

Awareness

Southern California's Guide to Conscious Living

JANUARY / FEBRUARY 2014

VOLUME 21, NO. 1



**LINDA CRILL
BLIND CURVES SEND
HER ON THE ROAD
TO REINVENTION**

An Interview with **LINDA CRILL**

Blind Curves Drive Her on the Road to Reinvention

By Donna Strong

Linda Crill knows both the risks and rewards of reinventing herself professionally *and* personally. For more than twenty-five years Linda worked with top executives in Fortune 100 corporations, first as a VP at Citigroup, and then as a consultant with her own company, Opus Development. Through her work she became an accomplished leader in organizational development, team building and facilitating change management.

While Linda was well established in the corporate sector, after the economic downturn of 2008, she sensed a need for change. She and her husband Bill started their own video biography business together — Fond Memories Studio. Just as the new enterprise was really launching, Linda's world was blindsided by the news that Bill had a very advanced form of cancer. While he was given only four months to live, a lot of love and ample alternative treatments allowed him to share another eleven months with his devoted life partner.

Through the dark night of seeking a new life after her husband Bill made his transition, she made a decision that was totally out of character — to trek 2500 miles down the Pacific Northwest coast on a Harley. Without any prior experience as a motorcyclist she was suddenly propelled into a series of daunting challenges and exciting discoveries as she entered the exotic new world of motorcycle riding.

Linda's first book, *Blind Curves*, is full of wit and wisdom born of a stark reality of loss

and raw experience of stepping outside her known world in many ways. As these times of rapid change are offering blind curves to many, her book is a welcome contribution to

Linda Crill: Well, one of the big problems I had after my husband's death was how to answer the question of what to do when nothing feels right — how do you move forward?



Photo by Miguel de Kanter

the compelling and often demanding work of transformation that has become a necessity. An intrepid explorer, Linda's story of finding new passion and purpose in her life is both inspiring and insightful.

Awareness: *I wanted to ask you, Linda, what was the spark that led you to sharing your motorcycle trip, which was quite transformational?*

My husband Bill and I had a business together the last two years before he was diagnosed with cancer. We did peoples' life stories in videos and coffee table books. Just as this business was taking off, he was diagnosed with terminal cancer and told he had only four months to live.

Awareness: *Oh my.*

Linda: We had one of those rare marriages that many wish

they had. We were able to keep him alive for eleven months, because we did extraordinary things, including Chinese medicine and acupuncture, but nobody recovers from it. I learned the difference between what I call healing and curing a disease. You can heal a family. You can heal an individual, even with a disease such as cancer. Although tremendous healing took place, we couldn't cure the cancer.

So Bill died. The next month our cat of fourteen years died. My daughter had just gone off to college right before Bill made his transition, so now there was no one at home but me. Then a woman in New York that I had done business with died unexpectedly. My stepfather was also in hospice and I was wishing I could spare mother the grief she would have to face. The night before my stepfather died, I went to my neighbor that was like a brother to me, and said, "Terry, I'm here because I need a hug and a three-Kleenex cry, are you available?" He said "yes." Terry died the next morning of a heart attack. Literally, in two months I had four significant deaths right after my husband died.

Awareness: *That's shocking.*

Linda: It took a whole year to begin putting my life back together. I was doing all the things experts tell you to do to pull your life back together. I was eating, sleeping, and exercising, and not just a little. I was doing 120 miles a week on a bicycle and three private one-on-one Pilates classes. I

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LINDA...

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was doing acupuncture every week and eating healthier than ninety percent of the world, but every place I would go to see friends, they wanted to give advice as a way to make my life better. They offered the only thing they knew, and I would sometimes hear it as much as eight times in one evening from different friends, "Linda, make sure you're exercising, sleeping, and eating right." I wanted to say look at me, "Do I look like I'm not eating?" but instead I always said, "thank you," because they were really saying, "Here is something I am offering you."

Then finally one day it became like Chinese water torture, and I couldn't be nice anymore. It happened when my sister and brother-in-law called me on the phone and he did the — I called it the eat-sleep-and-exercise trilogy. When my brother-in-law once again said the trilogy, I blew up at him. Not really at him; I was just angry. It was the first time I actually said to somebody I am doing all this and it doesn't work.

And then I thought, what's the most opposite thing I can think of? If this isn't working, I'm going to do the opposite brainstorming exercise I do with my clients. First I came up with eating a huge bag of potato chips straight through because I am from southeastern Pennsylvania and we love our thick potato chips.

This shows you how non-creative I am, but the only other thing I could come up with was to learn to ride a motorcycle because I always thought motorcycles were loud and destroyed everybody's peace, and were unnecessarily dangerous.

So I announced that I was going to learn to ride a motorcycle, even though I had no intention of ever doing it.

Twelve short hours later when I went to meet my friend, Ron, for lunch, he asked, "Linda, how's it going? Really, tell me the truth. I know on the outside you look good." It was true. It was my inner soul that was so unsatisfied, and I couldn't figure out what I was going to do next. What was I going to do as a single person that would get me passionate about life again?

I responded to Ron, "I am defeated and frustrated. I've over-achieved at following expert advice as well as the choices I've made on how to rebuild my life, but none of it works. It's so bad I've even threatened to learn to ride a motorcycle."

I expected this statement would elicit sympathy but instead a big smile spread across Ron's face. He said, "Linda, I have organized annual motorcycle trips annually for the past ten years. In two months we are flying to Vancouver, Canada, and riding Harleys down the coast. "We need a woman rider and that's you!"

Less than twelve hours after my brainstorm, the universe had brought me the opportunity to do exactly what I had said stated — I was going to learn to ride a motorcycle and go on this trip!

Awareness: That leads me to a question about how your own inner guidance communicates with you? It is so important, and you have many examples of tapping into it in your book.

Linda: I call it the internal guidance system or IGS. It is going to be a chapter in my next book on reinventing yourself. We get a lot of information given to us through our feelings and through our bodies, such as when you go into a job site and immediately your body just tenses up.

If we were to go inward and ask how do I feel at this moment, there is a lot of internal guidance that comes through from emotions and our physical bodies. It also comes from intellect. It's an inner knowing-



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ness if you allow it. I've known things in this world that I never should have known and I believe if we tune in, we can know. I've always been curious since the age of thirteen or fourteen about how this all really works and I've always looked inward for answers. My psychologist father taught me to go inward and look at emotions and thoughts.

Awareness: In your book you talk about how to harness the urge to change, however it shows up, whether as a flash-point of anger or a spell of boredom. Would you speak about the process of reinventing yourself?

Linda: I think we're all asking 'what now?' in some part of our life, whether we're just out of college, becoming a mother for the first time or facing retirement. One of the things we have to be willing to do is to expand beyond what we used to be and create more possibilities in order to reinvent ourselves.

We can't just say no, I don't do those kinds of things. For instance, my husband was not an athlete and I didn't do very many athletic things when I was married to him. Now that he is gone I've asked, "What do I like to do? Who can I be now?" I have to try things I haven't tried before. So, part of the reinvention happens by opening doors labeled "not me" and expanding our horizons.

Most people going through change would prefer more of the same because failing can be more painful than continuing as is, even if we stay in a situation that is not working. The blind curve piece of the book was that I got to the point where more of the same was worse than heading into the blind curve.

At least the blind curve gave me the opportunity. I didn't know what was around it. I didn't know what I was going to get out of the motorcycle trip, but at least I was trying something different and there was a chance it might be bet-

ter. If you take enough blind curves one after the other — the next and the next — eventually you are creating from a much bigger horizon.

Until you go out and try something new and go around the first blind curve with that 'oh my god' feeling, you won't know what you really want. We have to be willing in this age to continuously try new things. Of course, some of the new things that we try, we'll say, "shoot, this isn't for me," but a good part of reinventing is the willingness to erase some old definitions and try new things. When you're ready to go forward with your life again, you've got to take some risks.

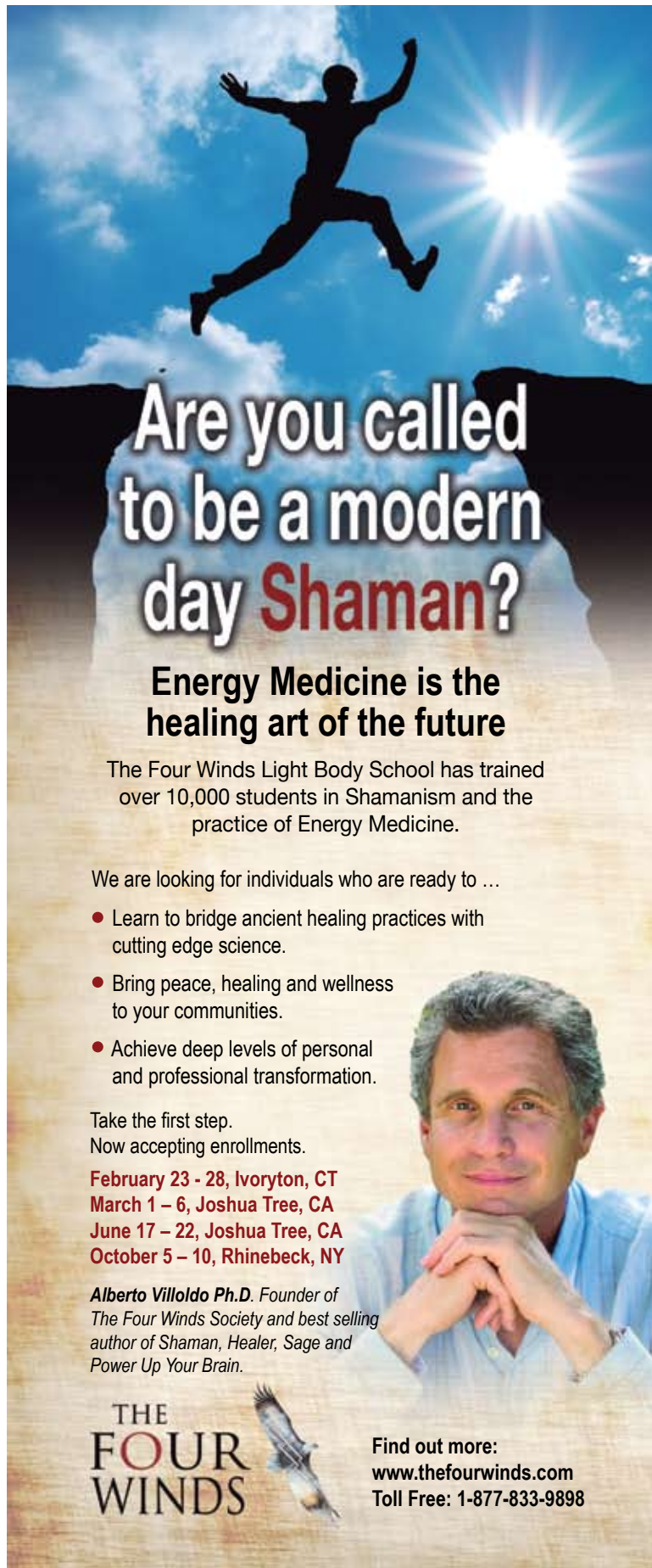
The motorcycle experience taught me that no one should ever decide to learn to ride a motorcycle in thirty days and go on a 2,500 mile road trip on a full-sized Harley with fifty pounds of luggage, trying to keep up with the experienced motorcyclists. After landing in Vancouver, the first thing I did was to get on a strange motorcycle loaded with luggage, and jump straight into traffic. That's not very intelligent.

The point was, I was scared to death when I did it, and yet I hung in there. Every day for the first eight or so days of the trip there was something that scared me to death, such as the four-mile bridge from Washington State into Oregon that has no sides.

On a motorcycle, you are exposed to the world 360 degrees. You see everything. You may not realize it, but in a car, you don't see a lot because of the windshield and the roof. On a motorcycle, you're seeing everything wide open. I am on this grated bridge, and my tires are wobbling back and forth for four miles.

On top of that, there were crosswinds coming in from the Pacific hitting us, and halfway across the bridge I am ready to give up and say, "I can't do

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LINDA...

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this." But what do you do? I mean, you're on a motorcycle halfway across the bridge and it's just as far to go the rest of the way across as it is to turn around, and you don't dare panic because you'll be dead. I can't pull off to the side of the road; there is no side of the road to pull off on. I had to make it across. The thing I kept discovering on this trip was every time I was afraid of something and then I did it and succeeded, the happiness that came to me was 100 times more powerful than the 400 thread-count sheets or the massages I used to pamper myself after all the loss.

At the beginning of my book I describe how I felt when I finally passed my motorcycle exam, which I consider to be a miracle on that full-sized motorcycle with as little practice as I'd had. The day I finally did it was the happiest day in my life since my husband had died.

So part of what the *Blind Curves* trip showed me is what

happens when I take on something that is difficult. I failed at some of it. I didn't always succeed. I failed in that final test a number of times. What I learned was that I wasn't a quitter first of all, and secondly, I learned I could handle my fears. I could take it moment-by-moment.

After my husband died, one of the things I did was to pick up a book by Pema Chodron. Now I have read all of Pema Chodron's books at least eight times through. I've also picked up Jack Kornfield's book, *The Wise Heart*. So you'll find a lot of mindfulness perspective in my book. I've always been curious and hungry to understand how else we can look at life.

I've also learned that I've used spiritual principles all of my life in the corporate work I do. Yet if I were to say to a work group, this is a spiritual principle that I'm using, it would have scared people off. I found if you just talk about how to approach issues in this minute, just focusing right now — it's amazing how responsive people are. In the corporate world I never called it spiritual guidance. I never called it intuition. I called it gut feel. Men in the corporate world will respond to gut feel. So it's always being re-interpreted.

Awareness: I want to say that you have achieved some mastery in life experience. What are some of the greatest

rewards for your having gone through all the arduous, and I think, thrilling experience of reinventing yourself?

Linda: The reward for me is that every day, I try to look at something differently than I did before, whether it's to try a new vegetable or to take a new way home. I have learned that I have all these things in my basket that I can do someday if this job doesn't work out. So to me, the motorcycle trip really turned me into a life explorer.

The other thing I learned on the trip is there is nothing so powerful as learning failure is a part of every process. Dropping the motorcycle had actually saved my life. If I had not dropped the motorcycle and failed the class, I never would have done all of that hard, slow practice I needed so desperately to prepare for the trip.

If you study what all these great masters have said about mindfulness, they have said that whatever has happened, act as if it is what was supposed to happen. Later I realized, 'oh my god,' failing that test actually saved my life! So I stopped judging day-by-day if this is good or this is bad, and I act as if whatever happened is supposed to happen. If you start living your life following that one principle, it changes everything.

Awareness: Yes. We would

all stop second-guessing so much.

Linda: People say that time heals all, but I think perspective heals all. When we can see the larger picture things make sense. My husband's death did not make sense to me until much, much later when I had a different perception of who I had become and what had happened to him. Then I saw what happened as a true miracle. Now you can't say that to somebody in the first couple years after death, or even four, or five. I can't say it to most people because most people wouldn't get it.

Awareness: Yet you learned that there are gifts even in what is the hardest to accept, correct?

Linda: Always. In fact, pain is what makes us grow more. There is great resiliency that comes from facing ourselves, to be able to say I know I can manage what's being thrown at me because I've managed before. I was diagnosed with breast cancer a few years ago, and I went through it as if it were the flu. I didn't get angry. I didn't get worried about whether I would live or die, because I had already stood at hell's gates — watching my love dearly struggling for each breath, struggling in pain, while wanting him to live and knowing he was not going to — that was much harder for me than facing my own breast cancer.

In fact, I know now that I have the resiliency to move forward in life. On the motorcycle trip I faced my fears and discovered that I could finally trust myself again. I came back from that trip ready to expand my horizons by trying some new things. Now I have a new life as a speaker, writer and reinvention expert.

For more on Linda's work, visit www.lindacrill.com and www.blindcurves.com

Donna Strong is a writer, creative catalyst and an ardent lover of bees. To follow her activities visit www.donnastrong.com, www.harmonyofbees.com or www.facebook.com/harmony.bees

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