

THE Healing Field



*A young psychiatrist's battle with his anorexic patient,
her hunger strike against God, and their journey
through the dark night of the soul*

*"Beautifully
crafted and
gorgeously delivered
composition, based on a
real life story."*

*—Wendy Behary, LCSW
Disarming the
Narcissist*

Howard E. Richmond, M.D.

THE HEALING FIELD

**A Young Psychiatrist's Battle with His Anorexic Patient, Her Hunger Strike
against God, and Their Journey through the Dark Night of the Soul**

Howard E. Richmond, MD

"The Doctor is effective only when he himself is affected."

—Carl Gustav Jung

Published by Mind Expander Press

Copyright © 2014 by Howard E. Richmond, MD

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, distributed, or otherwise transmitted in any form or by any means, including photocopying, recording, or other electronic means, without the expressed permission of the author, except for the purpose of brief quotations that appear as part of critical reviews and certain noncommercial purposes as permitted by copyright laws. For permissions, please contact the publisher at: HowardRichmondMD.com

This book is not intended as a substitute for treatment of psychological or emotional conditions that may require evaluation and care from a physician or appropriate mental health professional. The intent of the author is that the book be a source of inspiration and support for one's quest for physical, mental, and spiritual wellbeing.

Published by Mind Expander Press, Encinitas, California

ISBN: 1497475716

Dedicated to those on the journey
through fear and judgment
toward love and compassion.

Preface

Dear Reader,

I wrote *The Healing Field* only at the urgent call of my patient, whom I call Lori in this novelized version of our story. “You have to write about this,” she implored. “You have to write about the miracles, because it can help someone else.”

It never crossed my mind to share such a deeply personal and intimate journey of one of my patients. Confidentiality, after all, is a foundation of the doctor-patient relationship. Yet on a deeper level, a voice inside me knew she was right. If she had the courage to bare her soul, and if our journey together could inspire others or affect them positively, then I was all in.

The Healing Field needed more than a dozen years of cultivation before it was ready to bloom. While names have been changed and some minor characters and events have been fictionalized to maintain privacy, the novel reflects the essence of what unfolded between my patient (the aforementioned Lori) and me (Henry Kaplan in the book).

Howard E. Richmond, MD

Encinitas, California

Prologue

Bullets for Jesus

March 23, 1976

Lori Blackwood Johnson finished preparing sandwiches at her parents' home in rural southern California. Tuna fish, tomato, and avocado, sliced to perfection. She barely noticed Jimmy Swaggart preaching in the living room on AM radio: "Don't listen to the hedonists," he spouted. "God doesn't want you to be a homosexual."

Her blue eyes peered out the kitchen window toward the graying sky. Other things were weighing on her mind. *The Lord rained upon Sodom and Gomorrah brimstone and fire.* A beam of sunshine broke through the clouds without warning, highlighting vegetation on the distant hills.

In four days, Lori would be turning twenty-one. She had married suddenly, nine months earlier. Lori's son was almost a year old now, napping in her old bedroom. It had been a shotgun wedding. That was the murmur from the congregants. *I feel so overwhelmed,* she thought. *How did my life become so confusing?* Lori didn't feel prepared for being a wife or a mom. But what worried her most was the fact that her sister Linda, who was four years older than Lori, had become so terribly depressed and withdrawn. Linda was spending more time alone in the bedroom each day, blinds shut tight, darkness consuming her light.

Lori's soft shoulders sank heavily from guilt. Linda had become increasingly withdrawn ever since Lori gave birth. *That's because I was able to keep my baby,* Lori reminded herself. *Linda's baby was born out of wedlock.* Lori flashed back five years to the time Linda got pregnant and told their father.

Linda was nineteen, Lori fifteen. Getting pregnant outside the bonds of marriage was a serious offense in the watchful eyes of their community and church. Lori's parents called an emergency family meeting and summoned the unwed members of their flock to the master bedroom. Lori, Linda, sixteen-year-old James, and twenty-one-year-old Gail gathered at their doorway. The oldest daughter, Theresa, was married and on a religious mission with her husband in Southeast Asia.

"Line up single file," Mr. Blackwood barked.

Like the Von Trapp family, the four siblings rapidly assembled in birth order—Gail first and Lori last, with James and Linda sandwiched in the middle. Mom, tight-lipped and quietly agitated, stood next to her husband at the end of their twin beds with their old-fashioned box springs and rounded spruce headboards. Lori's tongue furtively flicked the top of her palate, a revival of the nervous habit she thought had faded long ago.

"Forward, march!" Jeremiah Blackwood commanded with the authority vested in him by virtue of his position. Dads knew best, the patriarchal tribe assured most assertively and absolutely. One by one, the frightened children entered their parents' sterile bedroom. Linda, usually so sweet, pretty, and dainty—like an award-winning Japanese orchid—hung her head particularly low. All three girls had their eyes glued to their feet. James, knowing the heat was off him, breathed easier than his sisters.

Their father began with a familiar quote. "Every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust and enticed."

Lori wished she could hold and comfort her dear sister, whose pain felt like her own. She longed to reach past James with her outstretched arms and say, "Let me embrace you, sweet Linda, and remind you I am by your side and love you dearly." But she dared not risk such an

effusive gesture. The fear of her father's wrath and rejection kept her own anger buried deep in a vault of trepidation and sadness.

"Then when lust hath conceived," Father continued solemnly, "it bringeth forth sin; and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death."

Lori's mother swallowed in wretched discomfort. She had just made a significant tithing at church, and now there was hell to pay.

"Lori!" the elder Blackwood snapped. "Which verse?"

James smirked with silent jealousy. Everyone knew Lori was a whiz on chapter and verse.

"James, chapter one, verses fourteen and fifteen," Lori muttered blankly to her ankles.

"Your sister has committed the evil act of fornication," their father proclaimed, "and has become pregnant." He paused to examine his other two daughters, as if searching for impurities. "And because of selfish gratification of her own pleasure, she has inflicted deep pain onto your mother and me."

Jeremiah L. Blackwood was a proud deacon and treasurer of the church that Lori's maternal grandfather, a minister, had founded. Lori's paternal grandmother had also been of the cloth. The whole family tapestry was woven in religious fibers. Now Father would have to resign.

No one dared breathe. Lori felt the burn of his stern gaze, but she also felt the silent despair she knew her sister was suppressing. Unable to stay silent any longer, she blurted out, "What about the baby?" She was trembling at the knees.

Her father ignored the outburst. "Since there is so much immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband."

First Corinthians 7:2, Lori remembered. Her eyelids twitched. *What about the baby?* she screamed inside.

Father pointed to Linda's flat belly. "The child will be placed in a Christian home." He glanced at his wife, who stood by expressionless. "And your mother and I have decided it's best that Linda go away while she shows evidence of her egregious sin."

Lori gasped. Linda muffled a sob. Gail didn't know what to do. James sneezed, drawing attention he did not want.

"Young man," his father said, "where will you find the following: 'The sexually immoral will not inherit the kingdom of God?'"

"Uh...uh..." James scratched his head. "John, chapter one, verse fourteen?"

Lori's body contracted further, as a flood of grief strained to be released. *Please don't ask me*, she thought, struggling to push back her tears.

"Wrong!" his father said. "You will memorize the whole verse by tomorrow night." He turned his head toward Lori. "Which is it?"

"First Corinthians, chapter six, verse sixteen," she mumbled through her clenched teeth.

"Correct. Now then." He swept his gaze from Gail to Lori. "About face!"

They turned around in unison.

When her belly began to bulge, Linda was sent to a Christian home in Los Angeles under a cloud of shame. Lori was left to grieve in silence, counting the months, the weeks and the days till her sister would return, trying not to think how Linda's heart would be gutted when the baby was taken away from her. As soon as the umbilical cord was cut, a middle-aged nurse, mask covering her face, whisked the infant away to a young married couple waiting in the next room

with adoption papers in hand. Linda had tried to scream, “No! She’s mine! Give her to me! She’s mine!” But no words had come out.

A flurry of rain pattered on the clay roof interrupting Lori’s thoughts.

“Satan loves those who lust after the pleasures of the body,” Jimmy Swaggart cried out from the radio.

She lurched around and reached for the off button. Flustered, she turned her attention back to lunch, a welcome distraction. *I pray that Linda is going to eat today*, she thought, counting the plates, making sure there was food for everyone.

A loud pop reverberated at the opposite end of the house and sent a jolt of lightning up Lori’s spine. She recoiled in anguish, assuming it was Father shooting a rabbit from the porch outside the master bedroom. Lori and Linda cringed when he fired at the furry creatures.

“Damn critters are eating the cantaloupes and watermelons again,” he’d yell, reloading his Winchester .22 caliber single-shot rifle.

“Please don’t shoot them,” they’d beg to no avail. Their words fell on deaf ears and their eyes swelled with tears. Finally they gave up and tried to be far away whenever their father got out his rifle.

But this shot sounded too close to be outside, and Lori’s mind bolted forward to the present. She looked out the side window, where she saw her father and her husband, Kevin, hurriedly leaving the fruit garden at the far end of the expansive backyard. Dad wasn’t shooting rabbits. Lori’s heart skipped a beat.

“Linda!” she called out.

There was no answer.

She took a quick breath. Her mind started to race. She shouted, “Linda! Answer me! Linda, please!” The silence only made her voice reverberate throughout the house. Lori sprinted down the long hall toward the sound of the shot. In the doorway of her parents’ bedroom, she came to a sudden halt, as if her body had slammed into a wall. Her mind reeled at the horrific scene before her.

Praise for *The Healing Field*

The Healing Field is more than a novel. It is a beautifully crafted and gorgeously delivered composition based on a real-life story. It thoughtfully reveals the bold and unabashed narratives of a psychiatrist and his patient amid their strengths and struggles, personal and conjoint experiences, and raw texture of authentic humanness. Narrating with a mellifluous and metaphorical voice, Howard Richmond offers readers a unique opportunity—inviting them to enter the private emotional residence of an unconventional treatment room. The book is respectfully and entertainingly written. Readers are permitted to peer into the personal world of a devoted physician and the complex challenges he shares from the confidential file folder of one woman who experiences a courageous awakening.

—Wendy T. Behary, LCSW, author of *Disarming the Narcissist: Surviving and Thriving with the Self-Absorbed*

The Healing Field is a riveting novel about the healing journey of doctor and patient—a universal story of how the power of love can conquer fear and make you want to live. Howard Richmond is the rare physician who knowingly crosses unconventional terrain, with creativity and empathy, in pursuit of saving his patient from self-destruction.

—Bill O’Hanlon, featured Oprah guest and author of *Do One Thing Different*

Dr. Howard Richmond has an extraordinary ability to share his wisdom and experience with his patients. He helps them with clarity, love, humor and great devotion. I’ve observed him lecture, teach and inspire his colleagues and the community for over two decades. In *The Healing Field*, we can clearly see how Dr. Richmond is able to support, guide and empower. It is a must read for anyone who is interested in seeing what the power of the human spirit can do in the midst of terrible emotional trauma. Kudos to both teachers: Lori and Dr. Howard.

—Daniel Vicario, M.D., ABIHM Medical Oncology and Integrative Oncology
Medical Director, U.C. San Diego Cancer Center Director, Integrative Oncology Program
San Diego Cancer Research Institute

Dr. Howard Richmond takes us on a healing journey through a complex web of human emotions, replacing fear, anger, shame and hate, with love, hope, courage and strength. His compassion and endurance combined with humor, intelligently sweep us into a world where the impossible not only becomes possible but real.

—Nina C. Payne, Author of *Moments in Time*

Howard Richmond's book, *The Healing Field*, is a story for all of us. Dr. Richmond offers us a clue to spontaneous medical remissions and how they can occur in a single moment of surrender and trust.

—Paul Brenner, MD, PhD, author of *Buddha in the Waiting Room* and *Seeing Your Life Through New Eyes*

Sometimes a story comes along that has universal power. In the case of *The Healing Field*, it is a story that forever changed two people's lives—and because they chose to share it, it has the power to change ours.

—Krista Roybal, MD, Founder and Medical Director of True Life Center for Wellbeing