

WHEN HOPE NEVER DIES

The Story of My Recovery From Cancer and The Program I used to Heal Myself

By Marlene McKenna with Tom Monte

Chapter 1

Spring was coming. The March air was cold and there was a stiff wind that still had to be faced. But the sun was getting stronger, the days just a little longer, and there were suggestions, here and there, that nature was about to rebound yet again, despite the awesome power of winter to snuff out all but the faintest embers of life. Spring always brings hope, I thought again, as I stood in my kitchen at the sink and filled a tea pot with water. I had to keep focusing on the positive. Somehow, I would find a way out of this terrible nightmare, I told myself. As I looked out my kitchen window, I saw a small patch of grass that had somehow been cleared of snow and was now basking in the waning afternoon sunlight.

It was March 18, 1986 and I was home because I was about to be admitted to Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston the following day to undergo exploratory surgery. I was 40-years-old, but my health had been collapsing in stages, like huge falling land masses from the side of some deteriorating cliff.

Three years before, I had been diagnosed with malignant melanoma. After a malignant mole had been removed from my back, I entered a frightening period in which new signs of disease seemed to emerge with shocking regularity. With each new symptom, my life seemed driven all the closer to some perilous cliff. For most of that three-year period, my doctors were unable to determine what exactly was wrong with me. None of them wanted to jump to the obvious conclusion: that the melanoma had recurred and that my symptoms were not as mysterious and inexplicable as my doctors had been saying. Finally, in February of 1986, the obvious was inescapable. Yes, my doctors finally acknowledged. The cancer probably had returned. I would have to undergo exploratory surgery to confirm or deny everyone's suspicions.

Now in my kitchen on the day before I was to be admitted to the hospital, I couldn't help but consider my life and the events that had brought me to this terrible precipice.