

STORIES OF COURAGE



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Introduction

All of us have an idea of what it means to be courageous. From a young age, we are fascinated by and drawn to stories that present courageous characters: Harry Potter, Katniss Everdeen from *The Hunger Games*, and even Wilbur the pig in *Charlotte's Web*. Courage, we learn, is something that even the most unlikely characters can discover within themselves just when they need it most. And because showing bravery is admirable, it makes us want to aspire to courage ourselves. But what exactly is courage?

Blockbuster movies often show bravery in stereotypical ways: brawny heroes standing up to villains; underdogs taking on mythical monsters. Certainly, flashy feats of physical bravery are exciting to watch, but there is far more to courage than that kind of bravery alone.

One type of courage is daring to follow one's own path, regardless of what others may say. It takes an unusual kind of courage to face the fear of the unknown and the possibility of failure. In 1972, a young man dropped out of college during his freshman year, in spite of his parents' disapproval, to follow his dreams. He then traveled to India to study Buddhism, hoping to gain the enlightenment that would help him achieve his goal: creating new technology. Four years later, he and a friend had invented one of the first personal computers. The young man was Steve Jobs, the co-founder of Apple.

"It is most important to have the courage to follow your heart and intuition," Jobs told the 2005 graduating class of Stanford University. "They somehow already know what you truly want to become. Everything else is secondary."

Another form of courage is standing up for what one believes is right. It is, of course, much easier to sit back and not speak out against injustice, inequality, or discrimination. After all, when one is silent, there is little chance of confrontation or unpleasant disagreement. However, as Martin Luther King, Jr. once pointed out, "Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter." Courageous people know that to witness injustice and do or say nothing about it is a form of cowardice—and a retreat into a meaningless type of existence. It

isn't necessary to win every fight against injustice to be considered brave. It is simply the willingness to fight at a time when a fight is needed. And as Martin Luther King, Jr. also said, "The time is always right to do the right thing."

Sometimes daring to follow one's own path or fighting for what is right takes a long time. That's why persevering even in the face of difficult circumstances is another kind of courage. The great poet and writer Ralph Waldo Emerson wisely noted, "A hero is no braver than an ordinary man, but he is braver five minutes longer." In other words, truly brave people do not give up when things start getting tough—they just become tougher themselves. Consider J.K. Rowling, author of the *Harry Potter* series. While writing the first *Harry Potter* book, she was broke and jobless. Then, when the book was finished, every publisher Rowling visited rejected her book, saying that it was boring. And yet she persevered. Finally, a small company reluctantly took a chance on Rowling. Today, she has sold more than 400 million books. When asked about her secret to success, Rowling simply said, "Anything's possible if you've got enough nerve."

Some people demonstrate courage by getting outside of their comfort zones and letting go of the familiar. Getting outside one's comfort zone could involve anything from going camping in the woods to being the first person to sail around

the world. When you willingly face a challenge or something that you've never experienced before, you're showing courage. Embracing the unknown is brave.

“This world demands the qualities of youth; not a time of life but a state of mind, a temper of the will, a quality of the imagination, a predominance of courage over timidity, of the appetite for adventure over the life of ease,” Robert F. Kennedy once said. For without a “predominance of courage over timidity,” life would stagnate, and nothing new or challenging would ever get discovered or experienced—even camping in the woods.

Still another kind of courage is the ability to face suffering—physical or mental—with a quiet dignity and a faith that sooner or later, your life will improve. It's no small matter to endure pain without falling into hopelessness and thinking about giving up. “The ideal man bears the accidents of life with dignity and grace, making the best of circumstances,” the philosopher Aristotle wrote more than 2300 years ago, and his words are still true today. This doesn't mean that brave people don't *feel* pain the same as anyone else would. It means that in spite of experiencing suffering, they are able to move beyond it.

And not only do brave people feel pain; they also feel fear. But, as with pain, it's what

brave people *do* with their fear that makes them courageous.

As children, we are often told, “Be brave! Don’t be afraid!” when facing something that takes courage. That advice can be confusing to an eight-year-old standing, with shaking knees, on the edge of the diving board at the pool, while all her friends are urging her to jump. How is it possible to simply stop being afraid of something? Does it mean that if you’re afraid, you’re not courageous? Actually, no. Being fearless is not at all the same as being courageous. If one has no fear whatsoever when facing something frightening, then he or she would, in fact, not *need* any courage.

“I learned that courage was not the absence of fear, but the triumph over it,” wrote Nelson Mandela. “The brave man is not he who does not feel afraid, but he who conquers that fear.” Mandela spent 27 years in prison for standing up against racial inequality in South Africa. As the prison warden locked Mandela’s cell, he looked at him and said, “This is where you will die.” Every day and night, Nelson Mandela was afraid, and yet he continued to speak out, triumphing over the fear even as he felt it. At the end of those 27 years, due to growing domestic and international pressure as well as fears of a racial civil war, Mandela was released. Four years later, in his country’s first

multiracial election, he became president of South Africa.

And, in the end, the more often we do things that frighten us, the more courageous we become.

“You gain strength, courage and confidence by every experience in which you really stop to look fear in the face,” First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt famously said. “You are able to say to yourself, ‘I have lived through this horror. I can take the next thing that comes along.’ You must do the thing you think you cannot do.”

In the following stories, you will meet nine extraordinary people who exhibit all these varieties of courage. They follow their own paths, fight for what is right, persevere in spite of setbacks and hardships, go far beyond their comfort zones, and often endure unimaginable physical or emotional pain. And without a doubt, they all feel fear—some for years—as they “take the next thing that comes along.”

Why read about courage? Is it so we can be in awe of those who have done far more than we could imagine doing ourselves? Not really. While there is certainly nothing wrong with being in awe of these brave men and women, it is more important to think about them in terms of ourselves and of what each one of us, if tested,

could be capable of. Further, these stories clarify an important point about courage: It is not an isolated virtue—it is necessary to bring to light some of the best things in our life.

As the writer Maya Angelou, who bravely faced a difficult childhood, once wrote: “One isn’t necessarily born with courage, but one is born with potential. Without courage, we cannot practice any other virtue with consistency. We can’t be kind, true, merciful, generous, or honest.”

That’s why it is so important to take Eleanor Roosevelt’s advice and “do the very thing you think you cannot do.” ■

Matchmaker



“I think it’s probably just a strained muscle,” 15-year-old Roxanne Black said to her mother one afternoon following rowing practice. Her lower back was bothering her, but it didn’t seem worth worrying about. Roxanne had gotten sore muscles in the past after a hard workout with

her high-school rowing team. Except this time, Tylenol and a heating pad didn't make the pain go away.

"I'm taking you to the doctor," Roxanne's mother announced when the pain in Roxanne's back got so bad that she could barely breathe.

The doctor couldn't find anything wrong with Roxanne, and then the pain simply went away. But within a few days, strange new pains appeared that clearly had nothing to do with rowing. Soon a burning rash covered Roxanne's entire body, and after the rash faded, her ankles swelled up. The doctor took blood and had it tested but still couldn't find the cause of Roxanne's symptoms, so he referred her to a specialist. The specialist performed a routine examination. Afterward, while Roxanne and her mother sat in his office, he touched her swollen ankles and stared at the test results.

"Then he looked up, and a strange word floated from his mouth," Roxanne later wrote. "*Lupus*. I saw it, like in a cartoon caption, odd and ominous, hanging in the air."

When Roxanne saw the tears in her mother's eyes, she knew that this weird-sounding disease must be serious. As soon as she got home, Roxanne looked up *lupus* and discovered that it is a rare disease; only one of every 400 people in the United States suffers from it. In lupus, the body's immune system attacks the body instead

of protecting it. The attacks can be unpredictable, painful—even deadly.

Roxanne was stunned. How could this be happening to *her*? Until this point, she had been living the life of a typical teen: hanging out with friends, going to parties, and enjoying time at the beach in Atlantic City near her home in New Jersey. Now that was all about to change in a dramatic and painful way. For the next three months after being diagnosed, Roxanne was in and out of a children's hospital. A kidney biopsy confirmed that she not only had lupus—she had the worst form of it.

“I still couldn't believe this was happening—that my body, my old friend and companion, was betraying me this way,” Roxanne wrote. “And what had I done wrong? I'd always been active, eaten well, and rarely even caught a cold or flu. But like a horror movie where the werewolf watches his body alter in the mirror, mine was turning on me.”

At first, friends came to visit Roxanne in the hospital; but one by one, they stopped dropping by. Roxanne knew that her illness made them feel uncomfortable. The drugs she had to take had made her face swollen, and her hair had fallen out in clumps. Friends who used to laugh and joke with her would barely look at her now. Loneliness and isolation became even harder for Roxanne to deal with than the illness itself.

“With chronic illness, you enter another country, and it can feel as if you’re the only inhabitant,” Roxanne later explained.

When Roxanne returned to school, the feelings of loneliness grew worse. Students stared and sometimes snickered at the large men’s tennis shoes she now had to wear because of her terribly swollen feet, and friends acted awkwardly or kept their distance. Although she was only 15, Roxanne was wise enough to realize that she desperately needed a connection with others who could understand what she was going through. But what could she do? She didn’t know of any support groups for people with lupus. So Roxanne took a brave step—she decided to create her own support group.

The first meeting of the group would take place in a community room at the local library. Roxanne worried that no one else would show up. After all, lupus was rare, and it could make a person look and feel very sick. Would other people really want to join a group and talk about how isolated and sick they felt? *Maybe I’m all alone*, Roxanne thought.

Roxanne was so worried and nervous that she wandered into the library and picked up a book of quotations to take her mind off the possibility of an empty room. One quotation caught her eye: “We are all here on earth to help others; what on earth the others are here for I don’t know.”

Only a few weeks earlier, when Roxanne had been feeling particularly sorry for herself, her mother had said, “Maybe you got sick for a reason. Have you ever thought of that? Maybe you were meant to help others.” At the time, the question had annoyed Roxanne. How could she help others? *She* was the one who needed help! But then she walked back to the community room, and she saw that it was practically full. There *were* other people like her. She wasn’t alone after all!

“A feeling welled up in me—one I hadn’t experienced since I’d become sick—a swell of satisfaction, optimism, and purpose,” Roxanne wrote. “At that moment, the organization that would be the root of my salvation and the answer to my mother’s question was born.”

Roxanne continued to lead the ever-growing support group during her next two years of high school. Because more than 90 percent of lupus patients are female, she often found herself giving comfort and advice to women older than her own mother. She also gained valuable insights and learned important lessons, ones not usually available to someone her age. Seeing how devoted an older man, Joe, was to his wife, Ruby, who was dying of lupus complications, Roxanne witnessed firsthand the power of unconditional love. Joe stayed beside Ruby, quietly helping her with anything she needed and holding her hand as she died.

“This is what I want; a love like this,” Roxanne thought. “Someone who would stand by me in my happiest and my darkest hours, who would be with me right until the end.”

When Roxanne received a scholarship to Rutgers University, she had to leave her support group behind, but now she had plans for something even bigger. Roxanne had seen the need for a support group for lupus patients—but what about the many thousands of people who were suffering from other rare diseases? Surely, many of these people felt just as lonely and afraid as Roxanne had.

Roxanne came up with an idea for a nationwide group that she would call Friends’ Health Connection. Through this network, people all over the country could get in touch with one another and offer support and friendship.

Seventeen-year-old Roxanne sat down on the bed in her dorm room and worked late into the night, putting together a heartfelt letter describing her plan. She intended to send the letter to dozens of newspapers, television stations, and magazines, hoping to learn whether there would be any interest in her plan. The response Roxanne received truly surprised her.

“Within a week, I’d received a call from a writer at *USA Today* who said he had simply been touched by my letter and planned to print

an article; later, Christiane Amanpour of CNN called me, expressing enthusiasm for my idea, and came to interview me in my dorm room,” Roxanne recalled.

Following the article and the interview, letters poured in from people all over the United States. Roxanne could not believe how many people had strange illnesses she’d never heard of. And all these people longed to find friends with the same illnesses—friends who would truly understand what they were going through.

Roxanne looked at the piles of letters and felt a strong sense of determination. “Suddenly there was no time to be sick,” she wrote. “I had a purpose.”

Roxanne may not have wanted to take the time to be sick, but her lupus had other ideas. Organs that lupus frequently attacks include the kidneys, and not long after starting Friends’ Health Connection, Roxanne was told by doctors that her kidneys were in bad shape. As a result, Roxanne often had to spend hours a day connected to a dialysis machine, whose purpose was to clean poisons and impurities from the blood—something her kidneys could no longer do.

Hooking herself up to dialysis frightened Roxanne, and the idea that her body was filling up with poisons that had to be removed by a

machine made her feel sick. Worse still, Roxanne often had to cut social events short in order to go through the dialysis process. One Saturday night, she met a young man at a party, and they ended up at his apartment, listening to music. Just as the situation was becoming romantic, however, Roxanne realized she needed to get home. She had a metallic taste in her mouth, a sign that her blood needed to be cleaned. If she ignored this warning and her body became too filled with impurities, she could die.

“Look, I have to tell you something,” Roxanne said. “I have kidney failure, and I’m on dialysis. I have to get home and have a treatment.”

The young man tried to act as if it didn’t bother him, but Roxanne knew it did. “There’s nothing to pierce a romantic bubble like the word ‘dialysis,’” she later wrote. She never heard from him again.

It takes a rare kind of courage to keep moving forward with hope and purpose when faced with so much adversity. Roxanne Black had that kind of courage. In spite of having to keep up with college classes while dealing with illness, pain, and dialysis, Roxanne still found the time and energy to work on Friends’ Health Connection. Sitting on her bed (sometimes even at the hospital), surrounded by piles of letters, Roxanne carefully read every letter and matched people who had the same diagnosis.

“I had become a kind of matchmaker of the spirit; people weren’t marrying from my connections, but they were finding soulmates who shared their health problems,” Roxanne explained.

These connections changed people’s lives throughout the United States. Suddenly, two women two thousand miles apart, both suffering from cystic fibrosis, found someone they could laugh with and confide in. Two men with rare brain tumors called each other every morning to offer encouragement and empathy. Most of these people would never meet in person, but simply having someone who would listen and understand meant the world to them. As Roxanne continued to match people, she learned something else: Sometimes just listening is an act of love.

When Roxanne was 19, her doctors told her that dialysis was no longer working well for her. Roxanne would have to have a kidney transplant soon, or she would die. Being placed on a wait list for a kidney might take too long, so one of Roxanne’s older sisters, Bonnie, offered to donate one of hers.

The transplant was a success, but recovering from such a delicate operation was grueling and painful. Sometimes it hurt Roxanne to simply move at all. At the same time, as word spread around the country, Friends’ Health Connection was attracting even larger numbers of people.

Even though Roxanne had found volunteers at Rutgers to help her with all the letters and matchmaking, she still kept working to help people connect—again from her hospital bed.

It's easy to imagine that at 19 years old, when most of Roxanne's classmates were enjoying the excitement of college life, parties, and just being young and healthy, Roxanne might have felt sorry for herself or given up—or at least taken a break. She never did, and her courage and spirit soon caught the attention of people everywhere.

During her junior and senior years at Rutgers, Roxanne was designated one of the top eighteen college students in the nation. She was honored with a presidential medal from President George H.W. Bush. Both NBC and CNN sent camera crews to Roxanne's dorm room and followed her around all day, interviewing her. Also, both *USA Today* and *The New York Times* wrote feature articles about her.

While Roxanne surely appreciated all these honors and awards, her greatest joy came from working to help patients connect and to encourage them to be as amazed by life as she had come to be. Although there had been a brief period of time when Roxanne had bitterly wondered *Why me?*, she ultimately came to see her illness as a blessing.

“We don't realize how our illness experience has also been the most intense of

educations,” Roxanne wrote. “I tell patients to consider themselves part of a college they never applied to but were chosen to attend by special scholarship—one that has provided them with rich reservoirs of wisdom and a deeper appreciation for life.”

Roxanne’s courage in facing the challenges of her illness and remaining engaged in life would reward her again and again—both professionally and personally. One freezing New Year’s Eve, Roxanne received a phone call from a friend asking her to come to a party at her house, more than an hour away. Roxanne wasn’t feeling well, and she had planned to spend the evening at home. But for some reason, she had a feeling she should go to this party. At the last minute, she decided to go.

At the party, Roxanne met a handsome man named Leo who had just returned that very evening from visiting his sister in Texas and had also decided at the last minute to attend the party. Right away, Roxanne felt a great sense of kindness coming from Leo. She also felt that their meeting was not by chance—that there was a *reason* that she and Leo just happened to come to the same party that night.

“Why did I go to this party . . . ? Why did Leo return on that day from seeing his sister in Texas?” Roxanne wrote. “These are the questions that cannot be answered by our rational minds.”

She had realized that we are often simply guided by the universe, by powers of fate and luck that have nothing to do with logic. Roxanne's illness had shown her that things rarely go the way we think they should, and that when we simply allow the universe to guide us, some of the most amazing and unexpected blessings come our way.

When the party ended that evening, Leo kissed Roxanne on the cheek and wished her a happy New Year. At that very moment, Roxanne knew that fate and luck were guiding her. She barely knew Leo, but *something* told her that he was a special person and that he was the reason she had come to this party. Roxanne was right. Today, she and Leo have been married for more than 15 years.

Roxanne Black's life would continue to be defined and enriched by her awareness of the good things that come from what we typically think of as bad or difficult situations—so much so that she was inspired to write a book, *Unexpected Blessings*, in 2008. While very young, Roxanne had learned just how important relationships and connections to others are for those who are suffering. As a result, she would make it her life's work to bring people together to give them hope, inspiration, and an optimistic way of looking at life. *Unexpected Blessings* was part of this work.

One of the most difficult times in Roxanne's

life occurred when her mother suddenly died just days before Roxanne turned 25. Roxanne's mother had always been right beside her during her illness, taking care of her and encouraging her to stay positive. Roxanne knew that her mother had asthma, but she had no idea how serious it was. Her mother didn't want to trouble Roxanne with her own health problems. So when her mother suddenly died from complications of asthma, Roxanne was devastated. In spite of her generally positive outlook on life, this time she could find no reason for optimism.

"That I was never going to hear her voice at the end of the phone or see her alive again seemed both impossible and unbearable, and left me in a paroxysm of grief," Roxanne wrote in *Unexpected Blessings*.

And yet, in the midst of this darkest grief, Roxanne was blessed once again with surprising joy. On her birthday, Roxanne was so sad that she didn't even want to get out of bed. However, she finally pulled herself together and decided to do some laundry. Stacked in a corner of the laundry room were a few boxes that her mother had given her several months earlier. Roxanne had not paid much attention to them, but now she opened one. It was full of old cassette tapes.

"I randomly picked up one from the top and took it upstairs. I placed it in the cassette player and pressed Play. Out came a younger version

of the voices of my mother and me,” Roxanne wrote.

Roxanne sat in her room, stunned by the sounds of her and her mother singing and laughing together. Then, right before the tape ended, her mother’s voice said, “Happy birthday, honey.” Roxanne knew this was a gift, a blessing. Suddenly, grief was replaced by joy.

“I now accept that there’s a higher power that sends us signs that our loved ones are never lost,” Roxanne later wrote. “When I hear my mother’s laugh emerge from my throat or see my profile in the mirror and glimpse my grandmother, I know this to be true on a personal level. We’re all walking encyclopedias of those who came before us. Still alive, after all.”

When Roxanne was 35, her transplanted kidney began failing. Once again, it was back to long hours of dialysis, but at least now she had her husband, Leo, by her side. One evening, after a particularly long and tiring day of dialysis, the telephone rang. It was the transplant center in Pittsburgh. An eight-month-old infant had died, and his parents had donated his kidneys, the transplant surgeon told Roxanne. Did Roxanne want them?

Because the kidneys were so tiny, both would be transplanted into Roxanne. And because the donor was so young, there was a good chance

that the kidneys would last much longer than her older sister's. Roxanne told the surgeon yes, to which the surgeon replied, "You must come right now. You can't wait to fly in the morning, and you must let your husband drive."

Leo was already exhausted, but without one word of complaint, he loaded Roxanne into the car at midnight and drove the six hours to Pittsburgh. During the surgery, he nervously paced in the waiting room for hours, and then stayed by Roxanne's side throughout her difficult recovery.

"I was as helpless as a rag doll," Roxanne wrote. "I couldn't sit up by myself, and even moving my head a few inches was painful. Leo had to carry me to the bathroom, feed me, even change my bedpan."

Through Leo's actions, Roxanne discovered a joy in recognizing what she called "one of life's most blessed and challenging roles," the role of a caretaker. And in Leo, she now saw that she had indeed found the kind of love and person she had hoped for when she was only 16—someone who would stand by her in her happiest and darkest hours.

Roxanne's reaction to the gift of the two kidneys was "a lot of mixed feelings . . . deep sadness for the donor, responsibility to live a meaningful life in his honor and memory, overwhelming gratitude . . . but mixed with the fact that there

was a loss involved before I was given the gift of life.” In *Unexpected Blessings*, Roxanne expressed these feelings: “To my anonymous eight-month-old kidney donor, you live on within me. I think of you each day.”

Four years after Roxanne’s second kidney transplant, she was still healthy. Her work with Friends’ Health Connection kept her busy, and it was endlessly rewarding. She was married to a man she’s described as “my hero—the kindest, most special person I ever met.” Then, even more wonderfully, she and Leo welcomed their baby girl, whom they named Annalise, meaning “Graced by God’s bounty.” In so many ways, Roxanne now felt that she had it all. Her life had finally turned out to be everything she had always hoped it could be.

Then, three years later, everything changed.

“I came home from a long day at work, and I was rubbing my neck the way you do when you’re tired, and I felt a lump,” Roxanne said. “I asked Leo to feel it, and his face turned white. Right away, he said I needed to go to the doctor.”

The doctor’s diagnosis was lymphoma, a cancer of the immune system. It was a disease that was far more dangerous than lupus. *How could this have happened?* Roxanne wondered. Her doctors felt that the lymphoma was probably the

result of having to take so many potent drugs for lupus for so many years, but there was no way to be certain of the cause.

“This time it was a different ballgame because of my daughter,” Roxanne explained. “There was no way she could understand what was going on, and I didn’t want her to be frightened. It was a really hard time.”

When Leo would bring Annalise to visit, Roxanne would temporarily remove the IV tubes that were connected to her. And often, the hospital staff would do special things for Annalise so that the three-year-old would not be afraid.

In the past, Roxanne had always dealt with her illness with optimism and patience. Not this time. “I felt only anger. I was so mad at the illness,” Roxanne said. “I just felt like ‘this is the last straw.’ I’d been through so many years of illness already. And now I had a daughter to think about. Being sick again just seemed so unfair.”

The chemotherapy and the stress of fighting another serious illness left Roxanne completely drained. Friends’ Health Connection had now become an international organization that required a great deal of work, and because it was a not-for-profit organization, it also required a great deal of outside funding.

“So two things happened at once,” Roxanne said. “Because of my anger at my illness, I no

longer felt that I could inspire others who were ill. And then, after 15 years, the main source of funding for Friends' Health Connection suddenly ended."

Roxanne decided to shut down the organization she had been running for more than 25 years and direct her efforts elsewhere. Because Friends' Health Connection often invited famous authors and celebrities to speak about their struggles with disease, Roxanne had a good bit of experience with contacting and scheduling speakers. She decided to start her own company, working from home, using her experience to schedule speakers and authors for conferences and major events.

"I wanted to be at home with my daughter," Roxanne explained. "And I wanted to dedicate any energy I had to keeping my family life as normal as possible. Honestly, I was just trying to survive. I thought I was done with Friends' Health Connection."

But she wasn't.

One year later, with her lymphoma in remission, Roxanne suddenly felt, in her words, "ready to face the world again." She was mentally and physically ready to go back to Friends' Health Connection—but now there was no organization to return to. Although Roxanne's new company was doing very well, it didn't feed her soul and fulfill her as helping others had.

At first, this void in Roxanne's life just bothered her; but then, over time, she fell into a deep depression. "Friends' Health Connection was all I had known since I was 17, and it had always been the purpose for my pain," Roxanne said. "I just wanted to get back to it, but I didn't know where to start."

The depression was nearly overwhelming. In many ways, Roxanne found it harder and more painful than any physical illness she had ever battled. Finally, at her wits' end, Roxanne turned to two friends, a husband and wife, who had always supported Friends' Health Connection.

"I thought of them as kindred spirits who understood me," Roxanne explained. "I just went to talk with them about what I should do. I would never have guessed that that visit would have turned into a miracle."

The couple offered to donate enough money to get Friends' Health Connection back up and running again. Roxanne was stunned. "It was such a gift. It was like getting my life back. Again."

It was, indeed, yet another unexpected blessing in Roxanne's life.

Today, Roxanne Black continues her work scheduling speakers and authors, but she also serves as the executive director, without pay, at Friends' Health Connection. Everyone who had

been involved with Roxanne and Friends' Health Connection when it was shut down was happy and excited to help rebuild the organization, even after two years.

The organization that began as a way of letting sick people know that they are not alone has come a long way. It has certainly grown and changed since the days when a 17-year-old Roxanne sat on a hospital bed, sorting letters and matching patients. Today, Friends' Health Connection is a worldwide network with thousands of members. Roxanne herself is healthy, has been married for over 15 years, and has a daughter entering fourth grade.

More than 30 years later, Roxanne knows that the essence and the spirit of Friends' Health Connection have never changed. "I've always been honored to use my own pain to help others who are suffering," Roxanne says. "This work has always been my heart and soul." ■