives, but indeed the mysteries and wonders that are unravelled along the way. It's not just a handful of childhood memories that I share but moments of healing power and personal growth in learning patience.

We learn things about ourselves through lessons in life. These lessons, albeit often uncomfortable, serve us well. Tenacity is a wonderful trait to possess, and if you don't yet have it in your toolbox, I urge you to seek it out. This will see you through. This, along with finding the beauty on route to your goal.

BODY LANGUAGE

What my body taught me:

"*When I give, I am taking from myself.*"
– Patricia Lavelle

Lesson: It's a gift to give to others and be what other people need – but if that's not reciprocated and your cup isn't replenished – your body, mind and spirit loses out.

Chapter 2

Batteries and Vacuums

There are two types of people in this life: the battery and the vacuum. I love this image because it's easy to frame the types of people in your life within these two groups. A battery person will feed you positive energy, encouragement and validation. A vacuum person will be only too happy to accommodate a battery person because they make them feel good about themselves. But the vacuum person doesn't necessarily like or want to have an authentic connection with the battery person. Instead, they see them only as a positive charge to their life flow, and so they take, take, take leaving the battery person depleted and exhausted, and maybe even anxious.

It's often difficult to frame a person when you lack life experience, or if you've been surrounded by vacuums all your life. If you are the only battery person that you know then your experience will be centred around vacuums and you may have come to understand this as the norm. And,

if this is your experience, it may be even harder to come to terms with this because I imagine you've given your positive charge with love, willingness and commitment to the happiness of others.

There are times when this is okay. There is a gentle rhythm of ebb and flow, like the world's oceans that surround us. When a person is of a similar 'battery' type to yourself, you might find that, at times, they lend you a positive charge through encouragement and validation and wanting you to live out your dreams and desires, and in turn, when the need arises, you return the positive charge to power their goals, dreams and aspirations. This person could be in the shape of a close friend, a partner, a son or daughter, a niece or nephew, brother or sister, or even a parent. After all, we each long for authentic life connections that support us on a personal level throughout our lifetime, and we look to see the good in people.

Unfortunately, vacuum people also exist within all of the titles I just mentioned. And, when they appear in the form of any of the above, it can be incredibly difficult to see where your willingness to show them love ends and their willingness to drain you begins. Much of the time, a lack of awareness lies within the vacuum. Most don't act with vicious intent to take from you. Instead, they only feel the good that comes from you and find it easier to draw the positive charge that you extend to them rather than find it within themselves.

Of course, there are times where we all seek counsel. This is quite different from being vacuous to another person. At such times, battery types of people will look to

a trusted someone for support, to get another perspective, but ultimately to affirm their own strength in taking whatever next step is required. It's likely that you'll be very particular about the person you seek counsel from because to go to a vacuum person will almost certainly leave you feeling confused and worse off than when you sought their support in the first place.

A vacuum person will not know how to support you. They may fumble with ideas and anecdotes which will all somehow lead back to themselves. This is simply because they haven't learnt how to function and give endlessly as a battery type of person does, and why would they need to when their battery support (you) has never faltered? When a vacuous person is presented with a drained, broken or faltering battery person, it can be unnerving for them. They may not, as in their typical style, be aware of this, but something within them will be sending red flags to their nervous system as a warning sign that things could get rocky when they don't feel that charge coming through. If this happens, you may hear them tell you everything you want to hear in that moment, drawing you into safety. And, as much as they may care for you, it is very much their safety they are afraid to lose, just as much as yours.

We humans are nothing if not complex creatures. We take on personality traits relative to our experiences. If we like to help and heal others, then we are true givers (batteries). If we haven't done the work on ourselves yet it doesn't mean that we can't see the light in someone else who has. Vacuums can see your glowing crown and they want a piece of it, if not to steal it altogether for themselves.

They see that you've somehow got what they need. They don't question why you have it – they just know it's a viable source of energy for them. And they want to covet it without doing the hard work to earn it.

My next example is from when I was twenty. I loved the idea of being loved. Don't we all? It doesn't change as we age. We all LOVE love. We each want to belong. We each like to be personally chosen. And when it happens, we project ourselves onto the other person. Most of us in this world are beings of light. This light absorbs within our hearts in rich and wondrous ways. When someone chooses us, we believe it is for pure reasons. Why would we assume otherwise?

But, as it happens, we all evolve at different paces. Some people have more emotional intelligence than a hundred people put together, whilst others hide from emotion because they don't appreciate how vulnerable it makes them feel. When we're young, we have less wisdom to navigate emotional experiences. This, in conjunction with a desire to be desired, can lead us into situations which ultimately hurt us.

My first boyfriend, the name irrelevant, was plucked from a crowd of other boys I knew at that time, yet this particular boy stood out. There was something charismatic about his nature. He was a chef at the Crest Hotel at Gatwick where I worked. I'd been staying in staff accommodation where we could be sitting up all night and chatting to the early hours. The vibrancy of the goings-on at the hotel was a laugh a minute. You could always expect the unexpected with visitors that were about to board a

plane for another country. They were more liberated than most. Amongst the escapades was finding a naked girl in the bushes on hotel grounds and the head chef's car wrapped in cling film. On the less vibrant side, there was also a darkness where visitors would book into the hotel because something in their lives had broken. Here, they could be anonymous, avoiding responsibility and questioning through the shelter of an airport hotel. As with all things that go up, such as energy and laughs, there must also be balance. The gravity of a new situation would bring us all crashing to the ground with a heavy thump.

It was me who found him; an older man, his grey lifeless body, an almost empty whisky bottle by his side, another twenty, empty, beneath his bed. The room stank of a life derailed; stale alcohol with its promise never fulfilled. No one was around to help this man other than me finding his body, too late to offer any real help. It sent a shock wave throughout all the staff as we wrestled with our own existence and permanence within this life. I don't know if this man was a vacuum or a battery. I only know that he was depleted of everything. It seemed to me that he was a truly broken spirit.

Within the hotel staff, I'd had my eye on the boy who would become my first boyfriend for some time, whilst another boy was the one I called 'friend'. My friend and I would regularly have the same days off and drive down to Brighton with the engine rumbling into my ears and petrol fumes filling the back of my throat. There was a good feeling between me and my friend. It was comfortable. Natural. There was no vacuum. Just two friends enjoying

days off. I also had a female roommate. We worked on reception together. She looked after me, ironing my shirts and driving me to her hometown of Warrington to show me around. There was nothing vacuous about her either. Looking back, I can clearly see the type of person my first boyfriend was when I framed him against these two people that I called friends. He was very much a vacuum.

I allowed my boyfriend to be more important than me. At first, it was important for me to draw his attention, then it was important that I held it. He was a bare minimum sort of guy. Do you know the type? The 'give you just enough to keep you hooked, but nothing more' type of guy. It's the 'nothing more' that's the damaging part. Nothing more means that you're left constantly wondering how to be better, how to be more, how to be enough for the other person in the hope that one day they will give all of themselves to you. Had the older man I found lifeless encountered such experiences that had bled him dry through trying to be something to someone?

My boyfriend had his own issues, as is a typical style for a vacuum-type person. He came from a religious family. This was reason enough for him to 'have to' keep his distance from me on a physical level because his older brother had recently got a girl pregnant which cast enormous discomfort on his family. He vowed never to repeat his brother's mistake as he'd seen how hard he'd had it ever since. In some ways I wondered whether this was a convenient excuse, but in most ways, I saw it as viable. I told myself it was respectable, even. The relationship between us was strange, an 'arm-width distance apart'

sort of relationship. This was an existence that made me feel in constant need to show him how pure I was, how capable I was to accept him, his family and their values. In turn, I cast all of my own needs aside.

This is dangerous territory for anyone pursuing a relationship with a person that is not emotionally intelligent, mature or able to think for himself. But what was I to know at the age of twenty when all I wanted was for him to accept me and tell me that I was enough. This, of course, was my mistake. A mistake that would haunt me for decades in the shape of a love unfulfilled and unclosed. Eventually, the door shut between us but not before I had ample opportunity to berate my self-worth. He, on the other hand, did none of this. I don't know how he's grown over the years. I hope as much as I have, possibly more because he certainly needed to be the one who dug deeper for emotional growth, but for argument's sake, let's hope that he's learnt to be less vacuous in the same way that I've learnt to be less accommodating.

Losing sight of the importance of self-love, self-worth and self-validation is like telling someone they can take your crown to light their way, and stamp out your light for good. In actual fact, the greatest gift that you can unwrap is learning that all you seek in self-love, self-worth and validation lies within you. And it's always in reach and asks for nothing but your belief in return.

Imagine that your body is wrapped in layers. Layers of thoughts. Layers of experiences. Layers of opinions. Layers of inspirations. Layers of hopes. Layers of dreams. Layers of limits. All of these layers have been built over