

Grasping the Will

By Sally Brown

There have been two times in my life where I have firmly grasped my will. The first occurred during the birth of my first child. I had been cramping all day, had checked in with the doctor who pronounced that the event would happen this evening, and went home to have whatever a home birth meant to me at the time.

When I was seized with the first full-on contraction, I became irritated because “No one had told me I was going to be like THIS!” In between the first and second contraction, my mind madly schemed for a way to stop the pain. Second contraction – new understanding. “The only way to stop this is to get the baby OUT!” Against everything I had read and been told, I grasped my will, removed my mind from what needed to be done, and let my body do its work. Third contraction – baby is out, alive and well. Now, please understand that I had been eating well and exercising heartily for the nine months before and for years before that, so my body was fit and ready for the experience. But I always attributed will power as the final ingredient in a speedy delivery.

The next time I remember grasping my will came twenty-five years later. I had been at Pine Mountain for an annual personal retreat, when I brought difficulty on myself that could not be resolved easily or quickly and it was time to return home. I left hurt, angry, upset, confused, unhappy and vowing never to return again.

It took several months of being back home to be able to even begin to look at what had happened, to see my part in it, which is the only part I really could look at. I also assessed what Buddhism meant to me and why I was practicing. This was a turning point. I kept up my meditation practice, and one day, months later, a thought occurred – I wanted Buddhist teaching. The monks are the way to that teaching. No human interaction will keep me from it. It was my will giving me the determination to keep training.

So here I am, back at Pine Mountain, happily doing the work of training – whatever that means for today. I have asked for and been given forgiveness, and I have forgiven myself and others. I am a better person for the experience. Birthing isn't easy; neither is training, but the results can be transformative.