

# The Art of Receiving Well

*Receiving is an activity, an opening of yourself like a child to a swing, or like God to a prayer. You bring nourishment from the outside in.*

Mariah Fenton Gladis

*Inspirational Living Series*

Books by

Mariah Fenton Gladis

*Tales of A Wounded Healer*

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*Bitterness Is Not An Option*

*Creating Moments That Matter*

*Asking For What You Want*

*The Art Of Receiving Well*

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## About The Author



In 1981, Mariah Fenton Gladis was diagnosed with Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS), more commonly known as Lou Gehrig’s disease. Three prominent neurologists gave her a 10% chance of surviving more than 2 years.

Yet, three months after the diagnosis, Mariah married and proceeded to have two children. Today, she continues to be a loving wife, a doting mother, an author, a renowned psychotherapist and motivational speaker. Mariah’s courage to continually go forward with grace and determination—and without bitterness—demonstrates the amazing survival capacity of the human spirit.

Mariah continues to conduct workshops across the globe, addressing a wide range of human challenges: from early life emotional trauma to debilitating grief and loss, from life threatening illnesses to people seeking more meaning and joy in their lives.

In Mariah’s words:

*“People often ask me how I do it, listening to people’s problems all day long. I tell them that I don’t hear problems. I hear people wanting to change, wanting to be better human beings, wanting to create happier families. From every continent and all walks of life I hear people wanting to love and be loved more effectively. I hear people wanting to remove barriers in their lives and provide a healthier environment for their loved ones. This is a privileged position that I have, sharing so many compelling and heartwarming moments of laughter and tears with people working toward healing.”*

## The Art Of Receiving Well

Have you ever been given a gift and not really received it? Do you know how you resist receiving? Do you deny the love as genuine? Do you devalue the giver? Do you clench your body behind an outer shell? Do you hardly notice what you've been given? Do you overlook it or take it for granted or actively push it away and refuse it? Or do you remember a time when you did fully receive someone's offering? By that I mean, noticed the gift and the giver?

Receiving is an activity. Often this is news to people. They've never understood, nor even contemplated the nature of receptivity. When they are presented with a gift, it is as if all activity stops, they go into passive mode. In truth, an essential activity has just begun. Real receiving necessitates being in full, clear contact with yourself, your body and the other person. It is a purposeful action, fueled by concentration, awareness of self and other, and grounded in the intention to receive well. It requires grateful absorbing of the gift, whether it's a smile, an expression of love, a physical presence, a sexual union, a massage, a touch, a piece of art, an orchid, a complement, a favor, an apology. The list is endless; from the ever so subtle to the magnificence of nature and the grandeur of true love. The simple truth is, the less you receive, the less fulfillment you'll experience in life. So when you have learned to move out in the world in response to your needs and to express them with skill and authenticity, it will all be for naught if you don't have the ability to fully receive from yourself and others.

Receiving is not about what you get, or how much you accumulate in life or about grasping. There are countless

wealthy people who are at a loss as to why they are so unhappy. They mistake external wealth with internal prosperity. There are others who demand love or respect or power and get it. But, because of the forced nature of the giving, they don't get what they really want. Receiving is not in any way manipulative, and does not entail taking something away from another person.

Rather, receiving from another is about a shifting, a shuttling back and forth between awareness of the external world, the gift and the giver, to your inner self, where you place, distribute and hold the gift. True receiving is an internal event, an opening of yourself like a child to a swing, or like God to a prayer. You bring nourishment from the outside in.

If Ron is stroking my hand, I feel the touch, the sensation, whether I'm receiving it or not. The potential for the event ranges from insignificant to precious. It all depends on the spirit in which it was given and the capability of the receiver. I hold the power to make his touch impotent or nourishing; to take his touch from a mere physical contact, to something that maximizes the power of the gift and is satisfying and meaningful. I'm aware of him, his intentions, and his touch on the outside, and I allow his touch to permeate my skin into my whole being. I want to turn my skin and every pore into a sponge; receiving and appreciating every ounce of what I am being given. From the gift of this moment, I may feel safe and a sense of belonging, precious and loved, attractive and desired. And it doesn't have to be a big, obvious event. It can be done thoroughly, efficiently and effectively in the natural course of time. The ordinary moment can become a sweet, extraordinary moment of aliveness and healing.

To truly receive, you must remain focused on the experience of receiving. If you're thinking about your to-do list while making love, obviously you will not receive the full impact of the love and pleasure being offered. And you deny your

lover the fulfillment of being received. If your mate tells you that you look pretty, and you respond with, “I think I look fat”, you have taken the gift and effectively thrown it in the trash. You have given no effort to receiving. If someone is giving you words of love, and you can only let in a little bit, there is a loss on both sides.

A poignant example of restricted receptivity is from one of my workshops. A father, a brilliant astronomer, had been remote and uncommunicative throughout the life of his 23-year-old daughter. He spent his life in his basement lab, or peering at the sky. She was desperate for his attention and his affection, and was interpreting his remoteness as a reflection of his lack of love for her.

When I had gone as far as I could go with her in one-on-one therapy, I suggested she invite her father to a weekend workshop. She was totally overwhelmed by the idea, and could not imagine in a million years that he would be willing to do anything for her that was so far out of his comfort zone. I suggested she ask. To her shock and amazement, he agreed!

Wearing a trench coat, he arrived at the workshop—a pale, balding man with wire rim glasses. He stood in the opening circle of participants, stiff, with his head down and eyes on the floor, unable to give even the slightest eye contact to anyone. An entire day passed before he removed his coat. In what was, for him, an uncomfortable setting, it seemed to protect him. As person after person did work in front of the group, he began to soften and open. He became curious and interested. At times, he appeared deeply moved. Off came the raincoat. When his daughter revealed how she had felt abandoned by him all these years, he respectfully acknowledged his absence, and his discomfort with emotional closeness. He was now willing to learn.

I asked him to sit on the floor in front of her and gaze at his

daughter, as he would a newly discovered star, and to experiment with integrating his heart in the process. When I asked him to report his findings, he spoke of noticing her beautiful, long, brown hair and lovely brown eyes. He found her to be precious, kind and vulnerable. And in his heart, there was a very deep love for her. With guidance, he broke through his inability to express his affection. Finally, after 23 years, he told his daughter how much he loved her. I asked the daughter how much of her father's love, from zero to a hundred percent, she was receiving in that moment? She said twenty percent. Even when the love was staring her in the face, she couldn't receive it. Due to the many years she spent surviving in the absence of affection, she had not developed receptive capabilities. It was easier for her to live without love than it was to take it in.

The most important part of my work with this client was to train her in receptivity. Receiving is an activity. It requires purpose and concentration. It requires investing just as much focus on receiving as you want the other person to invest in giving. Receiving is creating and focusing on the awareness of your needs being met, and maximizing the impact of this sense of fulfillment. This capacity to receive well is essential to achieving both satiation and integration.

Try this brief experiment. Look around at your environment now and choose a color you are seeing that pleases you. Go inside your body and fill yourself with breath. Place your two feet on the floor. Feel the support of your backbone while you focus intently on that color. Is it a solid patch of blue or green, or are there as many variations in the shade of green as there are on certain leaves? Really look. See what is before you. Take in the beauty of the color. Wonder about it. Give gratefulness that this color, in this moment, is in the world for you. Receive it as a gift in your body.

The more you do it, the more you practice in a moment here or there, the sooner you will make healthy receptivity a way

of life.

Think now of the thirst analogy. After getting that glass of water, drinking it to satiation, and receiving and reflecting on it, you say something like, “That was good, perfect. Done. I needed that.” Do you remember the next moment? What did you feel? What went through your mind and body? Did you turn and say, “Now what?” to yourself? Or maybe you had something to do and said, “Ok, let me get to that.” And then go on to the next figure that emerges from the ground (background) of your experience.

How well do you receive the love of the closest persons in your life? Receiving is an action, an activity requiring concentration and purposeful movement. How much do you take in? Rate yourself from zero to 100%. If your number is low, you have definitely discovered a powerful tool to change the quality of your life. You have the need and the opportunity to receive all the time; from nature, loved ones, books, music, food, through a galaxy of moments in your life. You need to maximize the moments; see the gift and the giver. Be in full contact and open up. Notice your body. Work with your breath. Inhale the love all the way down to your toes. Imagine it filling you up. Hold onto it. Don't be a colander by letting it come in one end and fall out the other. Retain the sweetness of the moment in your forever place. If you don't have a forever place in your body, design and develop one; a place you can return to at any moment when you need love and nourishment. Love won't enter you unless you allow it in. Invite it in. Take it in. Don't be a brick wall. Don't be impervious. Turn your body into a sponge. Let love saturate every cell. Visualize it. Inhale. Receive.

Think about what went into the gift giving; the effort, the thought, the generosity, the well wishes of the giver. Take time and inhale. Let the gift and the spirit in which it was given all the way inside. Let it touch your heart. As you do you will naturally overflow with appreciation for the giver.

Remember, receiving well is a powerful gift to the giver. Lisa's openness nourished the whole circle of givers. By your receptivity you make it a win-win and well worth the effort for the giver to have directed and delivered his or her love to you. Express your full appreciation. Allow your hearts to touch and realize the sweet specialness of the moment. Use your eyes to really see the gift and the giver. Hear the words. Be in full contact and gratefulness, the natural outgrowth of receptivity. Allow yourself to be moved. Soft. Pliable. The precise sensation of deep appreciation is one of the greatest pleasures we can feel in this lifetime. Enjoy it.

—Excerpts from Mariah's book *Tales of a Wounded Healer*

**BIOGRAPHY:** Mariah Fenton Gladis, MSS, LCSW, BCD

Founder and Clinical Director of the Pennsylvania Gestalt Center for Psychotherapy and Training since 1976, Mariah has been a faculty workshop leader at *Esalen Institute* since 1987. She received a Social Worker of the Year award from *NASW*, a Living Legacy Award from the *Women's International Center*, and is one of "Pennsylvania's Best 50 Women in Business."

Mariah is on the Board of Advisors of *Camp Dreamcatcher* – a camp for children affected/infected with HIV/AIDS, faculty and trainer for *Center for a Healthy World*, a volunteer-driven psychotherapy cooperative, and belongs to the *National Association of Social Workers*, where she is a Board Certified Diplomate. Mariah is the author of *Tales of a Wounded Healer*, an accessible description of her psychotherapy practice.